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"A negative slogan unconnected with a definite positive solution will not sharpen, but dull, consciousness, for such a slogan is a hollow phrase, mere shouting, meaningless declamation."

Lenin

"Sects change their doctrines more readily than they change their names."

Anon

"In the terminology of the Marxist movement, unprincipled cliques or groups have been characterized as political bandits. A classic example of such a group is the group known as the 'Lovestoneites'. This group, poisoned and corrupted the American Communist movement for many years by its unprincipled and unscrupulous factional struggles. Able and talented people they had no definite principles. The 'political' programme was always adapted to their primary aim of 'solving the organisation question satisfactorily.'"

"Their politics were always determined for them by external pressure."

James P Cannon

"Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement."

Lenin

Introduction

Even those who had thought themselves beyond being surprised or outraged by the Socialist Workers' Party, experienced a frisson of shock and initial disbelief at the role it has played during the Serb-Kosova-NATO war - that of outright apologist for the murderous Serbian drive in Kosova. Alongside Stalinists who think Milosevic's Yugoslavia (Serbia) a socialist state, confused pacifists, half-

demented little Englanders and Serb chauvinists, they were the main organisers of a one-sided pro-Serb 'Anti-War' movement under the slogans: 'Stop the Bombing; Stop the War'. Within that movement, they were, together with the Milosevicite neo-Stalinists, the most determined opponents of concern with the Kosovar Albanians who were then being massacred and uprooted. At meetings all over Britain they fought against committing those present to demanding 'Yugoslavian (Serbian) army out of Kosova', even as a subordinate slogan. Using the style and technique of a 1940s-vintage apologia for the USSR, their pamphlet Stop the War systematically misrepresented everything to do with the build-up to war and the fate of the Kosovar Albanians,

They did not dare say it, but their politics could most clearly have been expressed in the slogan 'Victory to Milosevic'. Meanwhile, in the 'small print', their 'thinkers' - Alex Callinicos in Socialist Worker, for instance - reproduced the bourgeois establishment's line, embodied in the Rambouillet agreement: Kosova Albanian independence would 'destabilise' the region! They had, it seemed, one-and-the-same underlying argument for backing Milosevic as NATO had for bombing him! They did not say that what Milosevic was doing in Kosova was 'all right', or that it 'didn't matter', but they minimised and denied it, sometimes shamefacedly, sometimes boldly. At the NUT conference their leading teacher argued against bothering about the Kosovars on the grounds that they were now only 'history' (see WL55). It was not Hitler's Holocaust, they rightly insisted, but with the obscene intention of making as little as possible of what it was, and of what Milosevic was doing to the Kosovar Albanians.

In a war in which many tens of thousands of Kosovars have been butchered by the Milosevicites, they turned Socialist Worker into a Serb war propaganda sheet, on the political, intellectual and moral level of gung-ho pro-NATO tabloids like the Sun.

The immediate origin of this behaviour is plain and easy to comprehend: they let all other political considerations be devoured by one, negative, idea - 'Against NATO's war'. Where the old pro-USSR Stalinists used to side positively with one bloc, that controlled by the USSR - and today's neo-Stalinists sided positively with the 'socialist' Milosevic - the SWP arrived at positive support for Milosevic by an all-defining negativism: against NATO, no matter what!

They backed themselves, spitting incoherent curses at NATO, into the company of the dark-age Serb imperialists, and turned themselves into vulgar propagandists for Milosevic!

It is, of course, likely that calculations of organisational advantage - winning the favour of the still-numerous Stalinoids in the trade unions - played a big part in what they did. But that has little political or theoretical interest for us. What interests us here is how, from being early advocates of the 'Third Camp' of the working class and the oppressed, the SWP has wound up in the nearest thing to the old Stalinist 'camp' in Europe - Milosevic's. How an organisation that in 50 years has not reconciled itself to the displacement of three-quarters of a million Palestinian Arabs in 1948 (coupled with the displacement of over half a million Jews from Arab countries), which, 50 years on, ludicrously bases its advocacy of the destruction of Israel on the tragic fate of those Palestinian Arabs - wound up in this

war doing vulgar public relations work for a regime engaged in premeditated mass murder and the uprooting of over 90% of the population of Kosova!

This article will argue that the arbitrary, subjective and wildly zig-zagging politics of the SWP are rooted in, or anyway can be traced back to, the incoherences and mystifications of its bedrock 'position', Tony Cliff's theory of state capitalism. Not to 'state capitalism' in general, but to the arbitrary, subjective, inconsistent and principle-free approach which dominates this group in every sphere and is to be found also in its bedrock theory. It has always, as a political formation, decided its politics arbitrarily, and with an opportunist eye to organisational advantage. An examination of Cliff's basic 'contribution to Marxism' is the best way into this subject.

I will argue that, on the level of Marxist theory, Cliff's position is an inorganic hybrid of post-Trotsky 'degenerated workers' state' theory and 'bureaucratic collectivism', and that on the level of theory - not of politics, theory - its implications and perspectives have most of the faults of post-Trotsky degenerated workers' state theory.

For the SWP's performance in the Balkan war, the words of Trotsky which we quoted in the last Workers' Liberty, will bear repeating: 'An individual, a group, a party or a class that is capable of 'objectively' picking its nose while it watches men drunk with blood, and incited from above, massacring defenceless people, is condemned by history to rot and become worm-eaten while it is still alive.'

I. The great riddle of the twentieth century

Winston Churchill famously said of Stalin's USSR that it was a conundrum wrapped up in a paradox inside an enigma. The one-time Yugoslavian CP leader Anton Ciliga spent many years as a prisoner of Stalin. An English version of part of his book of memoirs was entitled *The Russian Enigma* (1940). Its French original was called *Au Pays du Grande Mensonge* (From the Country of the Great Lie). The great lie was that the USSR was a socialist society ruled by the working class. That lie was supported by a vast network of subordinate lies, misrepresentations, misunderstandings and wishful thinking. The essence of the situation was expressed like this by Trotsky in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936):

'The means of production belongs to the state. But the state, so to speak, 'belongs' to the bureaucracy.'

Among anti-Stalinist Marxists there have been three broad groupings of description and analysis of the USSR, with different names: degenerated workers' state; state capitalism; bureaucratic collectivism. Each of the groupings contains many sub-divisions. Two of these names are extensions of bourgeois society. The third, bureaucratic collectivism, sees Stalinism as a distinct new socio-economic formation.

These names denote analyses which all claim to be Marxist. All deal with the same phenomenon. They share many elements of description and analysis. That means that discussion and argument between proponents of these categories too easily becomes an incomprehensible, arbitrary bandying of words and names. This inherent tendency to confusion is made worse by the fact that within each of the

'big three' names for the USSR, many often very different and at root incompatible theories have sought a home.

Worse still, there is much overlapping of substance between some variants of supposedly distinct theories, whose proponents choose to give them different names. In part this arises out of evolutions within different tendencies of analysis that retains a name it should have shed. Thus, for example, the Workers' Fight grouping (a forerunner of Workers' Liberty) had a variant of degenerated and deformed workers state theory, which it saw as rooted in Trotsky's analysis and political attitude to Stalinism, that had, on the level of theory, more in common in most respects - not all - with bureaucratic collectivist and state capitalist theories: its political conclusions - attitude to Stalinist expansion, for example, as for instance in Afghanistan in 1979 - often had more in common with those positions than with the position of most workers' statist. So, on the level of theory, had Ted Grant's theory of the degenerated Bonapartist workers' state. Tony Cliff's version of state capitalism had so little in common with other state capitalist theories, and in its underlying structures had so much in common with bureaucratic collectivism, that Hal Draper described its author's name for it as 'a matter of terminological taste' (See WL49). As we will see below, Cliff also shared, on the level of theory if not politics, most of the essential conceptions of post-Trotsky 'orthodox' Trotskyism.

Thus the argument between labels and name-tags - degenerated workers' state, state capitalism, bureaucratic collectivism - has become an almost incomprehensible babble. How can it be made sense of, translated into accessible terms? To make sense of it you must first break the subject of Stalinism down into the elements of the basic questions and issues to which all the theories in one way or another, give, or imply, answers. Each 'label' - and the many very different theories and sets of politics that are to be found within each label - is an, often arbitrary, composite of such elements and answers. The theories are permutations of the answers to the series of questions posed by Stalinism. Trotsky put it like this in 1939/40:

'Let us begin by posing the question of the nature of the Soviet state not on the abstract sociological plane but on the plane of concrete political tasks. Let us concede for the moment that the bureaucracy is a new 'class' and that the present regime in the USSR is a special system of class exploitation. What new political conclusions follow for us from these definitions? The Fourth International long ago recognized the necessity of overthrowing the bureaucracy by means of a revolutionary uprising of the toilers. Nothing else is proposed or can be proposed by those who proclaim the bureaucracy to be an exploiting class. The goal to be attained by the overthrow of the bureaucracy is the re-establishment of the rule of the soviets. Nothing different can be proposed or is proposed by the leftist critics. The distribution of productive forces among the various branches of economy and generally the entire content of the plan will be drastically changed when this plan is determined by the interests not of the bureaucracy but of the producers themselves. But inasmuch as the question of overthrowing the parasitic oligarchy still remains linked with that of preserving the nationalised (state) property, we called the future revolution political. Certain of our critics want, come what may, to call the future revolution social. Let us grant this definition. What does it alter in essence? To those tasks of the revolution which

we have enumerated it adds nothing whatsoever.'

This approach can be broken down further.

Who rules? The working class? The bureaucracy for the working class? A collective state capitalist class? A 'bureaucratic collectivist' class?
Can the working class rule socially and economically without ruling politically, that is, without democracy?
Is the bureaucracy merely 'parasitic' or is it a fully formed new exploiting ruling class? Is there meaning in such a distinction?
What is the place of Stalinism in history? A historical blind alley?
Is USSR society progressive? Regressive?
Is the USSR post-capitalist?
Is the USSR in transition to socialism?
What are the laws of motion of the USSR economy?
Is the working class in the Stalinist totalitarian states a proletariat like that of historical capitalism?
If it is state capitalism, what is the working class socialist perspective?
If it is bureaucratic collectivism, what is the working class socialist perspective?
If it is progressive, what political conclusions follow?
Are we for the defence of the USSR by the international working class?
Are we for the expansion of the USSR?
These are only some of the questions that were embedded in the disputes about names and labels. The whole discussion within the post-Lenin Bolshevik current, since the '20s, has been an unstable series of permutations of the varying answers to these questions. Let us examine the elements, in Trotsky himself and in those who tried to build on Trotsky's analysis of Stalinism, as did all those in the post-Trotsky Trotskyist currents, whatever label they used, and whatever permutations of the elements they made. But first some essential preparatory points.

II. 1917 and Marxist socialism

Fundamental to Marxist socialism is the idea that socialism is not possible in backwardness. Advanced capitalism brings into existence the social and material prerequisites for socialism - the possibility of an economy which provides abundance for all and thus eliminates that scarcity for the many, to escape from which ruling classes have throughout history raised themselves above the mass of the people. This idea was common to Russian Mensheviks and Bolsheviks alike.

During the Russian Revolution of 1917 they differed on whether the working class should, when the possibility arose, take state power in a backward society. Those who answered yes - Trotsky since 1905, and then, in 1917, Lenin and the Bolshevik Party - did so, not in order to deny the ABC of Marxism: socialism, the Bolsheviks too agreed, was not possible in the backward Russian conditions. In a 1922 postscript to an edition of a work of his from 1915, Trotsky wrote:

The assertion, repeated several times in the Programme of Peace, to the effect that the proletarian revolution cannot be victoriously consummated within a national framework, may perhaps seem to some readers to have been refuted by the five years' experience of our Soviet Republic. But such a conclusion would be unfounded. The fact that the workers' state has maintained itself against the

entire world in a single, and moreover backward, country testifies to the colossal power of the proletariat, a power which in other more advanced, more civilised countries will truly be able to achieve miracles. But having defended ourselves as a state in the political and military sense, we have not arrived at, nor even approached, socialist society. The struggle for revolutionary state self-defence resulted in this interval in an extreme decline of productive forces, whereas socialism is conceivable only on the basis of their growth and blossoming.'

The Russian workers could start; the finish would have to depend on the German, French, British and other workers in advanced countries. So would the fate of what the Russian workers had started. Abnormal circumstances - war, breakdown of the state, the preparedness of the working class and the Bolshevik Party - made it possible for the Russian proletariat to take power. But socialism could not be built: the Russian workers' revolution could not even survive unless it was the first of a chain of revolutions spreading to the advanced countries of Europe. The revolution would become international, or capitalism and the bourgeoisie would be restored in Russia.

On a certain level, the Bolsheviks after 1921, with their New Economic Policy, presided over a limited and controlled 'restoration' of capitalism - under a regime in which the working class, through its Bolshevik party continued to hold political power. Under this 'New Economic Policy' (NEP) in with there was a revival of the bourgeoisie and of rich, labour-exploiting farmers the Stalinist bureaucracy raised itself above society, above the working class and above the NEP small bourgeoisie.

Between 1927 and 1929 they crushed first the working class and then the renascent bourgeoisie. They destroyed both the left wing and the right wing of the Bolshevik Party. As Trotsky in 1940 summarised what had happened, the bureaucracy 'made themselves masters of the surplus product' of society.

Not only did the Stalinist counter-revolution fail to restore private property, it ruptured the entire framework of the NEP, substituting for it a command economy. With great savagery and an enormous destruction of human life, they forcibly collectivised agriculture. They industrialised at breakneck speed. They subjected the workers to savage exploitation. The labour movement was utterly destroyed. The 'trade unions', no longer working class agencies for self-protection, were made into state agencies for controlling the working class. The bureaucracy extended its tentacles into every nook and cranny of the economy, brooking no competition at any level, however petty.

What, in class terms, was this system? Lenin in 1920 in the course of defending trade unions independent of the workers' state, had called it a 'workers' state with bureaucratic deformations'. Under Stalin, it still seemed to be rooted in the October revolution, as its rulers claimed it was. Indubitably, the working class revolution had cleared the way for it, overthrowing the old order, and establishing working class rule, which the bureaucratic Stalinist counter-revolution had, in turn, by 1930, completely destroyed and replaced by the rule of a bureaucratic 'caste' or class. The key question for those who struggled to understand the USSR was: did the bureaucracy, which maintained and massively extended the property of the state it collectively 'owned', 'represent' a monstrously distorted working class

rule ('degenerated workers' state'); did the bureaucracy collectively play the role of the bourgeoisie in history and therefore personify 'capital' and, if it did, did that make the bourgeois-free USSR capitalist? Or did the bureaucracy rule over a distinctly new form of class society ('bureaucratic collectivism')?

Was there, in fact, continuity between the working-class revolution of 1917 and Stalinism? The Stalinised Communist International said there was : this was the Russian revolution triumphantly enduring and developing; its norms and practices were from now on the norms and practices of working class socialism. Old socialist terms and ideas were adapted to radically new meanings that were often the opposite of their old meanings. 'Democracy', for example, came to be used as a name for fascist-like state tyranny. Workers' power was the name given to savage bureaucratic rule over a brutally exploited working class that had less rights than the workers in Britain or France, in fact - no rights at all.

The totalitarian power of the state over society and especially over the working class came to be identified with the rule of the working class over society; prolonged totalitarian state arbitrariness against the workers and the peasants was equated with the dictatorial rule of the working class in 1919 fighting against the old 'entrenched' - in fact now long extirpated - ruling class and its agents. The goal of state collectivism replaced all other considerations. To all pre-Stalinist socialists the class character of economic state collectivism was understood as being determined by which class exercised political power. It was axiomatic collective working class power could not but be democratic. In Stalinised 'communism', these elementary programmatic ideas of working class socialism were replaced by the arbitrary ascription of a working class character to the dictatorship of a 'parasitic' or exploiting minority.

The idea that for real socialism the working class has to take over the achievements of advanced capitalism, that socialism is impossible except as the historical offspring and legatee of advanced capitalism, was replaced with the idea that it was the job of socialism to develop backward parts of the world until they could catch up with and compete with advanced capitalism. This became the dominant idea of what 'actually existing socialism' - as certain ex-Stalinist intellectuals, making their peace with capitalism, would put it in the '70s - was. The idea, rooted in the most basic notion of Marxism, that socialism could not happen from backwardness without 'all the old crap' reappearing, as Marx had written, was simultaneously denied by the Stalinists and proved true by the grotesque bureaucratic parodies of socialism produced by the Stalinists.

The Marxian idea of socialism itself was pulped and internally disrupted in this process. It was poisoned, it is plain at the end of the twentieth century, to such an extent that the old 'socialist' movement would have to die before authentic working class socialism could be reborn.

III. Trotsky

Where Trotsky stood is incontrovertibly clear: The revolution in Russia would - Trotsky had argued from 1905, and after 1917 - either spread to advanced countries, or be destroyed by bourgeois counter-revolution. Until close to the end of his life, believing that Stalinist collectivised property was a horrible mutation of the October revolution, he took it as certainty that outright destruction of 'the

gains of the 1917 revolution' would take the form of bourgeois restoration.

The counter-revolution that destroyed the power of the workers was not a bourgeois counter-revolution, but the rise to power of a type of collectivist ruling class which maintained state - their state - property. Trotsky and his co-thinkers such as Rakovsky chronicled the bureaucratic counter-revolution and stage by stage elaborated a working class programme of action against it. From 1933 Trotsky advocated what he would call after 1936, a new working class revolution against the bureaucracy. He called that revolution a 'political revolution', because it would maintain state property; but the measures he advocated - the working class seizure of power, smashing the bureaucratic state and replacing it with a democratic Soviet (Council) working class state, the seizure of the economy out of the hands of the bureaucracy - amounted to a full social revolution. The term 'political revolution' has been the source of much mystification.

Political power - bureaucratic or working class - was seen as central in an economy that was statified and politically controlled and not market regulated. For Trotsky, it was an 'interregnum economy', degenerating from the worker's power of the revolution, but not yet overthrown by bourgeois forces. It retained the potential of being regenerated by way of a new working class 'political revolution'. It was not, in Trotsky's view - and this is central - a degenerated workers' state in stable equilibrium, still less what it became for post-Trotsky workers' statist, a 'degenerated workers' state' in irreversible 'transition to socialism' - but a continually degenerating workers' state. It could not survive or go on degenerating indefinitely. If it achieved stability, as for many decades it did, then a set of new conclusions would be indicated.

Part also of this complex of ideas was the refusal to designate the ruling bureaucracy a ruling class. Trotsky had chronicled and anatomised this bureaucratic ruling group as it developed. Far from his refusal to call it a ruling class expressing softness towards it, or the idea that it 'wasn't so bad', Trotsky compared it, in 1938, unfavourably with (pre-Holocaust) Nazism, from which its political rule differed, he said, only in its 'more unbridled savagery'.

In what, essentially, did the degenerated workers' state character of the USSR consist for Trotsky? His thinking evolved through many stages in the 1930s and in his writings one finds many qualifications, but, irreducibly, the survival and extension of the fully nationalised economy was decisive. For Trotsky this could not have come into being without the 1917 revolution. His approach was historical, tracing the evolution and degeneration step by step. The qualitative break, he thought, would come either with the rupturing of the collectivist forms rooted in the revolution and the restoration of capitalism; or, alternatively, with the rupturing of the bureaucracy's political power by the working class, which would then go on to organise a radically different collectivist economy. Not theoretical extrapolation, but the test of war, he would come to say, had to pronounce this system more than an ephemeral freak of history.

That the bureaucracy had all the negative features of the worst ruling class in history was not disputed. For Trotsky, the bureaucracy was a parasitic growth on the continuously degenerating forms of collectivised economy rooted in the 1917 revolution.

Where, for Trotsky, did the USSR stand in the Marxist notion of the historic sequence of class societies? In the west that had been a dialectical progression from ancient slave society, to feudalism, to capitalism. After advanced capitalism, Marxists believed, would come socialism. The USSR was a backward, though developing, annex to world capitalism, under threat of engulfment by the more advanced capitalist world, either by way of military destruction or by the influx of cheaper goods produced by the vastly more productive system of advanced European capitalism, or a combination of both. The idea of the Stalinist state as 'socialism' encroaching from the 'periphery to the centre', in competition with advanced capitalism, Trotsky dismissed in its original Stalinist form - the idea of building 'socialism in one country' - as a foolish totalitarian variant of utopian socialism, fundamentally at odds with both the root ideas of Marxism and the guiding idea of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. He would have accused those of his comrades who, later, propounded the idea that the Stalinist state was 'in transition to socialism' of endorsing 'socialism in one country'.

For Trotsky the USSR's economic forms - collectivised economy and planning, albeit bureaucratic planning - remained post-capitalist, the bureaucratically distorted product of the 1917 revolution, a promissory note for the post-capitalist organisation of society which the Russian working class, in partnership with the workers of the advanced capitalist countries, could develop as a democratically planned economy. Because of backwardness, however, those forms were filled with an antagonistic content. In substance, despite the forms of property and his way of seeing them, the USSR for Trotsky was not post-capitalist in the context of and in relation to world capitalism, and could not be; the very basics of Marxist socialism, of socialism's necessary relationship to capitalism in history, ruled it out.

At the radical heart of this contradictory socio-economic formation, stood the ineradicable antagonism of the bureaucracy with the people, and, in the first place, the workers. Because of this contradiction, planning was vitiated. Democracy, without which rational planning was impossible, was incompatible with bureaucratic rule. Thus the terroristic bureaucrats ruled in the dark by way of a system of planning deprived of popular democratic social monitoring and workers' self-rule. In the early days of untrammelled bureaucratic rule, the Stalinist terror functioned as a crude substitute instrument of control and of monitoring.

IV. Trotsky's picture of the USSR

Trotsky was distinguished in the early 1930s by outright partisanship for the Stalinist regime in foreign policy, upholding one-party rule, and blazing 1920-vintage scorn at its Social Democratic critics. Trotsky's place in the very broad spectrum of non-Stalinist socialism changed steadily through the 1930s and the change is indicative of his evolution.

In 1936 in *The Revolution Betrayed* he came to Karl Kautsky's position in his formulation quoted above (the state owned the economy, but bureaucracy owns the state). Trotsky dotted the outlines of a plain picture, but refused 'yet' to draw clear lines through the outlined picture. By the mid-1930s, the implacable and unrepentant defender of the USSR regime against Social Democratic and vulgar-democratic critics was scornfully castigating the pro-Stalinist Bauerite social democrats and their ex-Communist International alter ego, the 'Brandlerite' Right

Communists, for being apologists and defence lawyers for Stalin and Stalinism - and enemies of the suppressed workers of the USSR. Trotsky was essentially consistent.

Paradoxical though it seems, everything in Trotsky's evolution here was self-consistent.

Two excerpts from concrete descriptions of USSR society by Trotsky will show what Trotsky saw as the reality of the degenerated workers' state. The first is from April 1933 (The Theory of Degeneration and the Degeneration of Theory). In USSR history the period was an interregnum between the convulsions of forced collectivisation and the beginning of The Great Terror (December 1934). He links the state with a discussion of inflation and money: like the state, money has a necessary social function. It is a measure of value and means of exchange. Like the state, its role will diminish with social development. It too will finally wither away.

Trotsky examines the nature of Stalinist society from two sides: the state and the economy. His picture does not at all match with the historical and theoretical framework that he insists on. The society he describes is unmistakably a new form of class society, neither capitalism nor socialism, or in transition to socialism. It is what will, at the end of the '30s, be called bureaucratic collectivism.

'The soviets have lost the last remnants of independent significance and have ceased being soviets. The party does not exist... the trade unions are completely crushed... under the cover of the struggle with the right deviation.

'The state not only does not wither away... but... becomes ever more openly the instrument of bureaucratic coercion... The apparatus of the trade unions themselves has become the weapon of an ever-growing pressure on the workers'.

Referring to the 'regime of terror against the party and the proletariat', Trotsky asks: 'Where does such a terrible, monstrous, unbearable exercise of the political regime come from?'. He finally answers: 'The intensification of repression is necessary for the defence of the privileged positions of the bureaucracy'.

Trotsky describes the reality of bureaucratic arbitrariness and inflation. 'Money regulated by administrative prices fixed for goods loses its ability to regulate plans. In this field as in others, 'socialism' for the bureaucracy consists of freeing its will from any control: party, Soviet, trade union or money ... Economic planning frees itself from value control as bureaucratic fancy frees itself from political control. The rejection of 'objective causes'... represents the 'theoretical' ravings of bureaucratic subjectivism... The Soviet economy today is neither a monetary nor a planned one. It is an almost purely bureaucratic economy. To support unreliable and disproportionate tempos, a further intensification of pressure on the proletariat became imperative. Industry, freed from the material control of the producer, took on a super-social, that is, bureaucratic, character. As a result it lost the ability to satisfy human wants even to the degree to which it had been accomplished by the less-developed capitalist industry...

'From this and from this alone... flows the necessity for the introduction of

coercion into all cells of economic life (strengthening of the power of [factory] managers, laws against absentees, death penalty for spoliation of collective-farm property by its members, war measures in sowing campaigns and harvest collections... the [internal] passport system, political departments in the villages, etc. etc.)... The dictatorship of the proletariat wither away in the form of bureaucratic inflation, that is, in the extreme swelling of coercion, persecutions, and violence.

The dictatorship of the proletariat is not dissolved in a classless society, but degenerates into the omnipotence of bureaucracy over society'.

Six years later (June 1939). in *The Bonapartist Philosophy of the State*, Trotsky depicts Stalinism as a system more akin to Dark Age feudalism or to the rigidifying Roman Empire of about 300 AD than to either socialism or capitalism, or anything in between.

'The realities of soviet life today can indeed be hardly reconciled even with the shreds of old theory. Workers are bound to the factories; peasants are bound to the collective farms. [Internal] Passports have been introduced... It is a capital crime to come late to work. Punishable as treason is not only any criticism of Stalin but even the mere failure to fulfil the natural duty to get down on all fours before the 'Leader'. The frontiers are guarded by an impenetrable wall of border patrols and police dogs on a scale heretofore unknown anywhere... Foreigners [in fact, communists, and especially communist refugees from capitalist police states] who had previously managed to get into the country are being systematically exterminated.

'The... soviet constitution, 'the most democratic in the world', amounts to this, that every citizen is required at an appointed time to cast his ballot for the one and only candidate hand-picked by Stalin or his agents. The press, the radio, all the organs of propaganda, agitation and national education are completely in the hands of the ruling clique... How many have been shot, thrown into jails and concentration camps, or exiled to Siberia, we do not definitely know. But undoubtedly hundreds of thousands of party members have shared the fate of millions of non-party people'. Though the 'official edict' is that 'socialism has been realised', Stalinism has 'brought the state to a pitch of wild intensity unprecedented in the history of mankind'.

Trotsky pictures the life of the 'ruling caste'. In addition to publicly acknowledged salaries, 'they receive secret salaries from the treasuries of the Central Committee or local committees; they have at their disposal automobiles... excellent apartments, summer homes, sanatoria, and hospitals. To suit their needs or their vanity all sorts of 'soviet palaces' are erected'. Trotsky shows that the bureaucrats can pass on to their children, if not property in the means of production, then status and future membership in the elite: the ruling caste 'almost monopolise the highest institutions of learning'.

Trotsky summarises: 'The Bonapartist apparatus of the state is thus an organ for defending the bureaucratic thieves and plunderers of national wealth'. And Stalin is 'the spokesman of privileged parasites. In the land that has gone through the proletarian revolution, it is impossible to foster inequality, create an aristocracy, and accumulate privileges save by bringing down on the masses floods of lies and

ever more monstrous repressions'.

Is this strange social system, in which 170 millions of people live, which is neither capitalist nor socialist, a new form of society? But what sort of society?

V. 1933: Trotsky discusses state capitalism

People and groups linked to Trotsky's Left Opposition in the late 1920s and early 1930s, denied that the USSR was a working class state and called it state capitalism or what would later be called bureaucratic collectivism. Inside the USSR, the Democratic Centralists, allies and factional comrades of the Trotskyists in the opposition to Stalinism, were state capitalist. Trotsky polemicised against them.

Let us examine Trotsky's polemics against an early '30s ex-Communist International proponent of a theory that Russia was state capitalist, Hugo Urbahns, and against Lucien Laurat, a proponent of a 'bureaucratic collectivist' view. Trotsky separated from Urbahns and the biggest Left Opposition group outside the USSR, the German Leninbund, in 1929 because the Leninbund opposed Russia in the Chinese-Russian conflict over the Chinese Eastern Railway. In 1933, in *The Class Nature of the Soviet State*, Trotsky dealt in detail with Urbahns' attempt, from within a broadly Left Opposition framework, to interpret the USSR as 'state capitalist'. State Capitalism as the proper classification of the USSR then meant something very different, for everybody concerned, from what it came to mean in Trotskyist circles in the 1940s, in the work of, seriatim, CLR James, Dunayevskaya, Chailieu and Cliff, those theorists of 'state-capitalism' whom readers will know best.

Trotsky, secure in his own concrete analyses and political responses to Stalinism, and in the working class programme of action against it which he and the Left Opposition had elaborated in the previous ten years, in 1933 rejects all 'theoretical and terminological experiments' (all that differ with his own theoretical and terminological experiments - which consist in stretching old terms and existing theory to incorporate new phenomena). He regards attempts other than his own to summarise and conceptualise the USSR's social relationships - which he himself has and will continue to describe honestly - as mere playing with 'terminology'. His concern is, by holding the Stalinist phenomenon in the old framework and the revolutionary perspectives that go with it, to limit the theoretical and intellectual disruption caused by the realities of Stalinism. Trotsky's insistence on doing this until the eve of his death will only complicate and make worse the intellectual and theoretical havoc amongst revolutionary socialists that he is trying to avoid.

Debating with the state capitalism Hugo Urbahns, Trotsky welcomes Urbahns' 'descent' from his [earlier] terminological exercise in the sphere of the political superstructure down to the economic foundation'. In 1939 he will 'welcome' Bruno Rizzi's 'clarity' too.

What Urbahns calls 'state capitalism', and Trotsky discusses in 1933, is remarkably like what Bruno Rizzi will call 'bureaucratic collectivism', the discussion of which in 1939 will be the occasion for Trotsky's tentative and incomplete shifting of the entire conceptual framework in which he has so far seen Stalinism. In 1933, by contrast, nothing shifts. 'State capitalism', as discussed by Trotsky, is Urbahns' term for the manifold forms of initiative by existing bourgeois states -

Italy, Germany, the USA - to superintend, stimulate and 'organise' the sick capitalist economy, thereby playing a role in economic affairs not known in modern capitalism until World War 1. It was part of the inter-war drift to the neo-mercantilism that divided the world into more or less walled-off imperialist trading blocs. In this world trend Urbahns seeks an explanation for Stalin's USSR.

Trotsky agrees with Urbahns that the trend is real and very important. 'Monopoly capitalism has long since outgrown the private ownership of the means of production and the boundaries of the national state. Paralysed, however, by its own organisations, the working class was unable to free in time the productive forces of society from their capitalist fetters. Hence arises the protracted epoch of economic and political convulsions... The bourgeois governments are obliged to pacify the mutiny of their own productive forces with a police club. This is what constitutes the so-called planned economy. In so far as the state attempts to harness and discipline capitalist anarchy, it may be called conditionally 'state capitalism'.'

Trotsky recalls that the broad use of this term, in 1933, differs from the original Marxist meaning of it: 'only the independent economic enterprises of the state itself'. Now it signifies 'all the varieties of state intervention into the economy; the French use the word *etatisme* (statification) in this sense'. Urbahns, according to Trotsky, pronounces this 'state capitalism' to be 'a necessary and, moreover, a progressive stage of the development of society, in the same sense as trusts are progressive compared with the disparate enterprises'. But Trotsky thinks Urbahns' appraisal of such capitalist planning a 'fundamental error'. During the historical epoch of capitalist upswing, 'state capitalism' - state enterprises - might act 'to lead society forward and facilitate the future economic labour of the proletarian dictatorship'. The present capitalist 'planned economy' is 'reactionary through and through'.

Describing the drive for national self-sufficiency by, for example, in newly Hitlerised Germany, he writes that 'state capitalism drives to tear the economy away from the worldwide division of labour; to adapt the productive forces to the Procrustean bed of the national state; to constrict production artificially in some branches and to create just as artificially other branches by means of enormous, unprofitable expenditures. The economic policies of the present state - beginning with tariff walls upon the ancient Chinese pattern and ending with the episodes of forbidding the use of machinery under Hitler's 'planned economy' - attain an unstable regulation at the cost of causing the national economy to decline, bringing chaos into world relations, and completely disrupting the monetary system that will be very much needed for socialist planning. The present state capitalism neither prepares nor lightens the future work of the socialist state but, on the contrary, creates for it colossal additional difficulties.'

This description of the destructive work of state capitalism in economics is also an anticipatory full summary description of the 'statism' of Stalinism, and of its real relationship to socialism. Everything said here is 100% true of Stalinism. Trotsky regarded the Stalinist drive to cut international economic links, as distinct from controlling them through the state monopoly of free trade, as downright reactionary.

Trotsky concludes: 'It remains a deep secret what concrete economic content Urbahns himself puts into his understanding of the Soviet 'state capitalism'.'

As noted, this exchange is important in that it essentially covers the same ground as the 1939 dispute about 'bureaucratic collectivism', and in terms of world trends has exactly the same factual basis as the later covering of the same ground, at the start of World War Two. We will see the later Trotsky better in this light.

Trotsky will in 1939 submit the hypothetical idea of world bureaucratic collectivism to the same criticism, but with an important variant.

'Even if we grant that Stalinism and fascism from opposite poles will some day arrive at one and the same type of exploitative society ('bureaucratic collectivism' according to Bruno R's terminology) this still will not lead humanity out of the blind alley... Even if the various fascist governments did succeed in establishing a system of planned economy at home then... the struggle between the totalitarian states for world domination would be continued and even intensified. Wars would devour the fruits of planned economy and destroy the bases of civilisation...'

But where the 1939 criticism assumes, or concedes, that the various planned economies produce net progress - 'fruits' - in their own countries, except that that progress is annulled by war and international conflict, the 1933 criticism focuses on denouncing the evil effects of the 'planning' in each country. In *The Revolution Betrayed* and frequently elsewhere, Trotsky contrasts the reactionary economic effects of capitalist partial-statism with the alleged progressive results of Stalinist total-statism. Yet elsewhere again he denounces, and rightly, the excessiveness of Stalinist-statism... 'The monstrous centralisation of the entire industry and commerce from top to bottom... was determined not by the needs of socialism but by the greed of the bureaucracy to have everything without exception in its hands. This repugnant and by no means necessary violence against the economy...' (p.146.) The unresolved contradiction here arises from Trotsky's decision in the early 1930s, once his predictions of speedy collapse of Stalin's forced collectivising and breakneck industrialising 'left course' have been confounded, to attribute the successes of industrialisation to the allegedly proletarian property forms.

The Trotsky of 1933 then discusses variations of what will later be called the theory of 'bureaucratic collectivism'.

VI. 1933: Trotsky discusses 'bureaucratic collectivism'

This discussion too is very important for 'tracing' Trotsky's evolution. In 1933, the experience of full-blown 'industrial' Stalinism has been so short that Trotsky's belief that it will, be one way or another, only an interregnum, is reasonable. Trotsky therefore treats 'bureaucratic collectivism' as a notion derived from anarchism and discusses and judges the new phenomenon of Stalinism essentially in terms of the old frame of bourgeois-proletarian class alternatives - the frame which Stalinism is in the process of breaking.

He discusses the view of the Social Democrat, ex-Communist Lucien Laurat that the USSR is 'neither proletarian nor bourgeois' but 'represents an absolutely new type of class organisation, because the bureaucracy not only rules over the

proletariat politically but also exploits it economically, devouring that surplus value that hitherto fell to the lot of the bourgeoisie'. Laurat invokes Karl Marx's Capital, but his, says Trotsky, is a 'superficial and purely descriptive 'sociology'.'

Contemptuously, Trotsky equates the Social Democratic 'compiler' Laurat with 'the Russo-Polish revolutionist Makhaisky' who 'with much more fire and splendour' had, over 30 years previously, 'define[d] 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' as a scaffold for the commanding posts of an exploiting bureaucracy'. Makhaisky 'only 'deepened' sociologically and economically the anarchistic prejudices against state socialism'.

Trotsky does not here pause to distinguish between the subject under discussion, the USSR in its Stalinist degeneration, which Trotsky will soon recognise as having been totalitarian 'for several years', and the dictatorship of the proletariat in Lenin's time. But that is just what is at issue between himself and Laurat. Trotsky does not distinguish between the USSR under Stalin and the 'state socialism' - the regime of a profoundly democratic workers' state - in dispute between Marxists and anarchists. It is still an argument about old theories and perspectives.

Marxist politicians and historians had interpreted and tried to shape history. The tragic task of those of Trotsky's generation who survived to the '30s was to rework Marxism in the light of Stalinism and define both Stalinism and their own place in history and in Marxist theory. It was less unreasonable for Trotsky to hold back from doing this in 1933 than it would increasingly come to be - glaringly and increasingly at odds with the facts that Trotsky himself dealt with - as the years wore on.

Trotsky argues with Laurat not about facts, but about the interpretation of agreed facts. Laurat's argument about the bureaucracy's 'uncontrolled appropriation of an absolutely disproportionate part of the national income' is, says Trotsky, based on 'indubitable facts'; but it 'does not... change the social physiognomy of the bureaucracy'. There is a parasitic bureaucracy in every regime. The fascist bureaucracy, 'straddles the boss's neck, tears from his mouth at time the juiciest pieces', is still only a bourgeois hireling. Thus too with the Stalinist bureaucracy. 'It devours, wastes and embezzles a considerable proportion of the national income. Its management costs the proletariat very dearly. In the Soviet society, it occupies an extremely privileged position not only in the sense of having political and administrative prerogatives but also in the sense of possessing enormous material advantages. Still, the biggest apartments, the juiciest steaks and even Rolls Royces are not enough to transform the bureaucracy into an independent ruling class'.

The supposed ruling class, the USSR working class, is not here merely interfered with, as the German ruling class sometimes is by the fascist gangsters who preserve its social rule; it is in every detail of its life the dragooned and slave-driven source of the surplus product, in an economy organised by the bureaucracy and controlled by the bureaucracy. This is a bureaucracy that fills all the roles ever played by any ruling class, and therefore unlike any auxiliary bureaucracy of any previous ruling class. This bureaucracy is, at the very least, the bureaucratic analogue of all previous ruling.

Later Trotsky estimates that the bureaucracy takes half the national income, and

that it thereby pauperises the workers. Is not the bureaucracy the ruling class where there is no other elite? In truth, when he answers 'no', Trotsky here is close to mere pettifogging.

There is no other ruling group, no other elite, no competitor for the bureaucracy's place in the social hierarchy. Against this fact, the political and juridical fiction of the working class as ruling class and the supposed roots of the nationalised economy in the revolution are, on the level of theory and 'perspectives', raised by Trotsky to overwhelming preponderance. Meanwhile in practice he draws the necessary revolutionary working-class political conclusions from the USSR working class's real position, and the real - not juridical and formal - relations in the society. With the turn to 'political revolution' he will, in outline at least, draw all the practical conclusions for the anti-bureaucratic struggle; these as Trotsky will say again and again, would not differ seriously were Trotsky to identify the bureaucracy as a new ruling class. For Trotsky, the rest is a matter of defending the theory and the perspective and of warding off conclusions he can still argue are premature and unnecessary.

The bureaucracy, he insists practices 'not... class exploitation, in the scientific sense of the word, but... social parasitism'.

Thus though Trotsky rejects the Stalinist programme of 'socialism in one country', he is nonetheless drawn into its logic, at one remove, by way of his recognition of the USSR as a working class state, degenerated: he accepts its development ('for now') as - not, as the Stalinists said, the development of socialism - but the construction of a society with a socialist tendency.

Trotsky does not dispute Laurat's facts. Instead he appeals to theoretical generalities. 'A class is defined not by its participation in the distribution of the national income alone, but by its independent role in the general structure of the economy and by its independent roots in the economic foundation of society. Each class (the feudal nobility, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie, the capitalist bourgeoisie and the proletariat) works out its own special forms of property. The bureaucracy lacks all these social traits. It has no independent position in the process of production and distribution. It has no independent property roots. Its functions relate basically to the political technique of class rule. The existence of a bureaucracy, in all its variety of forms and differences in specific weight, characterises every class regime. Its power is of a reflected character. The bureaucracy is indissolubly bound up with a ruling economic class, feeding itself upon the social roots of the latter, maintaining itself and falling together with it'.

But the issue here is whether the Stalinist bureaucracy has become something qualitatively more than previous bureaucracies. Here Trotsky assumes - in effect, simply by using the common word, 'bureaucracy' - that it has not, though he acknowledges elsewhere (*Revolution Betrayed*) that it has.

The question at issue in the USSR of 1933 is of a bureaucracy that is sole ruler and monopolist in the organisation of this society, combining all the roles of all previous ruling classes. It is sole custodian of the surplus product and organiser of production. On the other side the nominal ruling class, the working class, is designated the ruling class because it is a priori identified with a form of property - yet is it a class which plays the role of all previous subordinate, exploited classes,

combining characteristics of slaves, serfs and proletarians. By a series of class struggles which Trotsky fought in and chronicled, the bureaucracy has subjugated the proletariat and worked out the 'special property relations' which Trotsky denies it possesses, namely nationalised property in a totalitarian state which is the bureaucracy's own property.

On the issues as posed by the development of the USSR and by history, Trotsky still only brings to bear the general precepts of Marxism, that is, generalities derived from past history. The 'necessity' or otherwise of the bureaucracy's role in the economy has to be derived from an account of the society as it is; but Trotsky derives it from the general theory of previous societies, using that general theory against the facts he himself has recorded. Such arguments from Trotsky will become additional layers of scholastic dogmatic obfuscation, counterposed to the proper method of Marxism, long after it ceases to be reasonable to do as Trotsky does here in 1933 and regard the USSR as a freakish short-term variant of previous forms.

Between his concrete analyses and descriptions of USSR reality and his programme of working class action against Stalinism, worked out since 1923, on the one side, and his theorising about it, on the other, there is a great gap. After about 1933 Trotsky puts 'theory' on hold. Having declared in 1933 for what he will call 'political revolution' - this will be developed and hardened in the next 3 years - Trotsky entered a theoretical limbo: everything is fixed and frozen on the level of basic theory, while dramatic events unfold on the level of real history, Trotsky, expecting either bourgeois counter-revolution or a new working-class revolution, believes that nothing will change basically as long as nationalised economy remains.

Even when in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) he articulates a summary description of the USSR remarkable for its clarity and stark truth ('The state owns the economy, but the bureaucracy, so to speak, owns the state.') he draws no conclusions and unconvincingly argues against those who begin to - Carter, Craipeau, Burnham. They are only parallel things: Trotsky's generalising theory is about the past, his analyses and programme of action in the USSR about now. So it will be with Trotsky, despite many shifts within that frame until September 1939. In 1939 in a great rush, Trotsky's long restrained need to theorise and re-conceptualise the facts will jump over his head and appear before him as a nightmare possible future.

VII. Perspectives: before World War Two

What, according to Trotsky, were the possible perspectives for the Stalinised USSR? Despite the impressive early economic successes in crude industrialisation, it was a system characterised by convulsive social disintegration, bureaucratic arbitrariness and precipitate decline. Trotsky understood and said (*Revolution Betrayed*, 1936) that though the bureaucratic economy could assimilate western technology, it could not, in a society without freedom of speech, research or initiative, develop its own self-sustaining advanced technology. It was an inherently unstable and untenable system.

The contradiction between bureaucratic rule and the democratic imperatives of planning was, he thought, increasingly sharp and unmitigable. He thought the

Moscow Trials (1936, '37, '38) and the great purges were the beginning of the 'death agony of Stalinism'. Elements of the bureaucracy were crystallising out into a nascent bourgeoisie - what Trotsky called the 'faction of Butenko', after a Stalinist functionary who defected to Mussolini. It was a system in stark and accelerating decline from October, that could end only in either bourgeois restoration or in a new working class 'political' revolution.

It was, it is clear from what he wrote, - in for example In Defence of Marxism - only because he rejected the idea that the Russian system at the end of the '30s was a stable form of collectivist society, that Trotsky rejected the idea that the bureaucracy, though it had all of the worst features of a fascist ruling class, was a fully formed stable ruling class with a necessary role in the economy. It lacked the historic legitimacy bestowed on past ruling classes because they were necessary to that stage of the development of the means of production in humankind's evolution from ape to social self-control in socialism. The Stalinist system could not last, said Trotsky.

Far from having realised socialism, as the idiotic lies of the Stalinist rulers contended; or, as post-Trotsky Trotskyism - and in his own way, as we will see, the 'state capitalist' Tony Cliff - contended, being in transition to socialism, the USSR under the bureaucratic dictatorship was evolving naturally towards catastrophic breakdown. Only a new working class revolution could prevent the restoration of capitalism. The time span Trotsky projected was very short ('in a few months or years').

His refusal to draw conclusions about the ruling bureaucracy as a ruling class was fundamentally and explicitly tied to and dependent on this timescale. In turn Trotsky linked this time scale to empirical tests: if the USSR survived the war.

It was not until the last 11 months of his life that Trotsky publicly developed the theoretical possibility - a tremendous break with the past - that the USSR might prove to be not a freak formation between capitalism and a degenerated workers state but a socio-economic formation 'in itself' - a relatively stable system, a socio-economic formation different from capitalism and socialism; either the barbarous alternative to socialism after the capitalist epoch, or a historical cul-de-sac. This was in The USSR and War (September 1939) and Again And Once More on the Class Nature of the USSR (October 1939).

'Let me recall for the sake of illustration, the question of Thermidor. [Counter revolution: the reference is to an even in the French Revolution]. For a long time we asserted that Thermidor in the USSR was only being prepared but had not yet been consummated. Later, investing the analogy to Thermidor with a more precise and well deliberated character, we came to the conclusion that Thermidor had already taken place long ago. This open rectification of our own mistake did not introduce the slightest consternation in our ranks.

'Why? Because the essence of the processes in the Soviet Union was appraised identically by all of us, as we jointly studied day by day the growth of reaction. For us it was only a question of rendering more precise a historical analogy, nothing more. I hope that still today despite the attempt of some comrades to uncover differences on the question of the 'defence of the USSR' - with which we shall deal presently - we shall succeed by means of simply rendering our own ideas more

precise to preserve unanimity on the basis of the program of the Fourth International....Here Trotsky plainly means: if we have to conclude that the USSR is after all a new form of class society, it will be an organic conclusion from what we have done and are doing. By way of concrete description and the elaboration of the concrete revolutionary tasks posed by the reality of Stalinism.

'Our critics have more than once argued that the present Soviet bureaucracy bears very little resemblance to either the bourgeois or labour bureaucracy in capitalist society; that to a far greater degree than fascist bureaucracy it represents a new and much more powerful social formation. This is quite correct and we have never closed our eyes to it. But if we consider the Soviet bureaucracy a 'class' then we are compelled to state immediately that this class does not at all resemble any of those propertied classes known to us in past; our gain consequently is not great. We frequently call the bureaucracy a caste, underscoring thereby its shut-in character, its arbitrary rule... But even this definition does not of course possess a strictly scientific character. Its relative superiority lies in this... the makeshift character of the term... The old sociological terminology did not and could not prepare a name for a new social event which is in process of evolution (degeneration) and which assumed stable forms. All of us however, continue to call the Soviet bureaucracy a bureaucracy, not being unmindful of its historical peculiarities. In our opinion this should suffice for the time being.

'Scientifically and politically - and not purely terminologically - the bureaucracy represent a temporary growth on a social organism: or has this growth already been transformed into a historically indispensable organ? Social excrescences can be the product of an 'accidental' (i.e., temporary and extraordinary) enmeshing of historical circumstances. A social organ (and such is every class, including an exploiting class) can take shape only as a result of the deeply rooted inner needs of production itself. If we do not answer this question, then the entire controversy will degenerate into sterile toying with words...

'Bureaucratism, as a system, [has] become the worst brake on the technical and cultural development of the country. This was veiled for a certain time by the fact that the Soviet economy was occupied for two decades with transplanting and assimilating the technology and organization of production in advanced capitalist countries... But the higher the economy rose, the more complex its requirements became, all the more unbearable became the obstacle of the bureaucratic regime... Thus before the bureaucracy could succeed in excluding from itself a 'ruling class', it came into irreconcilable contradiction with the demands of development. The explanation for this is to be found precisely in the fact that the bureaucracy is not the bearer of a new system of economy peculiar to itself and impossible without itself, but is a parasitic growth on a worker' state...

The crisis of capitalism is central to Trotsky's way of assessing Stalinism. The disintegration of capitalism has reached extreme limits, likewise the disintegration of the old ruling class. The further existence of this system is impossible. The productive forces must be organized in accordance with a plan. But who will accomplish this task - the proletariat or a new ruling class of 'commissars' - politicians, administrators and technicians?...

'The second world war has begun. It attests incontrovertibly to the fact that society can no longer live on the basis of capitalism. Thereby it subjects the proletariat to a new and perhaps decisive test.

The war is the great test: 'If this war provokes, as we firmly believe, a proletarian revolution, it must inevitably lead to the overthrow of the bureaucracy in the USSR and regeneration of Soviet democracy on a far higher economic and cultural basis than in 1918. In that case the question as to whether the Stalinist bureaucracy was a 'class' or a growth on the workers' state will be automatically solved. To every single person it will become clear that in the process of the development of the world revolution the Soviet bureaucracy was only an episodic relapse. If, however, it is conceded that the present war will provoke not, revolution but a decline of the proletariat, then there remains another alternative: the further decay of monopoly capitalism, its further fusion with the state and the replacement of democracy wherever it still remained by a totalitarian regime... This would be, according to all indications, a regime of decline, signaling the eclipse of civilisation...

'Then it would be necessary in retrospect to establish that in its fundamental traits the present USSR was the precursor of a new exploiting regime on an international scale...

'The historic alternative, carried to the end, is as follows: either the Stalin regime is an abhorrent relapse in the process of transforming bourgeois society into a socialist society, or the Stalin regime is the first stage of a new exploiting society. If the second prognosis proves to be correct, then, of course, the bureaucracy will become a new exploiting class...

'Bruno has caught on to the fact that the tendencies of collectivization assume as a result of the political prostration of the working class the form of 'bureaucratic collectivism.' The phenomenon in itself is incontestable. But where are its limits and what is its historical weight?...

For Trotsky, the Stalinist USSR is inconceivable apart from October 1917. 'The Kremlin oligarchy... has the opportunity of directing economy as a body only owing to the fact that the working class of Russia accomplished the greatest overturn of property relations in history. This difference must not be lost sight of.

'The October Revolution was not an accident. It was forecast long in advance. Events confirmed this forecast, because Marxists never believed that an isolated workers' state in Russia could maintain itself indefinitely... Degeneration must inescapably end at a certain stage in downfall.

'A totalitarian regime, whether of Stalinist or fascist type, by its very essence can only be a temporary transitional regime... If contrary to all probabilities the October Revolution fails during the course of the present war, or immediately thereafter, to find its continuation in any of the advanced countries; and if, on the contrary, the proletariat is thrown back everywhere and on all fronts - then we should doubtlessly have to pose the question of revising our conception of the present epoch and its driving force. In that case it would be a question not of slapping a copybook label on the USSR or the Stalinist gang but of re-evaluating the world historical perspective for the next decades if not centuries: Have we

entered the epoch of social revolution and socialist society, or on the contrary the epoch of the declining society of totalitarian bureaucracy?

The twofold error of schematists like Hugo Urbahns and Bruno R. consists, first, in that they proclaim this latter regime as having been already finally installed; secondly, in that they declare it a prolonged transitional state of society between capitalism and socialism...

Trotsky explains what he 'defended' and does not defend. 'We defend the USSR as we defend the colonies, as we solve all our problems, not by supporting some imperialist governments against others, but by the method of international class struggle in the colonies as well as in the metropolitan centres.

'We are not a government party; we are the party of irreconcilable opposition, not only in capitalist countries but also in the USSR. Our tasks, among them the 'defence of the USSR,' we realize not through the medium of bourgeois governments and not even through the government of the USSR, but exclusively through the education of the masses through agitation, through explaining to the workers what they should defend and what they should overthrow. Such a 'defence' cannot give immediate miraculous results. But we do not even pretend to be miracle workers...

The primary political criterion for us is not the transformation of property relations in this or another area, however important these may be in themselves, but rather the change in the consciousness and organization of the world proletariat, the raising of their capacity for defending conquests and accomplishing new ones...

'We must build our policy by taking as our starting point the real relations and contradictions... Our 'defence of the USSR' will naturally differ, as heaven does from earth, from the official defence which is now being conducted under the slogan: 'For the fatherland! For Stalin!' Our defence of the USSR is carried on under the slogan: 'For socialism! For the World Revolution! Against Stalin!'

Trotsky finds that he has to answer the charge that his provisional endorsement of the theory of bureaucratic collectivism has alarmed dogmatists on his own side of the escalating factional struggle in the SWP(USA).

'Some comrades evidently were surprised that I spoke in my article ('The USSR in War') of the system of 'bureaucratic collectivism' as a theoretical possibility. They discovered in this even a complete revision of Marxism. This is an apparent misunderstanding. The Marxist comprehension of historical necessity has nothing in common with fatalism. Socialism is not realizable 'by itself' but as a result of the struggle of living forces, classes and their parties. The proletariats decisive advantage in this struggle resides in the fact that it represents historical progress, while the bourgeoisie incarnates reaction and decline. Precisely in this is the source of our conviction in victory. But we have full right to ask ourselves: What character will society take if the forces of reaction conquer?

'Marxists have formulated an incalculable number of times the alternative: either socialism or return to barbarism. After the Italian 'experience' we repeated thousands of times: either communism or fascism. The real passage to socialism

cannot fail to appear incomparably more complicated, more heterogeneous, more contradictory than was foreseen in the general historical scheme. Marx spoke about the dictatorship of the proletariat and its future withering away but said nothing about bureaucratic degeneration of the dictatorship. We have observed and analysed for the first time in experience such a degeneration. Is this revision of Marxism?...

'What social and political forms can the new 'barbarism' take, if we admit theoretically that mankind should not be able to elevate itself to socialism? We have the possibility of expressing ourselves on this subject more concretely than Marx. Fascism on one hand, degeneration of the Soviet state on the other, outline the social and political forms of a neo-barbarism...

'If we are to speak of a revision of Marx, it is in reality the revision of those comrades who project a new type of state, 'non-bourgeois' and 'non-worker'. Because the alternative developed by me leads them to draw their thoughts up to their logical conclusion, some of these critics, frightened by the conclusions of their own theory accuse me... of revising Marxism.'

Nonetheless, the charge of 'revisionism', fuelled by ignorance, malice and theoretical poverty will reverberate down the decades!

VIII. The results of World War Two

After its survival and vast imperialist expansion following Trotsky's death, the USSR could no longer be described in the terms Trotsky had used and for the reasons he had given, as a degenerated workers' state, nor the Stalinist bureaucracy as a parasitic growth and not a social organ, as a caste and not a ruling class. When the Stalinist state proved capable of replicating itself in societies where there never was a proletarian revolution; where, as in China, the bureaucracy repressed the proletariat before and during the bureaucratic revolution, and not 10 years after a proletarian revolution, as in the USSR, Trotsky's workers' state theory died. Anybody who wanted to go on using Trotsky's name for the USSR, or its clones had to find another set of reasons. 'Workers' state' theory had either to disappear or to put a new and radically different analysis into Trotsky's verbiage: the 'Orthodox' could now maintain 'Trotsky's' position only by the most thoroughgoing 'revision' of the whole of revolutionary Marxist theory, elaborating a radically new set of theories within Trotsky's familiar old terms.

In the very long term - 50 years -Stalinism proved an unviable system and a historical blind alley, but far from collapsing 'in a few months or years' before capitalism or working class revolution, as Trotsky was sure it would, Stalinism survived and seemed as late as the early '80s, to friend and foe alike, to be a viable system: it seemed in some respects better equipped than capitalism to win the long Stalinist-capitalist competition. It was still expanding (into Afghanistan) at the beginning of the 1980s.

In 1940, in Stalin, Trotsky had defined the bureaucratic counter-revolution after 1928 as the bureaucracy making itself 'sole master of the social surplus product', what, in capitalism, Marxists name 'surplus value'. Trotsky thereby arrived at a clear description of the bureaucracy as exploiters of the working class. He still,

before the USSR was submitted to the test of the looming war, hesitated to name what he described with an appropriate name, though he rendered the old name, degenerated workers' state, nonsensical.

Once the survival and expansion of Stalinism in World War Two had destroyed, root and branch, Trotsky's theory that the USSR was a deformed workers' state, what then, for Trotskyists? It was not possible rationally to go on arguing, as Trotsky had, in essence to postpone giving the indicated answer, that it was too soon to decide! He himself had set the temporal and empirical tests to re-conceptualise the given USSR as a new form of class society. At the end his refusal to do so rested on the one central argument: it should be left to the test of war. By the time war had put the system to the test, Trotsky was dead. But his tentative re-conceptualisation in September-October 1939 had cut through the cable binding Trotskyism to the Stalinist USSR and the idea that so long as nationalised property survived, the USSR was a degenerated workers' state rooted in October.

Instead of developing from Trotsky, the orthodox held on to the letter of Trotsky. They abandoned his methods of analysis. Post-Trotsky neo-Trotskyists froze Trotsky's interim and increasingly tentative degenerated workers' state theory. They substituted the name for Trotsky's method of analysing evolving USSR reality. They substituted analogy for class analysis.

From 1937, Trotsky had, for the sake of argument, separated the idea that the USSR was progressive - because it developed the means of production while world capitalism in the great slump and after was in marked decline - from the characterisation of Russia as a workers' state. He had asked more than once (in reply to Burnham, Carter and Yvan Craipeau, for example, in 1937): are we not, whatever its class character, compelled to see it as progressive? The post-Trotsky Trotskyists built new workers' state theories on this.

If, in terms of Trotsky's 1939-40 reasoning, no theory of the USSR as a workers' state was possible after World War Two, except a Stalinist one, this idea - the USSR is progressive no matter what - was transmuted by his followers into the idea that the survival of the USSR proved it was a workers' state, thus turning Trotsky inside out; and further, that the creation of Stalinist states elsewhere by the Russian Army or by autonomous Stalinist forces which created societies modelled on the USSR, such as Tito's and Mao's, meant that they too, by analogy, had to be classified as workers' states - 'deformed workers' states'. Thus did Trotsky's followers, committing political suicide, hold to the letter and form of his defunct old conclusions.

For Trotskyism, history was repeating itself. USSR Trotskyism in 1929 was faced with the fact that the expected bourgeois counter-revolution did not happen, but instead the bureaucracy uprooted the feeble shoots of bourgeois counter-revolution, destroyed the labour movement and emerged as 'master of the surplus product'. Now, with the emergence after World War Two of a new external bureaucratic Russian Empire, something analogous happened on a vast international scale. The bureaucracy not only survived the war, but as, in the crisis of 1928 and after, it vastly expanded its spheres of operation; this time, way beyond the borders of the USSR. Stalinism was replicated in other countries by

way of peasant movements that could by no twisting of language properly be construed as working class, as rooted in the working class or as making a workers' revolution.

The bureaucracy in the USSR and now elsewhere continued to develop the means of production in its own savage, murderous and immensely wasteful way. The new bureaucratic formations in China, Yugoslavia, etc., could not, as Trotsky had insisted was the case in the USSR - it was central to his analysis and to his theory of the degenerated workers' state - be said to be in conflict and contradiction with the collectivist property. They created it: collectivised property could not now be identified even obliquely with 1917, and even residually as a form of working class property. The old basic notion of socialism, that political power was decisive, which had been set aside, pro tem, as Trotsky grappled with the USSR's contradictoriness, logically now should have come into its own. Trotsky in 1936 had posed the issue clearly. In fact 'totalitarian economism' swept all before it (see *The Fate of the Russian Revolution*).

Within the verbiage of Trotsky, which they turned into a sacerdotal language, as remote from life as any sacerdotal jargon frozen in time ever was, they radically altered Trotsky's ideas. Why did the post-Trotsky Trotskyists freeze ideas derived by Trotsky from continued analysis of the Russian reality? Because of the superficial and disorienting formal resemblance of Stalinist society to 'socialism' - nationalised economy and the elimination of both the capitalist mode of economic activity, and the bourgeoisie which personified it. Because attempts to analyse the world afresh threatened to collapse what they saw as the whole Marxist system. Though Trotsky, when he tentatively re-conceptualised the USSR as it was in 1939, had shown them how to escape from this trap, they let themselves remain imprisoned by Trotsky's 'totalitarian economism' - 'full' nationalisation is a workers' state - and the idea he developed with increasing prominence after 1937 - as the idea of the USSR as any sort of workers' state became less and less tenable - that the property forms in the USSR were, in face of the semi-collapse of capitalism, progressive even if Russia was not a workers' state of any sort. They added a new adjective, 'deformed', for, e.g., China, to Trotsky's now utterly defunct workers' state designation.

Where Trotsky had argued convincingly that if the USSR could be defined as a stable social formation and not a freak short-term once-only formation created for a short time by the swirling cross-currents of history, then it would have to be seen as a new form of socio-economic formation, the post-Trotsky Trotskyists, faced with hard facts, chose to break with Trotsky's reasoning. The post-Trotsky Trotskyists insisted that states that arose by a conquering army subjugating the working class - in Yugoslavia and China for example - were working class dictatorships. Any state modelled on the USSR, in which the bourgeoisie was destroyed and replaced by a Stalinist bureaucracy, was a workers' state, irrespective of the workers.

The Stalinist USSR had, said Trotsky's self-designated 'best disciples', miraculously changed the direction of its social and class evolution, as Trotsky had seen them in the last years of his life. Stalinism in the USSR and in the USSR's clones across an additional sixth of the world, was now 'in transition to socialism'.

In this way, Trotsky's ideas, proclaimed as 'official' orthodox Trotskyism, were turned on their head, inside out and upside down. Socialism in one country - or 'socialism in a number of backward countries', was proclaimed to be the vindication of the 'permanent revolution' of Trotsky. The Stalinists had in spite of themselves been forced to carry out Trotsky's programme. Leaders of the neo-Trotskyist 'Fourth International', Pierre Frank, for example, proclaimed Mao and Ho Chi Minh and Tito, unconsciously to be Trotsky's political legatees, not Stalinists!

The evolution of the 'official', 'orthodox' Trotskyism shows that the complex of problems - the nature of stratified economy, of the ruling elite, of this system's place in history and of its relationship to capitalism was capable of a very wide variety of answers and of many permutations and combinations of the elements that made up the answers. There was a great freedom and scope for whatever answer sympathy, mood, impression or revulsion indicated to you. The post-Trotsky Trotskyist workers' state label was only a way of calling these states post-capitalist and progressive.

Because of the importance of the foregoing, it is worthwhile to schematically nail down exactly what was changed in 'mainstream' 'official Trotskyism'. It was, we will see, also incorporated in Cliff's state capitalism.

The idea used by Trotsky from 1937, against demands to abandon the workers' state idea, that workers' state or not, the nationalised economy of the USSR was progressive, was now used to wipe out most of the pre-1940 Trotskyism. For eastern Europe in the 1940s, China or North Vietnam in the '50s or Cuba in the '60s, Stalinist statism was, it would be argued - by Ernest Mandel, for example - progressive because it shielded the economy from the world market and the dictates of the untrammelled law of value, which would have kept those states as mere suppliers of raw material to the advanced countries and hindered their economic development. Stalinist planning, which Trotsky had from the beginning called chaos and anarchy, multiplied by the subjectivism and ignorance of the totalitarian bureaucracy, was now allotted an enormously progressive historical role.

More: for these ideas to make any sense at all capitalism had to be seen as Trotsky saw it in the '30s, as a system in historical reflux and terminal decline. Trotsky's picture of capitalism in the '30s was one-sided and exaggerated even then, but world capitalism was indeed in tremendous decline in the '30s. The idea that Stalinism was progressive in the USSR and was the only way to develop backward countries was propounded now in a world where capitalism was experiencing a long, long economic expansion, and in which whole new areas of the world were drawn into fully capitalist relations. The verdict of history does not support the idea that Stalinist state slave-driving was the most effective way of developing backward countries.

The Stalinists' basic programmatic idea, 'socialism in one country', was in its fundamental assumptions incorporated into post-Trotsky Trotskyism. The USSR's claim to great economic progress was accepted. The new 'Trotskyism' - codified at the 3rd World Congress in 1951, which was in fact the first congress of a political current new in 'Trotskyism' - minimised such things as the contribution of slave labour and an atomised, driven working class to Stalinist progress. Trotsky's early political objection to 'socialism in one country', that it implied no revolution other

than that of 1917 for the whole historical period that it would take the USSR to 'catch up' was deemed to be outmoded by the fact of new 'revolutions' (Yugoslavia, China, etc.), the expansion of the USSR post World War Two and the status of the USSR as one of the world's nuclear-armed great powers. Stalin had, they now decided, built a historically viable socio-economic formation that could compete with capitalism, and with increasing success, for as long as the workers' revolution was delayed in the advanced capitalist countries. And the old arguments against 'socialism in one country'? It was, they (Ernest Mandel, for example) said, no longer one country, but a cluster of countries! Most, though not all, of them - Czechoslovakia and East Germany - were backward: yet they were now seen as evolving toward socialism. Socialism was - 'for now' - evolving not out of advanced capitalism and as its spawn and replica, but as capitalism's competitor, moving 'from the periphery to the centre'.

Conflicts with the capitalist states would force even the big Stalinist parties in Europe - France, Italy - to take power. Trotsky's fear of bureaucratic counter-revolution was also outmoded: the bureaucracy was committed to nationalised property. Russian and its allies were strong against international capitalism; so were the liberation movements in the colonies. Stalinism was stabilised, expanding and developing economically - 'in transition to socialism'.

The 'actually existing revolution' was a matter of 'one, two, many socialisms in one country'. None of this - even if they were deformed and degenerated workers' states - made sense in terms of the Marxism of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. On an international scale, it bore more than a passing resemblance to the vision of Michael Bakunin in the First International and after about the effective movement for revolution coming from the social fringes and the social depths - not from the proletariat of advanced capitalism, on the basis of the best achievements of that capitalism, but now on an international scale from the 'wretched of the earth' on the edges of capitalism.

A 'political' revolution - now usually defined as something far more shallow than Trotsky had defined it - was, of course still necessary in the USSR. But China? When it decided in 1955 that China was a workers' state, the SWP/USA said yes; the Mandel-Pablo group, no until 1969. Yugoslavia? No. Vietnam? No. Cuba? No. The result was chronic instability and a rabbit-like fecundity in generating competing groups.

For all practical purposes Stalinism was, without acknowledgement, accepted as the next, or probably the next, progressive stage in backward countries, in the space pre-1917 socialists had given to the bourgeois revolution in backward countries. The inescapable tendency of support for Third World revolutionary Stalinists was to write Third World Stalinist revolutions into Trotskyism as a necessary, or anyway probably inescapable, first stage. The different tendencies varied in their crassness about this and in their proportion of delusion (Maoism, Castroism is not Stalinist) to crassness. The expansion of Stalinism in any new area was accepted as historically progressive as against any other possibility except working class power.

The new post-Trotsky workers' state theory was in its essentials identical to the ideas of Trotsky's make-weight antagonist in 1939, Bruno Rizzi, who held that both Stalinism and fascism were all part of a great historically progressive -

though unfortunately harsh and brutal - bureaucratic and collectivist world wide revolution. They had much in common with the perspectives of the Rizzi-ite James Burnham (who had in 1939 argued against Trotsky that capitalism had more or less been restored in the USSR: see *The Fate of the Russian Revolution*) in his very widely circulated 1941 book, *The Managerial Revolution*. The neo-Trotskyists pasted Trotsky's terminology, like a well-known label slapped on a bottle of bootleg whisky, over their version of Bruno Rizzi's and 1941-James Burnham's theory, and applied it to Stalinism. They themselves had defined the new Stalinist states of Eastern Europe as fascistic and reactionary, at their second World Congress (April and May 1948). They were under no illusions about what they were; in late 1948-9 they just reclassified them. 'Workers' state' came to indicate neither working class self-rule, nor, as in Trotsky's degenerated workers' state, some supposed remnant of a workers' revolution, but that Stalinism was progressive. Even in their own terms, Pablo-Mandel never produced a coherent theory to cover all the Stalinist states. They retained a variant of Trotsky's programme for the USSR and its direct clones; but it was diluted, qualified by all the changes above, and essentially an afterthought, something for the future: the USSR, etc. were progressive and progressing; were stable and in a new bureaucratic equilibrium; the bureaucrats' USSR, as both model and source of material help, was not, or not consistently, hindering other Stalinist revolutions, but helping them, if only by acting as a counterweight to the USA.

In sum, the post-Trotsky Trotskyists answered the questions posed by the Stalinist conundrum in this way. Stalinism, though it could be better and needed stern remodelling by the working class, was progressive; it was post-capitalist, in transition to socialism; it was the 'wave of the future' at least in the backward countries (and for Michel Pablo in the early '50s everywhere, perhaps for 'centuries of degenerated workers' states', as he tentatively put it); it was to be supported against capitalism, even though its triumph would extirpate liberty and every vestige of a labour movement, lock the proletarians of capitalism in a totalitarian vice, and drive them like slaves.

The post-Trotsky 'orthodox' Trotskyists accommodated to the survival and expansion of Stalinism by turning all of Trotsky's ideas and perspectives into their opposite. Like a civilian population fooling an invader, they turned all the road signs in the wrong direction. Except the invader was already inside their heads in the form of false ideas about Russia. They turned the signs around to fool themselves! If Stalin had emptied the old forms and old words and terms of socialism of their old content, refilling the old socialist wine bottles with poison and corrosive acid, the post-Trotsky Trotskyists imported the basic Stalinist counterfeits of socialism into the camp of the rearguard of Bolshevism. It was the ultimate ideological triumph of Stalinism.

IX. The other Trotskyists: the Workers' Party

But there were other Trotskyists - those who had in '39-'40 opposed Trotsky. Before we discuss the theory of state capitalism Tony Cliff developed in 1948, we need to discuss the other Trotskyists (Max Shachtman, etc.) who in the last year of Trotsky's life and throughout the 1940s, logically and systematically developed in their analysis of world politics what was, on the evidence of Trotsky's last articles, and despite the fierce polemics he had hurled at their troublesome heads (collected in the one-sided and misrepresentational 1942 book, *In Defence of*

Marxism) the real logic of Trotsky's position. Explicitly, they followed through on his political innovations of September-October 1939 and in the last six months of his life when he wrote 'The USSR in War' and 'Again and Once More' and the 'Communist International and the GPU', accepting for the first time the theoretical possibility that the USSR could be seen as it was and as it had been for a decade as a new form of class society, 'bureaucratic collectivism'.

From the split in the SWP (April 1940), or a bit before it, Trotsky resumed the trajectory of the ideas he had been following in 'The USSR in War' and 'Again...' The violent polemics against Shachtman and Burnham - which his 'disciples' will fraudulently turn into his legacy, by suppressing for 30 years much that he wrote at the same time and after - are, if his work from the Revolution Betrayed (1936) to his death is depicted as a straight line, only a short violent blip. At the end, in an article dated 17 August 1940, 3 days before he was struck down, Trotsky described the leaders of the Communist International parties as people aspiring to be in their countries what the Russian bureaucrats are in theirs. Even during the faction fight, Trotsky's more public writings on Poland and Finland are closer to what Shachtman was saying than to what Cannon and Goldman were saying.

Those who in 1939-early '40s fought Trotsky in the name of a democratic response to the USSR invasion of Finland and what they saw as the better extrapolations from his own ideas (see Fate of the Russian Revolution) elaborated during the '40s a viewpoint radically different from that of the official Trotskyists, with whom they interacted continuously until the end of the decade, and later.

Yet the tendency that formed the Workers' Party in April 1940 was thrust before its time half-formed into independent existence. Some of its members - James Burnham (who ceased to be a member almost immediately), Joseph Carter, Hal Draper and others had long been at odds with Trotsky over the idea that Russia was any sort of workers' state. Before the dispute about how to respond to the Stalinist invasion of Poland and Finland, they had had no political differences with Trotsky. The USSR, whatever it was, was progressive vis a vis capitalism, they said, and therefore it should be defended. Trotsky, while asserting that the USSR was a degenerated workers state, virtually conceded after 1937 that the precise class character could be left in abeyance provided there was agreement on such political questions.

The most important of the Workers' Party leaders, Shachtman, and Martin Abern, agreed with Trotsky's degenerated workers' state framework. The sharpest presentation of the anti-workers' state position in the 1939 dispute was made by Trotsky himself, using the unknown 'Bruno Rizzi' and his unknown work as a theatrical mask that allowed Trotsky himself to play more than one role. Rizzi's general ideas are not summarised or discussed by Trotsky at all, only his view that the USSR is a new form of class society. This, literally, was Trotsky debating with himself, and, against 'Bruno Rizzi', arguing with what he saw as the only viable alternative to the workers' state position.

While his orthodox disciples counterposed Trotsky's concrete interim conclusions as dogma to Trotsky's method, which, in his hands, had led him by August 1940 quite a way beyond the 'Orthodox' positions of late 1939 and early 1940, the heretics adopted both Trotsky's spirit and his methods. What Trotsky wrote in

'The Communist International and the GPU' - that the CPs were incipient Stalinist state bureaucracies - would come to be seen by the 'disciples' as one of the greatest heresies of the Workers' Party/Independent Socialist League. Nothing but the re-conceptualisation of the USSR as it was, which Trotsky had indicated, and roughed out, could save them from this fate. For the 'disciples', nothing did save them.

What the split bestowed on the Workers' Party was the freedom to follow the impulses that had led them to recoil from Trotsky's subordination of the right to live of the Finnish labour movement, to the USSR and its defence, and thus the freedom to follow Trotsky's own trajectory unhindered by religiosity towards Trotsky's conclusions.

In 1941 they decided that the USSR was a new form of class society, bureaucratic collectivism. They did not mistake the literal transcription and litany-like repetition of Trotsky's words for their proper work of translating and adopting revolutionary socialist politics to reality.

The Workers' Party saved itself and rational revolutionary politics. They kept out of the hole Trotsky's too-faithful followers dug themselves into after Trotsky's death. The precondition for what they did was that they organised themselves as a democratic collective, with freedom to explore, discuss and argue politics and Marxist theory.

It fell to the Workers' Party to draw the conclusions about the USSR Trotsky had indicated. I am not arguing here that nobody but Trotsky ever had an idea on these questions - Carter, Draper and others preceded him. I do say that the record proves that the Workers' Party absorbed and developed the ideas and trajectory of Trotsky's last period - which the 'disciples' suppressed in themselves, just as for decades they buried the articles in which they were expressed. This entire dimension of Trotsky's thinking on the level of theory fell to the inheritance of the Workers' Party, which developed and augmented it.

Before the USSR was tested in war, the Workers' Party made the re-conceptualisation Trotsky had refused to make - 'yet'. They made it on the only lines possible, and these had already been marked out by Trotsky (and by others from other tendencies before Trotsky) - bureaucratic collectivism. This meant that they made the changes as a development within the weighty Bolshevik tradition, and within Trotsky's defence and development of Bolshevism: in short, to repeat, they developed Trotsky in the direction Stalin's assassin had stopped him developing. To do so of course, they themselves had to analyse and think and synthesise, that is, act as living Marxists. Elements in the Workers' Party thought things through unevenly. Shachtman kept as close as he could to Trotsky for most of the '40s. For a while, he argued that the bureaucratic collectivist USSR remained progressive and should be defended. Others argued that it was reactionary and should not be defended.

But these were free and open debates by people liberated from the compulsion to defend 'Trotsky's line'. The Workers' Party heretics analysed the world around them. The difference between them and the 'orthodox' as it is preserved in the files of their weekly papers (*Militant* and *Labor Action*) and monthly magazines (*New International* and *Fourth International*) of the '40s, is extraordinary. The

intellectual and political decline that quickly set in amongst the 'orthodox', self-condemned to the role of rationalising scholastics about and, increasingly, apologists for, the USSR, (often by a shameful silence about many aspects of the USSR) is as startling as it is terrifying and tragic: - it is like watching a strong and vigorous person crouching and cringing before an altar, anxiously muttering and mumbling and fiddling with a string of rosary beads. These were serious revolutionaries, some of them amongst the very best of those in the USA who responded to the call of the Russian Revolution. Yet the logic of their position vis a vis Stalinism compelled them to submit to the all-shaping totalitarian economism (nationalisation is a workers' state) for Russia, and then to extend it to other countries. It made them glory in the march of Stalin's army to the centre of Germany, raping, pillaging and enslaving all the peoples they imprisoned within the widening circle of military steel and concrete that marked the farthest extend of Stalin's Empire.

In contrast, the Workers' Party analysed and commented freely about the world as it was. Where nations were being overrun and enslaved, they could say so in plain English and respond with clear Communist politics. They could modify their ideas in response to unfolding evidence. The majority of them when they adopted bureaucratic collectivism as a definition had defined the USSR as Trotsky had, as a freak formation; Russia's survival, expansion and later Yugoslav, Chinese, etc., replications, forced them to modify that. Those who had at first seen bureaucratic collectivism as progressive were forced to abandon that: indeed, to face the fact that it was always nonsense. As eager as the disciples that World War Two should generate revolution, they nonetheless could look at the realities in a way that the orthodox could not.

The basic difference came to be that between two sharply distinct ways of approaching the world. One was a formation that was increasingly religious in its ways - reason in thrall to dogma: dogma outside reason, not subject to review by reason; theory and theorising that served preconceived and unimpeachable prior conclusions; real observation of the world as it was subverted by commitment to a preordained view of what was and was not, and what would be; a habit of relating to the here and now by way of reading back from an unrealised future, etc.

The other was a tendency that retained and used the capacity to reasons critically even about its own dearest hopes, wishes and preconceptions - and about itself. Politically, the Workers' Party remained a living tendency; the other slowly died, destroying many of the key ideas of the 1940 Trotskyism as it floundered about.

For example: the idea that for socialists the working class is the subject to history and, further, that working-class self-awareness and general understanding, and working class organisation in a revolutionary party are basic pillars of the outlook Trotsky represented. But if it is a dogma that revolution will certainly be the result of the Second World War, even though the working class movement, and the revolutionary movement, has been smashed and destroyed - what then? Either you face the fact that, in these conditions, working-class revolution cannot be, or is very unlikely to be, the first result of the war; or you climb up the ladders of mystification and teleology, and imagine a revolution that can somehow dispense with all the subjective prerequisites of working class revolution as understood by

Marxists.

That is what the orthodox did in the war years and later in different ways by accepting other revolutions as working class and non-working class forces as surrogate for the working class for long after. In contrast, the Workers' Party could allow itself to think about the realities of the world - for the immediate prospects of socialism bleak realities.

The orthodox 'disciples' could wrap delusions around themselves for shelter. Seeing Stalinism as the first stage of victory for socialism left those Trotsky did not reduce to despair and desertion, with the ambivalently comforting idea that 'socialism', the 'world revolution' was, somehow, moving forward. The WP/ISL had no such encouragement. Just as their ties to Russia distinguished the Stalinists, however right-wing their policies of a given moment might be, from the social democrats, support by the orthodox for the Russian 'workers' state', etc., erected a powerful barrier against conciliation with their own ruling class. Seeing the realities as they were, the others had no such barrier, but relied on an equation of 'Washington' and 'Moscow' as imperialist equal evils; a view that, for many of them, it became increasingly difficult to sustain.

X. One, two, many state capitalisms

The SWP myth is that in 1948 Cliff's theory of 'Bureaucratic State Capitalism' cut through the impasse of the Workers' State theory and the futility of Bureaucratic Collectivism. It is usually presented as the first or only state capitalist theory. In Tony Cliff's recent Trotskyism After Trotsky for example. In fact even within the Trotskyist current, state capitalism was anything but novel.

State capitalism as an account of the USSR was as old as the USSR. The SPGB had called the USSR incipiently state capitalist from 1918 and 'state capitalist' from 1929-30. The social-democrat Karl Kautsky had sporadically talked of state capitalism - in *Terrorism and Communism* in 1920, for example: 'Today... both state and capitalist bureaucracy have merged into one system... industrial capitalism has now become state capitalism.' Later, in *Social Democracy versus Communism*, he wrote of Lenin, 'utilising his state power for the erection of his state capitalism.' Kautsky thought that without democratic control of the state, the workers find themselves with respect to the problem of control of the means of production in the same situation which confronts the workers in capitalist society. In the USSR too it would be necessary for the producers 'to expropriate the expropriators'.

The ultra-left Communist Anton Pannekoek thought that though the new ruling class in the USSR was not a bourgeoisie, because they only 'owned collectively', the ruling class was a bureaucracy and the system 'state instead of private capitalism'. Karl Korsch, the German Communist, who broke with the Communist International in the late mid-'20s, believed that there was a worldwide movement from capitalism to state capitalism.

The followers of the Italian communist Amadeo Bordiga developed a theory according to which the USSR was state capitalist because 'far from being planned the Russian economy flounders in the midst of the anarchy of the market... the Russian economy is 'planned' by nothing other than the world market!' The

Bordigists were and are serious revolutionaries, but ultra-left sectarians.

The Paul Mattick school of ultra-left sectarianism also glossed over all detailed questions of historic perspective in sweeping generalisations, but from another angle. Bolshevism was 'one aspect of the world-wide trend towards a 'fascist' world economy' (Anti-Bolshevik Communism, p.71). In these theories, what made the USSR state-capitalist was not market forces but the authoritarian plan imposed on the workers; in its planning the USSR simply represented a more complete form of what was emerging in the West.

Of the many attempts to argue that the USSR was state capitalist before 1948, none of them solved the problem of how to locate the USSR in the historic perspective of capitalist development. They all ended up either postulating a state capitalism disconnected from any broad historic perspective of capitalist development, or they resorted to 'convergence' theories according to which the differences between the USSR and the West were secondary details, fast being obliterated by a converging historical evolution.

There were state capitalists in the Siberian Left Opposition, and this was known in the west from Anton Ciliga's account of life in the USSR's labour camps (published in an abbreviated version by the Labour Book Club in 1940). Discussion of state capitalism was a feature of the broader left. In 1938 the American magazine Modern Quarterly published a state capitalist study of the USSR by Dr Ryan Worrall, a British Trotskyist; the ILP published a shortened version of this article in 1939. Rudolf Hilferding replied to it. The majority leadership of the RCP, in the person of Jock Haston, played with the idea that Russia was state-capitalist in 1946-7, and Cliff, who started out after he arrived in Britain in September 1946 arguing against them, took over and developed their ideas. The mere state capitalist label conveyed very little.

Versions of this school of thought were advanced by groups within the Trotskyist movement in the 1940s, by Chaulieu [Castoriadis] in France, by Munis in Mexico, and by C L R James and Raya Dunayevskaya in the US. All these currents became ultra-left and sectarian. The most talented of these writers were James and Dunayevskaya.

James and Dunayevskaya developed their ideas as members of the Worker's Party. (Much of their description of the USSR was similar to Shachtman's). Their chief difference with Shachtman was that Shachtman (until the mid-'40s) argued that the USSR was progressive compared to capitalism, and that Stalinism was radically different from and opposed to capitalism. Raya Dunayevskaya published two big articles on Russian state capitalism in the New International in 1942 and a third part in 1946.

The evolution of workers' state theory into mystification was paralleled by the evolution of state capitalist theories.

By the late 1940s all the currents - workers' state; bureaucratic collectivist; state capitalist - of Trotskisant thought had in one way or another to come to terms with the fact that Stalinism was a relatively stable, war-tempered expanding system. It could no longer be seen as a transitory, hybrid, short-term historical aberration. Its capitalist character was, to say the least, not as obvious as its all-

dominating 'statism'. Was it state capitalism produced by the evolution of plain capitalism, according to the classic theoretical model of Frederick Engels and others, discussed by Trotsky in *The Revolution Betrayed* and dismissed by Trotsky as by other Marxist before him as in practice impossible because such a system would be so close to socialism that inevitably it would suggest and foster democratic movements for its own negation - as Trotsky put it, it would make the state 'too tempting an object for social revolution'?

Any argument that the USSR was state capitalist, in that sense faced, in the facts about the USSR, insurmountable difficulties. A strong feature of the USSR's 'socialism in one country' Stalinism was its systematic severance of links with the world market and its all-dominating drive for self-sufficiency. Trotsky considered that aspect of Stalin's USSR to be outright reactionary. Not all links with the world market were in fact cut, but there was a comprehensive drive to autarky. There was a rigid state monopoly of foreign trade. On the economic facts, the USSR could not be analysed as a giant 'firm' in the international capitalist market because on no level could the economic movements and deployment of resources inside the USSR reasonably be construed as being all of one mechanism with the movements of international capitalism.

Whatever name the Stalinist states are given, this - or 'high Stalinism', anyway - is predominantly a system of overweening state power, a system based on the most self-contradictory and, in the longer scale of history, most untenable of all possible socio-economic systems: not a self-regulating, but a 'planned' economy under the absolute rule of an uncontrolled state, whose ruling class, its organisers and beneficiaries, cannot, for self-preservation, allow any of the prerequisites of planning - free exchange of information or opinions, honest reporting, or self-rule and self-administration either for society as a whole or for any part of it. Therefore it is in all its variants as Trotsky pointed out for the USSR in 1933 - a system of bureaucratic arbitrariness, accident, whim and subjectivism - a system without any accurate social and economic means of accounting.

Thrown back intellectually to a pre-Renaissance world of state and pidgin-Marxist state-church authority and scholasticism, it is economically a world before the invention of reliable and objective techniques of socio-economic accounting; it even lacks reliable arithmetic.

Take not the USSR, but Mao's China, for which a case in the older Marxist terms could be made for 'state capitalism': the pre-Stalinist (though in some respects Stalinist-aping and Stalinist trained) Chiang Kai-Shek regime had 'nationalised' much of industry. Mao led a so-called 'bloc of four classes', including sections of the 'national bourgeoisie', to power, and gave back industry to the 'national bourgeoisie'. Half a decade later, when the capitalists were pushed aside by the state, they were given 7% per year interest on their capital. They were drawing it, despite all the enormous convulsions of the years between, at the end of the 1960s; it was abolished then, but restored later. State capitalism? Yes, perhaps, in isolation. But it was only one part, and very much the subordinate part, of Mao's China.

In 1958 the Great Leap Forward a less immediately bloody variation on Stalin's forced collectivisation and industrialisation drive after 1929 was decreed.

Enormous masses of people were mobilised by the state and sent to build dams and other public works. Agricultural collectivisation was carried through in conditions where the techniques and machinery that would have made it an instrument of greater agricultural productivity simply did not exist. The main 'economy of scale' consisted in the fall in the cost of peasant subsistence achieved by large-scale communal feeding. Vast numbers were directed by the state, in defiance of the most elementary rules of science, technology and economics, to build 'steel furnaces' in their backyards and start making industrial-quality steel. Immense, devastating social waste was the result of this arbitrariness and bureaucratic subjectivism by the all-powerful rulers of the totalitarian state.

Within three years, perhaps as many as 30 million people died as a result of this fomented chaos and waste, and then famine: the giant state overturned Chinese society as an overgrown man might kick over an ant-hill or a dolls' house.

One faction of the bureaucracy, led by Liu Shao-Chi and Deng Xiaoping, held the Maoists in check for four or five years after this fiasco, and then the 'Cultural Revolution' was launched. Rampaging 'revolutionary youth', ultimately controlled by Lin Piao's 'Red Army', wrecked cultural, social, economic and educational havoc. Higher education was abolished for over a decade!

The idea that this was an economically regulated system, and not one of overwhelming totalitarian state power crazily out of control, cannot be sustained on the facts; nor is this whole period wiped off the records by the present Chinese economy of totalitarian state-private capitalism, seemingly evolving towards the development of plain capitalism. The fact that neither 'workers' state' nor 'state capitalism' made sense of full-blown Stalinism points to the rational alternative - the development and correction of Trotsky's picture of Stalinist economics: the work the Workers' Party did after 1940.

Those who wanted to argue a state capitalist thesis after the Second World War had, given the wars' verdict on Stalinism, special problems. They had to respond to the other Trotskyism that had evolved after 1940 and had rectified Trotsky's errors on the USSR. Those who used state capitalism to hack a way out of the contradictions of workers' statism were as much under the pressure of Trotsky's dire warnings against Max Shachtman as the workers statist. They were naturally unwilling to face the idea that the USSR was something new. The workers' statist crammed it into one strange terminology; the state capitalists, including Tony Cliff into another.

The pressure of both Trotsky's formal workers' statist legacy and of the Workers Party's 'bureaucratic-collectivist' arguments account for the development in the 1940s of 'state-capitalist' theories of a special sort, based on analogies, special definitions and redefinitions of words and substantial meanings - what might be termed 'esoteric meaning' or 'prophetic insight' theories. In Cliff these were buttressed by a weighty academicism.

XI. Tony Cliff's revolution in science

Tony Cliff's 'Russia: a Marxist Analysis' is impressively loaded with statistics and quotations from the Marxist classics, and with numerous citations of Russian

language sources. It was published in June 1948 as an internal bulletin of the RCP (he said in an introduction that it had been completed some months earlier). One third of the book is given over to an examination of socio-economic relations in the USSR. This proves only that the USSR is not a socialist society. It could lead to degenerated workers' state, bureaucratic collectivist or state capitalist conclusions.

The theoretical part of the study is much less weighty. Cliff's theory of state capitalism was in fact rooted in the politics of the British RCP majority - Haston, Grant - whose other main offshoot was the strange workers' state theories of the Militant/Socialist Party. Cliff shared the same basic ideas and translated them into a state capitalist 'dialect', building on earlier work by Jock Haston.

The essential points I will argue are these: a. The perspectives for the USSR which Cliff purveyed have been proved to be as wrong as those of the most muddled of workers' statist. b. Despite the fact that for Cliff the USSR was 'state capitalism' and not a degenerated workers' state, the logic of 'socialism in one country' was accepted by Cliff, as much as by the post-Trotsky Trotskyists. c. In Cliff's state capitalist theory of Russia, the blind alley character of the whole society which its collapse has demonstrated, is simply inexplicable. d. Cliff's argument that state capitalism was more effective as a social-economic formation and as a way to develop a backward society was as nonsensical as its workers' statist analogue. e. Cliff's theory was on the level of theory a pastiche of scholasticism and dogmatism: it was as bankrupt on the level of perspective as degenerated and deformed workers' statist theory. f. The arbitrariness and subjectivism of Cliff's political conclusions from his theorising can be seen as the paradigm of all the SWP's other politics and organisational practices. g. It was a procrustean cramming, cutting and stretching theory, inorganic and, as theory, sterile: an inert prop to be moved at will about the stage, its logical lines of development chopped off, and bits stuck on, to suit Cliff's convenience. h. The original theory has been chopped and changed so much that there is nothing but the name left; sects change their doctrines more easily, as someone said, than they change their names!

This article is centrally concerned with the place of Tony Cliff's theory of state capitalism in the evolution of post-Trotsky Trotskyism. His place in this galaxy, on examination, will prove to be very surprising. For this purpose the best place to start is in the last section of chapter 1 of Russia: a Marxist analysis - 'Russia, an Industrial Giant' - where Cliff reveals that he harbours startling sentiments on the USSR.

'Despite bureaucratic mismanagement... the efforts of self-sacrifice of the people raised Russia... to the position of a great industrial power... from being, in terms of industrial output, first in Europe and second in the world' (Cliff doesn't notice that Europe is in ruins? He doesn't think it can be rebuilt? He thinks Russia can maintain this leading position and better it? Evidently yes!)

Russia 'has stepped out of her sleepy backwardness to become a modern, powerful, industrialised advanced country. The bureaucracy has thus earned as much tribute as Marx and Engels paid to the bourgeoisie. It has been the first to show what man's activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far

surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts and Gothic cathedrals... the bourgeoisie...draws all ... nations into civilisation. It has created enormous cities... and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colonial productive forces than have all preceding generations together.'

This is no isolated note. Elsewhere in the book Cliff will imagine Stalin speaking in the words of an ancient Mesopotamian king:

'I have mastered the secrets of the rivers for the benefit of man... I have led the waters of the rivers into the wilderness; I have filled the parched ditches with them... I have watered the desert plains; I have brought them fertility and abundance, I have formed them into habitations of joy.'

Russian Stalinism is on the high road of social development. It is, Cliff argues, in transition towards socialism. The USSR, though no workers state is not a freak (as in Trotsky or Max Shachtman for most of the 1940s); it is not barbarism, not social regression, not a historical cul de sac...

Not least surprising is the emotional tone of what he writes, which comes after a third of the book has described Stalinist horror after Stalinist horror. On one level Cliff seems to be as reconciled to contemporary Russian 'Bureaucratic State Capitalism' and its historic mission as we are to the industrial revolution of the 19th century.

This is an astonishing verdict on Russian Stalinism's place in history to find in work by one who comes from Trotsky's tradition and in this work calls himself Trotsky's disciple. Plainly there is in it an immense psychological shift from the horror Trotsky articulated and, his increasing tendency to question even the USSR's progressiveness towards the end of his life; it is a verdict in sharp contrast not only with that of the Workers' Party but - written in late '47 and early '48 - it is even at sharp odds with the mood of the Cannon-Pablo-Mandel degenerated workers' statisticians - the big majority of the Fourth Internationalists - at that time.

At the April-May '48 Second World Congress, of the reconstructed Fourth International, they passed a motion that the East European Stalinist states were 'state capitalist and reactionary' in the spirit of Trotsky against Urbahns, and adopted a strikingly less than enthusiastic stance towards the USSR; they would only defend 'what was left of the conquest of October' (implicitly, not much). They will come to terms with the survival and expansion of Stalinism, after June 1948, when Tito and Stalin fall out and within a year, will be reinterpreting Russia and Stalinism and the Eastern European states in a new light - without abandoning criticism etc. - as 'this stage' of the workers' revolution, representing historical progress in the mid-twentieth century.

Though he does not reach any such political conclusions, Cliff's state-capitalist idea has allowed him to be a pioneer amongst Trotskyists in the great seismic shift of 1947-9/50 towards 'reconciliation' with Stalinism. How can this mix of stark class rejection and historical legitimisation be explained? By the fact that Cliff, the state capitalist, hatched out of the same political nest as those in the British Trotskyist organisation, the RCP, who would develop Militant's ideas on Stalinism.

To a considerable extent, the bold and positive exposition of the achievements of the Stalinist bureaucracy is a riposte to the hawing and indecision on this question by Cannon-Pablo-Mandel and the majority of Trotskyists. These had been denounced by the RCP majority from the security of their own acceptance that Stalinism was stable and had made working class revolutions in all of Eastern Europe.

The Workers' Party and its co-thinkers had long ago rejected the whole workers' state notion (and the orthodox majority had seemed to be faltering and, when Cliff wrote, possibly on the road to the same conclusion).

Cliff was not alone here. Including the Workers' Party, the current stemming from the Russian Left Opposition of 1923 was by 1945-6 divided into three broad tendencies: those who rejected the idea that Stalinism had anything to do with the working class - these included both bureaucratic collectivists, and CLR James and Raya Dunayevskaya state capitalists. At the opposite pole were those who had quickly come to terms with the idea that Stalinism was not a historical freak but a viable 'progressive' historical formation that had Stalinised half of Europe; and that in the face of these facts, not Stalinism had to be re-conceptualised along the lines Trotsky had suggested, but Trotskyism: these were on the level of theory followers of Bruno Rizzi and the James Burnham of 1941. In between, there was the vacillating majority, letting themselves be torn apart by contradictory impulses and theories.

In this, the British RCP majority, ancestors of Socialist Appeal, the Socialist Party and the SWP, played a singular if not quite a consistent role. They were by the end of the war amongst the most enthusiastic cheerleaders for the Russian Army, the 'softest' on Stalinism. Then in 1946 the main leader of the organisation, Jock Haston, began to rethink the issues and the leading group decided that the USSR was state capitalist. That is how things stood when Cliff came to Britain in September 1946. He was a degenerated workers' statist and shared the views of the middle group that the Stalinist occupied states in Eastern Europe were state capitalist formations under the control of bourgeois states.

In the course of the discussion, the Haston-Grant-Lee grouping changed their minds yet again: Russia was a 'Bonapartist workers state' and so were all the Eastern European Stalinist-ruled states. This was self-emancipation from the doubts and conundrums that continued to bemuse the others by way of political suicide. If the USSR could 'revolutionise' half of Europe, creating as much as remained of the October revolution, what did that say about the USSR, about the character of 'the epoch' etc. By finally and unceremoniously junking Trotsky's workers' state theory, and adopting a mirror-image bureaucratic collectivism - the USSR Stalinist state was a stable progressive formation - they called it Proletarian Bonapartism. They reversed all the evaluations and negative political, social and historical judgements of the Workers' Party. They were not the first to say this sort of thing - David Rousset, a future Gaullist MP - had in 1946 said that the Eastern European states were workers' states; Isaac Deutscher in 1945 had projected a Bonapartist revolutionary role for Stalin's armies (in a series of articles in the left wing Labour weekly Tribune). But from 1947 the RCP majority became the champions within the Fourth International of this idea. It was their ideas - soon to become, in less crude, brutal and less truthful form, the dominant ideas of neo-

Trotskyism - about Stalinism that Cliff 'translated' in his theorising into the state capitalist dialect. That is the explanation for the astonishingly positive account of Russian state capitalism in history. The rest of the Trotskyist movement would not catch up with them for a while yet.

XII. Cliff and Haston-Grant

The most important point politically here is the remarkable extent to which Cliff's picture of the USSR is shaped by the Haston-Grant culture of the RCP so that he is more appreciative of the great industrialising work of the Stalinist bureaucracy, more 'optimistic' about the USSR's further development under the bureaucracy, more accepting towards the USSR's claims of 'development in one country', than the contemporary 'orthodox Trotskyists.'

Again: of agricultural collectivisation and 'primitive accumulation' Cliff says: 'Stalin accomplished in a few hundred days what Britain took a few hundred years to do. The scale on which he did it and the success with which he carried it out... bear stern witness to the superiority of a modern industrial economy concentrated in the hands of the state, under the direction of a ruthless bureaucracy.' (p 46)

Where Trotsky saw the bureaucracy as a gangrenous social scab, Cliff sees it as Grant and Haston have come to see it, though under another name. He rests much on analogy (the marsupial is the mammal!) 'The historical mission of the bureaucracy is summed up in Lenin's two postulates: increase in the productive forces of social labour and the socialisation of labour. On a world scale these conditions had already been fulfilled... In Russia the revolution got rid of the impediments to the development of the productive forces, put an end to the remnants of feudalism, built up a monopoly of foreign trade which protects the development of the productive forces of the country from devastating pressure of world capitalism, and also gave a tremendous lever to the development of the productive forces in the form of state ownership of the means of production'. This could be any devotee of the 'progressive' USSR talking! 'Under such conditions all the impediments to the historical mission of capitalism - the socialisation of labour, and the concentration of the means of production which are necessary prerequisites for the establishment of socialism and which the bureaucracy was able to provide are abolished. Post-October Russia stood before the fulfilment of the historical mission of the bourgeoisie.' (p 105). This is no barbarism or historical blind alley! Trotsky's three options: world revolution or capitalist restoration and later, bureaucratic collectivism are all beside the point: restoration? It has been progressive capitalism all along...

Remember, Trotsky's depiction of the destructive tendencies of a hypothetical state capitalism? Here it is replaced by the state capitalist USSR's supposed economic progressiveness. Doesn't the subsequent history indicate that Trotsky's hypothetical state capitalist picture was close to reality? But Cliff, under state-capitalist labels, rejects that picture in favour of a flattened-out, almost caricatured version, of the 'progressive economy' picture which Trotsky adduced as evidence that the USSR was not state capitalist!

Presumably Cliff was simultaneously influenced by the Haston-Grant culture in the RCP (which became Militant/Socialist Party) and took refuge in his own peculiar version of state capitalist theory because it seemed to him a way of conceding the

'progressiveness' of Stalinism, yet retaining a guaranteed class hostility to it, and not having to agree with Haston-Grant that the Stalinists could create new workers' states.

For Cliff, Russian state capitalism comes out of the workers' revolution, and could not exist without it!

He puts a question with the answer more than implied. 'Can a workers revolution in a backward country isolated by triumphant international capitalism be anything but a point in the process of the development of capitalism, even if the capitalist class is abolished' (p106).

He sums up. '...The first step the bureaucracy took with the subjective intentions of hastening the building of 'socialism in one country' became the foundation of the building of state capitalism.' And as we will see, according to Tony Cliff, they succeeded in outstripping monopoly capitalism on the road to the transition to socialism - in getting to the border, and in part beyond the borders of socialism.

He records that all the Marxist thinkers have regarded state capitalism as a theoretical possibility - capitalism develops so that the state organises for the capitalists, who continue to draw on bonds and debentures in proportion to their contribution to the common capitalist pool. The state would be a giant capitalist trust engaging in economic competition on a world scale. Equally, all Marxists believed that in practice capitalism could not actually evolve to that stage. Before the evolution from monopoly capitalism to full state capitalism, either the workers would have dispossessed the capitalists, or state capitalist competition would generate terrible imperialist wars and social decline.

Tony Cliff: 'It is indubitable that individual capitalists through evolutionary development will in practice never arrive at the concentration of the entire social capital in one hand.'

Here Cliff bases himself on Trotsky in *The Revolution Betrayed*, from which he quotes a long passage. For two reasons Trotsky, who accepts the theoretical possibility of state capitalism, considers it impossible in practice: 'The contradictions among the proprietors themselves' (Trotsky); the fact that if the state were 'universal repository of capitalist property the state would be too tempting an object for socialist revolution'. Cliff does not dwell on why the Russian state for those living in it is not 'a tempting target', that the state is all-powerful. That points in a different direction. For Cliff, as for Trotsky, state capitalism of this evolutionary sort is a theoretical but not a real possibility. It is a theoretical toy. It is the workers' revolution which makes state capitalism possible!

While, Cliff says, in reality this evolutionary state capitalism is 'impossible', does that, he asks, 'exclude the possibility that after a ruling working class is overthrown, not traditional capitalism but state capitalism is restored (sic).' What Cliff refers to has not necessarily anything to do with capitalism. That would have to be proved by analysing the resulting economy and its place in the world capitalist economy. He uses the idea that state capitalism, impossible as an evolution of capitalism, is made possible by a workers' revolution that is then overthrown: 'the revolutionary proletariat has already concentrated the means of production in one body'.

The first Five Year Plan was 'the first time that the bureaucracy sought to realise the historical mission of the bourgeoisie as quickly as possible. A quick accumulation of capital (sic) must put a burdensome pressure on the consumption of the masses, on their standard of living. Under such conditions, the bureaucracy, transformed into a personification of capital for whom the accumulation of capital is the be all and end all, must get rid of all remnants of workers' control... must fit all social political life into a total mould... thus industrialisation and a technical revolution ('collectivisation') in a backward country under conditions of siege transformed the bureaucracy... into a ruling class, into the manager of the general business of socialism.'

As a résumé of history this is Stalinist apologetics rooted in fatalism. Some of the horrors, the mass murder of millions and the ruins of much of agriculture for a generation or more, were rooted in the fact that it was not a technological revolution in agriculture; the technology was not ready... He dismisses the alternative working class course worked out and fought for by the Left Opposition.

Cliff argues that the bureaucracy is an exploitative ruling class, collectively owning the means of production. He concedes most of the arguments for rejecting the notion that the USSR is state capitalist; he then produces a series of arguments based on analogies, which he takes for identities, and on vulgar bourgeois economics. (He defines 'capital' as plant and machinery; he defines competition not as competition of exchange values, but of use values [arms] held in reserve). Is the working class in the USSR a proletariat, free to sell its labour power on the market? Implicitly, Cliff answers, No. Is the internal economy of the 'capitalist' USSR regulated by the law of value? He answers no here too. Is the USSR to be made (state) capitalist sense of, by being conceived of, as a giant firm with the same relationship to the world market as a big British firm might have to the British and other capitalist markets? He admits that here too, there is no basis for classifying the USSR as capitalist: its links with the world market are simply too weak to shape and dominate the USSR's economy. Is the ruling class a bourgeoisie? He is careful to explain that it is not. Is there, though, a bureaucracy which administers the economy, for a superannuated capitalist class drawing dividends? Nothing like that. In what he describes and concretely analyses Cliff is miles and miles away from anything previously conceived of as capitalism.

He could on the basis of his description go on (except for having defined the bureaucracy as a ruling class) like the RCP majority whose very positive account of the USSR he shares, using his state capitalist dialect and not theirs, to describe the USSR as a degenerated workers' state. Cliff is in Trotsky's tradition in all this. Trotsky had left a pretty thorough concrete analysis of the USSR. The well-known facts all the Trotskyists confronted could only with great violence now be construed as compatible with a workers' state theory - only if everything of '1940' Trotskyism but the idea that nationalised property was progressive, was abandoned, and acceptance that Stalin had been right about 'socialism in one country' added. It required scarcely less violence to the facts to construe them as proof that the USSR was state capitalist.

The key historical explanation and argument Cliff deploys to 'prove' Russia is state capitalist is that just as in theory capitalism could evolve organically to state

capitalism and then be seized by the proletariat, so in reverse: a working class revolution does what capitalist evolution never can do, and creates a centralised economy - which is then seized. (He doesn't explain how it is seized by 'state capitalists' except by the argument that the role the bureaucrats play in history is analogous to that of capitalism - ergo: it is capitalism). Only by way of 'esoteric lore' theorising can the USSR be construed as state capitalist (or a workers' state). In fact it is plain, as we have seen that Cliff's theory is a dialect of the most extreme workers' statism circa 1947.

Let us look a little closer at what Cliff says. We will focus our investigation on Chapter 5 of *Russia: a Marxist Analysis: 'The common and different features of a state capitalist and a workers' state'*.

In the theoretical model of evolutionary state capitalism which Cliff thinks 'most improbable' (p109, 1964 edition), the capitalists, having created a unified economy, can be expropriated by the working class; then the roles are reversed when, having created their own centralised economy, the workers are expropriated. This began as a modest question - 'is the possibility ruled out?' - it has now become 'proof!' He develops this to the stage where he says that the role of an isolated workers' state in a backward country is to prepare the way for state capitalism, which cannot grow organically out of even the most advanced, most monopolistic form of capitalism. If in basic Marxist theory - and in the Marxist theory of hypothetical state capitalism - capitalism prepares the way for working class power, in Cliff the workers' revolution, isolated and overthrown politically, while the economic centralisation it has created is preserved, prepares the way for what he will say is the most advanced of all possible advanced capitalism: state capitalism leap-frogs the working class revolution, only in turn to eventually be leap-frogged by the workers. Where Marx wrote (*Capital*) that ultimately the death knell sounds for capitalism and 'the expropriators are expropriated', Cliff would have to amend it: 'the leapfroggers are leapfrogged!'

Having assessed the possibility of evolutionary state capitalism as 'most improbable' (p 109) and having suggested that the old Marxist idea of the easier working-class expropriation of state capitalism into a workers' state, could work backwards, he now buttresses it. 'The only argument... against the possibility of the existence of state capitalism is that if the state becomes the repository of all capital (sic) the state ceases to be capitalist': state capitalism is theoretically impossible. (He has already sketched the classic Marxist condition for a single state 'capitalism' being capitalism: 'while competition on the world market continued'. And that condition is now, for now, ignored.)

This is close to the argument: because state capitalism is theoretically possible, therefore state capitalism, once the workers have cleared the way, is the only possible analogue for the USSR!

Cliff says, if state capitalism is oxymoronic 'the name of such a society in which the competition on the world market, commodity production, wage-labour, etc. prevails will be quite arbitrarily chosen.' He is here arguing for the dogmatists vain seeking for security in familiar names. This is slight of hand: he would not argue that these categories exist in the USSR. There is here too an arguing backwards. This undesirable conclusion will follow if you reject my solution. Why does the

name you give it have fundamental importance? Do these categories apply to Russia? When he gets to it, he will in every case answer 'no', and find analogies instead!

XIII. Being arbitrary

Cliff says: 'One may call it managerial society, arbitrarily determining its laws'. 'Arbitrarily determining'? The name can be arbitrarily chosen; the laws would have to be explored, extrapolated from evidence and experience. That sentence, smuggling in the question of the laws, is pure Cliff. There is here in Cliff's notion of identifying the work of establishing the laws of motion of Stalinism with 'arbitrariness', if you do not cram it into a familiar name, a superstitiousness identical to that of the orthodox Trotskyists, a seeking of safety in the familiar, a fear of sailing on uncharted seas, of terra incognita: if Cliff had been the first to find America, he would have insisted it was England! If he had without warning encountered a marsupial he would have insisted that it was a mammal. The spirit here is radically the opposite of Marxism, and a mere variation on the common superstitiousness that ruined post-Trotsky Trotskyism.

What does Cliff do, instead of 'arbitrarily determining' Stalinist societies' laws? He dispenses with exploring as a means of determining the unknown laws of this system and arbitrarily fixes the labels appropriate to capitalism, derived from exploring the history of capitalism and its modes of operation, to Stalinism. Thus he fools himself by making the 'arbitrary' exploration seem unnecessary. All one has to do is to cut and stretch reality and substitute analogies for concrete exploration of the reality! All Cliff's statistics are designed to illustrate the preconceived theory: his state capitalism does not come out of an analysis. The analysis is crammed into 'state capitalism'. This is every bit as scholastic as the approach of the orthodox Trotskyists - a variant/dialect of what they were doing with their stretching and cutting to fit a newly re-elaborated deformed and degenerated workers' state theory.

Having accepted the 'extreme improbability' of an evolutionary development from monopoly capitalism to state capitalism, Cliff then invokes the most concentrated capitalism known - that of Nazi Germany and contrasts it with Adam Smith's capitalism, stresses the differences and concludes:

'It is only the absence [sic] of the gradualism of development through the stage of monopoly capitalism, which makes it difficult to grasp the similarities and differences between the Russian economy and capitalism and traditional capitalism on one hand and a workers' state on the other!' What does the 'absence of gradualism' mean in evolution? Qualitative break without prior evolution? But revolution is the product of evolution - 20 years in a day. Without it, revolution is impossible. Where the Fabians decreed 'the inevitability of gradualness', Cliff decreed the dispensability of gradualness - of evolution - for revolution! It is an example of Cliff's reliance on analogues and parallels and cod dialectics. In Cliff's original 1948 version, the workers make the state capitalist revolution - needing only a 'supplementary' 'political' counter-revolution to realise its true nature. The common patterns with Trotsky and with orthodox Trotskyism are glaring here too. Cliff is saying the same things, in a different but no less arbitrary dialect. This 'state capitalism' juts into socialism.

'Seeing that state capitalism is the extreme theoretical limit which capitalism can reach, it necessarily is the furthest away from traditional capitalism. It is the negation of capitalism on the basis of capitalism itself. Similarly, seeing that a workers' state is the lowest stage of the new socialist society, it must necessarily have many features in common with state capitalism. 'What distinguishes between them categorically is the fundamental, the essential difference between the capitalist and the socialist system.' If the decisive thing is who is in power, then, are the features in common structural? So, if workers take power what happens? This is Trotsky's political revolution: Trotsky's programme of specific changes covers everything. Trotsky's fault was theoretical mystification: so too is it Cliff's: and Cliff had none of Trotsky's excuse.

'State capitalism' is a transitional stage to socialism, this side of the socialist revolution; while a workers' state is a transitional stage to socialism is the other side of the socialist revolution. So socialist revolution is a matter of the transfer of power? If a new Russian socialist revolution is primarily a transfer of power, it is Trotsky's 'political revolution'! At most it becomes a matter of arguing with Trotsky about labels.

This is 'variations on a theme' by Trotsky. It is also tautological and banal: the test will be in the details he now gives. Cliff headlines this section, 'State capitalism: a political negation of capitalism'.

'Regulation of economic activity by the state is, in itself, a partial negation of the law of value, even if the state is, as yet, not the repository of the means of production: the law of value assumes the regulation of economic functions in an anarchical way.' (p110) Cliff deals at length with partial negations of the law of value.

State capitalism is 'a partial negation of labour power as a commodity': for labour power to be a commodity the worker must be free of the means of production; and free of legal impediment to selling his labour power.'

Cliff's headline is, 'State capitalism - a transition to socialism' Translated, this sub-head means: 'Stalinism, a transition to socialism'. He is now comparing socialism and state capitalism, having dealt with monopoly capitalist concentration of the working class.

'The partial negation of capitalism on the basis of capitalist relations of production, means that the productive forces which develop in the bosom of the capitalist system so outgrow it, that the capitalist class is compelled to use 'socialist' measures and manipulate them in their own interests. This would be true of state capitalism that evolved out of monopoly capitalism, as it is to an extent true of monopoly capitalism. What has it got to do with the very backward USSR? All the 'old crap' - and 'state capitalism' - re-emerges there from backwardness, not overdevelopment.

Cliff quotes Lenin (Imperialism) that monopoly capital is a 'transitional form to socialism'. (But Lenin deals with advanced, developed capitalism, Tony Cliff with a movement from primitivism to 'state capitalism'!) Cliff in 1948 thinks Stalinism is so successful that it has gone as far and in some key respects further than the most advanced capitalism: state capitalism is highly developed capitalism in one country!

All this is a parallelogram of the degenerated workers' statist for whom Russia is in transition to socialism and the Stalinists, for whom it is socialism realised. It is Cliff's version of the ideas of Grant and Haston but with a different label. He is psychologically so appreciative of Stalinism's wonders because he has cut himself off from the concerns of the still uncertain others - arbitrarily, subjectively.

On p113: 'State capitalism and a workers' state are two stages of the transition period from capitalism to socialism. State capitalism is the extreme opposite of socialism - they are symmetrically opposed and they are dialectically united with one another.' The difference is political power. Again this is political revolution a la Trotsky.

'Under state capitalism, workers' labour is partially negated in that the worker is not free to choose his employer'; and under workers' state where work is collective self employment.'

It is, for socialism, 'now or never'. Thus Cliff reflects the orthodoxy. He brings references to the H-bomb in as *deus ex machina* to back up this view. Marx said society would go towards socialism or barbarism. The threat of barbarism takes the form before our very eyes, of hitching the productive forces of humanity, of industry, and science to the chariot of war and destruction.'

Cliff and his supporters will put it like this: the development of the means of production in a backward country cannot be progressive when on a world scale humanity is ripe for socialism'. How do we know? Since 1948, when Cliff wrote vast areas of the world have experienced capitalist development, vast new armies of proletarians have appeared etc.

Cliff quotes Lenin/Bukharin/Engels about the collectivising and centralising tendencies of advanced capitalism. Where has this come from in the USSR? From the success of 'socialism in one country' in building 'monopoly state capitalism in one country'. It has come from backwardness, competing with the most advanced capitalism. Historically, it is the Stalinist bureaucracy that built up industry. Historically, what Cliff describes in the USSR after 1928 is a new class creating a country ripe for socialism at miracle speed. This is the picture of the workers' statist who have - the RCP - become convinced that the USSR is in irreversible transition to socialism. The point here is that Cliff, in his theorising about state capitalism, workers' statism, etc., as distinct from dealing with facts of history, falsely assumes a symmetry (workers' statism to state capitalism by political counter-revolution and vice versa). That possibility did not exist in 1928; if it exists now it is the product of Stalinism. Stalinism has indeed worked wonders.

One of the oddest things in Cliff's long chapter 1, examining the social and class realities of the USSR is that he does not seem to know who exactly he is arguing with; Stalinists who say the USSR is socialism, or Trotsky and the workers' statist. He argues with neither satisfactorily. His chapter on Trotsky is a shoddy travesty. This is at first sight puzzling. But the significance of Cliff not seemingly knowing whether he is arguing with the idea of a degenerated workers' state or with the Stalinist claim that the USSR is socialism is that he eliminates the notion of a degenerated workers' state to replace it with a dialect of itself, 'bureaucratic state capitalism' - a state capitalism that is not state capitalism and which incorporates most of the theoretical (as distinct from the political) implications of

the degenerated workers' state position - that is being elaborated after Trotsky's theory has collapsed. All degenerated and deformed workers' state theories in reality describe the rule of a bureaucratic collectivist class: bestowing the honorary title workers' state is only a means of calling it progressive. Like the proponents of the notion that Russia is a degenerated workers' state, Cliff takes refuge in the redefinition of terms, in scholasticism and the over-pasting of inappropriate and in misleading labels.

In Cliff's state capitalist vision Stalin is building up our eventual legacy, and faster than capitalism could. It is in Cliff exactly as in the worst of the later deformed and degenerated workers' state theories. Like the degenerated workers' statist, he departs massively from the proper picture of Stalinism as bureaucratic arbitrariness and neo-medievalism. In the process of accepting USSR society as a thing in itself, not a la Trotsky, an ephemeral moment in history, transitional in one direction or another, Cliff too presents a glossed up picture of the bureaucracy's achievements. It is not for him a workers' state or lower socialism, but a viable monopoly state capitalism that has in key respects leapfrogged ahead of the most developed capitalism. Instead of seeing it as freakish, or barbaric, Cliff sees state capitalism in a 'progressive' light that gives it historical 'legitimacy'...

Side by side with reliance on bourgeois definitions of capital (as hardware) and the gross nonsense in terms of Marxist economics involved is the idea that the capitalist character of the USSR depends on competition of use values, there is the reliance on sometimes preposterous analogies. For example on page 32 he notes that the vastly extensive use of slave labour in the USSR arose because relatively Russia was so much poorer in capital than in man power. He then offers this mad analogical assimilation of the Stalinist Russian experience to capitalism: 'the slaves in Stalin's camps were a crude version of 'the army of the unemployed' of traditional capitalism, that is, they served to keep the rest of the workers in their places.'

Here encapsulated you have both what is wrong with his whole approach, and his spectacular capacity to convince himself of blatant nonsense. How does the 'reserve army' of unemployed labour power work in capitalism? It exercises pressure on wage rates by competition with workers who are free proletarians operating in a labour market. In Russia? police state terror, one employer, no trade unions, masses of workers more or less randomly enslaved. That terror, more or less arbitrary enslavement, etc., does make labour more controllable, is indisputable. That it is the equivalent of unemployment under 'free' capitalism loses all idea of quality and quantity.

XIV. Conclusion

Cliff's theory of bureaucratic state capitalism was politically superior to any theory that polluted socialism with the notion that the Stalinist states were in any sense any sort of workers' state. That needs to be said and emphasised. As theory, that is as a conceptualisation of reality that grasped its essentials, that penetrated to an understanding of its inner workings, that allowed some degree of foresight about future developments - as theory - 'bureaucratic state capitalism' was utterly useless. More, it shared all the faults on the level of theory of those who thought the USSR was a degenerated workers' state 'in transition to socialism'. Cliff's

theory too, which in origin and shaping influence was the twin of the workers' state theory of Militant/Socialist Party/Socialist Appeal, saw what it called 'bureaucratic state capitalism' as in transition to socialism. It did not even have the distinction of uniquely proposing the need for a new revolution - that it took over from Trotsky and, for the USSR, shared with workers' statist. For Cliff in 1948, bureaucratic state capitalism in the USSR was naturally not 'post-capitalist', as workers' statist would for decades see it. But it was at the furthest possible point of capitalist development short of socialism. It was so 'dialectically' advanced that in some respects it overlapped the margin between capitalism and socialism.

The difference in substance between this and what workers' statist said it was, on the level of theory, was scarcely discernible - at most it was a matter of semantics. In no sense was this a viable theory. It was an underdeveloped hybrid, a name as much as a theory. It has over the years been changed out of all recognition.

Michael Kidron, Chris Harman, and others developed Cliff's thesis further by eroding it and transforming it into a bland exercise in labelling. The thesis about military competition determining the economy evidently did not apply to most state-monopoly systems outside the USSR; it was faded out. Likewise the argument about Stalinist state capitalism representing a 'synthesis' between world capitalist pressures and property forms created by a workers' revolution. The notion that capitalist production in the West was being geared towards use-value rather than exchange-value was also quietly dropped.

What remained after all the fading-out was not much: the notion that the state-monopoly systems were state-capitalist because despotic bureaucracies controlled production and subordinated the workers' living standards to the accumulation of producer goods.

Instead of the theory being improved by successive approximations to reality, using evidence and debate as they developed to identify errors in Cliff's original exposition and to draw lessons from those errors, Cliff's followers practised a sort of successive distancing from reality, making the theory more bland, vague, and tenuous.

It is now an SWP shibboleth not a theory. There is almost nothing of the '48 theory left. Tony Cliff claims he was right on everything. Symbolically, when last year he wrote an article in the magazine Socialist Review to mark the 50th anniversary of his great work, he devoted the article entirely to arguing why the USSR's bureaucracy was a ruling class. He had nothing whatsoever to say about whether or not it was a state capitalist ruling class!

To try to draw any direct line between this theory and the SWP's performance during the Serb-Kosovar-NATO war would be futile, indeed foolish. Yet there is a connection. The SWP has never treated theory - any theory - seriously. For Marxists, theory is a guide to what you do and do not do. You try to work out implications and ramifications. What was remarkable about the politics derived for the theory of bureaucratic state capitalism was how little of it there was. Except for 'defence of the workers' states' the SWP was, except for some years in the '60s, an orthodox Trotskyist organisation with doctrinal quirks.

Theory was always the property of a small mandarin. And 'theory' could always be bent or put into a state of temporary suspension if some advantage might be got from doing that. Tony Cliff believed that 'tactics contradict principles'. That meant that what the group did was entirely separable from any principles it had. This was to some degree always true.

While its 'state capitalism' formally placed the organisation at the furthest pole from Stalinism, it could nevertheless even as far back as the '60s tolerate having Stalinist members (See 'A Funny Story Agreed Upon' WL41).

Today, the organisation is a rigidly run undemocratic kitsch-Trot sect, able at a word from the centre to undertake any zigzag or change of line in pursuit of organisational advantage. In political terms this is a 'bandit group'.

Beginning as proponents of the so-called 'Third Camp' (working-class independent politics) they have in the recent war behaved like half-demented Stalinists. Arbitrariness, subjectivism, banditism, calculation - these are what guides the organisation.

The impulses that led Cliff to oppose the workers' state degeneration of Trotskyism were good ones. The impulses that led him to take refuge in theorising that was as artificial and as superstitious as any of the workers' state theories, betrayed his better instincts.

Today, it is the young people who mistakenly go to the SWP looking for serious socialist politics who are betrayed.

Note: Cliff as critic of bureaucratic collectivism

In early 1968 Tony Cliff published in the journal International Socialism an article called The theory of bureaucratic collectivism - a critique. It was presented together with a curious note explaining that it dated from 1948, but that no original could be found... No explanation was offered as to where, then, their text came from. The 1968 text has since been added as an appendix to editions of Cliff's 1948 Russia, a Marxist analysis. In this odd way the IS group again began to deal openly with a theory and a tendency with which in its founding document and throughout its entire history it had been conducting a usually hidden and occasionally open debate.

Cliff's critique of bureaucratic collectivism, though its purpose is to buttress his state capitalism, is essentially criticism from the point of view of 1940s 'official' Trotskyism at the end of its tether. Cliff criticises 'the theory of bureaucratic collectivism' under 8 headings.

1. The place of bureaucratic collectivism in history. The statement that the Stalinist regime was neither capitalist nor socialist [sic] left the latter's historical identity undetermined. Hence Shachtman could at one point see bureaucratic collectivism as more progressive, and a few years later as more reactionary than capitalism.

Here Cliff is a jeering sectarian critic of people who are dealing with an unfolding new phenomenon, and, at the beginning of their independent existence, still carrying much of the analysis and politics of Trotsky, who argued after 1937 that

the USSR was economically progressive, whatever class ruled. Some of them have already abandoned the idea that this system is progressive (Carter, Draper) but the majority, led by Max Shachtman, though they have (1941) jettisoned Trotsky's name for the USSR (degenerated workers' state), have scarcely moved from Trotsky's analysis. That analysis is shot through, in Trotsky and in the Workers' Party, with the awful combination of simultaneously seeing the economic system as progressive vis a vis declining capitalism, and its totalitarian political system as identical with Nazism, 'except for its more unbridled savagery'.

Cliff had come through the war as part of an international tendency cheering for the Russians, seeing Russian victories as victories for the working class, indifferent to the horrible realities attendant on Russian progress in the war. Even after he'd hatched out as a state capitalist, Cliff had merely traded one set of labels for another, one dogma into which to cram the unfolding realities for another.

Ridiculously Cliff asserts that there have been only two consistent elements in bureaucratic collectivism: the conclusions that in any concrete conditions, Stalinist Russia must not be defended (no matter that the concrete conditions change all the time).

The name exercises Cliff overmuch. As for the name, he repeats what Karl Marx quoted against P J Proudhon: 'where there is a lack of ideas, an empty phrase will do.' A lack of ideas? Cliff's large and impressive collection of quotations from the classics of Marxism in Russia: a Marxist Analysis are all lifted without change from articles in New International, where they have been the common coin of the discussion of Stalinism for a decade; much of his concrete assessment of Russia is taken from the Workers' Party! What Trotsky once wrote of certain sectarians on the fringe of the Trotskyist movement fits Cliff's relationship to the Worker's Party: he fed on crumbs from its table and 'repaid with blackest ingratitude'. Cliff's addition is to cram the Trotsky/Workers' Party analysis of Russian reality into categories and labels (which he can only sustain by going outside Marxist economics, using 'capital' to mean plant and machines and world competition not of exchange but of use values to carry the idea that the USSR is capitalist!) By ideas Tony Cliff evidently means names!

He justifies himself by writing nonsense about the history of Marxism, contrasting it with Max Shachtman, etc. In Marx's and Engels' analysis of capitalism, the fundamentals the place of capitalism in history, its internal contradictions, etc. remained constant from their first approach to the problem until the end of their lives. Their later years brought elaborations of and additions to the basic theme. He then repeats that Shachtman first thought bureaucratic collectivism progressive and later concluded it was barbaric. A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1859) and Capital Vol 1, (1867) were only elaborations? Karl Marx's two decades in the British Museum Library were devoted to sorting out a few details? Unless one recalls that it was not until the 1850s that Marx finally solved the great mystery of proletarian exploitation within formal bourgeois equality and the free sale and purchase of labour power, then the deep foolishness of what Cliff writes here will not get its proper appreciation. In 1948, Stalinism was 20 years old; in 1968 (when this text was 'finalised') 40. Cliff is indecently eager to denounce those who have, building on Trotsky, been analysing a new historical phenomenon. Cliff's grievance is that they do this necessarily

open-ended work rather than follow him into scholastic and semantic exercises which by cramming the unfolding reality into old labels would, he thinks, render work other than defining and redefining words and collecting statistics to illustrate preconception unnecessary.

The formidable pretentiousness here is dwarfed by the sheer disloyalty. Marx and Engels began work on the analysis of capitalism in the 1840s. According to Marx, capitalism was then already over 400 years old! It had had its bourgeois revolution in Holland, England, France. It had a very substantial analytical literature, on which Marx built including even a number of differentiated labour theories of value. The place of capitalism in the flow of history was impossible not to see. To belabour those analysing the new phenomenon of Stalinism like this, was only possible for someone who had fled from the task, and taken refuge in word games and dogmatism, who superstitiously felt that the naming of complicated unfamiliar things with old 'Marxist' names gave him the strength of Marx and Engels' analysis of a radically different system!

2. The second section deals with Bruno Rizzi's version of state capitalism. Why Trotsky used Rizzi is plain: he needed a foil with whom to discuss what he, Trotsky, plainly saw as the only serious alternative to the increasingly untenable degenerated workers' state theory. In 1948, still less in 1968, Rizzi represents nothing politically (except that some of his fundamental ideas have conquered a section of the Trotskyist movement, which has relabelled their variations of Rizzi's theory 'deformed and degenerated workers' states'). There is a very substantial body of Workers' Party literature. Why go on about Rizzi? It gets the ghost of Trotsky on side!

3. The Stalinist regime barbarism? He quotes Shachtman citing the old Marxist idea, 'Capitalism must collapse out of an inability to solve its own contradictions: and thus either socialism or barbarism will be the result: Stalinism is the new barbarism'. Cliff: if Stalinism denotes the 'decline of civilisation, the reactionary negation of capitalism, then of course it is more reactionary... capitalism has to be defended from Stalinist barbarism'.

But, but, but! In the 19th century capitalism was championed against quasi-feudal and feudal reaction and against, for example, the US slave states. There would be nothing new for Marxists in such a pattern if the facts led to such a conclusion; nor for revolutionary socialists would it imply self-subordination to comparatively progressive capitalism. Even in a common war front, should that make the best political sense, the revolutionaries and the workers they influenced would maintain political and even military independence from their allies. In 1851 Marx outlined the tactics of the Communists in such an alliance with bourgeois forces against reaction: 'Strike (at the common enemy) together, march separately'. The 'Theses on the national question' from the Second Communist International Congress based its tactics in backward countries on 1851. Maintaining political, etc., independence, Communists would form a de-facto common front with bourgeois liberals against an immediate fascist or Stalinist attempt to take power. The independent Communist forces would simultaneously strive to displace and overthrow their allies. Cliff argues backwards, impermissibly: if that is true, than this unexpected and undesirable conclusion follows. Serious people, Marxists and non-Marxists, reject such an approach as inimical to rational thought. If the USSR

has on the facts to be considered barbarism, what objection could be raised to the above? Marxists never thought of such a thing in such a context? Neither the Workers' Party, nor, after 1949, its successor, the ISL, backed capitalism against Stalinism. That Shachtman did in the '60s is neither here nor there: it did not follow logically from the idea that Russia was barbarism.

In the 1940s especially the argument that Russian Stalinism was barbarism was well nigh unanswerable. Cliff himself had compiled a vast amount of evidence for it. Slave labour (10 million perhaps at any time from the early '30s to the early mid '50s); every aspect of life regulated by a savage totalitarian, utterly lawless state; the complete loss of every advance in social, legal, political intellectual and spiritual freedom, and of every right of speech, writing, publishing, assembly, association, social organisation, working class organisation, etc., etc., etc. that humankind had gained since the middle ages: that was the USSR and its replications. Against this Cliff argues in part by defining barbarism rather narrowly.

When Marx spoke of 'the common ruin of the contending classes', as in Rome after slave society disintegrated, it was associated with a general decline of the productive forces. The Stalinist regime, with its dynamic development of the productive forces, certainly does not fit this description.

This is the criterion that had led Trotsky after 1937 to maintain that the USSR was progressive, whatever its class character, in the face of the decline of capitalism. Here, against the idea that Stalinism is barbarism, Cliff comes as near as makes little difference to the idea (not the statement) that it is progressive. Cliff can be 'optimistic' can go through a very long post-1948 political life soothed by his state capitalist labels, ignoring most of the problems. He isolates the economic life he ascribes to the USSR from the entire complex social, economic and political network that made up the socio-economic formation that was Russian Stalinism. Trotsky had well understood the dead weight of bureaucratic rule on USSR society; he did not separate it from the economy; that was one reason why he was sure the system simply could not be viable. It survived for a qualitatively longer time than he thought, but ultimately it did not survive.

Cliff, though he is very critical of USSR economic reality (1964), has bought into the idea that this system 'works' and that its problems and contradictions will serve to prepare the proletarian revolution. In fact, the verdict of history on this system cannot but be that the 'embryo of the future', the working class future we all fervently hoped would succeed Stalinism until the events of 1989 and after crushed our hopes, had indeed died 'in the womb of the old society'.

The enormous, economic-social devastation that has succeeded Stalinism in the USSR, and, less so, in other countries - what is that? The collapse, regression, disintegration of a Stalinist society whose womb was barren of any progressive successor. A society whose conditions of life for many decades rendered its working class incapable of learning, thinking, or of understanding society, and which used Nazi-style totalitarian police state repression to prevent it from organising, debating, communicating with the different parts of itself or expressing itself orally, on the air or in print. Trotsky understood. He thought in 1939/40 that it would take outside working class stimulus to make Russian working class action possible.

Here, as in virtually every question Cliff has touched on, he is an 'economist,' a totalitarian economist, for whom the social and political consequences are of little ultimate importance so long as the economy is 'dynamic'. Unlike Trotsky, he gives virtually no weight in the scale of history, or in the perspective for history, to the non-economic factors. He has only a narrow, limited, partial view of USSR society. He draws no conclusions from the rest of the picture he sketches.

4. The motive for exploitation in bureaucratic collectivist society. Cliff says Shachtman explains the motive for exploitation in bureaucratic collectivist society thus: In the Stalinist state, production is carried on and extended for the satisfaction of the needs of the bureaucracy, for the increasing of its wealth, its privileges, its power. This is the full extent of what Cliff has found in the whole of the literature of the Workers' Party in the way of explanation for exploitation! He himself explains it by international competition, which he calls capitalist competition and finds in the USSR's production of military equipment. The idea that the Workers' Party neglected to take account of the international context of the USSR and so on, is both absurd and disloyal.

No politically literate nine year old could in 1948 or 1968 write a description of the situation of the USSR and not include its struggle to catch up or keep up with other states including in the arms race. Cliff would add nothing to any intelligent description, except the insistence that arms competition is capital accumulation dictated by the anarchic competition between capitalists. This is a) infantile sectarian pedantry: say it as I do or it doesn't count, and b) a belief in word magic (repeat the words in quotes above!)

5. Class relations under bureaucratic collectivism. This section is one of the oddest things in Cliff's whole body of work, which does not lack for oddities. He belabours the bureaucratic collectivists, and Max Shachtman in particular, for holding to a position he himself essentially shares with that is, has taken from' them!

6. The nature of the working class in Russia. Bureaucratic collectivists say and logically must say, that the USSR's workers are not a proletariat.

The argument that the Russian worker was not a proletarian rested on conditions in the society as a whole: the fact of one employer owning everything, who also controls what is produced or imported for the worker to buy with his wages; the worker is controlled, regimented and for decades was subject to reduction to a chattel slave by a totalitarian state, and so on. Cliff (in 1968) muddies the issue by reducing it to the high-Stalinist restriction on the movement of workers from one factory to another. But is this a sufficient reason to say that the Russian worker was not a proletarian?

He preposterously argues that US slavery, linked to perhaps the most advanced industry in the world, [the Lancashire cotton industry] was abolished because of its low productivity! (To be replaced for 100 years by a quasi-slave share-cropping system, and only in the last few decades by cotton harvesting machinery.)

Cliff talks about the general trend of history being against slave labour. Hence its almost complete disappearance since the death of Stalin, since Russia reached industrial maturity. If the Russians are not proletarians, Marxism as a method, as a guide for the proletariat as the subjects of historical change becomes

superfluous, meaningless. To speak of Marxism in a society without proletariats is to make a supra-historical theory. Yes, but! This is the dogmatic argument for the superstition of safe known labels: if something is so far unknown, it is therefore impossible. Close your eyes. Cliff solves the problem by defining, or rather scaring it away. Considering what he wrote in 1948, and what was in circulation, this is quite a performance. It is the political and moral measure of him.

7. Historical limitations of bureaucratic collectivism. Having rubbished the 'competition' with such integrity and concern for truth, Cliff recommends the advantages you get if you buy his own wares, like someone on a street corner selling dud watches that have 'fallen off the back of a lorry'. Cliff: 'if one accept the state capitalist nature of the Stalinist regime, one not only accepts its laws of motion' the accumulation of capitalism as dictated by the pressure of world capitalism but also the historical limitations of its rule. Never mind what is true, or even plausible: look at the advantage you get. (You also get a set of picture cards reproducing guaranteed authentic colour photographs of all the great revolutionaries from Spartacus to John Ball to Thomas Munzer to to Gracchus Babeuf, and all the Great Moderns Blanqui, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Cliff, Callinicos, Milosevic.)

8. Attitude to the Stalinist parties. (In 1968 when Cliff published this, there were members of IS in Manchester whose politics would lead them to leave the group in protest at its opposition to the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968).

From the assumption that bureaucratic collectivism is more reactionary than capitalism, Shachtman argued that socialist should side in the labour movement with social democrats against local Stalinist agents of bureaucratic collectivism. There follows nearly half a column of [misdated] quotations from Shachtman arguing that Stalinists were in the labour movement but not of it; that they represented a totalitarian programme of destroying the labour movement, in contrast to reformists, who, in their own way, stood for preserving the labour movement. Cliff thinks this too shows 'a lack of historical perspective', an oversimplification. The Stalinist parties are agents of Moscow and assemblies of fighting individuals 'strangled by the same bureaucracies'. Shachtman's attitude to the CPs would strengthen the right wing social democratic parties [who have no contradictions?] and help the CP leadership hold the militants to them. That it was necessary to adopt a more flexible attitude to the CPers than the ISL had before '56 is, I believe true. Yes! But did that mean refraining from saying clearly what was what? Trotsky, not Shachtman, wrote this, three days before he was struck down:

The predominant type among the present 'Communist' bureaucrats is the political careerist, their ideal is to attain in their own countries the same position that the Kremlin's oligarchy gained in the USSR'. [The Comintern and the GPU, 17 August 1940].

Note: the Johnson-Forest tendency

Not all the Workers' Party were bureaucratic collectivists.

A sizeable minority were state capitalists, convinced by the arguments of C L R

James and Raya Dunayevskaya (who began by logically saying Russia was just a fascist state and in 1947 rejoined the SWP-USA, which was pledged to support and defend the "fascist state capitalism"!)

This tendency in the Workers Party, known by the cultist name of "Johnson-Forest" (pen/ party names of James and Dunayevskaya) had shared all the mystifications of the Cannonites about imminent revolution, despite the state of the labour movement and the working class, and some that were peculiar to themselves.

James is now very well known and has been the subject of a number of books.

Leaving side the question of state capitalism for the moment, if James were to be judged on his political positions throughout the 1940s, it would be very hard to say anything good about him.

When Johnson-Forest rejoined the SWP-USA they took a sizeable chunk of the Workers Party with them - a fifth or a quarter, perhaps - and thus dealt the Workers Party a severe blow.

They remained in the SWP virtually silent - they did publish a big position document, *State Capitalism And World Revolution*, in 1950 - for about four years. Then they suddenly left the SWP, throwing a megalomaniacal statement over their collective shoulder.

The nearest thing to the unreason, mysticism, cultism, pontifical pronouncements and duff philosophising you find in the Johnson-Forest documents and articles of the forties is the British SLL-WRP in the late 60s and early 70s.

Hall Draper's review of Tony Cliff's "Russia", 1955 edition

Tony Cliff's work is not one of those over-plentiful books on Russia which merely set out to describe, cuss out, or philosophise about the horrors of Stalinism. It is a serious and valuable study, from a Marxist viewpoint, of the nature of the Russian state.

The author - long a leading Trotskyist in England and now associated with the left *Labor Socialist Review* - believes that the best theoretical description of the Stalinist system is "bureaucratic state capitalist," and we will have to say a word about his handling of this state-capitalist theory; but his political conclusions are very close to, if not identical with, those of Independent Socialism.

Apart from this point of view, however, Cliff's Stalinist Russia does a preliminary job in its first two (long) chapters which is alone worth the price of the book.

These two chapters present an analytical description of the social and political conditions of Stalinism, virtually constituting a handbook on "Why Stalinism is not socialism." And this is done by marshalling a vast amount of factual material based on official Stalinist sources laws, publications, etc.

The first chapter does this job on the socio-economic relations of the Stalinist system, including: the destruction of workers' control, role of the "trade unions",

the wage system, legal restrictions on the worker, draconian punishments for lateness or other offences, position of women in society, slave labour, depression of the standard of living and subordination of consumer goods production, the productivity of labour under Stalinism, expropriation of the peasantry, the turnover tax, the atrocities of the criminal law, the advance of inequality and salary differentiation., etc.

And finally in this chapter Cliff presents an excellent discussion of the unplannedness of this "planned economy," stemming from the built-in dislocations of bureaucratic mismanagement.

In Chapter II, State and Party in Stalinist Russia, Cliff has equally authoritative summaries of the Russian reality on the structure of the armed forces, the role of the "soviet" organs of government, the rigging of the elections, the monolithism of the party, etc.

All of this material is fully documented as to sources. In the course of taking up many of these questions, Cliff counterposes the Stalinist reality to the Russia of Lenin and Trotsky, making clear the gulf between the Stalinist counter-revolution and the Bolshevik state which this counter-revolution destroyed.

Socialists have long looked forward to a contribution of this sort. An approach to it - and a useful one - was a section entitled Soviet Myth and Reality in one of Arthur Koestler's books (an otherwise vapid collection of essays whose title, *The Yogi and the Commissar*, has become better known than any of its contents). There was a report some years ago, I remember, that this section was going to be expanded to book-size by Koestler and Dwight Macdonald, but nothing seems to have come of it, if it was true. In any case, Cliff's two chapters represents the best accomplishment of this task to date, for its size.

Much of the material in the subsequent sections of Cliff's book, dealing with the nature of the system, is devoted to refuting the view that Russia is a "workers' state" or "socialist state." An excellent chapter, which appears as an appendix, deals directly with An Examination Trotsky's Definitions of Russia as a Degenerated Workers' State. It is a very effective attack on this theory, which has led to the present extreme degeneration of both wings of the "orthodox Trotskyist" movement and its Fourth International.

In a couple of other chapters (III and IV) Cliff describes a great deal of material which would be necessary part of any Marxist discussion of the nature of Stalinism. These take up some general considerations about "workers states" and then The Material Heritage of Pre-October (Revolution) Society in Russia. It is the next three chapters which attempt to present the theory of "state capitalism as applied to Russia.

Of course, as our readers know, this theory is quite mistaken in our opinion; but since this is not the place to polemicise against it, it is more important to note what kind of "state capitalist" theory is this one of Cliff's. For there are all kinds of people who have applied who have applied this label of state-capitalism to Russia, with quite different political and theoretical meanings: just as, for that matter, the same is true of our own label of bureaucratic-collectivism.

We have often pointed out that the "state-capitalist" theory sometimes shades into versions which make it virtually identical with our own. This tends to happen where the "state-capitalism" which is seen in Russia is analysed as being so basically different from "private" capitalism that it tends to take on the characteristics of a new social system, which is not the same as any other existing system, and which is labelled a hyphenated-capitalism only as a matter of terminological taste.

Cliff's analysis does not begin this way, but it tends to wind up so. To begin with, he makes a brave attempt to subsume the Russian Stalinist "capitalist" system within the same (Marxist) economic categories as the old capitalism. With him, as with all others who have attempted this feat, it boils down to stripping capitalism of all essential attributes which do not fit into the Stalinist picture; and, as with all others, the first of these attributes to go is capitalist profit as the motor of the system.

But he moves from this type of analysis to something else, which becomes increasingly important for his analysis till it governs his political conclusions.

This is: heavy stress on the importance of the differences between the two different "state-capitalisms" which he finds himself discussing. One state-capitalism is that which is "an organic, gradual continuation of the development of capitalism"; the other is the "state-capitalism which arose gradually on the ruins of a workers' revolution."

At the point where he makes this distinction explicit, he also reveals the Achilles heel of his whole theory:

"Historical continuity in the case of state-capitalism which evolves from monopoly capitalism [the first type] is shown in the existence of private property (bonds). Historical continuity in the case of state-capitalism which evolves from a workers' state that degenerated and died, is shown in the *non-existence of private property*."

The italics are Cliff's, and his answer to this question of historical continuity is vital for him, for it is the same as asking: *What is the systematic common ground between capitalism and this "state-capitalism" of his, which did not and cannot arise from capitalism?* When he answers "non-existence of private property" the game is up, I think; for obviously this "non-existence" shows only that the old capitalism has not been resuscitated and says nothing at all about the positive question of what it is that has grown up on the ruins of the workers' state.

However, I cite this to show how Cliff's analysis moves over to the more fruitful question of the gulf between the capitalist world and the Stalinist "state-capitalist" system, and it seems to me that it would be easy to show that every one of his political, and even social, conclusions flows from his analysis of the differences between the two systems, and not at all from his (to me) laboured exposition of the "capitalist" nature of Stalinism.

So in the final two chapters, where Cliff takes up *The Imperialist Expansion of Russia* and *The Class Struggle in Russia*, the sharp point of his analysis is directed against any conceptions of the "progressiveness" of Stalinism and toward a

revolutionary opposition to the whole system.

Cliff's political standpoint is that of the Third Camp and makes no compromise with any illusions about Stalinism. This is its political strength.

Without any doubt, the book belongs in every socialist's library.

From *Labor Action*, 16 January 1956

Appendix

Anti-Stalinist Encyclopedia

Review by Hal Draper of "The Soviet Regime - Communism in practice", by W. W. Kulski. Syracuse Univ. Press. 1954

In January, in reviewing T. Cliff's book *Stalinist Russia*, I mentioned that it does a great job in its first couple of chapters in assembling a documented mass of material on the conditions of the people under the Stalinist regime; that it was in fact "the best accomplishment of this task to date, *for its size*."

The reason for the italicized qualification was the, existence of Kulski's book, which is truly unique and which has no close competitors: Kulski's "The Soviet Regime is in every sense a one-volume encyclopedia precisely on the subject of documenting the conditions of the Stalinist regime "out of their own mouths", most particularly out of their own laws and official documents.

Do not confuse this job with that performed or even attempted by any other among the scads and slews of books on Russia that come out of the publishers' assembly line. Fainsod's bulky *How Russia Is Ruled*, for example, also has an encyclopedic (or at least textbookish) air about it but does not really compare.

Kulski does not pretend to be making any political or sociological analysis as he goes along, except perhaps incidentally in comments; he is interesting solely in presenting the factual material itself; and this is an advantage, from this reviewer's standpoint, because it means the book has a minimum of mere anti-Communist agitation in it.

It is solid-packed with fact and quotations, intelligently marshalled, organised and presented to document the whole picture.

Since this goes on from page 1 to page 607, It can be imagined what a bursting storehouse of such information this book is.

I do not mean by this that the tone' of the book is "objective." Professor Kulski, on the contrary, writes and presents his material as an indictment of the regime.

The book is divided into four parts - Cultural Isolation and Conformity;

State and Party; Worker and Social Stratification; Peasant and Collective Farming - with a fifth part on the post-Stalin era up to 1954. It would be useless to try to list all the subjects covered in the chapters under these heads, because they cover practically everything.

The first part on "Culture" also includes the various aspects of the drive for ideological conformity in art, history writing, science, sports, linguistics,, nationalism (in re the non-Russian nationalities of the country), etc.

Under "State and Party" Kuisi covers not only all the obvious subjects like elections, governmental structure, nature of the party and its control of all other institutions, all individual freedoms and rights, but also criminal law, the courts, family and marriage problems, youth, and political aspects of non-Russian nationality questions.

The third part, of course, goes into all the ramifications of labor's lot - from wages and working conditions to bureaucratic factory management, housing, labor control, women's work, social security, and class stratification.

The fourth part is similarly extensive on the exploitation of the peasants and the organization of the collective farm system.

"This work," says Professor Kuisi in his Introduction, "is intended to provide a reference book which will give indirect access to Soviet sources. To avoid the reproach of intending to make propaganda of any sort. I have limited myself to Soviet sources only, refraining from the use of foreign commentaries and second-hand accounts. I wanted the reader to hear Soviet legislators, politicians, and authors speak directly.

"This method fails to provide only one important kind of information, that concerning the actual conditions of inmates of the Soviet correctional labor camps, but the official reasons and the judicial and administrative procedures for confinement to the camps are fully discussed, because the Soviet State makes no secret of them."

This well describes the' unique character of this work and is a guide to what one can and cannot expect from its contents.

It is not the sort of book that one reads through, and I confess that I have not done so. I have been dipping into it for its sections on various separate subjects, as one usually does with a reference book.

As one might expect from the author's background (Polish Government in Exile) some of its political judgements made in passing are of the standard bourgeois type, but it is not worthwhile criticizing this further in this space; political enlightenment is not its forte. But if (say) you want to document the draconic Russian law penalizing workers for coming late to their jobs, or any other such concrete fact, this book is

what you need.

From Labor Action, 19 March 1956