

The remnants of the conquests of October are defended against imperialism *despite* the monstrous totalitarianism that is grafted onto them.

Already in 1939-40, Trotsky and his comrades declared, "*We were and remain against the seizure of new territories by the Kremlin*". (They took sides with Russia against Finland because Finland was then an outpost of Anglo-French imperialism; they did not evaluate an expansion of Russian control as progressive. On the contrary, Trotsky spoke of the fate of the people of former Eastern Poland as becoming the "semi-slaves" of Stalin). The historically progressive elements were massively overlaid by the reactionary anti working class regime. The experience since then has reinforced this attitude one hundredfold: in an advanced capitalist country like

stan.

To slip from the view that Stalinist collectivism contains progressive or potentially progressive elements compared to imperialism or imperialist-backed alternatives, into the view that the Stalinist regime is progressive apart from the working class, while atomising and oppressing the working class and plebeian population, is to accept the bureaucracy as the protagonist of history — for now or for 'the next stage'. *It is a reactionary and elitist position.* No wonder Woods finds himself speaking of the 'dark masses' of Afghanistan!

If we assume that no conscious or sub-conscious racism is involved here (and I do assume that), we are left with a choice example of Militant's insensitivity, and with a naked expression of truly Fabian contempt and disdain, licenced by pater-



Chinese leader Huang Hua visits right-wing rebels

Czechoslovakia with a mass labour movement and a mass Communist Party (a real party, not a ruling apparatus). Russian control meant the annihilation of the labour movement.

Trotsky's view, in fact, was that the property relations were *potentially* progressive; imperialism should not be allowed to destroy that progressive potential, but working class revolution was necessary to realise the potential. "*In order that nationalised property in the occupied areas, as well as in the USSR, become a basis for genuinely progressive, that is to say socialist development, it is necessary to overthrow the Moscow bureaucracy*" (Trotsky). The USSR 'as a whole' — property relations *plus* bureaucratic tyranny — was a *reactionary* force.

To advocate the expansion of that system is an *explicitly pro-Stalinist* position.

Of course, we supported the Vietnamese, for example, against imperialism, *despite* the Stalinist leadership. In the case of Afghanistan, there is nothing to support but a Stalinist leadership and the brutal extension of Kremlin power.

To say that the overthrow of already established nationalised property by imperialist intervention is reactionary and should be resisted is one thing. It is another to support the Russian bureaucracy against the people of an invaded country. We say to imperialism: hands off Afghanistan. We can't, or we should not, say that to the people of Afghani-

nalism, towards the people of Afghanistan. The brutal expansion of Russian Stalinism is looked to to sort them out rather than the brutal expansion of British imperialism. But it is the same spirit, the same tone, even the same image — complete with self-aware quote marks — for the people who are mere objects of history and of someone else's drive to conquer and perhaps industrialise them.

## The broad sweep

But, in the broad sweep of history, is it not true that the development of industry lays the basis for progress? In the broad sweep, yes — on condition that the working class liberates itself and seizes the control of the means of production from the hands of the bureaucracy. But politics is necessarily concerned with a more immediate focus, a sharper focus. *In that focus the idea that the oppression [and slaughter, deportation, etc. which has been the stock-in-trade of the Stalinist bureaucracy ruling the USSR], is a detail in the broad sweep of history, is a monstrous anti-Trotskyist nonsense. It loses the viewpoint of the militant who stand with the working class and with oppressed peoples, trying to organise them to make themselves the subjects of history, not its passive objects, in favour of the viewpoint of the historian/'prophet', the man in the ivory tower. An entirely different set of values,*

priorities, concerns and considerations belong to the militants compared with the philosophers in the watch-towers. Of course Marxist militants inform their work with the general historical considerations. *They do not allow them to override their goal of mobilising, organising, and rousing up the oppressed.* They do not allow the goal of industrial development on the back of the masses to supplant the goal Trotsky outlines in the quotation at the head of this article\*.

In the Granite view of Afghanistan everything is eventually — and quickly — to be made right by the workers taking political power from the bureaucracy in Russia and elsewhere. Such a view is rational only on an analysis of Stalinism such as Trotsky's, which identifies the bureaucracy as being in fundamental contradiction with the basic socialised relations of production. (In the final analysis, that is because it is in fundamental contradiction with the working class).

Grant presents a different picture: the bureaucracy (the Russian one or its would-be Afghan duplicate) is the bearer of a higher civilisation and will do for Afghanistan what capitalism did for Europe. That bureaucracy is at one, at least for a whole historical period, with the collectivised means of production, which for that epoch of history are 'its' means of production.

The implication is inescapable that Stalinism, which has a progressive role in the backward countries, *has had a progressive role in Russia too.* We have been through, and are still in, an epoch of progressive Stalinism. And it follows that the Stalinist states are stable class societies, whose ruling group is not a usurping bureaucracy in contradiction to the property relations but a historically legitimate ruling class, whose role in history is to develop the forces of production. Grant, in fact, like Isaac Deutscher, is a Shachtmanite (bureaucratic collectivist) disguised within the verbiage of Trotsky's theory, and placing a plus sign of appreciation against the new class society between capitalism and socialism while Shachtman placed a minus sign, calling it barbarism.

In that perspective, it is not clear why the working class political revolution against Stalinism in Russia should be on the order of the day now, or even on the agenda of the next epoch at all.

## Bloodbath

Finally, all arguments and details aside, there is the fall-back argument: if the Russians go, there will be a bloodbath. *If the Russians stay there will be [and there is] a bloodbath.* The argument is in fact thoroughly dishonest. It is also incomplete. The complete version would say, and not just imply — a bloodbath of PDP people and collaborators with the Russians.

Militant is not raising a humanitarian objection, but taking sides with the Russian army and its supporters. *It is a variant of the idea that it is better if the Russians*

\* As on Afghanistan, so in British politics, where Militant see their role as that of making propaganda for their 'perspectives' about how things will develop. Eschewing action and struggle, they mistake the role of passive commentators and would-be prophets for the proper work of proletarian militants.