

▶ Trotsky would turn in his grave at the notion that attitudes such as those of Socialist Challenge have anything to do with the politics he fought and died for. Trotsky argued that the USSR was a 'degenerated workers' state' which should be defended against the military onslaughts of imperialism. So does *Workers' Action*. But that does not mean that we regard the USSR (or the other Stalinist states) under the bureaucracy as 'better'. Far from it. The bureaucratic USSR is only to be defended insofar as it is a product of the struggle against capitalism, and *against* being conquered by imperialism — not 'for itself'. In most respects it is the opposite of the ideal socialists strive for.

Its collectivism has more in common with the caricature evoked by enemies of socialism like Von Hayek than with what socialists want to achieve.

▶ drawal of the Russian Army which was shooting down the insurgent workers of East Berlin. They called instead for the withdrawal of both the US and Russian armies from Berlin, and by thus taking the issue to the 'higher' plane of bloc relationships, maintained their own fundamental position then of being advocates of one bloc. That is, in real terms of politics and working class struggle, they refused to side with the East Berlin workers, while generally, abstractly deploring Stalinism. It was a classic piece of centrist evasion.

The same segment of the USFI rejected the programme of a working class anti-bureaucratic revolution in China (a 'political revolution') until 1967. The entire USFI today rejects that programme for Cuba. The European majority has consistently rejected it for Vietnam (though reportedly some groups have reconsidered.)

In their propaganda in favour of the PDP regime in Afghanistan, the minority around the SWP (USA) cited as one of that regime's merits that it had legalised trade unions — and neglected to mention that it forbade workers to strike. (See *Intercontinental Press/Militant* for the first six months of 1980). In other words, they accepted police-state labour-front-building by an aspirant totalitarian regime as genuine trade unionism, the labour-front apparatus for controlling the workers as organs of the working class.

All the USFI sections, which uncritically support and endorse the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua (a genuinely radical petty bourgeois regime), make propaganda citing as a great merit of the Sandinistas that they are building trade unions. Yet if their firm belief that the Sandinistas will replicate the Cuban regime in Nicaragua proves to be true, then what the Sandinistas are building are their own labour-front organisations. For there to be any other possibility in the Sandinista union-organising drive, the membership would have to fight for genuine self-controlling unions independent of the state.

The USFI will not help anybody in Nicaragua (not to speak of Cuba) to understand this or fight for it. They themselves have simply abandoned the programme Trotsky proposed at the end of his life for the independence of the unions (see *Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay* and the *Transitional Programme*). The inability of the IMG and *Socialist Challenge*, faced with a hypocritical bourgeois outcry against TUC links with Stalinist 'trade unions', to know what is important, the complete collapse of any sense of proportion — that is an aspect of the politics of the undrainable swamp of Brandlerite confusion of which it is part. They seem to have forgotten which side of the line on these questions is the workers' side.

*Trotsky rejected the idea that 'defence of the USSR' against imperialism meant spreading illusions in the regime or refraining from rousing the international labour movement against it. He was bitterly scathing against the 'Friends of the USSR' who were silent or evasive on the regime for fear of damaging the USSR*



Trotsky took sides — and tried to get the international labour movement, whatever its given political coloration at that moment, to take sides — squarely with the workers of the USSR (and with the oppressed nations within the USSR, like the Ukrainians) against the totalitarian regime.

He never allowed the need to distance himself from the imperialist and pro-imperialist critics of the USSR to determine what he said. *The Russian reality and the duty to tell the truth to the labour movement did that.*

He did not hesitate to classify things and name them according to what they were. For example, for the last three years of his life at least he insistently repeated his belief that "*Stalin's political apparatus does not differ [from that in fascist countries] save in more unbridled savagery*" (The *Transitional Programme*)

Nor is it any different today, 40 years after an agent of that regime struck Trotsky down

A major psychological reason why there is reluctance to call things like the Russian 'trade unions' by their proper names is probably the fear of thereby praising by implication the regime which our movement exists to fight — that of 'liberal' capitalism. There is probably a subconscious reluctance to face the facts about the Stalinist regimes, and their implications, because those regimes are so terrible compared with the political regimes in the historically privileged advanced capitalist countries that the latter seem almost good by comparison. And of course, horror at the reality of the Stalinist regimes has, in the last four or five decades, led many one-time revolutionary socialists to 'reconciliation' with 'liberal' capitalism.

*But the choice is not confined to either Thatcher and Reagan or Brezhnev and Honecker: there is also the possibility of a working class socialist democracy.*

The programme of working class democracy and revolutionary socialism is rooted in the incapacity of capitalism to satisfy the needs and aspirations of the work-

ing class. Capitalism periodically ravages the lives of working class people with slumps and wars, and it is now ravaging the lives of over two million working class families in Britain alone.

In many areas of the world it imposes its own forms of dictatorship. In social crises like Britain's present crisis it has time and again resorted to savage repression. It is now attempting, as yet in a limited way, to tie our own unions to the state. Now less than ever before is there a basis for any labour movement reconciliation with capitalism or its advocates.

In fact, irreconcilable working class and socialist opposition to our main enemy at home cannot be stable or politically serious if it is based on anything other than a clear and independent working class view of the world, and on the experience of all the struggles of the working class throughout the world.

Therefore we must not block out of our consciousness a real awareness of what our class faces under the Stalinist regimes. We must not mollify or console ourselves with half-conscious assumptions that the totalitarian Stalinist regimes are *really* not so bad, are *really* rather benevolent and paternalistic to those they deprive of civil rights and personal and group autonomy, and are *not really* dripping with the blood of workers who have dared to stand out against them.

They do really drip with workers' blood.

The inspiring rebirth of a labour movement in Poland now highlights and underlines the situation in the other Stalinist states. It highlights and underlines what our responsibilities are in this situation.

We must actively support the workers in Russia and the other Stalinist states, and that means opposing their oppressors in every way we can.

It means rousing the anger, the hatred and the active hostility of the labour movement against them.

It is, to repeat, as basic as not crossing a picket line. And as basic as the attitude one takes to those who do.