



**Internationalist Group**

**League for the Fourth International**

# **What Is Trotskyism?**

**The Stalin School of Falsification Revisited**

**Reply to the *Guardian***



Alexander Buchman

Leon Trotsky in Mexican exile. Coyoacán, 1940.

***Internationalist Group Class Readings***

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# Introduction

These articles were originally serialized in *Workers Vanguard*, the newspaper of the Spartacist League, running from No. 23 (22 June 1973) to No. 30 (10 October 1973), and later collected as a pamphlet under the title, "The Stalin School of Falsification Revisited." At that time the SL was the voice of revolutionary Trotskyism, the political tradition and program carried forward today by the Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International. The articles were a response to a series in the *Guardian* weekly by New Left Maoist Carl Davidson, "Left in Form, Right in Essence: A Critique of Contemporary Trotskyism," which is available online at <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/critiques/guardian/index.htm>.

In the series published in *Workers Vanguard* we used Davidson's rehashing of hoary Stalinist slanders and distortions as an opportunity to present a synopsis of what Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky and the Fourth International he founded actually stood for. Dealing with Trotsky's perspective of permanent revolution, his struggle against Stalin's anti-Marxist dogmas of "building socialism in one country" and "two-stage revolution," the Trotskyists' opposition to the class collaboration of the Popular Front, the Fourth International's military defense of the USSR and struggle for political revolution to drive out the Stalinist bureaucracy, the WV series concluded with two articles on the Maoist variant of Stalinism.

Much has changed in the world since these articles were first published. In particular, the Soviet bureaucratically degenerated workers state and the deformed workers states of East Europe were destroyed and capitalism restored there in

the period 1989-92. This was a world-historic defeat for the international proletariat. While social democrats (and not a few who falsely called themselves Trotskyist) hailed the counterrevolution, authentic Trotskyists fought tooth-and-nail against it. The imperialists proclaimed the "death of communism," and the U.S. trumpeted a New World Order. Yet barely a decade and a half later world capitalism was hit by the worst economic crisis since the 1930s Great Depression.

Although many pseudo-Trotskyists who sided with imperialism against the Soviet Union claim Trotsky's analysis and program on the "Russian question" is merely of historical interest, these fundamentals of Trotskyism continued to be highly relevant to China, Cuba and the other remaining deformed workers states threatened by imperialism and internal counterrevolution.

As the imperialists seek to ride a wave of popular revolt in North Africa and the Near East and populist-

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# 1. The Permanent Revolution

In their tireless efforts to betray the struggles of the workers and peasants, the Stalinists must continue to maintain a pretense of revolutionism. Yet their doctrines stand counterposed to the line of Marxism. This presents them with a dilemma, which they can only resolve by resorting to systematic lies about the Trotskyists. This goes from distortions of the political positions of Trotsky (as well as Marx and Lenin), to denying Trotsky's leading role as the military organizer of the October Revolution and accusing him of carrying out espionage for the Mikado! While many of the specific charges leveled against Zinoviev, Bukharin and other leading Bolsheviks accused of Trotskyism during the Moscow Trials were admitted by Khrushchev in 1956 to be total fabrications, the method remains. Today we are witnessing a widespread revival of the "Stalin School of Falsification" especially on the part of the various Maoist groups. Just as Stalin in his day needed a cover to justify his crimes against the working class, so today must the Maoists resort to vicious slander in order to cover for their counterrevolutionary policies in Bangladesh, Indonesia and elsewhere. This series is intended as a reply to these lies and an introduction to some of the basic concepts of Trotskyism, as they have developed in the struggle against Stalinist reformism during the past fifty years.

The struggle between the reformist line of Stalinism and the revolutionary policies of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky is no academic matter of interest only to historians. The counterrevolutionary policies of the "Great Organizer of Defeats" (Stalin) led not only to the assassination of Trotsky by an agent of Stalin's GPU and the murder of tens of thousands of Russian Left Oppositionists in the Siberian concentration camps, but also to the strangulation of the Chinese (1927), German (1933), French (1936), Spanish (1937), Indonesian (1965) and French (1968) revolutions as well as the sellout "peace agreements" of the Vietnamese Stalinists in 1946 and 1954. The struggle between Stalinism and Trotskyism is literally a matter of life and death for the revolutionary movement and must be given the closest attention by militants who are seeking the road to Marxism.

## What Is the Permanent Revolution?

At the heart of this conflict is the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution. This theory, first advanced at the time of the 1905 Russian revolution, was summarized by Trotsky in his article "Three Concepts of the



Leon Trotsky arriving in Petrograd, May 1917.

Russian Revolution," written in 1939:

"...the complete victory of the democratic revolution in Russia is conceivable only in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, leaning on the peasantry. The dictatorship of the proletariat, which would inevitably place on the order of the day not only the democratic but socialistic tasks as well, would at the same time give a powerful impetus to the international socialist revolution. Only the victory of the proletariat in the West could protect Russia from bourgeois restoration and assure it the possibility of rounding out the establishment of socialism."

It is this theory which Davidson and the Stalinists reject when they say that "Trotsky's views on the course of the Russian revolution, like those of the Mensheviks, were refuted by history" (*Guardian*, 4 April 1973). In fact, only because the uprising never reached the seizure of power was Trotsky's theory not

confirmed in practice in 1905. The course of the Russian Revolution of 1917 fully verified this theory. Only the dictatorship of the proletariat, embodied in soviet power, could solve the questions of land and peace, as well as liberating oppressed nations from tsarist rule. Moreover, a careful analysis of Lenin's views in 1905 and 1917 shows that he came over to agreement with all the essential aspects of Trotsky's formulation, and abandoned his own earlier slogan of a "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry."

The Stalinists' claim that Lenin still stood for a "democratic" revolution in 1917 and called for "socialism in one country" is pure fabrication. Likewise, their accusation that Trotsky's slogan was "Down with the Tsar, For a Workers Government," supposedly ignoring the peasantry, was repeatedly denied by Trotsky. The slogan of permanent revolution was, rather, for the dictatorship of the proletariat, supported by the peasantry.

In Trotsky's view, because of the uneven and combined development of the world economy, the bourgeoisie of the backward countries is tightly bound to the feudal and imperialist interests, thereby preventing it from carrying out the fundamental tasks of the bourgeois revolution – democracy, agrarian revolution and national emancipation. In the presence of an aroused peasantry and a combative working class, each of these goals would directly threaten the political and economic dominance of the capitalist class. The tasks of the bourgeois revolution can be solved only by the alliance of the peasantry and the proletariat.

Marxism holds that there can only be one dominant class in the state. Since, as the *Communist Manifesto* states, the proletariat is the only consistently revolutionary class, this alliance must take the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, supported by the peasantry. In carrying out the democratic tasks of the revolution, the proletarian state must inevitably make "despotic inroads into the rights of bourgeois property" (e.g., expropriation of landlords), and thus the revolution directly passes over to socialist tasks, without pausing at any arbitrary "stages" or, as Lenin put it, without a "Chinese wall" being erected between the bourgeois and proletarian phases. Thus the revolution becomes permanent, eventually leading to the complete abolition of classes (socialism).

But socialism is the product of the liberation of the productive forces at the highest level of capitalist development: classes can be abolished only by eliminating want – that is, scarcity. Thus, while the dictatorship of the proletariat may be established in an isolated and backward country, socialism must be the joint achievement of at least several advanced countries.

For these complementary reasons the revolution must extend and deepen itself – or else perish. Thus the opposition between Trotsky's "permanent revolution" and Stalin's "socialism in one country" is in reality the opposition between socialism on a world scale and the most brutal regime of bourgeois-feudal reaction (barbarism); there is no middle road.

While the theory of permanent revolution was the achievement of Leon Trotsky, the concept was first introduced by Karl Marx in 1850. Davidson, in his effort to cloak Stalin's theory of "socialism in one country" with the mantle of Marxism, maintains that Marx's use of the phrase "permanent revolution" was simply a general observation about class struggle continuing until socialism:

"Thus the revolution is 'permanent' in two ways. First in looking toward the future, its course is one of uninterrupted class struggle until classes themselves are abolished. Second, looking back historically once classes are abolished, the revolution is permanent in the sense that there is no longer class struggle and the seizure of power and domination of one class by another."

—*Guardian*, 4 April 1973

At this level of abstraction, it is no wonder that Davidson concludes that differences arise only "in the particularity of the question." But let us take a look first at what Marx actually said:

"While the democratic petty-bourgeois wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible, and with the achievement, at most, of the above demands, it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent until all more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance, until the proletariat has conquered state power, and the association of proletarians, not only in one country but in all the dominant countries of the world, has advanced so far that competition among the proletarians of these countries has ceased and that at least the decisive productive forces are concentrated in the hands of the proletarians. For us the issue cannot be the alteration of private property but only its annihilation, not the smoothing over of class antagonisms but the abolition of classes, not the improvement of existing society but the foundation of a new one."

—Karl Marx, "Address to the Central Committee of the Communist League" (1850)

This is in fact a powerful polemic, 75 years in advance, against Stalin's sophistry about "socialism in one country." Trotsky's theory is a further development of these fundamental propositions in the epoch of imperialism, when capitalism has penetrated through-

out the backward regions and the objective prerequisites for socialism on a world scale already exist (thereby endangering even the young bourgeoisies of the ex-colonial countries).

### Revolution by Stages: Germany 1848

According to the Stalinists the chief error of Trotskyism is the failure to recognize the necessity of “stages” of the revolution, in particular the democratic stage *as opposed to* the socialist stage. One of Davidson’s more illustrious predecessors wrote (a few years before Stalin murdered him as a “Trotskyite”!):

“Comrade Trotsky put the dictatorship of the working class at the beginning of the process, but did not see the steps and transitions that led to this dictatorship; he ignored the concrete relation of forces...he did not see the stages of the revolution....”

—N. Bukharin, “On the Theory of Permanent Revolution” (1925)

Let us consider this “theory” of two-stage revolution, the “particularity” of the permanent revolution. Did Marx, perhaps, have such a theory? Marx, of course, rigorously distinguished the bourgeois and proletarian revolutions as to their social content, since they represent different epochs of historical development. But even in the mid-19th century it was becoming clear that the bourgeoisie was too weak and the proletariat too powerful for there to exist a “Chinese wall” between the bourgeois and proletarian revolutions. Distinct in social content, they would be closely linked historically. The German revolution of 1848 made this link particularly clear. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels wrote:

“Communists pay special attention to Germany. There are two reasons for this. First of all, Germany is upon the eve of a bourgeois revolution. Secondly, this revolution will take place under comparatively advanced conditions as far as the general civilization of Europe is concerned, and when the German proletariat is much more highly developed than was the English proletariat in the seventeenth century or the French proletariat in the eighteenth. Consequently, in nineteenth-century Germany, the bourgeois revolution can only be the immediate precursor of a proletarian revolution.”

Marx did not believe that the working class could directly achieve victory in 1848, but that it would be forced to support the liberal bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie insofar as they fought against feudal-absolutist reaction. But even in this pre-imperialist period, when the proletariat was quite weak and politically dominated by the artisan and democratic petty-



**Trotsky, president of the Petrograd Soviet, awaits trial after 1905 revolution. While in jail he wrote his major theoretical work, *Results and Prospects*, presenting the theory of permanent revolution.**

bourgeois interests, he counseled the workers to “simultaneously erect their own revolutionary workers’ government hard by the new official government” in order to oppose their previous ally, as well as bring about “the arming of the whole proletariat.”

Marx’s prediction that proletarian revolution would closely follow the bourgeois revolutions of 1848 was not borne out. But neither were there successful bourgeois revolutions, precisely because the fear that proletarian revolution would break out if the least step were taken to rouse the masses drove the liberals into the arms of Prussian and Austrian reaction. Tied to the feudalists by a common dread of social revolution, the liberals strove not to overthrow the monarchy (as did the French bourgeoisie in 1789), but to *share* power with the feudalists. The German bourgeoisie could not rise above the level of a “shopocracy,” as Engels put it.

## Revolution by Stages: Russia 1905

The Russian revolution of 1905 again raised the question of permanent revolution, but in much sharper form. The Russian bourgeoisie was far weaker even than the German. For centuries the main characteristic of Russian development was its primitiveness and slowness, resulting from Russia's unfavorable geographic location and sparse population. Capitalist development in the northern empire was primarily imported from the West by the autocratic state, simply grafted on to the existing feudal economy. Thus while a modern industrial proletariat was forming in the main cities, concentrated in large factories which utilized the most advanced techniques, the town handicrafts and early forms of manufacture, which had formed the economic base for the bourgeoisie in the West, never had time to develop. With large industry primarily in the hands of European capital and state banks, the Russian capitalist class remained small in number, isolated, half-foreign and without historical traditions. Moreover, it remained tied by a thousand strands to the feudal-absolutist state and the landed aristocracy. A bourgeois-led revolution which could solve the tasks of democracy, agrarian revolution and national emancipation was utterly out of the question. And yet the tasks of the bourgeois revolution remained.

Faced with this reality the two wings of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party took sharply opposed positions. The Mensheviks with scholastic formalism and utter spinelessness deduced from the democratic character of the initial tasks of the revolution the "strategy" of an alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie. In a speech at the "Unification Congress" of the RSDLP (1906), Axelrod, a leading Menshevik, remarked:

"The social relations of Russia have ripened only for a bourgeois revolution.... While this general political lawlessness persists, we must not even so much as mention the direct fight of the proletariat against other classes for political power.... It is fighting for the conditions of bourgeois development. Objective historical conditions doom our proletariat to an inevitable collaboration with the bourgeoisie against our common enemy."

This conclusion was derived by simply mechanically pasting the classical scheme of European (and more particularly French) development onto Russian conditions, with the implications that proletarian revolution could only come after many decades of capitalist development. The kernel of the Menshevik position was captured by Plekhanov's remark that "we must prize the support of the non-proletarian parties and not drive them away from us by tactless behavior." To this Lenin responded: "...the liberals among the landed gentry will

forgive you millions of 'tactless' acts, but they will never forgive incitements to take away their land."

As against Plekhanov's coalition with the bourgeoisie, Lenin called for a bloc with the peasantry to carry out the agrarian revolution. This was codified in his formula of a "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry":

"We must be perfectly certain in our minds as to what real social forces are opposed to tsarism.... The big bourgeoisie, the landlords, the factory owners, and 'society,' which follows the *Osvo-bozhdeniye* [the liberals] lead, cannot be such a force.... We know that owing to their class position they are incapable of waging a decisive struggle against tsarism; they are too heavily fettered by private property, by capital and land to enter into a decisive struggle. They stand in too great need of tsarism, with its bureaucratic, police and military forces for use against the proletariat and the peasantry, to want it to be destroyed. No, the only force capable of gaining 'a decisive victory over tsarism' means the establishment of the *revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry*." [emphasis in original]

—V.I. Lenin, "Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution" (1905)

This policy was irreconcilably opposed to the insipid liberalism of the Mensheviks, instead fanning the flames of peasant revolt and leading the proletariat in a "tactless" assault on the tsarist autocracy. But at the same time he insisted on the characterization of the revolution as bourgeois, with power to be placed in the hands of the peasantry and the future opened to a flowering of capitalist development:

"Marxists are absolutely convinced of the bourgeois character of the Russian revolution. What does that mean? It means that the democratic reforms in the political system, and the social and economic reforms that have become a necessity for Russia, do not in themselves imply the undermining of bourgeois rule, on the contrary, they will, for the first time, really clear the ground for a wide and rapid, European and not Asiatic, development of capitalism; they will, for the first time, make it possible for the bourgeoisie to rule as a class."

—*Ibid.*

Trotsky's view, quoted at the beginning of this article, was distinct from those of the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks, though immeasurably closer to the latter. As he later wrote:

"The theory of the permanent revolution, which originated in 1905 ... pointed out that the democratic tasks of the backward bourgeois nations lead

directly, in our epoch, to the dictatorship of the proletariat and that the dictatorship of the proletariat puts socialist tasks on the order of the day.”

--*Permanent Revolution* (1929)

According to Davidson, Lenin “insisted that the revolution would develop in stages” while Trotsky supposedly completely ignored the bourgeois-democratic stage. This is simply a smokescreen. Trotsky never denied the bourgeois character of the initial phases of the revolution in the sense of its immediate historical tasks, but only in the sense of its driving forces and perspectives:

“Already in 1905, the Petersburg workers called their soviet a proletarian government. This designation passed into the everyday language of that time and was completely embodied in the program of the struggle of the working class for power. At the same time, *we set up against tsarism an elaborated program of political democracy* (universal suffrage, republic, militia, etc.). We could act in no other way. *Political democracy is a necessary stage in the development of the working masses* – with the highly important reservation that in one case this stage lasts for decades, while in another, the revolutionary situation permits the masses to emancipate themselves from the prejudices of political democracy even before its institutions have been converted into reality.” [emphasis in original]

–L. D. Trotsky, “Introduction” to *The Year 1905* (1922)

Davidson again tries to cloud the issues by claiming that Trotsky was “hostile to the peasantry” while “Lenin’s view is directly opposite.” This is pure fabrication. It is true that Trotsky dismissed out of hand the idea that the peasantry as a whole could be a “socialist ally” of the working class:

“From the very first moment after its taking power, the proletariat will have to find support in the antagonisms between the village poor and the village rich, between the agricultural proletariat and the agricultural bourgeoisie.”

–L. D. Trotsky, *Results and Prospects* (1905)

But in this respect, Lenin’s view was identical:

“The struggle against the bureaucrat and the landlord can and must be waged together with all the peasants, even the well-to-do and the middle peasants. On the other hand, it is only together with the



**Stalinist doctoring of history: Top photo shows Lenin speaking in Moscow’s Red Square on May Day 1920 while Trotsky and Lev Kamenev await their turn. Lower picture was retouched to “disappear” Trotsky and Kamenev.**

rural proletariat that the struggle against the bourgeoisie, and therefore against the well-to-do peasants too, can be properly waged.”

–V.I. Lenin, “Petty-Bourgeois and Proletarian Socialism” (1905)

The dispute between Lenin and Trotsky was not over whether or not the bourgeois-democratic stage of the revolution could be skipped or whether an alliance between the workers and peasants was necessary, but concerned the political mechanics of the collaboration of the proletariat and peasantry, the *degree* of independence of the latter. Trotsky pointed out (as had been shown by all past revolutionary experience, as well as the writings of Marx and Engels) that because of its intermediate position and heterogeneity of its social composition, the peasantry as a class was incapable of taking an independent role or forming its own independent party. It was compelled to follow the lead of either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat.

## Revolution in Stages: 1917

It is no accident that Davidson's articles hardly mention the 1917 October Revolution, going instead from the disputes in 1905 over the role of the peasantry straight to the question of "socialism in one country." Indeed, had Davidson reproduced Lenin's writings from this period he would have had to print statements radically different from Lenin's view of the 1905-1907 period. Before Lenin's arrival from Europe on 4 April [1917] the majority of the Bolshevik party called for "critical support" to the bourgeois Provisional Government of Prince Lvov, which had taken power after the February revolution overthrew the tsar. Stalin was the chief spokesman for this viewpoint at the March 1917 Bolshevik Party Conference. In his report on the attitude to the Provisional Government, he said:

"...the Provisional Government has in fact taken the role of fortifier of the conquests of the revolutionary people.... It is not to our advantage at present to force events, hastening the process of repelling the bourgeois layers, who will in the future inevitably withdraw from us. It is necessary for us to gain time by putting a brake on the splitting away of the middle-bourgeois layers.... Insofar as the Provisional Government fortifies the steps of the revolution, to that extent we must support it; but insofar as it is counterrevolutionary, support to the Provisional Government is not permissible." –Draft Protocol of the March 1917 All-Russian Conference of Party Workers"

While the bulk of the party leadership called for "completing the bourgeois-democratic revolution," Lenin insisted that the only revolutionary policy was calling for the dictatorship of the proletariat. In taking this position he came over to Trotsky's program of permanent revolution, and was accused of Trotskyism by the right wing. This required an ideological rearming of the party and at one point Lenin threatened to resign from the Central Committee in order to take the struggle to the ranks when his "April Theses" were initially voted down by the leadership. The key passage in these theses stated:

"The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that the country is *passing* from the first stage of the revolution – which, owing to the insufficient class-consciousness and organization of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie to its second stage, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants."

–V.I. Lenin, "The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution" (1917)

In direct opposition to Stalin's position of less than a

week earlier, Lenin demanded "No Support for the Provisional Government; the utter falsity of all its promises should be made clear..." (*Ibid.*). The opposition to Lenin was led by Y. Kamenev who claimed that "the bourgeois-democratic revolution is not completed.... As for Comrade Lenin's general scheme, it appears to us unacceptable, inasmuch as it proceeds from the assumption that the bourgeois-democratic revolution is *completed*, and builds on the immediate transformation of this revolution into a socialist revolution." In his "Letters on Tactics" Lenin replied to this charge:

"After the revolution [of February-March 1917], the power is in the hands of a *different* class, a new class, namely, the *bourgeoisie*....

"To this extent, the bourgeois, or the bourgeois-democratic revolution is *completed*."

"But at this point we hear a clamor of protest from people who readily call themselves 'old Bolsheviks.' Didn't we always maintain, they say, that the bourgeois-democratic revolution is completed only by the 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry'?... My answer is: the Bolshevik slogans and ideas *on the whole* have been confirmed by history; but *concretely* things have worked out *differently*....

"The Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies' – there you have the 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' already accomplished in reality."

"This formula is already antiquated....

"A new and different task now faces us: to effect a split *within* this dictatorship between the proletarian elements (the anti-defensist, internationalist, 'Communist' elements, who stand for a transition to the commune) and the *small-proprietor* or *petty-bourgeois* elements....

"The person who *now* only speaks of a 'revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' is behind the times, consequently, he has in effect *gone over* to the petty bourgeoisie against the proletarian class struggle; that person should be consigned to the archive of 'Bolshevik' pre-revolutionary antiques....

"Comrade Kamenev...has repeated the bourgeois prejudice about the Paris Commune having wanted to introduce socialism 'immediately.' This is not so. The Commune, unfortunately, was too slow in introducing socialism. The real essence of the Commune is...in the creation of a *state* of a special type. Such a state has *already* arisen in Russia, it is the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies!"

–V.I. Lenin, "Letters on Tactics" (April 1917)

And the Paris Commune, Brother Davidson, was the

dictatorship of the proletariat. In an article for *Pravda* at about this time, Lenin formulated the question in a manner identical to that of Trotsky:

“We are for a strong revolutionary government.... The question is – *what class* is making this revolution? A revolution *against whom*?

“Against tsarism? In that sense most of Russia’s landowners and capitalists today are revolutionaries....

“Against the landowners? In this sense most of the peasants, even most of the well-to-do peasants, that is, probably nine-tenths of the population in Russia, are revolutionaries. Very likely, some of the capitalists, too are prepared to become revolutionaries on the grounds that the landowners cannot be saved anyway....

“Against the capitalists? Now that is the real issue. That is the crux of the matter, because without a revolution against the capitalists, all that prattle about ‘peace without annexations’ and the speedy termination of the war by such a peace is either naïveté and ignorance, or stupidity and deception....

“The leaders of the petty bourgeoisie – the intellectuals, the prosperous peasants, the present parties of the Narodniks ... and the Mensheviks – are not at present in favor of a revolution against the capitalists....

“The conclusion is obvious: only assumption of power by the proletariat, backed by the semi-proletarians, can give the country a really strong and really revolutionary government.”

–V. I. Lenin, “A Strong Revolutionary Government” (May 1917)

It is true that Lenin both at this time and later occasionally referred to the soviets in the period February-October 1917 as an expression of the “revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry,” but those soviets did not hold state power. The struggle for “All Power to the Soviets” was, as Lenin put it, the struggle against the petty bourgeoisie, which did not wish to struggle against capitalism. And the state which resulted from the October Revolution was the dictatorship of the working class, supported by the peasantry. From 1917 on Lenin never implied that there could be such a creature as a state of two classes, such as envisioned by Stalin and Mao. As he put it in his polemic against Kautsky, “The Soviets are the Russian form of the proletarian dictatorship” (*The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* [1918]).



**Lenin presents his “April Theses” in 1917 at the Tauride Palace, arguing for all power to the soviets. Bolshevik “Old Guard” including Stalin called for critical support to bourgeois Provisional Government.**

Slogans and programs of revolutionary parties have a real meaning in the class struggle: they call for certain courses of action and oppose others. Kamenev who in April led the fight to retain the slogan of the “revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” in October opposed the revolutionary insurrection, and after the successful uprising actually resigned from the Central Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars in protest. In this behavior there was at least a semblance of consistency.

But Davidson and Stalinists everywhere would have us believe that the “Old Bolshevik” program was confirmed by the October Revolution! Behind this deception lies a purpose, namely to justify the anti-revolutionary policies of Stalinism. It is always “too soon” for socialist demands, we must always go through a “democratic stage” before the peasants can seize the land and the proletariat can expropriate the expropriators. As a true proletarian revolutionary, Lenin learned from the experience of the 1917 revolution, advancing a new program when the inadequacy of the old one had been clearly revealed. But what can one say of people who not only refuse to assimilate these lessons but insist on proclaiming that black is white? In the mouth of Stalin in 1927 the slogan of a “democratic dictatorship” was a justification for ordering the Chinese Communist Party to give up its arms just as Chiang Kai-shek prepared to massacre thousands of Communists and militant workers. Today, when the same slogan is used to justify support for “anti-imperialists” such as Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia, it will have the same result – annihilation of the revolutionaries and strangulation of the revolution. The choice is posed worldwide: Either socialism or barbarism, there is no middle ground!



Lenin, Trotsky and Red Army troops in Petrograd in 1921.

## 2. Socialism In One Country

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The story of the origins of the Stalinist doctrine of “socialism in one country” is one of the usurpation of power by a bureaucratic stratum at the head of the first workers state in history. This privileged caste consolidated itself in the Soviet state apparatus, which was formed as a necessary means of defending the conquests of the October Revolution in a backward peasant country ravaged by civil war and isolated by the imperialist blockade and the triple defeat of proletarian revolution in Germany (1919, 1921 and 1923). These unfavorable conditions required a policy of “compromise” and consolidation rather than a blind “extension” of the revolution. Attraction of bourgeois experts to aid in the rebuilding of industry, guarantees to the middle peasants in order to end the famine, a policy of united front with the reformist leaders of the labor movement in the capitalist countries in order to find a road to the masses – these were the necessary tasks of the hour. To reject “compromises” on principle, as did

the “Left Communists,” to reject the use of bourgeois experts on principle and call for the replacement of state management of industry with trade-union control, as did the “Workers’ Opposition,” could only lead to defeat. All the same, every compromise brings with it dangers.

Lenin was aware of these dangers from the beginning and set up the “Workers and Peasants Inspection” (Rabkrin) as early as 1919 in order to curb bureaucratic abuses. The Rabkrin, however, was headed by Stalin and became in effect his private police force.

By the time of the 11th Party Congress in 1922, Lenin was forced to observe:

“If we take Moscow with its 4,700 Communists in responsible positions, and if we take that huge bureaucratic machine, that gigantic heap, we must ask: who is directing whom? I doubt very much whether it can truthfully be said that the Communists are directing that heap.”

And in his very last writing, "Better Fewer, But Better" (1923), he called for an all-out war on bureaucratism, a drastic curtailment of the Rabkrin and its amalgamation with the Control Commission, noting that the former "does not at present enjoy the slightest authority." In a postscript to his "Testament" Lenin called for Stalin's removal as General Secretary of the Party.

### **The Triumvirate vs. Trotsky**

But simple administrative actions could not abolish a phenomenon thrown up by history itself, rather than by individual or organizational failings. The country was tired from five years of starvation and civil war, tired of waiting for a European revolution which did not come. This mood and the conservative interests of the vast bureaucracy, which overwhelmingly dominated the Communist Party itself, were reflected soon after Lenin's death by the consolidation of power in the hands of the Triumvirate of Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev, and the practical exclusion of Trotsky from the central leadership.

A sharp crisis in the party broke out in the winter of 1923-24 over the combined issues of party democracy and industrialization. The "New Economic Policy" of cooperation with the peasantry had led to the emergence of a strong kulak (rich peasant) element in the countryside, which was increasingly conscious of its bourgeois interests in opposition to the Soviet government, while industry continued to grow at a "snail's pace"; at the same time Stalin was running the party as a private fiefdom through the system of appointed secretaries. Trotsky demanded a sharp turn toward centralized planning and industrialization, an offensive against the kulaks and the return of democratic norms within the Party. The Triumvirate opposed this. (A year later Bukharin, who supported Stalin's policies, made his famous speech about "building socialism at a snail's pace" and calling on peasants to "enrich yourselves"!)

What is more, they moved to make sure their line would prevail at all costs: during February-March 1924, no less than 240,000 raw recruits were brought into the party in the "Lenin levy," and as soon as they were enrolled they were lined up as voting cattle to back the line of the General Secretary (Stalin). By this and various other bureaucratic maneuvers he was able to eliminate almost all oppositionists from the May 1924 Party conference, which was turned into an anti-Trotsky rally.



**The triumvirate seized power upon Lenin's death. From left: Stalin, Rykov, Kamenev and Zinoviev.**

The second engagement in the battle was begun with the "literary controversy" over Trotsky's "Lessons of October," an introduction to his articles of 1917 in which he exposed the role played by the current party leaders during the revolution. The fact that Zinoviev and Kamenev had opposed the insurrection, resigned from their government and party posts and demanded a coalition with the Mensheviks, or that Stalin had called for support to the Provisional Government of Prince Lvov in March 1917, was not widely known among the younger generation and was extremely embarrassing to the ruling group.

They counterattacked by denying that there was ever a right wing of Bolshevism, claiming that Trotsky played an insignificant role during the insurrection and launching a campaign accusing Trotsky, the organizer of the October Revolution and the Red Army, of never having broken with his pre-1917 views of conciliation with the Mensheviks. They also charged him with being hostile to the peasantry and continuing to hold to his theory of "permanent revolution" against Lenin's formula of the "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the peasantry and the proletariat." The latter charge was correct, but they had to ignore the fact that Lenin came over on all the essential aspects of permanent revolution in his "April Theses" of 1917, that he had explicitly abandoned his earlier formulation and had waged a furious struggle particularly against Kamenev on this point. For the rest, they could rely only on lies and slander.

It is true that Trotsky wrongly called for conciliation with the Mensheviks until 1914, but he was con-

vinced by the betrayals of the reformist Social Democrats in World War I that a split was inevitable and necessary. Lenin himself remarked that, “Trotsky long ago said that unification is impossible. Trotsky understood this and from that time on there has been no better Bolshevik” (“Minutes of the Petrograd Committee of the Bolshevik Party,” 1 [14] November 1917). Stalin, on the other hand, called for unification with the Mensheviks as late as *April 1917* when the issue was sharply posed and Tseretelli (the Menshevik leader) was soon to enter the bourgeois Provisional Government!

“*Order of the day*: Tseretelli’s proposal for unification.

“Stalin: We ought to go. It is necessary to define our proposals as to the terms of unification. Unification is possible along the lines of Zimmerwald-Kienthal [antiwar conferences in World War I].”

—“Draft Protocol of the March 1917 All-Russian Conference of Party Workers”

As for Kamenev-Zinoviev, the other two members of the Triumvirate and supposed defenders of Leninism against Trotsky, they called for conciliation during and after the insurrection itself (calling for a joint government with the Mensheviks) and opposed the uprising! No right wing in the Bolshevik party? Lenin called them “strikebreakers of the revolution” and called for their expulsion if they did not return to their posts.

“Forgetting” such important episodes of the revolutionary struggle also requires the deliberate rewriting of history. Thus when the minutes of the Petrograd Committee of the Bolsheviks in 1917 were being published the editors simply cut out the meeting in which Lenin commented that “there has been no better Bolshevik” than Trotsky! However, one of the printers managed to pass a galley proof to Trotsky and it has been preserved for posterity. Concerning Trotsky’s role in the October Revolution, things were a bit stickier since John Reed’s *Ten Days That Shook the World* showed in great detail Trotsky’s role as the organizer of the insurrection. So when the campaign against “Trotskyism” began, Stalin summarily announced that Reed had distorted the facts, a discovery which had escaped everyone’s eyes for the previous seven years. Lenin’s “Testament” was also suppressed (though Khrushchev later admitted its validity).

### **Stalin Discovers “Socialism in One Country”**

Even a steady diet of lies, distortions and slander could go only so far in securing the power of the new ruling clique. Stalin-Zinoviev-Kamenev were particularly vulnerable because in the theoretical arsenal of post-1917 Bolshevism, in the resolutions of the Com-

munist International or the program of the Russian Communist Party, there was nothing which would “justify” the Triumvirate’s increasingly conservative appetites. They needed a new theory which would be a clear alternative to Trotsky’s permanent revolution. This was found in the doctrine of “socialism in one country.”

In the current *Guardian* series on Trotskyism Carl Davidson defends this Stalinist theory with the claim that it is good Bolshevik coin:

“On the other hand, Trotsky stood in opposition to the Bolsheviks in claiming that the proletariat was bound to come into ‘hostile collision’ with the broad masses of peasants during socialist construction and that ‘without direct state support from the European proletariat, the working class of Russia cannot maintain itself in power and transform its temporary rule into a durable socialist dictatorship’.”

—*Guardian*, 11 April 1973

This is a myth manufactured out of whole cloth. Until December of 1924 *nobody* in the Bolshevik party, *not even Stalin*, claimed that it was possible to build socialism in one country, without direct state aid from a victorious proletarian revolution in Europe.

“Socialism in one country” is a complete perversion of Marxism in the service of a parasitic bureaucratic clique which desires above all to escape from the logic of history and to build a comfortable nest isolated from the class struggle. In Engels’ first draft of the *Communist Manifesto* this “theory” is clearly rejected. He wrote:

“Question Nineteen: Can such a revolution take place in one country alone?

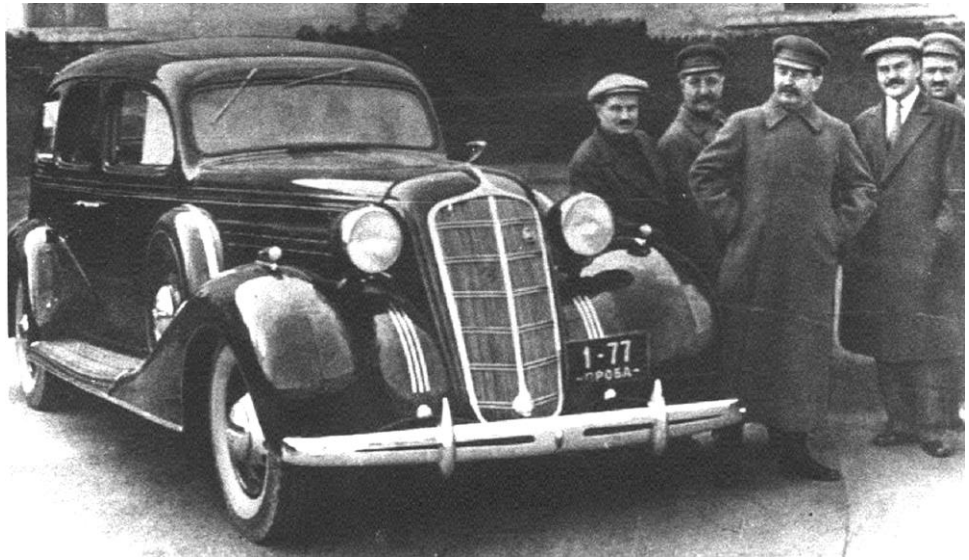
“Answer: No. Large-scale industry, by creating a world market, has so linked up the peoples of the earth, and especially the civilized peoples of the earth, that each of them is dependent on what happens in other lands.... The communist revolution will, therefore, not be a national revolution alone; it will take place in all civilized countries, or at least in Great Britain, the United States, France and Germany, at one and the same time.”

—F. Engels, “The Principles of Communism” (1847)

In a certain sense, this statement was too categorical; history has shown that it is possible for the revolution to be victorious, for the dictatorship of the proletariat to be established, in a single state. But the fundamental proposition continues to hold, that socialism cannot be constructed in a single nation.

Lenin recognized this and, as early as 1906, wrote:

“The Russian revolution has enough forces of its own to conquer. But it has not enough forces to retain the fruits of its victory ... for in a country with an enormous development of small-scale industry, the small-scale commodity producers, among them the peasants, will inevitably turn against the proletariat when he goes from freedom toward socialism.... In order to prevent a restoration, the Russian revolution has need, not of a Russian reserve; it has need of help from the outside. Is there such a reserve in the world? There is: the socialist proletariat in the West.”



**Stalin stood at head of privileged, conservative bureaucratic layer. Here seen admiring the first limousine produced by the Stalin Factory (ZIS) in 1936. From left, factory director Ivan Likachev with Kremlin heavies Sergo Ordzhonikidze, Iosif Stalin, Vyacheslav Molotov and Anastas Mikoyan.**

It was not until early 1917 that Lenin wrote of the possibility of the realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat first in backward Russia, but in no way did this imply an isolated penurious “socialist” society. For the Bolsheviks the dictatorship of the proletariat meant a bridge to revolution in the West. The conditions for the socialist revolution (creating the dictatorship of the proletariat) and for socialism (the abolition of classes) are not identical. That the dictatorship of the proletariat came first to Russia by no means implied that it would be the first to arrive at socialism.

This distinction was so clear that Stalin himself, in early 1924, wrote:

“But the overthrow of the power of the *bourgeoisie* and the establishment of the power of the proletariat in one country does not yet mean that the complete victory of socialism has been ensured. The principal task of socialism – the organization of socialist production – has still to be fulfilled. Can this task be fulfilled, can the final victory of socialism be achieved in one country, without the joint efforts of the proletarians in several advanced countries? No, it cannot. To overthrow the bourgeoisie the efforts of one country are sufficient; this is proved by the history of our revolution. For the final victory of socialism, for the organization of socialist production, the efforts of one country, particularly of a peasant country like Russia, are insufficient; for that the efforts of the proletarians of several advanced countries are required.”

–J. V. Stalin, “Foundations of Leninism” (May 1924)

In subsequent editions this was replaced by the opposite thesis, namely that “we have all that is necessary for building a complete socialist society.”

It could not be more clear that the Bolshevik perspective was one of proletarian internationalism, completely and unalterably opposed to the doctrine of socialism in one country. The Stalinists search through volumes of Lenin’s writings to pick out isolated quotations which will “prove” that Lenin, too, believed in the doctrine of socialism in one country. But if that were true, even ignoring the many times Lenin denied this, why did Stalin write in May 1924 the exact opposite? If “socialism in one country” were orthodox Bolshevism, why didn’t anyone discover this until late 1924?

The Stalinists’ favorite “proof,” quoted by Davidson, is from Lenin’s 1915 article “On the Slogan for a United States of Europe”:

“As a separate slogan, however, the slogan of a United States of the World would hardly be a correct one, first, because it merges with socialism; second, because it may be wrongly interpreted to mean that the victory of socialism in a single country is impossible, and it may also create misconceptions as to the relations of such a country to the others.

“Uneven economic and political development is an absolute law of capitalism. Hence the victory of socialism is possible first in several or even in one capitalist country alone. After expropriating the capitalists and organizing their own socialist pro-

duction, the victorious proletariat of that country will arise against the rest of the world – the capitalist world – attracting to its cause the oppressed classes of other countries, stirring uprisings in those countries against the capitalists, and in the case of need using even armed force against the exploiting classes and their states.”

Taken in the context of all his other writings from this period, it is absolutely clear that Lenin is referring here not to a “socialist society” but to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Moreover, he was obviously referring to Europe, since in 1915 Lenin did not even admit the possibility of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia before a socialist revolution in the West!

The other main Stalinist “proof” is a quote from Lenin’s 1923 article “On Cooperation”:

“Indeed, the power of the state over all large-scale means of production, political power in the hands of the proletariat, the alliance of this proletariat with the many millions of small and very small peasants, the assured proletarian leadership of the peasantry, etc. – is this not all that is necessary to build a complete socialist society...?”

This article is limited to the *political* and *legal* prerequisites for socialism. Elsewhere (“Our Revolution” [1923]) Lenin referred to the statement that “the development of the productive forces of Russia has not attained the level that makes socialism possible” as “incontrovertible,” while polemicizing against the Mensheviks who concluded from this that a revolution was worthless.

### The Productive Forces

During the 1930’s, in a setting of high inflation, a reign of terror inside the Communist Party and a civil war with the peasants caused by Stalin’s program of *forced* collectivization, the “complete victory of socialism” was announced. A resolution of the Seventh Congress of the Communist International (1935) declared that with the nationalization of industry, collectivization and liquidation of the kulaks as a class, “the final and irrevocable triumph of socialism and the all-sided reinforcement of the state of the proletarian dictatorship is achieved in the Soviet Union.” In 1936 the program of the Communist Youth declared: “The whole national economy of the country has become socialist.” A speaker favoring the new program argued:

“The old program contains a deeply mistaken anti-Leninist assertion to the effect that Russia ‘can arrive at socialism only through a world proletarian revolution.’ This point of the program is basically wrong. It reflects Trotskyist views.”

The old program, written in 1921 by Bukharin, was

approved by the Politburo with the participation of Lenin!

In his article, Davidson tries to maintain a pretense of orthodoxy by stating that “Marxist-Leninists, of course, have never held that the final victory of socialism – the classless society – is possible in one country.” By his own admission then, the Russian Communist Party of the 1930’s, under Stalin, was not Marxist-Leninist!

Davidson also accuses Trotsky of holding a “right opportunist ‘theory of productive forces’” as the basis for opposition to the slogan of socialism in one country. But this “theory of productive forces” is the very basis of Marxist materialist analysis of history! It was Marx himself who wrote:

“this development of productive forces ... is absolutely necessary as a practical premise [for socialism]: firstly for the reason that without it only want is made general, and with want the struggle for necessities and all the old crap would necessarily be reproduced; and, secondly, because only with this universal development of productive forces is a universal intercourse between men established.... Without this, (1) communism could only exist as a local event; (2) the forces of intercourse themselves could not have developed as universal, hence intolerable, powers...; and (3) each extension of intercourse would abolish local communism. Empirically, communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples ‘all at once’ or simultaneously, which presupposes the universal development of productive forces and the world intercourse bound up with them.”

–K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology* (1847)

Davidson ridicules these basic Marxist propositions (ascribing them instead to Khrushchev and Liu Shao-chi!), claiming:

“Most socialist construction that has taken place in the world has been in relatively backward countries. But to call it ‘socialism,’ in Trotsky’s view, would only ‘hopelessly discredit the idea of socialist society in the eyes of the toiling masses.’”

This view, according to Davidson, is “patently ridiculous.”

Just how “socialist” was the Soviet Union in the 1930’s? While Russia had made great strides in industrialization, definitively proving the superiority of socialist organization of production even with the terrible restrictions imposed by Stalin’s bureaucratic rule, it was still far behind the advanced capitalist countries. The most basic necessities – decent housing, adequate food and clothing – were still unavailable to the mass-

es of the population. Inflation was rampant and a black market continued to exist. Meanwhile the bureaucracy used its power to secure its own well-being, which concretely meant high salaries, special shops, automobiles, country houses and many other privileges. Lenin had said that the dying away of the state would begin on the very day of the seizure of power. The proletarian state, which was still an organ of class rule, would cease to be a separate power above society but the instrument of the vast majority, carrying out their will and basing itself on their active participation. In the Soviet Union of 1935, the state had not begun to wither away, but had grown instead into a gigantic apparatus of suppression and compulsion.

This, Brother Davidson, is socialism? Even after Stalin's political counterrevolution the Soviet Union was still a great advance over the conditions of tsarism and capitalism. It remained a workers state, in the sense of preserving socialist property forms, though badly degenerated. But the classless society (announced by Stalin's 1936 Constitution of the USSR) it was not.

### Betrayal of the 1926 British General Strike

The most damning proof of the counterrevolutionary meaning of the doctrine of "socialism in one country" was in the field of Stalin's foreign policy and his systematic downplaying, and finally abolition (1943), of the Communist International in favor of blocs with the bourgeoisies of the various countries where revolution threatened. An immediate and graphic illustration of the real content of Stalinist "internationalism" was provided by the 1926 British general strike.

In 1925, British coal operators sought to terminate the 1924 contract and replace it with a new agreement which would reduce miners to a below-subsistence standard of living. After an official inquiry into the industry, the government returned a report which would have placed the main burden of modernizing the coal industry on the miners. Their answer was a strike beginning on 3 May 1926. The next day the whole country was in the throes of a general strike. Councils of action were set up in the workers' districts to keep up morale and control the issuing of permits for emergency



**Workers demonstrating during 1926 British general strike. Stalinist bureaucracy covered betrayal by Trades Union Congress tops.**

work or special transport. This was not simply an industrial dispute, but a direct attack on the bosses' state.

The General Council of the Trades Union Congress, which had been entrusted with the conduct of the strike, called it off after nine days and at the height of its effectiveness, frightened by its revolutionary implications. Men going back to work found themselves blacklisted or accepted back only on terms including reduction in wages, loss of seniority or leaving the unions. On May 13 a second general strike occurred over the victimizations, but after conciliatory speeches from the TUC leaders – *and having no alternative leadership* – the men again returned to work. The miners stayed out until a series of separate agreements made between December 23 and 29, but they were forced by the treachery of the trade-union tops to fight alone. The owners won on all counts: the national contract was lost and miners had to work longer hours for lower wages.

During the temporary retreat of the class struggle in Europe during 1924-25 Stalin decided to try and make peace with the reformist trade-union leaders, possibly abandoning the Red International of Labor Unions. The keystone to this policy was the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee, a bloc between the Soviet trade unions and the General Council of the British TUC, formed in May 1925. After the General Council betrayed the 1926 general strike, Trotsky demanded an immediate rupture with these strikebreakers. Stalin and Bukharin refused. (Zinoviev had at this point joined the Opposition, though he was to capitulate to Stalin two

years later.) In 1926, the General Council supported British imperialism's repression of the Chinese revolution. Trotsky again demanded the denunciation of the Anglo-Russian Committee. Again Stalin refused.

When it finally succumbed in 1927, it was the *British* leaders who dumped the Committee. Its principal aim had supposedly been to oppose British intervention in Russia. As a logical extension of the doctrine of socialism in one country, this mythical aid from the labor fakery was sufficient grounds for sacrificing the 1926 general strike.

### **Stalin Orders Chinese Communists to Their Graves**

Another even more horrifying example of the meaning of socialism in one country was Stalin's policy in the Chinese revolution of 1925-27. As early as 1924 the Chinese Communist Party had entered the populist bourgeois Guomindang party of Sun Yat-sen on orders from Moscow. Trotsky objected when the matter was discussed then at the Politburo. The Chinese CP leadership under Chen Duxiu likewise repeatedly objected. In October 1925, they proposed preparing to leave the Guomindang; the plan was turned down by the Comintern Executive on Stalin's instructions. Stalin's line was that the revolution must be restricted to a bourgeois-democratic stage, under the leadership of a "bloc of four classes" including the national bourgeoisie, urban petty bourgeoisie, workers and peasants. The political expression of this bloc was the Guomindang, to which the Chinese Communists were to subordinate themselves. They were directed to hold down the class struggle against the "anti-imperialist bourgeoisie" in the cities and seek a balance between them and the peasant movement in the countryside, above all maintaining the unity of all anti-imperialist forces.

Stalin's main interest in China at the time was not to foster revolution but to achieve a diplomatic bloc with the Guomindang government. In early 1926, this bourgeois party was admitted to the Communist International as an associate party, and the Comintern Executive Committee, the "General Staff of World Revolution," elected Sun's successor General Chiang Kai-shek an honorary member! Only a few weeks later, on March 20, Chiang carried out his first anti-communist coup, barring CP members from all leadership posts in the Guomindang and demanding a list of all CP members who had joined the Guomindang. Under orders from Comintern representatives, the Chinese party leadership agreed! In October 1926, Stalin actually sent a telegram urging the Chinese CP to call off a peasant revolt in Kuangtung province. Trotsky commented on this:



**Fatal results of Stalin's criminal subordination of Chinese Communist Party to "anti-imperialist" Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang. Top: 1925 Hong Kong-Canton general strike. Above: Shanghai workers march after 1927 insurrection. Stalin ordered CP to turn in arms. Below: Chiang's "pacification commission" beheads Communist workers.**



**"The official subordination of the Communist Party to the bourgeois leadership, and the official prohibition of forming soviets (Stalin and Bukharin taught that the Guomindang 'took the place of**

soviets') was a grosser and more glaring betrayal of Marxism than all the deeds of the Mensheviks in the years 1905-1917."

—L. D. Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution* (1928)

This was bad enough, but after a challenge from the Left Opposition headed by Trotsky and Zinoviev, and during the crucial days of the Shanghai insurrection which began in March 1927, Stalin again and again reaffirmed the policy of capitulating to the nationalists while the latter were preparing to liquidate the communists. A March 1927 editorial in the *Communist International* said the main task in China was "the further development of the Guomindang." On April 5, Trotsky warned that Chiang Kai-shek was preparing a quasi-bonapartist coup against the workers and called for the formation of workers councils to frustrate this aim. At the same time Stalin boasted at a party meeting in Moscow that "we would use the Chinese bourgeoisie and then throw it away like a squeezed lemon." Also at this time the Chinese CP leadership was appealing to Moscow, trying to impress the Comintern with the significance of the Shanghai events, the greatest workers' rising in Asia, and with the need to break with the Guomindang. They were ordered to surrender Shanghai to Chiang's armies, and on April 12 the Guomindang army carried out a massacre which cost the lives of tens of thousands of Communists and militant workers who had laid down their arms at Stalin's orders. This was "socialism in one country" in practice!

But still Stalin would not abandon his policy and, declaring that the alliance with Chiang had now lapsed (!), he now ordered a bloc with the left-Guomindang, which had set up a government in Wu-


han. Again Chinese Communists were ordered to hold back the peasant movement in order not to antagonize the "anti-imperialist" bourgeoisie. And again the bourgeois nationalists turned on the CP. At the end of the year Stalin moved to head off criticism of his Chinese policy from the Left Opposition by ordering an uprising in Canton by telegraph in a tactical situation where it was bound to suffer defeat, which it did despite the heroic defense of the "soviet government" by the Canton workers.

According to Davidson, "the Comintern advocated a policy put into practice independently by Mao and ignored or opposed by both Chen Duxiu and Chang Kuo-tao." In actual fact Mao did not criticize the line followed by Chen in this period. At one point (fall 1924) he [Mao] was expelled from the CP Central Committee for his too-close cooperation with the right-wing Guomindang leaders!

While the Opposition's line on China had been firmly defeated in the thoroughly bureaucratized Russian Communist Party and the Comintern, it was still dangerous to Stalin to have Trotsky at freedom in the Soviet capital. In consequence, he ordered the arrest of the organizer of the October Revolution and founder of the Red Army, exiling him to Alma Ata in Central Asia and deporting him from the USSR two years later. The Bolshevik party had been transformed from the leading revolutionary force in the world into a mere appendage of Stalin's bureaucracy. When Davidson and the Maoists today support the doctrine of socialism in one country, it is this history of betrayals that they are defending.

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### 3. The “Third Period”

Russian peasants demonstrate in 1929 calling for “liquidation of the kulaks as a class.” Stalin opposed Trotsky’s 1926 call for gradual collectivization, but after the 1928 kulak revolt the Kremlin leader ordered the forced collectivization of half of all farms in four months.



Stalin’s consistent rightist course during 1926-27 led him to capitulate to the kulaks (rich peasants) at home, to the trade-union bureaucrats during the British general strike, to Chiang Kai-shek in China. He backed up this policy by a bloc in the Politburo with Bukharin, who had called on the peasants to “enrich yourselves” and projected the building of socialism “at a snail’s pace.” The Left Opposition led by Trotsky opposed this line, warning that it not only meant the massacre of thousands of foreign Communists but ultimately threatened the very foundations of the Soviet state itself. Stalin “answered” at the 15th party congress (December 1927) by summarily expelling the Opposition and formally declaring that “adherence to the opposition and propaganda of its views [is] incompatible with membership in the party.”

Trotsky’s predictions were dramatically confirmed by the kulak rebellion of 1927-28. The state granaries were half empty and starvation threatened the cities; grain collections produced riots in the villages, as the peasants (who could obtain little in the way of manufactured goods in return for the inflated currency) refused to sell at state-regulated prices. Suddenly in January 1928 Stalin switched to a tougher line, ordering

armed expeditions to requisition grain stocks. But even this was not enough. In May, he was still declaring that the “expropriation of kulaks would be folly” (*Problems of Leninism*, p. 221), but by the end of the year he argued: “Can we permit the expropriation of kulaks...? A ridiculous question.... We must break down the resistance of that class in open battle” (*Problems of Leninism*, p. 325). Such dramatic reversals of policy were a constant for Stalin.

Since 1924 Trotsky had been campaigning for industrialization and collectivization and was branded by Stalin as an “enemy of the peasant” and “super-industrializer.” But faced with an anti-Soviet peasant revolt in 1928, Stalin recoiled in utter panic, switching from blind conservatism to blind adventurism. In the 1927 *Platform* of the Joint Opposition, Trotsky and Zinoviev called for doubling the growth rate of the first five-year plan; Stalin now *tripled* it, at the price of tremendous suffering for the workers. The Opposition called for voluntary collectivization aided by state credits for cooperatives and a struggle against the influence of the kulak; Stalin now accomplished the forced collectivization in *half* of all farms in the Soviet Union in the space of *four months*! The peasants re-

sponded by sabotage, killing off more than 50 percent of the horses in the country, and a civil war which during the next several years cost more than three million lives.

Trotsky opposed the collectivization-at-machine-gun-point as a monstrosity. Marxists had always called for the gradual winning over of the petty bourgeoisie by persuasion and a voluntary transition to socialism through cooperative production. The industrialization, however, despite the incredible disorganization and unnecessary hardships caused by bureaucratic planning, he praised:

“The success of the Soviet Union in industrial development is acquiring global historical significance.... That tempo is neither stable nor secure...but it provides practical proof of the immense possibilities inherent in socialist economic methods.”

—L. D. Trotsky, “Economic Recklessness and its Perils” (1930)

Both the collectivization and industrialization fully vindicated the policies of the Opposition. To represent a return to Leninism, however, they required the complement of re-establishment of soviet and party democracy. The bankruptcy of his previous policies sharply revealed by the crisis, Stalin took the opposite course, reinforcing his bureaucratic dictatorship and expelling Trotsky from the Soviet Union.

### **Stalin Discovers a “Third Period”**

Stalin’s policies in the Communist International were a duplicate of his domestic zigzags. After the disaster of the Shanghai insurrection of 1927, in which he ordered the Chinese Communists to lay down their arms to the butcher Chiang Kai-shek, he sharply reversed course and ordered the adventurist Canton Commune which ended in a similar massacre of the workers. In the summer of 1928 Stalin generalized this pattern of reckless ultra-leftism into the doctrine of a “third period” of imperialism.

According to this “theory” there was a post-war revolutionary wave ending in 1923, a period of stabilization until 1928 and then a new period of the imminent and final collapse of capitalism. Like the catastrophists of today, Stalin reasoned that economic crisis would automatically create a revolutionary situation. In fact the early stages of a crisis are frequently accompanied by sharp demoralization in the working class. And it is noteworthy that at no time during 1928-32 did any Communist party in the world attempt to seize power! (Subsequently Stalin quietly abandoned his bombastic theory as he made a sharp turn to the right.)

The onset of the depression and the Comintern’s ultra-left policies wreaked havoc in the Communist parties. In the key country of Western Europe, Germany, a combination of mass layoffs and the CP’s policy of abandoning the trade unions resulted in the percentage of factory workers in the party falling from 62 percent in 1928 to only 20 percent in 1931, effectively turning the Communists into the vanguard of the unemployed rather than the workers. Typical for the pathetic results of “Third Period” adventurism were the May Day demonstrations of 1929 which had been prohibited by the capitalist governments: in Paris the police simply arrested all active CP members on April 30 (releasing them three days later). In Berlin the social-democratic police chief Zörgiebel brutally attacked the Communists, whose call for a general strike fizzled.

Another aspect of the “Third Period” policies was the practice of setting up small “revolutionary unions,” counterposed to the reformist-led mass organizations. Communists favor trade-union unity, but do not oppose every split. It may be necessary to break with the restrictive craft unions in order to organize mass-production workers. Also, when a left-wing upsurge is prevented from taking power solely by bureaucratic and gangster methods, a break with the old organization may be the only alternative to defeat. The key is support of the overwhelming majority of the workers, enabling the union to survive as a mass organization.

The “Third Period” dual unionism, considered a matter of principle, was quite different. It led to the formation of separate trade-union federations (the Trade Union Unity League [TUUL] in the U.S. and the Revolutionary Trade Union Opposition [RGO] in Germany), and countless tiny “red unions” with a few score members, which never had any chance of success. The “red union” policy is directly opposed to the Leninist policy of struggling for Communist leadership of the existing mass workers organizations, and with the exception of a few isolated situations it was doomed to defeat.

### **“Social-Fascism”**

A generalization of this policy was Stalin’s discovery that the reformist social-democratic parties were “social-fascist,” i.e., “socialist in words, fascist in deeds.” Since they were therefore no longer part of the workers movement (like the social-democratic-led unions), the tactic of united front was not applicable and Communists could at most offer a “united front from below,” that is simply calling on rank-and-file Social Democrats and trade-unionists to desert their leaders.

The social-democratic leaders prepared the way for fascism – about this there can be no doubt. In

January 1919, the Social Democrat Noske personally organized the massacre of hundreds of German revolutionary workers in repressing the “Spartacus Uprising” in Berlin; among the martyrs were Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, the top leaders of the German CP. In 1929 the Social Democrat Zörgiebel drowned the CP May Day march in blood. At every step on Hitler’s road to power the reformists capitulated rather than fight. And even after Hitler had already taken power, instead of organizing the massive resistance they had promised, social-democratic leaders offered to support the Nazi government’s foreign policy in the vain hope of thereby saving their party from destruction! They never fought until it was too late, and in the last analysis they preferred Hitler to revolution.

But this is not at all the same as saying, as Stalin did, that the Social Democracy was only the “left wing of fascism.” This philistine statement ignored the fact that the organizations of Social Democracy and the unions themselves would be *destroyed* as the result of a fascist victory. As Trotsky wrote:

“Fascism is not merely a system of reprisals, of brutal force, and of police terror. Fascism is a particular governmental system based on the uprooting of all elements of proletarian democracy within bourgeois society. The task of fascism lies not only in destroying the Communist vanguard.... It is also necessary to smash all independent and voluntary organizations, to demolish all the defensive bulwarks of the proletariat, and to uproot whatever has been achieved during three-quarters of a century by the Social Democracy and the trade unions.”

—*What Next?* (January 1932)

Here was a situation that cried out for the policy of the united front. The leaders did not want to fight but to retreat. The rank and file, however, could not retreat — they had to fight or face annihilation. Call on the social-democratic leadership to mount a united offensive against the Nazis! If they accept, the fascist menace could be destroyed and the road opened to revolution. If they refuse, their treachery is clearly exposed



**German CP leader Ernst Thälmann (left) at the head of the Rotfront-Kämpferbund (red front militia) in 1927. Thälmann rejected Trotsky’s call for a united working-class front against fascists as “counterrevolutionary” and announced in September 1932 that “Germany will of course not go fascist.” Nine months later he was in a Nazi jail.**

before the workers and the revolutionary mobilization of the working class is aided by demonstrating *in struggle* that the communists are the *only* consistent proletarian leadership. In Trotsky’s words:

“Worker-Communists, you are hundreds of thousands, millions; you cannot leave for anyplace; there are not enough passports for you. Should fascism come to power, it will ride over your skulls and spines like a terrific tank. Your salvation lies in merciless struggle. And only a fighting unity with the Social Democratic workers can bring victory.”

—“For a Workers’ United Front Against Fascism” (December 1931)

### “After Hitler – Us”

Right up to Hitler’s seizure of power, Stalin continued to follow out the sectarian-defeatist logic of the “Third Period.” After the September 1930 elections, in which the Nazis’ vote jumped from 800,000 to more than six million, the head of the German CP, Ernst Thälmann, told the Comintern Executive, “...14 September was in a sense Hitler’s best day after which there would be no better but only worse days.” The Comintern endorsed this view and called on the CP to “concentrate fire on the Social-Fascists”! The Stalinists ridiculed Trotsky’s analysis of fascism, and claimed there was no difference between the Brüning regime and the Nazis. In other words, they were entirely indifferent

whether the workers' organizations *existed or not!* Remmele, a CP leader, declared in the Reichstag (parliament), "Let Hitler take office – he will soon go bankrupt, and then it will be our day." Consistent with this criminal and utterly cowardly policy, the CP *joined together with the Nazis* in an (unsuccessful) attempt to unseat the social-democratic Prussian state government (the "Red Plebiscite" of 1931)!

In response to the wide support Trotsky's call for a united front found among German workers, Thälmann replied in September 1932:

"In his pamphlet on how National Socialism is to be defeated, Trotsky gives one answer only, and it is this: the German Communist Party must join hands with the Social Democratic Party.... Either, says he, the Communist party makes common cause with the Social Democrats, or the German working class is lost for ten or twenty years. This is the theory of an utterly bankrupt Fascist and counter-revolutionary.... Germany will of course not go fascist – our electoral victories are a guarantee of this." [!]

Nine months later, Thälmann was sitting in Hitler's jails. He was later executed by the Nazis, as were thousands of Communist and Social Democratic militants, and the workers parties and trade unions were crushed by the iron heel of fascism. Trotsky's analyses and policies were fully confirmed – and the German proletariat paid the price of Stalin's criminal blindness.

But this did not put an end to Stalin's betrayals. Trotsky had earlier warned, "We must tell the advanced workers as loudly as we can: after the 'third period' of recklessness and boasting the fourth period of panic and capitulation has set in" ("Germany, The Key to the International Situation" (November 1931). The tragedy continued to unfold with clockwork precision. Following Hitler's assumption of power, the Comintern, seized with panic, forbade any discussion of the German events in the Communist parties and dropped all mention of social-fascism. Instead, in a manifesto "To the Workers of All Countries" (5 March 1933), the Executive called for a united front with the social-democratic leaders (which they had rejected for the past five years), and for the CPs to "abandon all attacks against the Social Democratic organizations during the joint action"!

### The United Front

Carl Davidson's series on "Trotsky's Heritage" in the *Guardian* is a consistent whitewash of Stalin's crimes against the workers movement in an attempt to make a case for the Stalinist policies of "socialism in one country," "peaceful coexistence," "two-stage revolution," etc. In dealing with the events around Hitler's

rise to power, Davidson claims "the Trotskyists cover up for the political force that actually paved the way to power for the fascists – the German Social-Democrats" (*Guardian*, 9 May 1973). The reader can judge for himself from the above just who paved the way for fascism! Davidson goes on to remark, "This is not to say that the German Communist party made no mistakes or that their errors were insignificant.... They also made a number of ultra-'left' errors, including a one-sided emphasis on the 'united front from below,' rather than a more persistent effort at unity with the Social-Democratic leaders as well, even if this was turned down." Davidson neglects to point out that *at every point the policy of the German CP was dictated by Stalin himself*, and repeatedly confirmed by Comintern meetings!

The Stalinists consistently try to blur the working-class content of Lenin's united-front policy (whose main slogan was "class against class") in order to confuse it with Stalin's "popular front" with the "democratic" bourgeoisie. They seek to portray the united front as a tactic of class collaboration and capitulation to the social-democratic leadership. This has led some groups, such as the Progressive Labor Party (PL), to reject the tactic of united front altogether:

"As we have repeatedly pointed out, we reject the concept of a united front with bosses. We reject the concept of a united front with Trotskyists and the herd of various fakes on the left....

"We believe in a united front from below that takes the form of a left-center coalition."

–"Road to Revolution III," *PL*, November 1973

The united front from below, i.e., calling on the ranks to desert the reformist leaders, is always in order. But we cannot simply ignore these misleaders without resigning the vanguard to sterile isolation. Replying to opponents of the united front during the early years of the Communist International, Trotsky wrote:

"Does the united front extend only to the working masses or doesn't it also include the opportunist leaders?"

"The very posing of this question is a product of misunderstanding.

"If we were able simply to unite the working masses around our own banner or around our practical immediate slogans, and skip over reformist organizations, whether party or trade union, that would of course be the best thing in the world....

"...in order not to lose their influence over the workers reformists are compelled, against the innermost desires of their own leaders, to support the partial movements of the exploited against the exploiters....

“...we are, apart from all other considerations, interested in dragging the reformists from their asylums and placing them alongside ourselves before the eyes of the struggling masses.”

—“On the United Front” (1922)

These theses were approved by the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and by the Executive Committee of the Comintern. In his polemic against the ultra-lefts (*Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*), Lenin called for using “every opportunity to gain a mass ally, no matter how temporary, vacillating, unreliable, and conditional. Whoever hasn’t been able to get that into his head doesn’t understand an iota of Marxism, and of contemporary scientific socialism in general.”

After refusing for five years to unite with the social-democratic leaders, Stalin in March 1933 flip-flopped completely and agreed to a “united front” which prohibited the freedom of criticism. This meant the Communists pledged themselves in advance to remain silent in the face of the inevitable betrayals by the reformists, just as Stalin refused to criticize and break with the British trade-union leaders when they smashed the 1926 general strike. How little this has to do with Bolshevism can be appreciated by reading the original Comintern resolution on the united front:

“Imposing on themselves a discipline of action, it is obligatory that Communists should preserve for themselves, not only up to and after action, but if necessary even during action, the right and possibility of expressing their opinion on the policy of all working-class organizations without exception. The rejection of this condition is not permissible under any circumstances.”

—“Theses on the United Front” (1922)

### **The Soviet Union – A Degenerated Workers State**

The definitive betrayal by Stalin in Germany, and the necessary conclusion of calling for new communist parties and a new international, led to the question of a new party inside the Soviet Union itself. This, in turn, brought up again the question of the class character of the Soviet state and the nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy which ruled it. Trotsky refused to consider the USSR “state capitalist” as did many former Communists who had been expelled by Stalin. To do so would imply that there could be a peaceful counterrevolution, “running the film of reformism in reverse,” so to speak. Fundamentally the state is based on the property forms, which represent the interests of particular classes. The socialist property relations in the Soviet Union remained intact, and this colossal conquest of the October Revolution must not be lightly

abandoned. While opposing the bureaucratic Stalinist leadership, Bolshevik-Leninists must unconditionally defend the USSR from imperialist attack.

At the same time, this was no healthy workers state. The proletariat had been politically expropriated. The soviets were simply administrative bodies to rubber-stamp the decisions of the General Secretary. The Bolshevik party was a creature of the bureaucracy, the entire leadership of 1917 having been expelled or in disfavor, with the sole exception of Stalin. Given the events of recent years – the expulsions, the arrests and exiling of every oppositionist – it was criminal lightmindedness to believe that this parasitic bureaucracy could be eliminated without revolution. This would not be a social revolution, resulting in new property forms, but a *political* revolution. The USSR was a *degenerated workers state*:

“...the privileges of the bureaucracy by themselves do not change the bases of the Soviet society, because the bureaucracy derives its privileges not from any special property relations peculiar to it as a ‘class,’ but from those property relations that have been created by the October Revolution and that are fundamentally adequate for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

“To put it plainly, insofar as the bureaucracy robs the people (and this is done in various ways by every bureaucracy), we have to deal not with *class exploitation*, in the scientific sense of the word, but with *social parasitism*, although on a very large scale....

“Finally, we may add for the sake of complete clarity: if in the USSR today the Marxist party were in power, it would renovate the entire political regime; it would shuffle and purge the bureaucracy and place it under the control of the masses – it would transform all of the administrative practices and inaugurate a series of capital reforms in the management of economy; but in no case would it have to undertake *an overturn in the property relations, i.e., a new social revolution.*”

—“The Class Nature of the Soviet State” (October 1933)

The Stalinists immediately screamed “counterrevolution.” Trotsky was an agent of Chamberlain, Hitler, the Mikado, etc., and was out to re-establish capitalism, they claimed. But the Stalinists were never able to point to a single instance in which Trotsky refused to support the USSR against imperialism or called for abandoning the socialist property forms. In 1939, on the eve of the Second World War, he led a bitter struggle against a group in the American Socialist Workers Party, led by Max Shachtman, which refused to defend Russia against Hitler. Trotsky repeatedly emphasized that as long as the Soviet Union remained a workers state,

however badly degenerated, it was a matter of principle to defend it. In the hour of need the Bolshevik-Leninists would stand ready at their battle posts.

In the early 1960's Mao Zedong announced that the Khrushchev-Brezhnev leadership of the Soviet Union since 1956 was "social-imperialist," and that the USSR is no longer a workers state but a new imperialism presided over by a "red bourgeoisie." In a recent attack on Trotskyism from a Maoist viewpoint, the pamphlet entitled *From Trotskyism to Social-Imperialism* by Michael Miller of the League for Proletarian Revolution contrasts this Maoist view to Trotsky's position:

"In 1956 Khrushchev came on the scene, launching an attack on the dictatorship of the proletariat and spreading petty-bourgeois ideology and culture everywhere....

"Trotskyism has never understood in theory and never learned from practice the class character of the Soviet and Chinese states. During the period of Soviet history when the economic base was being transformed from private to social ownership of the means of production, the Trotskyites always stressed the political structure – the superstructure.... The economic base can never be considered apart from the political structure. In the Soviet Union, the Communist Party, which is the heart of the political structure, was taken over by a clique of bourgeois-type politicians and transformed into a variant of a big bourgeois political party. Now they are busy implementing economic policies which *reverse the socialist* economic base, which restore private ownership, private production for the market, and which reproduce on an enormous scale all the corresponding capitalist social relationships."

This passage demonstrates the Maoists' rejection of elementary Marxism. If, as they hold, a peaceful social counterrevolution took place in Russia, then logically a peaceful socialist revolution against capitalism is also possible – a classical social-democratic position which Lenin refuted in *State and Revolution*. Further, to maintain that such a revolution was accomplished by the appearance of a ruling group with "petty-bourgeois ideology" is idealism, completely counterposed to the Marxist materialist understanding that a social revolution can be accomplished only by an overturn in property relations.



**To consolidate the power of the Soviet bureaucracy, Stalin had to eliminate the leadership which made the October Revolution. By 1937 almost the entire Bolshevik Central Committee of 1917 had either died or been executed.**

Most important of all are the practical consequences of this policy. Since the USSR is an "imperialist" state according to Mao, it is not necessary to defend it against other capitalist states. In fact, Mao has gone so far as to press for a Sino-Japanese alliance against the Soviet Union and to encourage the retention of NATO as a bulwark against "Soviet imperialism" in Europe! These are the counterrevolutionary implications of the "state capitalist" position put into practice. They raise the specter of an inter-imperialist war with the USSR and China aligned with opposing capitalist powers – an eventuality which would place the socialist property forms of the deformed workers states in immediate danger. Though the Brezhnev clique in Moscow is not so explicit in blocking with capitalist states against China, its willingness to abandon the defense of the workers states in the hopes of achieving an alliance with U.S. imperialism was clearly revealed last year when Nixon was invited to sign a declaration of "peaceful co-existence" in Moscow at the very moment that American planes were carrying out saturation bombing over North Vietnam!

The Trotskyists, in contrast, call for Sino-Soviet unity against imperialism, for unconditional defense of the deformed workers states. At the same time we mercilessly criticize the parasitic bureaucracies who are sabotaging that defense. The advanced workers will recognize the justice of this principled, class position, and reject those such as the Maoists and pro-Moscow Stalinists who criminally abandon the defense of the workers' conquests.

## 4. The Popular Front



French Socialist premier Léon Blum (left), Communist Party leader Maurice Thorez (center) and bourgeois Radical Edouard Daladier (in second row center) celebrate the June 1936 electoral victory of the Popular Front. Far from blocking the fascists, the popular front was a roadblock to revolution, repressing the workers and opening the way to victory of right-wing Bonapartist forces (Pétain in France, Franco in Spain).

The turn toward the “Popular Front” came toward the end of 1933 as the Stalinized Communist International made a quick about-face from its ultra-left “Third Period” policies. With the triumph of Hitler and the renewed threat of imperialist attack the panic-stricken Soviet bureaucracy set about lining up allies for defense of the Soviet fatherland. Russia entered the League of Nations and signed a Franco-Soviet military assistance pact. Throughout this period the Comintern sought to ingratiate itself with the bourgeoisies of the democratic imperialist powers through calculated containment of revolutionary proletarian movements in Europe. The method: class-collaborationist alliances with and participation in the governments of the bourgeoisie. The cover: the struggle against fascism.

The popular front found theoretical expression in the report of Georgi Dimitrov to the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in August 1935. According to Dimitrov the main danger now threatening the workers was fascism. But fascism threatened not only the working class, but also the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie in general and even sections of the

bourgeoisie. In consequence, the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat and socialism are removed from the agenda during the present period:

“Now the toiling masses in a number of capitalist countries are faced with the necessity of making a *definite* choice, and of making it today, not between proletarian dictatorship and bourgeois democracy, but between bourgeois democracy and fascism.”

To defend bourgeois democracy, the proletariat must aim to ally with all other social groups threatened by fascism, including the “anti-fascist” sections of the bourgeoisie, in a vast “People’s Front”:

“Under certain conditions, we can and must bend our efforts to the task of drawing these parties and organizations or certain sections of them to the side of the anti-fascist people’s front, despite their bourgeois leadership. Such, for instance, is today the situation in France with the Radical Party....”  
—G. Dimitrov, “Report to the Seventh Comintern Congress” (1935)

During the Third Period the Communists refused to bloc with the German Social Democrats in a united

front against Hitler, dubbing them “social-fascists.” Now the Communists are not only willing to make ongoing alliances with the social democracy, but to form a government with the anti-fascist sectors of the bourgeoisie itself! Subsequently, in Italy during the late 1930’s this “broad alliance” was still further broadened to include appeals to “honest” fascists!

The popular front is nothing more than an expression of the theories and practices of class collaboration – a bloc of organizations and parties representing various classes on the basis of a common program, the defense of bourgeois democracy. Though the name was new, the content was not. The German Social Democrats formed “left bloc” coalition governments with the democratic bourgeoisie (in the form of the Center Party) throughout the 1920s. The only difference was that the Communists occasionally made a pretense of being revolutionary, while the Social Democrats were more open about their reformism.

The Stalinists try to claim that the popular front is simply the logical extension of the united front to a higher plane. Nothing could be further from the truth. The “working-class united front” was formed under the banner of “class against class” and was raised precisely in order to break the Social Democrats away from their perennial class-collaborationist alliances with the “democratic” bourgeoisie:

“The tactic of the United Front is the call for the united struggle of Communists and of all other workers, either belonging to other parties and groups, or belonging to no party whatever, for the defense of the elementary and vital interests of the working class against the bourgeoisie.”  
–Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), “Theses on the United Front” (1922)

The united front served both to join the forces of the various workers organizations in action and also to expose the reformists, who would participate in struggles for working-class interests only when forced to do so by pressure from their base, and who would desert at the earliest possible moment. Since the Bolshevik party *alone* represented the true historical interests of the working class, it was crucial that there be no common program with the reformists, since this could only mean the abandonment of the Leninist program. Nor could there be any restrictions on the right to criticize the other parties to the front. Hence the second main slogan of the united front, “freedom of criticism, unity in action” or, as Trotsky put it, “march separately, strike together.”

In the popular front, however, the proletarian parties renounce their class independence and give up their

working-class program. Earl Browder summed this up succinctly in his report to the Central Committee of the Communist Party USA on 4 December 1936:

“We can organize and rouse them [the majority of “the people”] provided we do not demand of them that they agree with our socialist program, but unite with them on the basis of their program which we also make our own.” [!]

The popular front conformed with the Menshevik theory of the “two-stage revolution.” First the struggle for bourgeois democracy, then the struggle for the overthrow of capitalism. The Stalinists proceeded from the absolutely false conception that a basic social conflict existed between bourgeois democracy and fascism. Fascism appeared in Europe following World War I as a necessary development of bourgeois rule in a period of severe economic decline. It is a last resort of the capitalists to preserve their system when it is no longer possible through normal parliamentary measures. The Stalinists at one point even tried to justify their two-stage schema by claiming that fascism actually had its roots in feudalism, not capitalism!

In point of fact, the popular front was simply another bourgeois solution to the conditions which led to fascism. The Communists or Social Democrats are invited to participate in a capitalist government under conditions in which no existing bourgeois parliamentary combination can effectively rule over a restive mass of workers and peasants. The price of the coalition is Communist support to strikebreaking and similar measures by the governments in which they participate.

During the 1930s, popular-front governments were realized during pre-revolutionary periods in France and Spain. There the coalition with the “democratic” bourgeoisie was able to head off powerful mass upsurges by diverting the general strikes and even insurrections into the dead-end of defending bourgeois democracy. In colonial countries, such as Vietnam, the popular-front policies led to dropping the demand for independence! To the Stalinists’ class collaboration, the Trotskyists counterposed a working-class united front to smash the fascists. Instead of depending on the republican generals and the police, they called for the formation of workers militias based on the trade unions. Weak in numbers and subject to vicious slander campaigns by the Comintern, the Trotskyists were unable to gain sufficient influence to break through the reformist stranglehold on the workers movement. Time and again the positions of the Bolshevik-Leninists were proved correct, but in a negative way, by the ignominious defeat of promising revolutionary situations. Stalin certainly earned the nickname Trotsky had given him – the Great Organizer of Defeats.

## France 1934-1936

In France fascist agitation made more headway than in any other of the “great democracies.” Fascist leagues appeared in open imitation of the Italian and German fascist organizations. After years of ignoring or downplaying the fascist danger, the Communist (PCF) and Socialist (SFIO) leaders panicked after the February 1934 attack on parliament by the Croix de Feu (Cross of Fire) band. Under tremendous pressure from the ranks, the Socialist and Communist-led trade-union federations held a massive joint demonstration on 12 February 1934 whose very size served effectively to throw back the fascists for months. Trotsky’s struggle of the past four years for a workers united front against fascism had been vindicated against the sectarian-defeatist idiocies of the Third Period.

In June 1934, PCF leader Maurice Thorez proposed a united front with the SFIO. The united front did not adopt the Leninist slogan of “march separately, strike together,” but instead took the form of a “nonaggression pact.” Both parties renounced their programmatic independence and ceased to criticize each other. Trotsky criticized the united front for limiting its actions to parliamentary maneuvers and electoral alliances and refusing to seek to arouse the workers in extra-parliamentary struggle against fascism, a struggle which might have opened up the prospect for proletarian revolution.

In the midst of acute social crisis, mass strike waves and readiness to fight of the workers, the PCF refused to struggle for power on the basis that the situation was “not revolutionary.” Instead, the PCF put forth a program of “immediate economic demands,” which served to disorient and disorganize the proletariat and speed the growth of fascism since the capitalists felt an increasing threat from the working class. The PCF renounced the struggle for nationalization, opposed the call for workers militias as provocative and refused arms to the workers, while trying to preserve a fig-leaf of revolutionism by absurdly calling for “soviets everywhere,” the immediate precondition for an armed insurrection.

In July 1935 the French Stalinists expanded the coalition to include the bourgeois Radical Socialists. The Radical Socialists, based on the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie, advocated progressive social changes but were firmly committed to private enterprise and



**Above: mobilization of ultra-rightist squads of Action Française on 6 February 1934 sought to topple bourgeois Radical government. Below: On 12 February 1934, over 100,000 workers took to the streets against the fascistic and monarchist mobs. But instead of forming a workers united front, as Trotsky called for, the CP and SFIO formed a popular front with the bourgeois Radicals.**



private ownership. In order to save unity with the Radicals, the PCF insisted that the popular-front program be restricted to defense of the republic against fascism, measures against the depression, and labor reforms. The popular front swept the March 1936 elections. The SFIO became the leading party in the Chamber of Deputies, and their chief, Léon Blum, became premier of a coalition cabinet of Socialists and Radical Socialists. The Communists refused to enter the government in order to avoid scaring the bourgeoisie but supported it in parliament.

As frequently occurs at the beginning of a popular-front government, the masses saw the elections as a

victory for the working class and unleashed a tremendous wave of militancy culminating in the May-June 1936 general strike. While the initial demands were mainly defensive, centering on a 15 percent wage increase, the strikes almost all involved the militant sit-down tactic. The bourgeoisie panicked, demanding that the Blum government take office immediately in order to contain the strike. Blum and the CGT labor bureaucrats negotiated an initial settlement which provided some gains, but on the condition of the immediate evacuation of the factories. The pact was solidly voted down by Parisian metal workers.

Fearing that, as Trotsky wrote, “the French Revolution has begun,” the PCF ordered its militants to support the agreements. Thorez declared, “There can be no question of taking power at this time” and “one must know how to end a strike.” The Socialist-Radical government did its part by seizing the issue of the Trotskyist newspaper (*Lutte Ouvrière*) which called for extending the strike. By the middle of June, the combined efforts of the reformists had succeeded in scuttling the resistance.

This was the high point of the popular front, for it was in breaking the 1936 general strike that the Blum government accomplished the basic task set for it by the bourgeoisie – stopping the drift toward revolution. The few significant social reforms, such as the 40-hour week, were soon reversed. In 1937, after a year in office and having lost the confidence of the working masses, the Blum government was toppled by the Senate. In mid-1938 the Radical Socialists formed a conservative ministry under Edouard Daladier. Daladier’s announcement that fall of a return to the 48-hour week provoked a new mass strike wave. The response of the PCF: a call for a one-day protest strike! Daladier declared martial law and sent troops to the factories. The labor movement collapsed, millions of workers tore up their union cards in disgust. By January 1940 the PCF had been banned, and all Communist-led unions were



**French workers responded to election victory of the Popular Front by launching general strike, June 1936. However, CP leader Maurice Thorez proclaimed, “One must know how to end a strike.” The government seized the issue of the Trotskyist newspaper *Lutte Ouvrière* which called to extend the strike. Nine months later, in March 1937, police of the Popular Front government massacred workers in the town of Clichy outside Paris.**

banned from the CGT labor federation. In June 1940, the bourgeois parties, as well as some SFIO delegates, voted to create the Vichy regime. Thus, far from stopping fascism, the popular front proved to be just one more “peaceful road” to barbarism.

### **The Popular Front in Spain, 1936-1939**

The consequences of the Stalin-Dimitrov popular-front policies were equally counterrevolutionary in Spain. The overthrow of the monarchy in 1931 had led to the establishment of a bourgeois republic, but the social policies of the Radical/Socialist coalition government were hardly more liberal than those of the military dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera during the late 1920’s (also supported by the Socialists). In October 1934 an insurrection broke out in the mining region of Asturias in reaction to the rightist policies of the government. Despite bloody repression (thousands of miners were machine-gunned by the military), the heroic uprising awakened the Spanish working masses and led to the widespread formation

of united-front workers committees (*alianzas obreras*).

In response, the leaders of the major workers parties moved to set up a popular front similar to that in France, including the Socialists (right and left wings), the Communists and also the POUM (the Workers Party of Marxist Unification). The POUM had been formed by the fusion of a right split-off from the CP (Joaquín Maurín's "Workers and Peasants Bloc" which Trotsky had referred to as the "Spanish Guomindang," i.e., a two-class party) and the former Communist Left headed by Andreu Nin. As a result of forming an unprincipled bloc with Maurín and signing the popular-front agreement, the ties between Nin and the Trotskyist movement were broken.

The popular-front agreement signed in January 1936 was a classic document of the abandonment of working-class politics. It pledged:

"The republicans do not accept the principle of the nationalization of the land and its free reversion to the peasants.... The republican parties do not accept measures for nationalization of the banks ... [and] workers control claimed by the delegation of the Socialist Party."

The republican/worker alliance won a plurality in the February 1936 elections, however, and formed a government under the bourgeois lawyer Manuel Azaña. As in France, the masses interpreted this as a victory and began a wave of land and factory occupations which the government was unable to contain. In consequence, on 17 July 1936 General Francisco Franco and a group of leading military officers issued a proclamation for an authoritarian Catholic state and went into rebellion. The response of the Azaña government was to attempt to negotiate with the insurgent generals, meanwhile refusing to arm the masses!

This temporizing might have succeeded if the masses of workers had not taken matters into their own hands. In Barcelona, a stronghold of the anarchists and the POUM, workers took over numerous factories and stormed the army barracks with pistols. In less than a day they had complete control of the city. This sparked similar revolts elsewhere, and the republican govern-



**Anarchist-led anti-fascist workers militia in Valencia, Spain during Civil War. Anarchist CNT leaders joined with Stalinists, Socialists and bourgeois politicians in popular-front government that repressed the workers and murdered leftists, sealing the fate of the Spanish Revolution.**

ment was forced to reverse itself, arm the masses and attempt a half-hearted struggle against Franco.

The alternative was a proletarian revolution which was possible at any moment. In Catalonia, transport and industry were almost entirely in the hands of the CNT (anarchist) workers committees, while in much of the northeast (Catalonia and Aragon) the peasant associations and agricultural workers unions had set up collective farms. The old municipal governments disappeared, replaced by committees giving representation to all anti-fascist parties and unions. The most important was the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias of Catalonia which, although it had bourgeois members, was thoroughly dominated by the workers organizations. Yet on top of this sat the "shadow of the bourgeoisie," a popular-front government of Catalonia headed by another bourgeois lawyer, Lluís Companys. As in Russia from February to October 1917, there was a situation of dual power, but with the workers still giving tacit support to the shaky bourgeois government.

In this situation, Lenin and the Bolsheviks had demanded, "Down with the Provisional Government, All Power to the Soviets!" The Spanish workers parties, however, from the Stalinists to the POUM and even the anarchists (who supposedly opposed even a workers government!), joined the bourgeois government in September 1936. The Stalinists assured their bourgeois friends that they had no intention of leading

the workers to power. In August 1936 the PCF newspaper *L'Humanité* stated:

“The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Spain requests us to inform the public ... that the Spanish people are not striving for the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but know only one aim: the defense of the republican order while respecting private property.”

With support of the Stalinists and Socialists guaranteed, Azaña and Companys began moving to re-establish bourgeois law and order. The first step was censorship of the workers press. The Catalan government followed this up with a decree dissolving the revolutionary committees which had arisen in July, and in late October it ordered the disarming of the workers in the rear. The POUM and CNT leaders were subsequently expelled from the cabinet, even though they had gone along with all these anti-worker measures. A secret police was organized, under the control of the Stalinists and GPU agents from the Soviet Union.

But this was not enough to break the back of the workers' resistance. A provocation was required. This came on 3 May 1937 when the Stalinists attacked the Barcelona telephone exchange held by CNT workers. Within hours, barricades were erected throughout the city and the workers were once again in a position to take power. Instead, the POUM and anarchist leaders capitulated to the central government, trusting in Azaña's pledge of no reprisals. Two days later the Assault Guards arrived and occupied the exchange, killing hundreds and jailing tens of thousands. Within a month the POUM was outlawed, at the demand of the Stalinists, and its leaders arrested and eventually shot. In short order, the CP led the Assault Guards in dissolving the collective farms and workers militias. Although the war dragged on for another year and one half, the result was already decided – since the workers and peasants no longer had anything to fight for, they became rapidly demoralized and the superior armaments of the fascists carried the day.

In all this the Spanish CP had acted as the guarantor of bourgeois order, leading the offensive against



**Barricades during street fighting in Barcelona May Days 1937. Popular Front government dispatched Stalinist-led assault guards (below) to crush anarchist and POUM workers. Stalin was the butcher of the Spanish Revolution.**



the anarchists and the POUM, the collective farms and the workers militias. In his desperate desire to achieve an alliance with the “democratic” imperialist powers, Stalin was absolutely opposed to revolution in Spain – even if this meant that fascist victory was the alternative. The Great Organizer of Defeats was also the Butcher of the Spanish Revolution.

But the responsibility for the debacle does not stop here. Nin and the other leaders of the Communist Left had once fought for the class independence of the proletariat. At one time they were a larger party than the Spanish CP itself. But by capitulating to the popular front, these centrists were as responsible for the defeat of the Spanish revolution as Stalin. Had they known how to swim against the stream in moments when the popular front had mass support, they could have earned the leadership of the workers movement when the masses later came to see that they had been betrayed. As it was the POUM went along with the betrayals, protesting only when it was too late.



**Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin meet at Yalta in 1945. Stalin dissolved the Communist International in order to support the war effort of the “democratic” imperialists. Stalinists in imperialist countries enforced strike bans.**

## **The Popular Front in World War II**

It is remarkable that in Davidson’s attack on Trotskyism, in addition to virtually ignoring the October 1917 Russian Revolution and the ignominious defeat of Stalin’s policies in Germany, he does not mention Stalin’s policies in Spain and France at all. And with good reason! But as a good Stalinist he must defend the popular front somehow, preferably with a more popular example. He chose World War II. According to the Stalinists, this was a war against fascism and in defense of the Soviet fatherland. Their political conclusion was a broad popular front “including even the temporary and wavering allies to be found in the camp of the bourgeois-democratic capitalist governments” (*Guardian*, 9 May 1973).

Davidson gives a somewhat accurate account of the Trotskyist position on the war, presuming that nobody could have opposed the great anti-fascist crusade except counterrevolutionary Trotskyists. But while the Stalinist policy was certainly more popular at the time, it will not wash so easily with a new generation of worker-militants who have far less illusions about the “democratic” character of U.S. imperialism. The Trotskyist position on the war was revolutionary defeatism in the capitalist countries in this *inter-imperialist* war. At the same time they gave unconditional support to the military defense of the

Soviet Union. This was no academic question, for Trotsky fought a sharp battle against the Shachtman group (in the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party) which was opposed to defense of the USSR, and eventually left the SWP taking 40 percent of the membership with it.

During the war the numerically weak Trotskyist cadre by and large carried out an internationalist line, despite social-patriotic bulges in some of the sections. The French section, for instance, organized a Trotskyist cell in the German navy. In the process, however, many of the leaders of the Fourth International were executed either by the Nazis or, like Nin in Spain, at the hands of the Stalinists. In the U.S., the SWP concentrated its work on fighting the no-strike agree-

ment supported by the CIO leadership and the CP.

The Stalinists had the opposite policy. According to CPUSA leader Earl Browder:

“In the United States we have to win the war under the capitalist system....Therefore, we have to find out how to make the capitalist system work....We have to help the capitalists to learn how to run their system.”

The *Daily Worker* of 25 December 1941 implemented this policy by hailing the CIO no-strike pledge as a “definite contribution to national unity.” What this meant in practice was strikebreaking. During the 1943 mine workers’ strike, CP labor leader William Z. Foster traveled the Pennsylvania mining districts trying to organize scabs and a “back-to-work” movement. On the West Coast, CP sympathizer Harry Bridges of the ILWU called for speed-up.

Thus throughout the 1930s and 1940s the popular front policy led to the identical practical result: strike-breaking and counterrevolution. The strangulation of the Spanish revolution, the defeat of the French general strike, scabbing in the U.S. miners’ strike – these were the fruits of class collaboration. Drawing the logical conclusion, Stalin made another concession to his bourgeois friends by dissolving the Communist International in 1943 because it hindered a united effort to win the war!

## 5. The Struggle For The Fourth International

A party that is incapable of defending the conquests already won by the working class will certainly be unable to lead the proletarian revolution. From the time it was formed in 1923 until Stalin ordered the German Communist Party to capitulate to Hitler without a fight almost ten years later, the Left Opposition steadfastly held to the banner of the Third International. In spite of the most incredible bureaucratic rigging, wholesale expulsions, and even exile and deportation, Trotsky held adamantly to his course of *reforming* the Comintern. Bureaucratically expelled Left Oppositionists demanded readmittance to their respective CPs and acted insofar as possible as factions of the Communist International, rather than proclaiming new parties. Critical events inside or outside the Soviet Union could stir the working class into action once again and provide the opportunity for replacing the Stalinist usurpers. Further, the Third International, enjoying the prestige of association with the only successful socialist revolution, had strong ties with the masses which could not be ignored. For the Left Opposition to prematurely renounce the Comintern would abandon hundreds of thousands of revolutionary-minded workers to the bureaucracy and doom the Trotskyists to isolation and irrelevance.

The sectarian-defeatist "Third-Period" policies of the Comintern which led to the victory of fascism in Germany in 1933 forced the Left Opposition to adopt a radical change in its perspective. Ever since 1930, Trotsky had warned that the fate of the international revolutionary movement depended on the outcome of the struggle against the fascist threat in Germany. The Communists (KPD), following Stalin's orders, played directly into the hands of the fascists by refusing to call for a united front with the Social Democracy (SPD) against the Nazis, instead denouncing the SPD as "social-fascist."



Leon Trotsky reading the newspaper of the U.S. Trotskyists.

### The Call for a New International

Hitler's peaceful march to power, without even token resistance by the Communists, led Trotsky to correctly conclude that the KPD had decisively degenerated. As a consequence of this world-historical defeat and betrayal, the German working class lay prostrate for more than a decade and the second imperialist world war and Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union were prepared. The Left Opposition now called for a new party in Germany:

"The question of the open break with the Stalinist bureaucracy in Germany is at the present moment of enormous principled importance. The revolutionary vanguard will not pardon the historical crime committed by the Stalinists. If we support the illusion of the vitality of the party of Thälmann-Neumann we would appear to the masses as the real defenders of their bankruptcy. That would signify that we ourselves veer toward the road of centrism and putrefaction."

--L.D. Trotsky, "KPD or New Party?" (March 1933)

But what about the rest of the Communist International?

"Here it is natural to ask how we act toward the other sections of the Comintern and the Third International as a whole. Do we break with them

immediately? In my opinion, it would be incorrect to give a rigid answer – yes, we break with them. The collapse of the KPD diminishes the chances for the regeneration of the Comintern. But on the other hand the catastrophe itself could provoke a healthy reaction in some of the sections. We must be ready to help this process. The question has not been settled for the USSR, where proclamation of the second party would be incorrect. We are calling today for the creation of a new party in Germany, to seize the Comintern from the hands of the Stalinist bureaucracy. It is not a question of the Fourth International but of salvaging the Third.”  
–*Ibid.*

However, not a single one of the Comintern sections made the slightest protest to Stalin’s claim that the policies of the KPD had been correct from start to finish, or even called for a discussion of the German events! Trotsky responded by declaring that an organization which is not roused by the thunderbolt of fascism and submits docilely to the outrageous acts of the bureaucracy demonstrates that it is dead and that nothing can revive it; Stalinism had its 4 August (a reference to the definitive betrayal of the reformist German Social Democrats, who voted for the Kaiser’s war budget in August 1914, thus siding with “their own” bourgeoisie in the imperialist war). In July 1933 Trotsky called on the Left Opposition to begin working for the creation of a new International and new revolutionary parties throughout the world. In accord with the new perspective, the Left Opposition changed its name to the International Communist League.

Trotsky’s analysis was quickly confirmed. After the German debacle the Comintern substituted the capitulatory policy of the “united front” at any price for the adventures of the Third Period. In its international policies, the Soviet Union decided to join the imperialists’ League of Nations (which Lenin had denounced as a den of thieves) and turned toward military alliance with French imperialism, openly repudiating revolutionary internationalism. The Stalinists divided the imperialist powers into two categories: the “democratic, peace-loving” on the one hand, and the fascist, war-like on the other. The Third International was subverted into becoming a simple tool for the diplomatic interests of the Russian bureaucracy, with the job of forging alliances with the “peace-loving” imperialists to protect “socialism in one country.” Thus the French CP was ordered to vote for the defense budget of its bourgeois rulers. The Stalinist bureaucracy officially declared that Roosevelt was “honestly seeking a democratic and pacifist solution to imperialist conflicts” and consummated popular-front alliances with liberal bourgeois parties in France

and Spain in 1936, which led to the victory of the fascists three years later. During World War II Stalin finally declared that the Comintern no longer served any purpose and formally disbanded it.

The ICL and groups sympathetic to it did not simply proclaim themselves to be the new International. Expulsion of the Left Opposition from the Comintern had deprived it of a necessary sphere of political activity, forcing it to develop as an isolated propaganda group. The Left Opposition had been able to train a limited number of cadres but lacked roots in the masses and was numerically weak. Moreover, its organizations had not been tested in serious class battles. The period ahead was to be one of preparation:

“Propagating the ideas of the Left Opposition, recruiting more and more adherents, individually and in groups, into the ranks of the International Communist League, carrying on an agitation among the masses under the slogan of the Fourth International, educating our own cadres, deepening our theoretical position – such *is our basic work in the historic period immediately ahead of us.*” [emphasis in original]

–L.D. Trotsky, “The SAP, the ICL and the Fourth International” (January 1934)

The principal tactic used by the ICL to recruit new adherents was revolutionary regroupment. Trotsky was the first to recognize the immensity of the task faced by his small, isolated movement. He searched out every opportunity to break out of isolation and find new allies, even temporary ones, so that the first steps could be taken toward the building of a new International.

In a period of tremendous revolutionary opportunities and dangers the oppositionist moods and tendencies of the 1930’s bore a predominantly centrist character, vacillating between social patriotism and socialist revolution. The German events (1931-33), the crushing of the “leftist” Austrian Social Democracy together with its supposedly powerful party militia (the Schutzbund) in 1934, caused deep ferment in the working-class movement and a widespread rejection of reformism. A proliferation of centrist currents appeared, as frequently occurs in the early stages of a new upsurge of working-class militancy. The ICL oriented toward these groups in order by example and propaganda to win the healthiest elements to a revolutionary program. But the tactic of revolutionary regroupment is not, as some maintain, a process of political accommodation to centrism. At the same time Trotsky waged a consistent struggle against the vacillating centrist leaderships, mercilessly rejecting the slogan of “unity” of all working-class organizations regardless of program and tactics:

“...to blur our difference with centrism in the name of facilitating ‘unity’ would mean not only to commit political suicide, but also to cover up, strengthen and nourish all the negative features of bureaucratic centrism, and by that fact alone help the reactionary currents within it against the revolutionary tendencies.”

—“On the State of the Left Opposition” (16 December 1932)

The realignment of forces within the European working class did not bypass the parties of the Second International. Disillusioned with the Comintern, many working-class militants and youth joined the social-democratic parties, resulting in the proliferation of leftward-moving tendencies within them. In France, Spain, Belgium and Switzerland sections of the Socialist Youth became sympathetic to Trotsky’s ideas.

In France, the Socialists (SFIO) had split at the end of 1933 with the right wing forming its own organization. This split shifted the SFIO, the largest workers party in France, to the left, and Trotsky advised the small French section of the ICL to enter the Socialists. The formation of a “united front” of the SFIO and CP in July 1934 and talk of merger of the two reformist parties provided added reason for immediate entry; every tendency outside the united front would become more isolated than ever. Trotsky advocated similar entries (the so-called “French Turn”) in most of the other sections as well.

The French Turn led to deep disputes and even splits within the partisans of the Fourth International, with some ultra-left sectarians such as Hugo Oehler in the U.S. rejecting the entry tactic on principle. The French section was split in half over the question, and the Spanish Communist Left (led by Andreu Nin) rejected it outright (only to fuse with a reformist group to form the POUM a year later). Even where it was carried out, however, the French Turn and struggles to regroup revolutionaries out of leftward-moving centrist formations brought few recruits to the Trotskyists. The proletariat had a long series of defeats behind it and was in retreat. With the threat of a new world war, the working class was interested in immediate solutions to its problems; the tiny Trotskyist groups were not attractive.

### Founding of the Fourth International

But with the impending threat of imperialist war and the drying up of the various centrist currents following the advent of the popular-front governments in France and Spain, the objective need for the foundation of a new International permitted no further delay. In September 1938 the founding conference was held outside Paris with 21 delegates representing 11 coun-



**James P. Cannon, founder of American Trotskyism.**

tries. While the Fourth International was weak in numbers, it represented the continuity of Leninism, expressed above all in its program.

The basic programmatic document adopted at the founding conference, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (“Transitional Program”), is the single most comprehensive and succinct summary of Trotskyism, representing the distillation of the interests of the proletariat in the epoch of imperialism. It is a document that has been willfully misunderstood, both by its opponents and some of its supposed adherents. Above all, it is not a program of reforms but represents marching orders for the seizure of power by the proletariat. It is based on the premise that in the epoch of capitalist decay, the objective prerequisites for socialist revolution are not only ripened, but already beginning to rot. The fundamental factor preventing world revolution is the reformist leadership of the unions and mass workers parties, the agent of the bourgeoisie in the workers movement: “The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.”

During the period of progressive capitalism the Social Democracy distinguished its minimum program (trade-union reforms, political democracy) and its maximum program (socialism), postponing the latter to the indefinite future. Now “there can be no discus-



**Left Oppositionists in exile colony at Yeniseisk, Siberia, demonstrate on the anniversary of the October Revolution in 1928. Center banner, with portraits of Lenin and Trotsky, says “Long Live the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.”**

sion of systematic social reforms and the raising of the masses’ living standards ... every serious demand of the proletariat ... inevitably reaches beyond the limits of capitalist property relations and of the bourgeois state.” The task of the communist vanguard was to make the proletariat conscious of its tasks, through a series of transitional demands which formulate the objective needs of the working class in such a way as to make clear the need to destroy capitalism:

“The strategic task of the next period – a prerevolutionary period of agitation, propaganda and organization – consists in overcoming the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard (the confusion and disappointment of the older generation, the inexperience of the younger generation). It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of *transitional demands*, stemming from today’s consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.” [emphasis in original]

–*The Transitional Program* (1938)

Such demands included a sliding scale of wages and hours, opening the books of the capitalists, expropriation of industry under workers control, for the formation of factory committees, workers militias, soviets and a workers government. In the backward

countries, it called for proletarian revolution, supported by the peasantry, which would solve both democratic (agrarian revolution, national independence) and socialist tasks. In the Soviet Union, it called for political revolution, while stressing the commitment of the Fourth International to unconditional defense of the USSR against imperialist attack.

### Stalinist Persecution

The Fourth International, at the time of its founding conference, was composed of sections consisting of a few dozen or at the most a few hundred members (with one exception, the U.S. section, the Socialist Workers Party, with 2,500 members). But despite their small numbers, the Trotskyists were a mortal threat to Stalin and his entourage of bureaucratic usurpers. The only answer was political and physical annihilation.

Stalin was, however, increasingly worried about even his own faction, and beginning in 1936 he proceeded to purge the entire leadership of the army; through the medium of the Moscow Trials, he accused and convicted all nine members of Lenin’s Political Bureau (save Stalin himself), as well as virtually the entire Bolshevik Central Committee of 1917. At the third trial (March 1938), Trotsky and his son Leon Sedov were accused of conspiring to sabotage and overthrow the Soviet government and restore capitalism in alliance with Hitler and the Mikado [emperor of Japan]. In his famous secret speech at the 1956 Twentieth Party Congress, Nikita Khrushchev officially admitted that the trials and the “confessions” on which

they were ostensibly based were a fraud from start to finish. Nevertheless, both Moscow-line and Maoist Stalinists today continue to repeat the slanders that Trotsky cooperated with the fascists even though there was never produced one shred of evidence to “prove” these charges.

Also at this time Stalin unleashed a systematic campaign to exterminate Trotskyist leaders throughout the world and to eliminate the thousands of Russian Left Oppositionists in the labor camps. An eyewitness account from the Vorkuta camps told of roughly 1,000 Bolshevik-Leninists in this camp, and several thousand more in the other camps of the province. Down to the end, the Trotskyist prisoners called for the overthrow of the Stalin government, while always stressing they would defend the Soviet Union unconditionally in case of war. When in the spring of 1938 the GPU ordered the murder of all remaining Trotskyists they marched to their deaths singing the *Internationale*.

Internationally, the GPU had assassinated Trotsky’s son; the Czech Erwin Wolf and the German Rudolf Klement, both secretaries of Trotsky; and the Pole Ignace Reiss, a former head of Soviet secret service in Europe. During the same period, they also eliminated prominent ex-Trotskyists such as Nin in Spain, the Austrian Kurt Landau and others. The culmination came with the assassination by a GPU agent of Trotsky himself on 20 August 1940.

### Unconditional Defense of the Soviet Union

The favorite charge of the Stalinists during this period was always that Trotsky allied with foreign powers to destroy the Soviet state. This was a bald-faced lie, as Trotsky always insisted that true Bolshevik-Leninists must unconditionally defend the historical gains of the October Revolution (see part 3 of this series). Every single programmatic document of the Left Opposition, the International Communist League and the Fourth International proclaimed the unconditional defense of the USSR against capitalist restorationist forces and imperialist attack.

But defense of the Soviet state required above all the ousting of the Stalinist regime which consistently sabotaged that defense. By the theory of “socialism in one



**Some of the 18 Trotskyists and Minneapolis Teamsters imprisoned in 1941 for their courageous internationalist opposition to the imperialist Second World War, even as they defended the Soviet Union.**

country” the bureaucracy wrote off the possibility of world socialist revolution, which was the only real defense of the achievements of the first workers state in history. But Stalin did more than this: he twice decapitated the top leadership of the Soviet armed forces during the late 1930’s (after repeatedly purging the Red Army during the 1920’s to drive out the Trotskyists); and he placed blind faith in his treaty with Hitler, thereby preparing the way for the rout of the Russian forces during the first weeks of Hitler’s invasion of the USSR. Only by vigorously leading the workers against their own bourgeoisies in the capitalist countries, and through political revolution in the Soviet Union, could the road be opened to socialism. This was the task of the Fourth International.

Trotsky’s last political battle was over precisely this question. In 1939-40, under the pressure of public opinion which had turned against the Soviet Union during the Hitler-Stalin pact, a petty-bourgeois opposition formed among elements of the leadership in the American SWP. The Shachtman/Burnham/Abern group suddenly “discovered” that the Soviet Union was no longer a workers state, and thus need not be defended unconditionally. Trotsky steadfastly refused to give one inch to the Shachtmanite faction, for he understood perfectly that to waver on this crucial issue would condemn the Fourth International to an ignominious death. This dedication to Bolshevik principles cost the SWP roughly 40 percent of the party membership when the Shachtmanites split in 1940, and destroyed the youth section. Though weak and persecuted, the Fourth International was able to avoid its own “4 August” by steadfastly holding to its program during this period of intense social patriotism.

## 6. The Third Chinese Revolution

The core of the *Guardian* series on “Trotsky’s Heritage” is a simple assertion: “History has proved Mao correct.” The Chinese revolution, according to Davidson, is the model for backward and colonial countries. The great beacon of Mao Zedong Thought shows the way. Is this so?

Let us take first the myth of Mao the great proletarian leader who has always struggled for the dictatorship of the proletariat, as opposed to traitors like Liu Shaoqi who tried to hold him back. In an earlier article, Davidson wrote that in 1927 “the Comintern advocated a policy put into practice independently by Mao and ignored or opposed by both Chen Duxiu [head of the Chinese Communist Party at this time] and Chang Kuo-tao.” Nothing could be further from the truth. In the first place, Chen unfortunately only carried out orders from Moscow even when he sharply disagreed; he did not have the proletarian spirit to refuse to obey these orders even when they literally sent thousands of Chinese comrades to their graves.

Second, it is to Mao’s credit that he refused to carry out instructions from the Communist International during the 1926-27 Northern Expedition of General Chiang Kai-shek, when Moscow wanted to hold down mass struggles at all costs. On 26 October 1926, Stalin had sent a telegram ordering the peasant movement to be restrained lest it alienate the Guomindang generals who, after all, were often landlords themselves. Mao was given the task of carrying out this restraining order in the key province of Hunan by the Central Committee of the party. He immediately returned to his home province and proceeded to do just the opposite, rousing tens of thousands of peasants to form peasant associations and seize and redistribute land belonging to the gentry. This vast wave of peasant unrest enormously aided the rapid northward march of the Guomindang (GMD) armies. It also made the generals “uneasy,” as can be easily imagined.

Mao’s policies in this period were not always more militant than the CP leadership’s, however. In the fall of 1924, he was removed from the Politburo of the party because of too-close ties to right-wing Guomindang circles. But Mao’s most general pattern of “protest” against a policy he disagreed with was to simply go off to the hills and carry out the policies he believed correct. When a Comintern telegram on 31



**Mao Zedong’s “anti-imperialist united front”: toasting Chiang Kai-shek, the butcher of Shanghai 1927, in 1945.**

March 1927 ordered the Shanghai party and trade unions to hide their guns with Chiang’s armies at the gates, the inevitable result was a massacre of tens of thousands of militants. Chen protested and carried out the suicidal orders; Mao never protested.

During 1930, Mao again came into conflict with the party leadership over land reform policy in the “peasant soviet” area. Wang Ming, then CP head, accused Mao of having a “rich peasant line” because he simply called for equal redistribution of land, not confiscating all the land of the rich peasants, but simply giving them equal shares. It would be more accurate to call it a middle-peasant line, for the rich peasants (kulaks in Russia) generally oppose violent upheavals in favor of gradual solutions which allow them greater opportunity to accumulate land and capital. It is the middle peasants who have the most to gain from a radical elimination of the feudal landlord class, and historically it has been middle peasants who have put forward such schemes for “black distribution” of the land. These were the leaders of the Russian peasant revolt of summer and autumn of 1917.

Most important, however, this is the most radical land-reform line that can be taken without totally disrupting the village. Guerrilla warfare depends on support from the general peasant population, not just the poorest of the poor, for isolated, poorly equipped *guerrilleros* are extremely vulnerable to betrayal. And

faced with modern weapons the only weapon of the peasants is overwhelming numbers, which again presumes unity. It is no accident that all guerrilla movements opt for a middle – or rich – peasant policy rather than taking the class struggle into the village; and one more reason why revolutionary Marxists insist that the proletariat is the only consistently revolutionary class, and oppose guerrillaism.

### **Period of the “Anti-Japanese United Front”**

But Mao was not simply an astute guerrilla leader. Gradually he came to a quite clear understanding of the essence of Stalinism – capitulation to the bourgeoisie while maintaining bureaucratic control over the workers and poor peasants. Thus, when he finally achieved predominance in the CP Central Committee it was as the most energetic proponent of a second “united front” with the Guomindang, following the Long March. This corresponded to the shift in line at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International (1935) and the popular-front period.

Shortly thereafter, on 1 August 1935, the CCP issued an appeal to all patriotic classes to join the Communists to fight against Japan. In line with the new popular-front policy, Mao issued new guidelines for moderating agrarian policy in order to win support from the rich and middle peasants. The Politburo statement of 25 December 1935 read:

“The Soviet People’s Republic will change its policy toward rich peasants; rich peasant land, except for that portion of it in feudal exploitation, regardless of whether it is under self-cultivation or whether tilled by hired labor, will not be confiscated. When land is being equally distributed in a village, rich peasants will have the right to receive the same share of land as poor and middle peasants.”

Now here was a real rich-peasant policy. Six months later it was amplified by a Central Committee statement: “Lands of all anti-Japanese soldiers and those involved in anti-Japanese enterprises must not be confiscated.” This permitted even large landlords to retain their land through the simple device of enlisting a son in the Red Army.

This land policy had its equivalent at the political level as well. The “Workers and Peasants Soviet Government” became the “Soviet People’s Republic,” which proclaimed:

“It [the ‘people’s republic’] is willing to have the broad petty-bourgeois class unite with the masses in its territory. All petty-bourgeois revolutionary class elements will be given the right to vote and be elected in the soviet.”



**Chen Duxiu, founder of the Communist Party, was scapegoated and expelled from CP after 1927 massacre for carrying out Stalin’s orders (which he had opposed) to support Chiang Kai-shek. He subsequently joined the Trotskyist Left Opposition.**

In the meantime, in the fall of 1936, orders were issued to ban the use of the name “Communist Party” at the sub-district level, replacing it with that of the “Anti-Japanese National Salvation Association.”

Having indicated its willingness to capitulate, the CCP sent a telegram to the GMD on 10 February 1937 proposing a united front. (In recent years the Maoists have made much of “the Great Helmsman’s” writings against those who placed sole emphasis on the united front and not enough on the party. Considering the terms of this “patriotic united front,” it was an outright betrayal of the masses to enter this front at all, even though all Trotskyists unequivocally supported China against Japan up to the point where this struggle for national independence was submerged by World War II.) In response to the CCP proposal, the Guomindang adopted a “Resolution for Complete Eradication of the Red Menace,” which agreed to reconciliation if the Red Army and soviet government were abolished, all Communist propaganda ended and calls for class struggle dropped. The CCP accepted, although the actual integration of the Communist base areas into Guomindang rule as well as the absorption of the Communist army remained solely on paper.

With the onset of World War II, Mao's class collaboration became even more blatant, if that is possible. He renamed Stalin's "bloc of four classes" with the slogan "New Democracy," which was defined as the "dictatorship of all revolutionary classes over the counterrevolutionaries and traitors." Davidson dishes up a sweetened version of New Democracy, according to which this intermediate stage would last only until the end of the civil war, after which "the revolution would immediately and uninterruptedly pass over to its second stage of socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat" (*Guardian*, 25 April 1973). Mao never said anything of the kind. Rather:

"The progress of the Chinese revolution must be divided into two stages: (1) the democratic revolution; (2) the socialist revolution.... As to the first stage or the first step in this colonial and semi-colonial revolution – according to its social nature, it is fundamentally still a bourgeois-democratic revolution in which the objective requirement is still basically to clear away the obstacles in the way of capitalist development....

"The Chinese revolution can only be achieved in two steps: the first being that of new democracy; the second, that of socialism. Moreover, the period of the first step will be a considerably long one and can never be accomplished overnight."

–"On New Democracy" (January 1940)

In another document from this period, Mao made the point even more explicit:

"Why do we call the present stage of the revolution a 'bourgeois-democratic revolution'? Because the target of the revolution is not the bourgeoisie in general, but imperialist and feudal oppression, the program of the revolution is not to abolish private property but to protect private property in general, the results of this revolution will clear the way for the development of capitalism.... So the policy of 'land to the tiller' is a bourgeois-democratic policy, not a proletarian and socialist one....

"Under the New Democratic system of government, a policy of readjusting the relations between capital and labor will be adopted. On the one hand, the interests of workers will be protected. An eight- to ten-hour-day system ... and the rights of labor unions. On the other hand, reasonable profits of state, private, and cooperative enterprises will be guaranteed.... We welcome foreign investments if such are beneficial to China's economy...."

■"On Coalition Government" (April 1945)

So much for Brother Davidson's "uninterrupted passing over" into socialism. And as for the meaning of this "New Democracy" in social and economic

terms, we only have to look at the land policy enforced during the "anti-Japanese united front," which contained such "progressive" measures as the following:

"Recognize that most of the landlords are anti-Japanese, that some of the enlightened gentry also favor democratic reforms. Accordingly, the policy of the Party is only to help the peasant in reducing feudal exploitation but not to liquidate feudal exploitation entirely....

"...peasants should be advised to pay rent and interest as well as to protect the civil, political, land and economic rights of the landlord."

–"Decision of the Central Committee on Land Policy in the Anti-Japanese Base Areas" (January 1942)

As to this mythical and completely anti-Marxist concept of a joint revolutionary dictatorship of all revolutionary classes, Mao had something very specific in mind, namely a real coalition government with the fearless anti-imperialist patriot Chiang Kai-shek, under which the KMT would control a majority of the government and the vast majority of the military units. This arrangement was worked out, and agreed to by the CCP, at a "Political Consultative Conference" in January 1946. The government would be made up of 40 persons entirely chosen by Chiang, half from the Guomindang and half from other parties (including the CCP). The Nationalist armies would be restricted to 90 divisions and the Communist forces to 18 divisions respectively. It was only because of the hostility to any compromise with the Communists on the part of certain sectors of the GMD, particularly the military, that this agreement was never implemented.

Thus over a twenty-year period, from the late 1920s to the late 1940s, Mao repeatedly sought to conciliate the Chinese bourgeoisie and even, at times, feudal elements while espousing doctrines which are classic expressions of the Menshevik theory of two-stage revolution. That there was no Indonesia-type disaster, with the liquidation of the party and murder of hundreds of thousands of militants, was due solely to the fact that the GMD government was so corrupt that Chiang could not afford to risk a coalition government. But the bourgeoisie was not always so weak. In the aftermath of the Shanghai massacre, Chiang had been able to stabilize Guomindang rule, and during the period 1927-36 he was able to systematically wipe out most of the Communist base areas.

### **New Democracy or Permanent Revolution?**

This leads to a second aspect of the Chinese Revolution, namely who was proven right by history? Davidson quotes Trotsky's observation that Stalin's attempt to resurrect the policy of a "revolutionary democratic dictator-



**Mao's peasant-based People's Liberation Army entering Tianjin in 1949. In 1932, Trotsky warned that "when the peasant troops occupy the industrial centers and are brought face to face with the workers," the Stalinists may "counterpose the peasant army to the 'counter-revolutionary Trotskyists' in a hostile manner." Precisely this occurred when the victorious PLA took China's cities in 1949 and proceeded to round up the Chinese Trotskyists.**

ship of the proletariat and the peasantry," which Lenin explicitly abandoned in April 1917 (see part 1 of this series), was completely inappropriate to China:

"The formula of the democratic dictatorship has hopelessly outlived its usefulness.... The third Chinese revolution, despite the great backwardness of China, or more correctly, because of this great backwardness as compared with Russia, will not have a 'democratic' period, not even such a six-month period as the October Revolution had (November 1917 to July 1918); but it will be compelled from the very outset to effect the most decisive shake-up and abolition of bourgeois property in city and village."

—*Third International After Lenin* (1928)

Davidson claims that Mao's theory of New Democracy was proven correct as against this prediction by Trotsky. Let's look at the facts: First, despite Mao's repeated attempts, he was never able to achieve a coalition government with Chiang. Second, when the Communists were sweeping through China at the end of the civil war, the bulk of the Chinese bourgeoisie fled to Taiwan with Chiang, eliminating the crucial bourgeois element of "New Democracy."

Most important of all were the changes in the property relations which followed the establishment of the "People's Republic of China" in October 1949. It is important to note that not until 10 October 1947 did Mao

even raise the slogan for the overthrow of the GMD regime. It was the occupation of the Yanan base area by Guomindang troops and Mao's realization that no compromise was possible and a coalition government of the "new democratic type" was a pipe dream, that finally forced the CCP to strike out for state power – in violation of Stalin's explicit orders. At the same time the Communist Party decided to overthrow Chiang, it took a logical corollary step, namely announcing an agrarian reform scheme similar to the "rich-peasant policy" Mao had followed in 1930, but far more radical than the timid rent reduction (and Red Army-enforced rent collection) of the period 1942-47.

Furthermore, following the proclamation of the Chinese People's Republic in October 1949, the CCP set up a "coalition regime" in which, despite the presence of a few "democratic" petty-bourgeois politicians, government power was clearly in the Communists' hands. Most important, the state power was based on the unquestioned military dominance of the Red Army. The bulk of the bourgeoisie had fled to Taiwan.

With the help of Soviet aid, the Communists set about building up a state sector of heavy industry, while arranging for the continuation of private ownership of some industrial concerns under state control and supervision. Finally, this policy was further tightened with the Chinese entry into the Korean War, which led to a series of measures against domestic capitalists, beginning in early 1952.

So please, Brother Davidson, will you inform us where the extended democratic stage was? This whole evolution is dramatic proof of the utterly fantastic utopianism which Mao's theories amounted to. Over and over, the CCP declared its desire to set up a democratic bourgeois regime, but the property relations that resulted were those of a workers state.

### **Can Peasants Establish a Workers State?**

It has been estimated that in 1949 workers constituted no more than five percent of the membership of the Chinese Communist Party; it was by then over-

whelmingly a party of peasants and petty-bourgeois intellectuals. Yet Trotsky held that only the working class, under revolutionary leadership, could set up the dictatorship of the proletariat. How then do we explain the “Third Chinese Revolution”? First we must be clear that this was not the pattern foreseen by Trotsky. Marxism has shown that in the sharp class polarization which occurs in every revolutionary period, the peasantry will be divided between elements following the bourgeoisie and those following the proletariat; that the peasantry alone does not have the social power to overthrow the determined resistance of the capitalist exploiters, nor the united class interests necessary to establish socialist property forms. However, the Chinese Revolution of 1949 was accomplished by a predominantly peasant party and army under the leadership of a petty-bourgeois military bureaucracy. But though this was different from the Trotskyists’ expectations, it *did not contradict* the essential Marxist program calling for the working class to establish its own class rule, supported by the peasantry, even in backward countries as the only means to solve the democratic tasks of the bourgeois revolution.

The most fundamental reason for the success of the peasant-based Chinese Communists was the absence of the proletariat struggling in its own right for power. The Chinese working class was demoralized and decimated by the continuous defeats suffered during the second Chinese revolution (1925-27). And the CCP’s subsequent policy was the deliberate discouraging of proletarian action. The second fundamental point is that the result of the 1949 military victory of the CCP was not at all a healthy workers state such as that created by the Russian Revolution of 1917, but a bureaucratically deformed workers state, in which the proletariat does not hold political power. Rather, the state power is and has been since 1949 in the hands of a tight Stalinist bureaucratic-military caste composed of the upper layers of the CCP, the People’s Liberation Army and the state bureaucracy. As demonstrated by the repeated failure of the economic policies of the Chinese regime (notably the “Great Leap Forward”) and the inability to create democratic forms of workers’ rule (even in the period of the demagogic “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution”), the only way that the road to socialism – the complete abolition of classes – can be opened in China is through a political revolution to throw out this military-bureaucratic caste.

(In addition, in the late 1940s the Chiang regime was so hopelessly corrupt that it virtually toppled by itself. Mukden, Beijing and Canton all surrendered without a shot at the end of the civil war. Moreover, the U.S. ruling class had become so discouraged with the

GMD government that it essentially withdrew its material backing in the 1948-49 period. Finally, the Communist army which had been starved for weapons was suddenly supplied with large quantities of modern Japanese arms following the Russian occupation of Manchuria. It is essential that these special circumstances be understood. To put it another way, had the Chinese proletariat been struggling under its own banners, the banners of the Fourth International, and had the bourgeois regime not simply disintegrated, the victory of Mao’s peasant armies would have been impossible.)

Today, after the mystification of the “Cultural Revolution” has worn off and the bureaucracy has reasserted direct control over the Chinese government, it is much easier to understand that China, like the USSR, the Eastern European countries, Cuba, North Vietnam, etc., is a deformed workers state. Yet only the orthodox Trotskyists have held this position from the very early stages of the Mao regime. The resolution of the 1955 SWP Convention on the Chinese revolution stated:

“Throughout the revolution Mao & Co. continued to impose arbitrary restrictions and limits upon its course. The agrarian reform was carried out ‘in stages’ and was completed only when the assault of American imperialism stimulated the opposition of the landlords during and after Korea.... The Chinese Stalinists were able to ride into power because the Chinese working class had been demoralized by the continuous defeats it suffered during and after the second Chinese revolution, and by the deliberate policy of the CCP, which subordinated the cities, above all, the proletariat, to the military struggle in the countryside and thereby blocked the emergence of the workers as an independent political force. The CCP thus appeared in the eyes of the masses as the only organization with political cadres and knowledge, backed, moreover, by military force.”

–“The Third Chinese Revolution and its Aftermath” (October 1955)

What is needed is a party which has the courage to tell this truth to the masses, even at times when this may be unpopular, and which understands the dynamic of permanent revolution so that it can defend these gains from imperialist attack and carry the struggle forward to socialism. The Maoists, with their reactionary dreams of “united fronts” with the “progressive bourgeoisie” and mindless enthusing over the so-called “Cultural Revolution,” which solved nothing, have proven themselves incapable of this task. It falls to the partisans of the Fourth International, the true heirs of the tradition of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky.

## 7. Mao's China: From Stalin To Nixon

The ghosts of the Mings and Manchus in the Forbidden Palace must be chuckling familiarly over the plotting of the disloyal heir apparent against the emperor. They no doubt believe that a new dynasty rules in Beijing, one rather like their own. However, Marxists have the advantage over such ancient specters in recognizing that the intrigues in Mao's court are, in the last analysis, generated and shaped by the pressures of the imperialist world order on an isolated and backward nation that has broken out of the capitalist system. The internal struggles within the Maoist bureaucracy, even in their most bizarre, personalist manifestations, are inextricably interwoven with the fate of the Chinese revolution and the socialist future of humanity.

Coming to power through a massive peasant uprising which destroyed capitalism in China and established a deformed workers state, the petty-bourgeois nationalist elite led by Mao was determined to restore China's status as a great power. During the 1950s, the pressure of imperialism forced the Maoist bureaucracy to remain within the USSR-led camp. However, as it became increasingly clear that the Kremlin's rulers were determined to prevent China from attaining its place in the sun, the Chinese bureaucracy broke with the Soviet bloc. Once China had cut adrift from its moorings to the Soviet Union, the conflict between China's material backwardness and the great power aspirations of its rulers produced a convulsive factional struggle in the late 1960s (the Cultural Revolution). The outcome of that struggle has been the transformation of Mao's China from an ally of the Soviet Union against American imperialism to a semi-ally of American imperialist diplomacy against the Soviet Union.

### The Economics of Utopian Adventurism

The Cultural Revolution was directly related to the failure of the Great Leap Forward (1958-60) and its impact on Mao's standing in the party. The Great Leap Forward, in turn, arose from the impossibility of imposing orthodox Stalinist industrialization policies dur-



**Primitive backyard furnaces during Mao's "Great Leap Forward" turned out to be disastrous, producing steel unfit for industrial use.**

ing China's First Five Year Plan (1953-56). The Stalin model of industrialization consisted in devoting the bulk of economic surplus to large, modern heavy industrial complexes. The food for the increased urban working class and agricultural raw materials are extracted from the peasantry through forced collectivization. This necessarily involves sacrificing total agricultural output and food consumption in order to increase the agricultural surplus available to the growing urban population. During the 1930s, the Russian food consumption fell 15 percent and there were widespread famines among the peasants, notably in the Ukraine.

However, China was simply too poor to apply the Soviet method for rapid economic growth. Compared to the Soviet Union in 1929, China in 1953 produced roughly one-half as much food per person. A reduction in food output comparable to that which occurred in Russia during the 1930's would literally have produced mass starvation in China. The conflict between China's poverty and orthodox Soviet-Stalinist industrialization came to a head in 1956, when rapidly expanding investment created shortages in consumer goods and raw materials leading to inflation. Instead of plowing through as Stalin had done, the Chinese bureaucracy abandoned the First Five Year Plan and retrenched. In 1957 investment was actually reduced and workers were laid off and shipped back to the countryside.

As often occurs under Stalinist regimes, economic retrenchment was associated with political liberalization (in this case, the Hundred Flowers Campaign).

However, the aroma of blooming flowers was not at all to the bureaucrats' liking. The scope and depth of discontent which the Hundred Flowers Campaign revealed alarmed the Maoist regime. The bureaucracy felt it necessary to reassert its authority and impose greater discipline and an enforced sense of national purpose on the masses.

Another important source of the Great Leap Forward policy arose from the contradictory state of agricultural collectivization. In contrast to Stalin's Russia, the collectivization of agricultural production through 1956 had a large voluntary component. This was possible because the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) enjoyed considerable moral authority among the peasants through its victory over the landlords and the egalitarian distribution of land. The peasants had real influence over the scale and pattern of production in the cooperatives. However, the local party cadre who administered the cooperatives were expected to maximize output, which meant plowing back a larger share of income and putting in more labor time than the peasants would agree to voluntarily. Thus, the rural party cadre were required to expand agricultural production without having the power to do so. Consequently, there was pressure from the party ranks to transform the cooperatives into *de facto* state farms where the peasants could be ordered about.

These pressures culminated in the Great Leap Forward of 1958. The heart of the Great Leap policy was the amalgamation of cooperatives into mammoth, self-sufficient production units (the communes) of several thousand families. It was expected that the commune system would liberate enormous quantities of labor which would be used to expand industry by handicraft methods, to produce heavy industrial goods by primitive techniques (e.g., the backyard steel furnaces) and to carry out huge water conservation projects. Commune members were to be paid solely on the basis of labor input, in effect transforming the peasants into wage laborers with no property claims on either their land or direct products. The Great Leap was sold to the peasantry in a manner approaching religious millennialism. China would catch up with the



Mark Gayne/University of Toronto

**Formation of agricultural communes was catastrophic, producing widespread hunger. Above: commune in Shensi province in 1965. To make large-scale cultivation possible requires mechanizing agriculture, but at the time China had few tractors. Great Leap Forward led to economic collapse and bureaucratic opposition to Mao's schemes.**

West in a few years and achieve full communism within 15 years. In brief, the peasants were told that after a few years of heroic sacrifice they would be living in a paradise on earth.

Whatever its practical effects in accelerating economic growth, the "communist vision" behind the Great Leap Forward was one of reactionary utopianism. Instead of communism's resulting from the international division of labor of several advanced workers states (and the elimination of scarcity), Chinese-style "communism" was to be brought about by the primitive labor of millions of peasants (i.e., the equal sharing of poverty). But so long as there is massive poverty, the economic basis for the creation of a parasitic bureaucracy – and ultimately a return to capitalist exploitation through counterrevolution – will remain. The Chinese leaders are not unaware of this fact for, despite their absurd claim that China is a *socialist* state, each new "anti-party clique of black-minded crime-steeped traitors" being thrown out of office is claimed to have been preparing the way for a return to capitalism. Socialism means the abolition of classes by the abolition of the material basis for class exploitation – economic scarcity. For Marxists, the proletariat is *the* bearer of socialism not simply because it is a victim of deprivation and oppression, but because it embodies the highest technical achievements of mankind, the material basis for a real cultural revolution. For

Marxists communism means the replacement of a hundred peasants by a tractor; for Maoists, communism means the substitution of the labor of a hundred peasants for the (unavailable) tractor.

In practice, the Great Leap was an unprecedented attempt at the militarization of labor. The bureaucracy worked the peasants to the limits of physical endurance. The hellish conditions created by the forced-draft pace of production can be seen in the fact that it was necessary for the Central Committee to issue the following directive to the communal party cadre:

“But in any event, eight hours for sleep and four hours for meals and recreation, altogether 12 hours, must be guaranteed and this must not be reduced.”

—*Peking Review* (3 December 1958)

It is now universally acknowledged that the Great Leap Forward led to an economic collapse unique in the history of the Sino-Soviet states. The exact magnitude of the production decline remains unknown because the regime has never published any economic statistics for the years 1960-63, which is itself a telling sign of economic catastrophe. However, reasonable estimates are that food crop output fell 15-20 percent between 1958-60 (*Current Scene*, January 1964), while industrial output fell 30-40 percent between 1959-62 (*China Quarterly*, April-June 1970).

The precise reasons for the catastrophe caused by the Great Leap are numerous. Bad weather was indeed a factor, although the Maoists have turned it into a total alibi. The regime, believing its own hopelessly inflated statistics, actually cut back grain acreage sown in 1959. Commune managers diverted labor to the glamour projects of backyard steel smelting and irrigation, devoting too little to basic farming. In the hysteria to produce output statistics, quality control was totally abandoned. Most of the communal steel was unusable and more than half the reported newly irrigated land was non-arable. The drive for commune self-sufficiency resulted in attempts to grow crops (e.g., cotton) under impossible geographic conditions. The abrupt cut-off of Soviet aid in 1960 was an important factor causing the decline in heavy industrial production.

However, the overpowering truth is that it was the gross violation of the peasants' property interests and rigid militarization of labor that were the fundamental cause of the economic catastrophe. The peasants rebelled against the commune system in the only way they could – refusal to produce. That peasant incentives were at the heart of the Great Leap's failure is attested to by the Chinese bureaucracy itself. In its retreat, the regime was forced to make major concessions to individualistic peasant appetites. In this sense,

the Great Leap Forward was decisive. It dissipated the moral capital the Communist Party had achieved in the civil war and through the egalitarian distribution of land. After 1960, the peasants could no longer be motivated by social ideals or promises of future plenty, but only on the basis of hard cash.

## **Mao's Demotion and the Great Limping Backward**

Mao was uniquely responsible for the Great Leap Forward. And of all the party leaders, he alone continued to defend it. He even defended the backyard steel furnaces, while observing that China's lack of railroads made it difficult to apply the ingots produced for any useful purpose. While the rest of the party leadership realized the Great Leap had failed because it grossly violated the peasants' self-interest, Mao claimed the failures were caused by the “errors” and “excesses” of the local cadre. Thus, Mao never rejected the principles underlying the Great Leap.

Since he kept defending a policy that had led China to the brink of mass starvation, it was predictable that Mao would come under attack by other sections of the bureaucracy. In 1959, Defense Minister Peng Dehuai, an orthodox, pro-Russian Stalinist, launched a direct attack on Mao for alienating the masses, producing economic chaos and fostering unnecessary friction with the Soviet Union. While Marshal Peng's frontal assault failed and he was purged, it weakened Mao's stature.

During 1959-61, as the disastrous results of the Great Leap became more and more apparent, Mao lost much of his authority among the leading cadre. He was nudged out of the central leadership and was replaced by a grouping led by Liu Shaoqi (Mao's long-time number two), Chou En-lai, Deng Xiaoping (the CCP secretary-general) and Peng Chen. Mao and his supporters (Lin Biao, and Chen Po-ta) were reduced to a left-critical tendency within the broader party leadership. The changes in the central party leadership were hidden from the public, although two of Peng Chen's subordinates (Wu Han and Teng To) published thinly disguised attacks on Mao, which later served as the pretext for launching the Cultural Revolution.

To recover from the Great Leap, the Liu regime embraced a Bukharinite economic policy with respect to both agricultural and industrial production. The communes were disbanded and replaced with the lowest level of collectivization, the “production brigade” of about twenty families. The free market was encouraged, as were private plots and private ownership of livestock. In 1962, the private grain harvest in Yunan was larger than the collective harvest. In 1964, in

Kweichow and Szechuan there was more private than collective tilling.

In 1961, the government placed a total ban on new industrial construction. The pace of industrial expansion was to be geared to the freely marketed surplus coming from the peasants and production brigades. Under Chinese conditions, allowing industrial development to be determined by the growth of the peasant market is profoundly anti-proletarian in the most elemental sense. In 1964, China's leading economic planner, Po I-po, told Anna Louise Strong that the regime intended to reduce the urban population by 20 million (Strong, *Letters from China*).

The return to a market economy combined with the CCP's sharp decline in popular authority created powerful *disintegrative* tendencies within the bureaucracy itself. Personal greed, careerism, the defense of narrow vested interests and regional warlordism became rife. During the Cultural Revolution it was reported that in 1962 the Shanghai and other regional parties requested grain from Chekiang, one of the few surplus regions. The first secretary of the Chekiang party is reported to have replied, "Chekiang is not a colony of Shanghai.... I have pigs to feed" (*China Quarterly*, October-December 1972). This response typifies the relations between different sections of the bureaucracy in this period.

Mao has represented the national messianic utopian wing of the bureaucracy. He was therefore deeply disturbed by the growing decline in discipline, unity and sense of national purpose within the party cadre. In 1962 he set up a pressure group, the Socialist Education Committee, with the dual purpose of restoring the party cadre's sense of élan and of limiting the trend toward peasant individualism in economic policy. The efforts of the Socialist Education Committee proved impotent against the strength of bureaucratic routine.

In view of the Cultural Revolution, it is necessary to emphasize the considerable overlap between Mao's policies and those of the Liu-led party center in 1961-65. While Mao was in favor of greater agricultural collectivization, he firmly supported policies which strengthened the social weight of the peasantry as against the working class, such as the transfer of the urban population to the countryside. Mao has always tried to liquidate the Chinese proletariat as a distinctive social group and dissolve it into the rural masses.

There was no significant difference between Mao and Liu over their attitude toward the proletariat. This was demonstrated by Mao's defense of the "worker-peasant" system during the Cultural Revolution, despite its deep unpopularity and negative economic consequences. This viciously anti-proletarian policy

(instituted by Liu in 1963) required peasants to do industrial work during the slack season. They were paid less than the permanent workers, did not receive the extensive social benefits available to the regular workers and were not allowed to join the unions. In turn, permanent unionized workers were replaced by "worker-peasants" and forcibly shipped to the countryside! The "worker-peasant" system well conforms to Mao's "ideal" of a communist society and is an effective mechanism for holding down wages to increase state accumulation. The "worker-peasant" system was the single most important cause of labor unrest during the Cultural Revolution. The Maoists not only defended the system but suppressed the contract labor organizations which had emerged spontaneously to defend the "worker-peasants."

Nor is there any evidence that there were significant differences between Mao and the rest of the CCP leadership over foreign policy before 1965. It was Liu and Teng, not Mao, who organized the campaign against "Khrushchevite revisionism." Many of today's Maoists should consider that they were won to the Chinese line by the "anti-revisionist" campaign led by Liu, Teng and Co., *after* they had nudged Mao out of the central leadership.

### **Indonesia and Vietnam on the Road to Washington**

During a party plenum in 1962, Mao revealed that Stalin had not trusted the CCP in the late 1940's, suspecting it of potential Titoism. Mao further related that while he sought to gain Stalin's trust, the CCP never sacrificed its independence. However, the Cold War polarization, particularly the Korean War, left China little choice but to become part of the Soviet-led bloc. During the mid-1950's, the CCP sought to develop its own tendency within the Soviet bloc, actively maneuvering among the East European parties on a more independence-from-Moscow line. As an important by-product of these activities, Mao's regime played a key role in pushing the Russians to crush the 1956 Hungarian uprising, then in justifying this internationally.

Part of the "Spirit of Camp David" (the Eisenhower-Khrushchev peaceful coexistence) was the understanding that the Kremlin would police expansion of Chinese national power. The main instances of this and likewise the main events leading to the Sino-Soviet split were Khrushchev's attempt to get China to abandon its military pressure on the Taiwan Strait islands in 1958; the Soviets' reneging on their promise to supply China with the capacity to produce nuclear weapons; and the USSR's pro-India "neutrality" during the 1960 Sino-Indian border war. China's increasingly strident political attacks on the Soviets led them



**Prisoners captured during Trisula operation in Indonesia, 1965. More than 1 million were killed in anti-Communist massacre. Mao paved the way by urging Indonesian Communists to ally with nationalist president Sukarno, as CCP had done with Chiang Kai-shek in 1927, with the same deadly results.**

to retaliate by cutting off all economic aid in 1960. This may be taken as the official date of the split.

Following the break from the Soviet camp, Chinese foreign policy consisted of an attempt to line up the “Third World” – a term defined to include Gaullist France! – against the two superpowers. In this period Chinese foreign policy registered some episodic diplomatic gains. However, in 1965, the Third World suddenly became off-limits for Chinese diplomats. A number of “friends of China” were toppled by military coups, notably Kwame Nkrumah [of Ghana], who appropriately was visiting Beijing at the time. In the wake of these right-wing coups the Second Afro-Asian Conference, which the Chinese had expected to turn into an anti-Soviet forum, was cancelled. However, the truly crushing blow was the overthrow of Sukarno in Indonesia, which resulted in the bloody physical liquidation of the pro-Chinese PKI (Communist Party of Indonesia), then the largest Stalinist party not holding state power.

The rightist coups that swept Asia and Africa in 1965 demonstrated that the strength of U.S. imperialism lies not solely in its direct military power, but also in its organic ties to the propertied classes throughout the world. Whenever the class struggle reaches a certain intensity, the colonial bourgeoisie breaks its flirtation with Beijing or Moscow and embraces the American ruling class as the main defender of the capitalist order in this epoch.

With China’s Third World grand strategy buried under the decapitated bodies of the Indonesian workers and peasants, a new danger threatened China – the U.S.’s escalation in Vietnam. The manifest impotence

of the “Third World” in protecting China, combined with U.S. imperialism’s bombing its doorstep, caused sharp differences within the bureaucracy. A group around Liu, Peng Chen and People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Chief of Staff Lo Jui-ching wanted to halt the deterioration of relations with the Soviet Union and arrange some kind of military united front with the Kremlin over Vietnam. The Mao-Lin Biao grouping wanted to continue to escalate the split with the USSR and to avoid another Korean War situation above all else.

In a sense, the first battle of the Cultural Revolution was fought out in the PLA

high command. Under the pretext of “professionalism” versus “politics,” it was in reality a struggle over policy toward Vietnam and a Soviet military alliance. Lo Jui-ching wanted to actively prepare for a possible massive ground intervention into Vietnam. In fact, a call for “people’s war” was a call for the de-escalation of the Vietnam war back to low-level guerrilla fighting so as to avoid the danger that China would be drawn into another Korean situation. Lin’s victory over his chief of staff was a victory for China-first military isolationism.

The decisive point came in early 1966 when the formally pro-Chinese Japanese Communist Party attempted to work out a military united front of Communist powers over the Vietnam War. A joint Chinese-Japanese CP statement on Vietnam was negotiated which did not attack the Russians for “revisionism,” thereby opening the door for Sino-Soviet collaboration. At the eleventh hour, Mao sabotaged the agreement and openly attacked the party leaders, notably Peng Chen, who were responsible for it. Mao was determined not to provoke the Americans’ suspicion by a show of solidarity with Russia. Under the pretext of fighting “revisionism,” Mao thus informed U.S. imperialism that as long as China was not directly attacked, it would not intervene even in the face of the most murderous attacks against the workers and peasants of other countries. Thus, the détente with the U.S. was not simply a right turn marking a retreat from the Cultural Revolution. Mao’s appetite for an alliance with American imperialism, in order to better prosecute the struggle with his “principal contradiction” with “Soviet Social-

Imperialism,” was in fact one of the essential underpinnings of the “Cultural Revolution.”

There was a clear connection between the factional line-ups over domestic and foreign policy. Because the Liu-led center was prepared to let the bureaucracy sink into careerist routinism and creature comforts and to let the economy expand at the pace of a peasant cart, the party center could envision defending China only within the general Soviet military sphere. Because Mao and Lin were determined that China would be a super-power second to none, they were determined to mobilize and discipline the bureaucracy and masses to overcome China’s material backwardness as rapidly as possible.

### **The Anti-Proletarian, Anti-Cultural Revolution**

In brief, the Cultural Revolution was an attempt to mobilize the masses to create the material conditions for Chinese great-power politics on the basis of national messianic fervor. To do this, the Maoists had to purge an increasingly conservative and self-interested administrative bureaucracy. For this task, Mao turned to the PLA officers and to plebeian student youth. Once it had been purged of pro-Russian conciliationist tendencies it was natural that the officer corps should find itself in the Maoist camp. The officers’ social position led them to be more concerned with the long-term strength of the Chinese state than committed to local vested interests. In addition, they were removed from the direct pressure of the Chinese masses and naturally favored extracting a larger economic surplus for armament production. The Chinese student youth were, in the main, the bureaucracy of tomorrow. They were the inheritors of the Chinese government and wanted that government to be great and powerful and its subjects hard-working and frugal. The vested interest of ambitious petty-bourgeois educated youth is in the future of the petty-bourgeois stratum. For that reason they easily embrace utopian ideals and attack those whose workaday concerns prevent those ideals from being realized.

With the support of Lin and the PLA command, Mao easily ousted his main factional opponents – Liu, Deng and Peng – in 1966, before the Cultural Revolution was taken into the streets. The wholesale purge of the bureaucracy proved more difficult. In the end, it proved impossible. To understand how the entrenched bureaucrats resisted the Cultural Revolution it is necessary to see what happened when the Red Guard “proletarian revolutionaries” confronted the Chinese proletariat – on the other side of the barricades!

Whatever illusions the Chinese masses may have had about what the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolu-

tion meant, it rapidly became clear that it did not mean more for the proletariat. Under the slogan of combating “economism,” the radical Maoists made it very clear they intended to hold down wages and intensify labor. During 1966, there were a number of labor struggles culminating in the January 1967 Shanghai general strike and nationwide railway strike, the greatest clash between the Chinese proletariat and Stalinist government to date.

The railroad workers were one of the most self-consciously proletarian sections of Chinese society, with their own housing centers and schools. The Cultural Revolution was particularly hard on the railroad workers because, in addition to the normal traffic, they had to transport huge armies of Red Guards around the country. In addition, they were required to study the Thought of Chairman Mao after putting in a long day of work. Because of the extra traffic, existing safety regulations were violated. When the workers complained, the Red Guards attacked “old [safety] regulations which do not conform to the thought of Mao Tse Tung” (*Current Scene*, 19 May 1967). No doubt the Red Guards believed that the Thought of Mao was more powerful than the laws of physics! The railway union in Shanghai organized other workers in negotiations centering on either reducing the longer working hours or being paid for them. In December, the local Shanghai authorities granted a general wage increase. When the Maoist center in Beijing reversed the wage increase, Shanghai and China’s railroads stopped working.

The Red Guards and PLA overthrew the local Shanghai government and proceeded to smash the strike. The famous “Letter to All Shanghai People” (*Shanghai Liberation Daily*, 5 January 1967) began with the command “Grasp Revolution, Stimulate Production.” The “Letter” went on to blame anti-party elements for inciting workers to leave their jobs and converge on Beijing. This was curious propaganda coming from the supposed leaders of a “proletarian” revolution against those holding political power. The railway strike took longer to suppress and university students had to be used as unskilled railway scab labor.

After the January 1967 events, those bureaucrats under attack by the Red Guards had little trouble organizing their own “Red Guards,” composed of workers, to defend them. The workers sensed that if the Red Guards took over they would be working twelve hours a day, seven days a week and studying the Thought of Mao for another eight hours. And in the street fighting that erupted throughout China’s cities, the radical Maoists were not winning.

Despite the “participation” of the masses, the Cultural Revolution remained a struggle *within* the bureaucracy. It was a battle between the Mao-Lin faction



**Peasants reading Mao's Little Red Book, 1965. The Great Anti-Proletarian, Anti-Cultural "Revolution" was a power struggle between two wings of the Stalinist bureaucracy, both hostile to the worker and peasant masses and neither opposed to allying with imperialism.**

and the atomized, conservative party apparatus. In the main, the students and workers were organized and cynically manipulated by the bureaucratic groupings. Revolutionary Marxists could not support either the utopian-militarist nationalism of the Mao faction or the various careerists struggling to keep their jobs.

From the standpoint of communists, the Cultural Revolution polarized Chinese society along the wrong lines by pitting subjectively revolutionary student youth, who believed they were fighting bureaucratism, against workers defending their standard of living. Had a Chinese Trotskyist organization been able to intervene, its task would have been to cut across these false lines of division and build a genuine communist opposition to the bureaucracy as a whole.

To the Red Guards, Trotskyists should have said the following: First, communist consciousness among the workers cannot be created by the methods of religious mysticism (has the spirit of Mao seized your soul?) but only when the workers are really responsible for governing Chinese society through democratic institutions. Secondly, the concept of socialism must be purged of military barracks asceticism. Communists are genuinely concerned about the material well-being of the masses and do not glorify poverty and endless toil. And perhaps most importantly, a communist society cannot be built in China simply through the will-power and sacrifices of the Chinese people. That requires the support of victorious proletarian revolutions in the advanced capitalist countries – revolutions

which are blocked by Stalinist China's foreign policy. A central task for Chinese communists is to use the power and authority of the Chinese state to further the world socialist revolution. This means not only a break from the policy of supporting anti-proletarian nationalist bourgeois regimes, but also immediately demanding a military bloc with the Soviet Union, most urgently in Indochina, even while the USSR remains under bureaucratic rule.

To those workers drawn into defending the incumbent apparatchiks against the radical Maoists, Trotskyists should say the following: The material interests of the workers cannot be furthered by supporting the "soft," venal elements

within the bureaucracy. Those material interests can only be served when a workers government controls the Chinese economy, replacing the deadening control of the conservative bureaucracy. To maintain political power, the workers government would indeed have to restrain wage increases in order to generate a surplus needed for military purposes and to absorb the peasantry into the industrial work force. The dictatorship of the proletariat cannot survive with a small, aristocratic working class surrounded by a sea of impoverished peasants. However, a fundamental improvement in the material conditions of the Chinese people can only come about through resources supplied by more advanced workers states. Economic aid to China through international revolution need not be a long-term prospect. A workers revolution in China would give an enormous impetus to a socialist revolution in Japan, Asia's industrial power, with a highly conscious proletariat and brittle social structure. The complementary, planned development of Japan and China would go a long way toward overcoming the poverty of the Chinese people. And these are the politics the Trotskyist movement should have presented to the embattled Chinese workers and students during the Cultural Revolution.

### Who Were the Victors?

With the incumbent bureaucrats able to mobilize groups of workers to fight the Red Guards, the radical Maoists were stalemated. The Maoist center then took



**Red Guards marching in Beijing in 1966 at beginning of the “Cultural Revolution.” Student youth were used by the Mao wing of the bureaucracy as shock troops against the workers.**

a step which fundamentally changed the course of the Cultural Revolution and eventually led to its liquidation. In February 1967, the army was called in to support the Red Guards in “seizing power.” Now the PLA officer corps is of the flesh-and-blood of the bureaucracy, tied to the rest of China’s officialdom by innumerable personal and social affiliations. As a condition for militarily supporting the Red Guards the PLA command demanded that there be no wholesale purge of the incumbent administrators, that they be allowed to rehabilitate themselves. This was the so-called “mild cadre policy.” The role of the PLA in preserving the bureaucracy was codified by a change in the formal program of the Cultural Revolution. When launched in 1966, the Cultural Revolution was supposed to produce a political system modeled on the Paris Commune. In early 1967, this was changed to the so-called “triple alliance” of “revolutionary rebels” (Red Guards), the PLA and the “revolutionary cadre” (incumbent bureaucrats). Clearly the officer corps was in charge.

The real relationship between the PLA and the Red Guards was revealed by the famous Wuhan inci-

dent in August 1967, although the army commander went too far. In a faction fight between two Red Guard groups, the army commander naturally supported the more right-wing one. When a couple of Maoist emissaries came from Beijing to support the more radical faction, the commander had them arrested. For this act of near-mutiny, he was dismissed. However, the fate of the principals involved in the Wuhan incident is highly significant. The mutinous commander, Chen Tsai-tao, is today back in power and the two Maoist emissaries were purged as “ultra-leftists.”

The Wuhan incident temporarily turned the Maoist center against the PLA command and the Cultural Revolution reached its peak of anarchistic violence, including the burning of the British chancellery. By the end of 1967, the pressure from the PLA command to crack down on the Red Guards became irresistible.

The 28 January 1968 issue of the *Liberation Army Daily* announced that the PLA would “support the left, but not any particular faction” – a not-so-veiled threat to smash the Red Guards. The article went on to attack “petty-bourgeois factionalism.” About the same time,

Chou En-lai asserted that the leadership of the Cultural Revolution had passed from the students and youth to the workers, peasants and soldiers. Throughout 1968, attacks on “petty-bourgeois factionalism,” “anarchism” and “sectarianism” drowned out attacks on “capitalist roadism” and “revisionism.”

And it ended with a mango. The final curtain fell on the Cultural Revolution in August 1968 when Mao personally intervened to resolve a faction fight between student Red Guards at Beijing’s Tsinghua University, where the first Red Guard group was formed. Having failed to resolve the dispute to his liking, Mao is supposed to have said, “You have let me down and what is more you have disappointed the workers, peasants and soldiers of China” (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 29 August 1968). Within 48 hours, China’s first “Worker-Peasant Thought of Mao Zedong Propaganda Team,” commanded by PLA officers, arrived at Tsinghua University and dissolved the Red Guards. For this service, the Chairman personally sent the group a gift of mangoes. The Red Guards were suppressed by similar methods throughout the country. The more resistant activists were sent to the country side to “remold” their thinking through toiling with the peasants, the usual fate for those who “disappoint” Mao.

The Mao faction did not win the Cultural Revolution. Mao had clearly expected to replace the administrative bureaucracy with cadre unambiguously loyal to himself interspersed with young zealots and engendering mass enthusiasm while doing so. Instead the popular reaction against the Cultural Revolution strengthened the resistance of the incumbent bureaucracy. Once the army was called in directly, Mao was forced to play a bonapartist role between the PLA officers representing bureaucratic conservatism and the radical student youth.

That the bureaucracy was largely conserved is demonstrated by the composition of the Central Committee elected at the Ninth CCP Congress in 1969 – the so-called “Congress of Victors.” The average age of the CC was 61 and the length of time in the party 25 years. Two-thirds of the CC elected in 1945 (who had not died or been purged before the Cultural Revolution) were re-elected to the 1969 Central Committee! The 1969 CC did show an increase in the proportion of those who had been on the Long March (the Maoist old guard) and a marked increase in the proportion of PLA officers (45 percent). Hardly what a naive Maoist enthusiast would expect as the aftermath of a supposedly anti-bureaucratic “revolution”!

The final liquidation of the Cultural Revolution came with the fall of the Lin faction. Lin Biao was associated with a series of manifestly bankrupt policies. On the domestic economic front, he was accused of wanting to launch a production drive in 1969 and of

“allowing peasants to be deprived of their legitimate income” (*Far Eastern Economic Review 1973 Yearbook*). Clearly Lin was pushing for another Great Leap Forward. However, the Cultural Revolution had revealed enormous economic discontent and the willingness of the workers to fight the regime to preserve their living standards. A Great-Leap-Forward campaign in 1969 could only have been suicidal. In fact, since the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese economy has been more market-oriented, more inegalitarian, more localized than it was in 1965. The Mao/Chou regime seems anxious to assure the masses that great economic sacrifices will not be demanded of them. Almost every official statement on economic policy asserts the peasant’s right to a private plot.

On foreign policy, the man who announced that “the countryside of the world would conquer the cities of the world” was equally a loser. In the late 1960s, only a political idiot could believe that China was successfully leading the “Third World” against the U.S. and Russia. The Cultural Revolution left China diplomatically isolated. Despite the Vietnam War, U.S. foreign policy up through 1968 continued to orient toward a bloc with Russia against China. With objective conditions favorable for diplomatic and economic gains, a rightward turn in foreign policy was inevitable. It is probable that Lin broke in opposition to the rapprochement with Nixon.

With his base in the army, Lin undoubtedly launched a factional struggle against the emerging Mao/Chou axis. He lost. It is quite possible that he planned a military coup as the Maoists now claim. However, whatever ill Lin may have wished Mao and Chou while he was alive, his corpse has more than made up for it. He is the perfect scapegoat for everything that went wrong because of the Cultural Revolution. Whenever a purged “capitalist-roader” is brought back into power, it was Lin who framed him up. When Chou apologized to the British for the burning of their chancellery, he put the blame on Lin.

With every passing day the victims of the Cultural Revolution seem to replace the victors. Even the “number two person in power taking the capitalist road,” Deng Xiaoping, is back on the road with Mao. And yet the Cultural Revolution has clearly left a badly divided party. The secretiveness and extreme brevity of the Tenth Party Congress point to a tense internal situation. It is as if the slightest formal concession to inner-party democracy would produce murderous factionalism. The elevation of the unknown Wang Hungwen to number three is probably a sop to the radical Maoists who are understandably distrustful of Chou En-lai – the man who is never on the losing side of a faction fight. However, Wang is probably a figurehead

with no real base in the party cadre. When Mao dies, the CCP should have a succession crisis that will make the Cultural Revolution look like a formal debate. Of course, the Chinese proletariat may take the question of which bureaucratic aspirant succeeds Mao off the historic agenda by establishing its own democratic class rule.

### **Down with Mao and Brezhnev! For Sino-Soviet Communist Unity!**

The most important development since the Cultural Revolution has been in China's foreign relations. State relations with the Soviet Union have drastically worsened, flaring into actual armed conflict in 1970. The Sino-Soviet boundary has become one of the most militarized borders in the world. The Mao/Chou regime's new love affair with Richard Nixon is clearly designed as a counter to what it sees as its principal enemy – the Soviet Union. This past year the Chinese attempt to line up Western imperialism against the Soviet Union has reached a new low. China is campaigning to strengthen NATO in order to divert the Russian army from Siberia. For example the 3 August 1973 *Peking Review* approvingly cites Lord Chalfont's letter to the *London Times* calling for expansion of NATO:

“Chalfont has of late published a number of articles in *The Times* to expose the Soviet threat to European security and plead for strengthened defense cooperation by the West European countries.”

Whatever episodic changes occur in diplomatic moods, the objective relationship of U.S. imperialism to the Soviet Union is fundamentally different than that toward China. The Soviet Union is economically and militarily qualitatively superior to China, and the military peer of the U.S. Therefore it is the Soviet Union which is the core of the anti-capitalist regimes in the world and the main objective obstacle to U.S. imperialism. (Could China have supplied the U.S.-blockaded Cubans?) Conversely, the Soviet Union could defeat China in a major war without imperialist intervention, while China could expect victory only in alliance with another power. Thus the logic of the great-power triangle is for a U.S.-China alliance against the Soviet Union. However, great-power politics are not historically rational and a U.S.-Soviet attack on China remains a possibility.

Under any circumstances, a war between Russia and China would be an enormous setback for the cause of socialism. If a Sino-Soviet war breaks out independently of the direct intervention of imperialism, such as an expanded version of the 1970 border clash, Trot-

skyists must call for revolutionary defeatism on both sides. However, if the U.S. allies itself with one side in a Sino-Soviet war to the extent that the outcome could be the restoration of capitalism through imperialist victory, Trotskyists must call for unconditional military defense of that deformed workers state directly under the assault essentially of U.S. imperialism.

The focus of the Russian-Chinese conflict is the Siberian border. Significantly, the legal basis for the conflicting claims is an eighteenth-century treaty signed by the Romanov dynasty and the Manchus – who as we all know were scrupulous in their concern for national rights! Those new to the socialist movement may find it impossible to understand why the leadership of a deformed workers state should be willing to go to war with another deformed workers state over a sparsely populated slice of territory and connive with capitalist powers in order to do so. Does this mean that workers states can be imperialists, just like capitalist powers? Is there an economic drive making war between these two Stalinist-ruled countries inevitable? Not at all.

In fact, the Moscow and Beijing regimes are *politically* threatened by each other's very existence, since both competing powers claim to represent the interests of the workers but are in fact the instruments of an isolated bureaucracy which can maintain itself in power only by forcibly suppressing any political life of the proletariat. Khrushchev and Brezhnev have dealt with Liu and Mao the same way Stalin dealt with Tito (against whom he had no territorial claims) and every internal opposition, from Trotsky on the left to Bukharin on the right, and with any potentially independent members of his own faction as well. A competing tendency claiming to represent the workers and with the resources of state power to propagate its views is doubly threatening to the precarious stability of these anti-proletarian regimes.

As Trotsky pointed out, the origins of the bureaucratic degeneration in the Soviet Union could be traced to the national limitation and isolation of the Russian Revolution in a backward country. This led to the elaboration of the nationalist ideology of “socialism in one country” – a necessarily *false consciousness* for a ruling bureaucratic stratum. Thus these supposed “Communists” speak airily of proletarian internationalism but at the same time truly believe that it is their sacred duty to extend the fatherland. And what is true for Moscow is equally true for Beijing or the second-rate nationalist bureaucracies in Sofia, Tirana, etc.

In the conflict over Siberia, the Russians now have an overwhelming advantage. In addition to ab-



**Stalinist treachery: Mao Zedong meets with Richard Nixon in Beijing, February 1972, to form a de facto alliance with U.S. imperialism against the Soviet Union even as U.S. B-52s are carpet-bombing North Vietnam.**

solite nuclear superiority, the Soviet army would have an advantage in conventional war not offset by China's greater manpower reserves. The Russian side of the border is much more heavily populated. And the Turkic-speaking peoples inhabiting China's northern border regions are resentful of centuries of Great Han chauvinism and may well be sympathetic to the Russians. Moreover, the Kremlin is also hard at work lining up the support of the capitalist powers. In addition to purely financial considerations, a major reason Brezhnev is so anxious for foreign capital in the Siberian oil and gas fields is to give the U.S. and Japan a stake in keeping Siberia Russian.

However, the Soviet military advantage is rapidly being undermined by the development of Chinese nuclear capacity. Thus, there is now pressure within the Brezhnev regime for a preventive nuclear strike against China before the Chinese develop much greater retaliatory capacity. The Soviet authorities are presently generating a major war scare, particularly among Siberian residents, based on the worst kind of "yellow peril" racism. A correspondent for the London *Economist* (25-31 August 1973) quoted a school teacher in Siberia as stating that:

"The Chinese radio, broadcasting in Russian, had threatened that the Chinese would occupy the south of Siberia, kill all the Russian men and keep the Russian girls for marrying."

If revolutionary workers governments were in power in Moscow and Beijing, the conflict over Siberia would be easily resolved in the interests of the Russian and Chinese workers. Siberia would be open to Chinese immigration and jointly administered to ensure rapid economic development. Moreover, the existence of the unified and revolutionary



workers states of Russia and China could well spark the Japanese socialist revolution, liberating Japan's economic resources for the development of Siberia, as well as of China.

Trotskyists understand that the Stalinist bureaucracies are caught in a fundamentally contradictory position. On the one hand they seek to defend themselves from imperialist attack, while on the other hand they strive for an impossible accommodation with the capitalist powers and fear above all the spread of world revolution, which would inevitably topple their parasitic regimes. In the long term, the deformed workers states (bureaucratically ruled states based on collectivized property forms) can survive only through the international extension of workers power. By pursuing nationalist policies, the Stalinist bureaucracies of China and Russia undermine the dictatorship of the proletariat and open the way for its overthrow by domestic counterrevolution or imperialist conquest. The Chinese revolution (the most important defeat for imperialism since the October Revolution in Russia) is now mortally threatened by nuclear war. It is war not with an imperialist power, but with the other powerful deformed workers state – the Soviet Union.

Only by overthrowing the reactionary Mao and Brezhnev governments can the Russian and Chinese working masses prevent going to war against each other and instead bring about the political, military and economic unification of the Sino-Soviet states against world capitalism.

For Communist Unity Against Imperialism Through Proletarian Political Revolution in the Sino-Soviet States!

For the Defense of the Russian and Chinese Revolutions Through International Proletarian Revolution!

## From Millerand to Mitterrand . . .

### 8. Trotskyism vs. SWP Revisionism

The last four articles of the *Guardian* series on “Trotsky’s Heritage” are devoted to demonstrating that Trotskyism is reformist and “counterrevolutionary” by discussing the current policies of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and, to a lesser extent, of the Workers League (WL). Not once is the Spartacist League mentioned. This is no accident. The SWP, which was once the leading party of the Fourth International, has long since abandoned the path of revolutionary Trotskyism for the swamp of reformism. First adapting itself to Castroism in 1961-63 by foreseeing a “guerrilla road to power” and to black nationalism with the theory that “consistent nationalism” leads to socialism, the SWP made its dive into reformism in 1965, becoming the organizer of a popular-front antiwar movement dominated by bourgeois liberals. Since then, it has extended this class collaborationism into new fields, organizing single-issue movements for the “democratic” demand of “self-determination” for just about everyone, from blacks (community control) and women to homosexuals and American Indians.

The political bandits of the WL, on the other hand, have made their mark in the U.S. socialist left by constantly shifting their political line in order to temporarily adapt to whatever is popular at the moment (Huey Newton, Red Guards, Ho Chi Minh. Arab nationalists, left-talking union bureaucrats) only to return to a more “orthodox” position soon after. Its constants are a belief that an all-encompassing final crisis of capitalism will eliminate the need to struggle for the Bolshevik politics of the Transitional Program and an abiding passion for tailing after labor fakers of any stripe, from pseudo-radicals to ultra-conservatives.

Thus, it is easy to “prove” that Trotskyism is reformist by citing the policies of the SWP and the WL. But this has about as much value as “proving” that Lenin was for a “peaceful road to socialism” by citing Khrushchev.



**Lenin and Trotsky in Moscow’s Red Square, 1919, on the second anniversary of the October Revolution.**

#### Feminism and Trotskyism

Because of the rotten betrayals of the SWP during the past decade, Trotskyism has become confused in the minds of many militants with the crassest reformist groveling before the liberal bourgeoisie. It also gives Maoists like Davidson plenty of opportunity to make correct attacks:

“Their [SWP’s] approach is to tail opportunistically each spontaneous development in the mass democratic movements. Each constituency, in succession, is then dubbed the ‘vanguard’ leading the proletariat to socialism, with the added provision that the ‘vanguard of the vanguard’ in each sector is presently made up of the student youth.”

—*Guardian* (13 June 1973)

This theory, formerly called the “dialectic of the sectors of intervention” by the SWP’s European friends, is a denial of the leading role of the proletariat and is expressed in their programmatic capitulation to feminism, nationalism, student power, etc. Elsewhere, Davidson criticized the SWP for tailing the nationalism of the black petty bourgeoisie and the WL for tailing the chauvinism of the labor aristocracy (*Guardian*, 30 May 1973). Again, this is correct.

But such criticism is cheap – it represents not the slightest step toward a Marxist program of prole-



**The “Battle of Deputies Run” during the 1934 Minneapolis Teamster strike led by the Trotskyists. When it championed the program of revolutionary Trotskyism, the Spartacist League called for building caucuses in the unions based on the Transitional Program. The latter-day and now born-again SL long ago abandoned class-struggle unionism, which is continued today by the Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International.**

tarian class struggle. Thus after criticizing the SWP for tailing petty-bourgeois feminists, Davidson counterposes the “mass democratic struggle for the emancipation of women.” This is the tip of the iceberg, for behind the contention that the struggle for women’s liberation is only “democratic” (and not socialist) lies a call for maintenance of the bourgeois family (simply “reforming” it by calling “for husbands to share equally in the responsibilities of the home”) and for an alliance with “even the women of the exploiting classes.”

### **SL Embodies Trotskyist Program**

Instead of capitulating to bourgeois pacifism the SL called for class-struggle opposition to the Vietnam war: for labor strikes against the war, bourgeoisie out of the antiwar movement, military support to the NLF, all Indochina must go communist; instead of petty-bourgeois draft refusal the SL was unique in consistently advocating communist work in the army.

Rather than capitulating to bourgeois nationalism, the SL called for an end to all discrimination on the basis of race, opposition to community control and preferential hiring, for a transitional black organization

on a program of united class struggle.

In the struggle for women’s liberation, the SL opposed capitulation to bourgeois feminism and the equally reactionary abstentionism of various workerist groups: We called for women’s liberation through socialist revolution, bourgeois politicians out of the women’s movement, free abortion on demand and adopted the prospect of the eventual creation of a women’s section of the SL, as envisioned by the early Communist International.

Alone of all the ostensibly Marxist organizations the SL has upheld the Leninist norms of youth-party relations, with the youth section (Revolutionary Communist Youth, RCY [now the Spartacus Youth League, SYL]) organizationally separate but politically subordinate to the party.

### **Nationalism vs. Class Struggle**

On the question of black nationalism, Davidson criticizes the SWP for tailing petty-bourgeois nationalists ... and then declares that U.S. blacks constitute a nation and should have the right to secede. The nationalist theory of a “black nation” in the U.S. ignores the fact that blacks (and the other racial/ethnic minorities) are thoroughly integrated into the U.S. economy, although overwhelmingly at the bottom levels, and have no common territory, special language or culture. Garveyite “back to Africa” movements, the theory of a black nation and all other forms of black separatism have the principal effect of dividing the proletariat and isolating the most exploited and potentially most revolutionary section in separate organizations fighting for separate goals. Both the SWP, with its enthusiasm for community control, and Maoists like Davidson’s October League and the Communist League with their reactionary-utopian concepts of a black nation, serve to disunite the working class *and tie it to the bourgeoisie*. The SWP’s enthusiasm for a black political party led it to enthuse over clambakes of black Democrats (such as the 1971 Gary convention), while black-nation separatism aids bourgeois nationalist demagogues like Newark’s Ford Foundation-backed Imamu Baraka

(formerly LeRoi Jones).

In part, the capitulation to black nationalism by wide sectors of the U.S. left is a distorted recognition that this most exploited sector of the working class will indeed play a key role in an American socialist revolution. Black workers are potentially the leading section of the proletariat. But this requires the integration of their most conscious elements into the single vanguard party and a relentless struggle for the program of united working-class struggle among black workers. Conscious of the need for special methods of work among doubly oppressed sectors of the proletariat, the SL has called for a transitional black organization not as a concession to black separatism but precisely in order to better combat nationalism among the black masses [see Internationalist Group Class Readings, *What Strategy for Black Liberation? Trotskyism vs. Black Nationalism*].

### **Leninism vs. Workerism**

Since the demise of the Weatherman-RYM II section of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in late 1969, black nationalism and feminism have been joined by a crude workerism as the dominant forms of petty-bourgeois ideology in the socialist movement. Adapting to the present backward consciousness of the working class, workerists have sought to gain instant popularity and influence by organizing on the level of militant trade unionism. Failing to heed (and in some cases denying) Lenin's dictum that socialist consciousness must be brought to the working class from the outside, by the revolutionary party, the radical workerists today carry out trade-union work which is in no way distinguishable from that of the reformist Communist Party in the 1930's and 1940's. Falling in behind every militant-talking out-bureaucrat, and not a few in-bureaucrats as well, they fail to wage a political struggle in the unions, saving their support for the NLF, Mao, etc., for the campuses.

Among ostensible Trotskyist groups, workerism has taken the form of denying the need to struggle for the whole of the Transitional Program in the trade unions. Some fake-Trotskyists argue that wage demands alone are revolutionary (Workers League), others that the Transitional Program must be served to the workers in bits and pieces, one course at a time (Class Struggle League); still others verbally proclaim the Transitional Program in their documents, but see the strategy for power as based on giving "critical support" to every available out-bureaucrat (Revolutionary Socialist League). The SWP, for its part, does almost no trade-union work at all and in its press gives uncritical support to liberal bureaucrats, both in power and out.

The Spartacist League, in contrast, calls for the formation of caucuses based on the Transitional Program to struggle for leadership of the unions. While willing to

form united fronts in specific struggles, the SL sees the fundamental task as the creation of a communist opposition – not just militant trade unionism. Together with Trotsky we affirm that the Transitional Program is the program for struggle in the unions. This does not mean that every caucus program must be a carbon copy of the SL Declaration of Principles – it is necessary to choose those demands which best serve to raise socialist consciousness in the particular situation. What is essential is that the caucus program of transitional demands not be limited to militant reformism, but contain the political perspective of socialist revolution.

Davidson quotes from Trotsky's 1940 conversations with SWP leaders to claim that Trotskyist trade-union work amounted to "anti-communism." We have recently published a series of articles on "Trotskyist Work in the Trade Unions" [reprinted in Internationalist Group Class Readings, *Trotskyism and Trade-Union Struggle*] detailing our criticisms of the SWP's policy of one-sided emphasis on blocs with "progressive" bureaucrats and its failure to build a communist pole 'in the unions. However, it was perfectly correct during the late 1930's to concentrate the Trotskyists' trade-union work on opposition to the Stalinists: these were the agents of Roosevelt in the labor movement, the authors and enforcers of the no-strike pledge during World War II. Of course, no one can accuse Davidson's friends in the October League or Revolutionary Union of attacking the Communist Party (or for that matter any militant reformist bureaucrat) in their trade-union work. Rather they uniformly support left bureaucrats in office (such as Chavez of the Farmworkers) and form blocs with out-bureaucrats when the incumbent leadership is too conservative to awaken any illusions at all among the workers.

Consistent with his pattern of distortion of Trotsky's positions in the earlier articles of the series, Davidson seeks to create the impression that Trotsky endorsed the SWP's practice of blocking with "progressive" bureaucrats against the Stalinists. Not so! In 1940 Trotsky explicitly criticized the SWP for softness toward pro-Roosevelt unionists and insisted on an orientation toward the ranks of the CP.

### **The Struggle for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International**

The degeneration of the SWP from Bolshevism to centrism did not simply occur one day in 1961, but was the result of a process of programmatic (and ultimately organizational) degeneration of the Fourth International after World War II. The critical point came with the split of the FI in 1953 which signified the organizational demise of the unified world party of socialist revolution. At the heart of the split was the program put forward by

Michel Pablo, head of the International Secretariat of the FI, of “deep entry” into the reformist Stalinist parties, redubbed centrist in order to justify the new line. Pablo no longer saw the crisis of revolutionary leadership as the key roadblock to revolution and the construction of the Fourth International as the solution. Instead he adopted the objectivist theory that the overwhelming crisis of capitalism (his “war-revolution thesis”) would force the Stalinists to undertake at least deformed revolutions. Thus, Pablo’s “Theses on International Perspectives” of the Third Congress of the FI (1951) state:

“The objective conditions determine in the long run the character and dynamic of the mass movement which, taken to a certain level, can overcome all the subjective obstacles in the path of the revolution.”  
—*Quatrième Internationale* [August-September 1951]

When it became clear that the implication of Pablo’s line was the organizational liquidation of the FI into the dominant Stalinist and social-democratic parties, and when this was brought home by a liquidationist pro-Pablo faction (headed by Bert Cochran and George Clarke) in the SWP itself, the party majority reacted sharply. James Cannon wrote:

“The essence of Pabloist revisionism is the overthrow of that part of Trotskyism which is today its most vital part – the conception of the crisis of mankind as the crisis of the leadership of the labor movement summed up in the question of the party.”  
—“Factional Struggle and Party Leadership,” November 1953

The organizational destruction of the FI by Pabloist revisionism in 1953 had come about as the result of a number of factors affecting the entire Trotskyist movement after World War II, but particularly the European sections. For one thing, virtually their entire pre-war leadership had been murdered either by the Nazi Gestapo or the Stalinist GPU. The living continuity with Trotsky had virtually been broken. Furthermore the sections had been decimated and largely isolated from the working class, while the Stalinists had been able to expand their influence through leadership of anti-Hitler partisan struggles. At the same time Stalinist regimes were set up under the protection of the Russian Army in Eastern Europe, and peasant-based insurrection in China led to the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a deformed workers state. Faced with these unexpected developments the initial response of the Trotskyist movement was to maintain that the Eastern European Stalinist regimes were still capitalist. Not until 1955 did the SWP, for instance, decide that China had become a deformed workers state. Having unwittingly vulgarized Trotsky’s dialectical understanding of Stalinism, the orthodox Trotskyists stressed Stalinism’s counterrevolutionary side until their theories no longer squared with reality. This

disorientation enabled the revisionist current around Pablo to justify its opportunist appetites by concluding from the limited social transformations in Eastern Europe that non-proletarian, non-Trotskyist forces can lead any form of social revolution.

The SWP had been least affected by this process, having emerged from the war with its leadership intact, its membership and ties to the working class increased, and the Stalinists still relatively weak compared to Europe. It was natural that in 1953 the SWP should lead the fight for orthodox Trotskyism. But, in fact, the party waged only a half-struggle, virtually withdrawing from any international work until the late 1950s. The “International Committee,” which it formed with the French and British majorities who opposed Pablo, hardly functioned at all. As the party lost virtually its entire trade-union cadre in the Cochran-Clarke fight, and as the greater part of its entire membership left during the McCarthy years, the leadership began moving to the right in the late 1950’s in search of some force or movement it could latch onto in order to regain mass influence.

It found this in the Cuban Revolution, which evoked a wave of sympathy throughout Latin America and in the U.S. The party leadership declared that Cuba was basically a healthy workers state, although not yet possessing the forms of workers democracy (!) and that Fidel Castro was a natural Marxist (i.e., he supposedly acted like a Trotskyist even though he talked first as a bourgeois nationalist and later as a Stalinist).<sup>1</sup>

Not surprisingly, this was the same line taken by the Pabloists in Europe. If the petty-bourgeois Stalinist bureaucracies could carry out a social revolution in Eastern Europe, they reasoned, why not also a petty-bourgeois nationalist like Castro. Thus in practice the SWP was coming over to the Pabloist line. At the same time an opposition was formed inside the SWP (the Revolutionary Tendency, predecessor of the Spartacist League) which considered Cuba a deformed workers state and criticized the SWP leadership’s capitulation to Castro and the European Pabloists. The RT in 1963 proposed a counter thesis (“Toward the Rebirth of the Fourth International”) to the majority’s document which was the basis for the SWP’s reunification with the European Pabloists to form the “United Secretariat.” While the party majority supported a peasant-based “guerrilla road to power” the RT upheld the orthodox Trotskyist position that only the proletariat could lead the struggle for agrarian revolution and national liberation.

The RT was expelled from the SWP in 1963 for its revolutionary opposition to the majority’s Pabloist tail-

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<sup>1</sup> On this topic see “For Workers Political Revolution in Cuba, Part 1,” in the Internationalist pamphlet, *Cuba: A Bureaucratically Deformed Workers State* (2010)

ing after petty-bourgeois forces. Subsequently the gap between the SWP's policies and the Trotskyism of the Spartacist group continued to widen. The ex-Trotskyist SWP capitulated in turn to black nationalism, bourgeois pacifism and feminism, to the point where today it is a hardened reformist organization with appetites to become the dominant social democratic party of the U.S.

We must learn from this history of defeats that revisionism leads to the same consequences whether it comes from Stalinist origins or from erstwhile Trotskyists. The Maoist line defended by the *Guardian* in no way offers a proletarian alternative to the reformism of the SWP. Instead of the SWP's single-issue reformist campaigns in alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie (NPAC [National Peace Action Coalition], WONAAC [Women's National Abortion Action Coalition]), the Maoists propose multi-issue reformist campaigns in alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie (PCPJ [People's Coalition to Peace and Justice]). The only road to socialist revolution is to make a sharp break with Stalinist and Pabloist revisionism and return to the Marxist program of proletarian class inde-



**Honor guard of Mexican Trotskyists after Leon Trotsky's murder by a Stalinist assassin on 20 August 1930. Reforge the Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution!**

pendence, uniquely embodied in the U.S. by the Spartacist League. Internationally this means an unrelenting struggle for the creation of a democratic-centralist programmatically-united Trotskyist tendency to carry out the task of reconstruction of the FI.

Down with Pabloism!

For the Rebirth of the Fourth International!

## Introduction...

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nationalist governments have arisen in Latin America, the program of permanent revolution is as vital today as it was when Trotsky first raised it in Russia in 1905. And as working-class discontent over the capitalist economic crisis is diverted into populist protests such as the *indignados* in Europe and the Occupy Wall Street movement in the U.S., the counterposition of proletarian class struggle to popular-frontist class collaboration is as stark as ever. Here, too, a study of Trotskyism is crucial in building a revolutionary opposition that can actually put an end to the depredations of capitalism.

Today Carl Davidson, a former leader of the New Left Students for a Democratic Society, is a main leader of the Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism, which split from the reformist Communist Party in 1991 seeking to bury itself deeper in the Democratic Party. In 2008 Davidson led a group calling itself Progressives for Obama. But while many Stalinist outfits closed up shop or were born again as pro-imperialist social democrats, among radical-minded youth there has been interest in Maoism and the misnamed "Cultural Revolution" in China in the 1960s, among the topics dealt with in this pamphlet.

Following the defeat of the Soviet Union, the Sparta-

cist League and its International Communist League drew defeatist conclusions about revolutionary prospects today. In order to justify its retreat from the class struggle, the SL/ICL renounced key aspects of Trotskyism. In particular, it proclaimed that the central thesis of Trotsky's Transitional Program – that the crisis of humanity is reduced to the crisis of proletarian leadership – is outdated and today it is the backward consciousness of the working class itself that is central. Thus in important respects, the SL no longer stands on the program outlined in this pamphlet. It has long since abandoned the struggle to build class-struggle oppositions in the unions, discussed here. It has denied the relevance of struggle against popular fronts in Mexico and the United States. It has written off permanent revolution in countries from Bolivia to Haiti, alleging that there is no working class. And following the 11 September 2001 attack on the NYC World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the SL/ICL buried the call for defeat of "its own" imperialist rulers, going so far as to support and justify the U.S. invasion of Haiti under the guise of earthquake relief in early 2010. The Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International continue to fight for the program of revolutionary Trotskyism outlined in these pages.

–February 2012

# Notes



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