

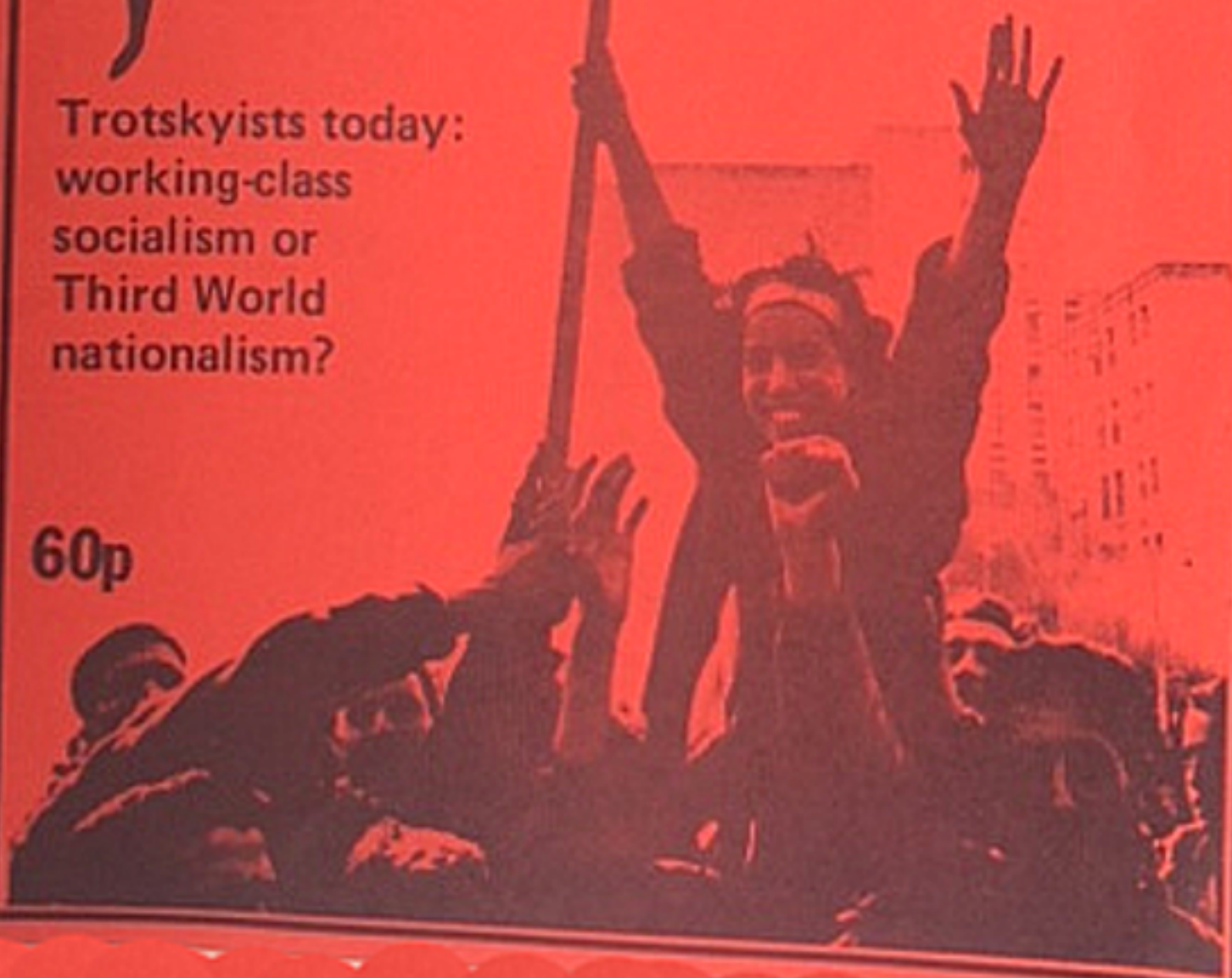
WORKERS' LIBERTY ④



Under whose flag?

Trotskyists today:
working-class
socialism or
Third World
nationalism?

60p



Nicaragua - yes! humbug - no!

WHEN THE rebel army — whose central core was 'communist' and Castroite in origin — took power in Nicaragua in mid-1979, it had the backing of an immense mass mobilisation. It was also backed by large sections, and probably by a majority, of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie had been excluded not only from direct political power but also from the more lucrative economic activities by the Somoza family, which ran Nicaragua as a private estate. The Nicaraguan bourgeoisie, for example, helped organise a general strike in the run-up to Somoza's downfall.

Thus the Nicaraguan revolution was made by a very broad spectrum of classes.

Terceristas

Those now in power in Managua originated as part of the great political wave of Castroism and Guevarism which swept through Latin America in the '60s and early '70s under the impetus and inspiration of the Cuban revolution. In Nicaragua the Guevarists suffered heavy defeats. After their defeats, they fragmented. Then in the mid-'70s the Sandinistas reunited under the domination of the right-wing faction, the Terceristas, who argued for a moderate 'social democratic' programme and an anti-Somoza alliance with the bourgeoisie as a means of winning state power.

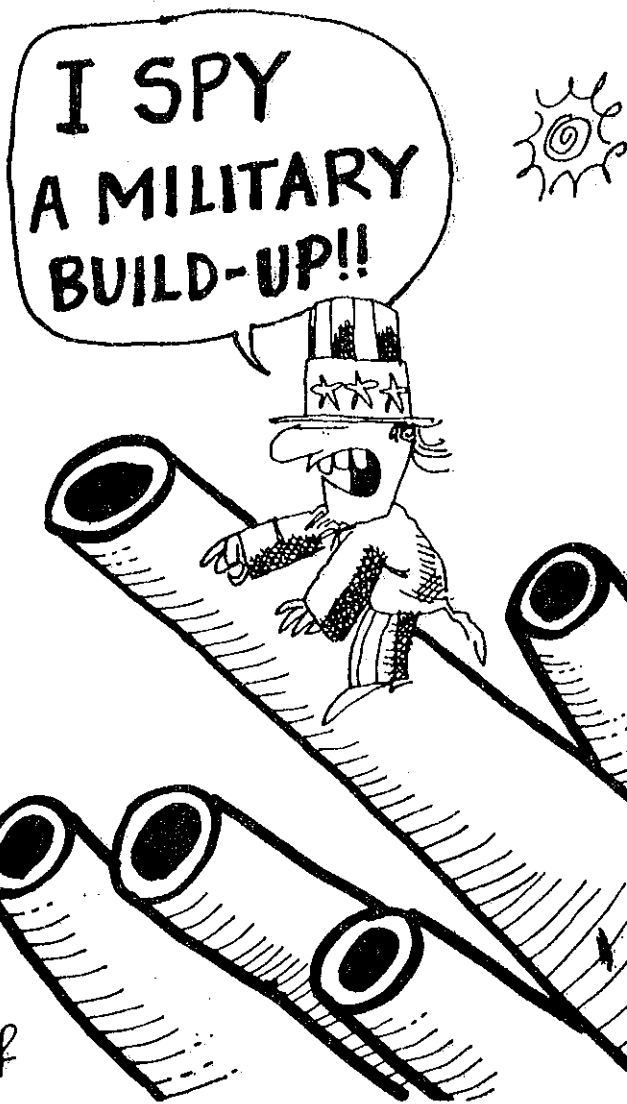
Eventually most of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie backed the Tercerista-led Sandinistas. Though unhappy at the overthrow of Somoza, even the US was relatively favourable to the new regime at first. President Jimmy Carter stood between the Sandinistas and anti-communist backwoodsmen in his own Congress. For the first 18 months the Sandinista regime was heavily dependent on US aid.

Who rules in Nicaragua now? Which class has state power? The Sandinista revolution wiped out the old Somozist state apparatus and created a new state machine — dominated by the Sandinistas, staffed by them. The bourgeoisie got less direct state power than they had had under Somoza, and by 1980 they began to make a big international fuss about it. But the

Sandinistas did not radically transform the economy, which remained in the hands of the bourgeoisie. The Sandinistas carried through a land reform, nationalised banks and mining — but two-thirds of industry and most of land is still in private hands.

So what is the class character of Nicaragua today? Capitalist: the state defends

private property. And its relation to the working class? The Sandinistas are nationalists — they do not see the working class as the centre of revolutionary politics. They have repressed the working class, promoting a state trade union, curbing the right to strike, and used 'states of emergency' against the working class. For most of



CONTENTS

1 Nicaragua yes — humbug no!
 3 Class politics or bloc politics? A critique of the manifesto produced in 1984 by the Australian section of the USFI. The Australian group has since left the USFI: but the basic ideas in its manifesto are widespread among many who are still would-be Trotskyists.
 For political revolution in Vietnam. A document of the Vietnamese Trotskyist Group in France (a group affiliated to, but largely shunned by, the USFI).
 Sandinism and permanent revolution. A study of the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution and the arguments used by the SWP of the USA to reject it.

19 The development of capitalism in the 3rd World. Many on the left dismiss colonial independence and Third World industrialisation as illusory or sham. In fact the Third World has changed substantially.
 29 South Africa: the case for a workers' party. The ANC is sometimes presented as practically the only force fighting apartheid. In fact there are many currents in the liberation movement, including an important strand striving towards working-class politics.
 32 The USFI today. A survey of the major would-be Trotskyist international grouping since its US associate, the SWP-US, lurched towards semi-Stalinist politics in 1979.

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A Nicaraguan envoy shakes hands with Liverpool city councillor John Hamilton

their rule striking — 'economic sabotage' — has carried a three-year jail sentence.

But the Nicaraguan state is not *simply* capitalist. The bourgeoisie is, and has been since mid-'79, at the mercy of the Sandinistas, a stable Stalinist-type formation holding direct state power. Within a few months of the revolution there were rifts in the popular front constructed by the Sandinistas, and the rifts would soon show themselves to be irreparable. The bourgeoisie could see plainly that whatever the Sandinistas said, they were not stabilised on the basis of a commitment to private property. The Sandinistas saw a long-term role for private property in the backward economy disrupted by civil war — but private property within a state committed to 'socialism'. Cuba was their ultimate model. The bourgeoisie were even alarmed at the literacy drive, which was accompanied by Sandinista political propaganda. Not without some justification, they began to see everything the Sandinistas did, from the literacy drive to setting up neighbourhood committees to creating their own trade union, as parts of a concerted plan designed to create an authoritarian party-state in Nicaragua on the Cuban model.

Immediately after July 1979 there was a five-person junta with two non-Sandinistas. But early in 1980 there were disputes about the composition of the promised Council of State. The bourgeoisie were alarmed.

They were also alarmed by the Sandinistas' pro-USSR policy on international questions. (For example, the Sandinistas supported the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan, and a year later they supported the suppression of Solidarnosc in Poland). By early 1980 a clear bourgeois opposition had emerged.

From early 1981, after Reagan took power and gave the green light to the Congress backwoodsmen, Nicaragua's relations with the US became very hostile.

Former Somozists and others built up counter-revolutionary armed forces on the border. In Costa Rica, a former Sandinista, Eden Pastora, built up a different anti-Somozist force. The CIA became heavily involved.

The CIA exploited the conflict between the Sandinista government and the Miskito Indians — about 5% of the population, living on the west coast, speaking English, and little integrated into Nicaragua — a sort of national minority. The Sandinista regime was initially heavy-handed and oppressive towards the Miskitos, disrupting their local

self-government. Expressive of the true nationalist character of the Sandinistas was the fact that their literacy drive tried to make the Miskitos literate — in Spanish. Bitter conflict developed, though the Sandinista regime has now agreed to Miskito autonomy and made peace with some Miskito leaders.

The Sandinista regime has also developed a welfare state — education, health, etc. — and subsidised food prices. Ordinary people in Nicaragua are now better off than in the past. The regime certainly has a lot of popular support, despite the crippling of the economy by debt problems, US-inspired sabotage, etc.

That's important. But for Marxists it's not the end of the story.

Where does the Sandinista revolution stand now, six years after Somoza fled? The Nicaraguan revolution is in limbo. The contras have had only sporadic military success. The USSR does not seem willing to sponsor Nicaragua completely, though US pressure is driving Nicaragua closer and closer to the USSR. Nicaragua is at present capitalist but has the possibility of peaceful evolution to a Stalinist state where capitalism has been overthrown. The Sandinista social measures are progressive but not socialist. The Sandinista state in Nicaragua is not totalitarian. Even state organisations show some autonomous life

And there are some strikes.

Guatemala

There is some pluralism, but there is also a strong pressure towards a Stalinist regime. The prospects are fairly bleak. The US seems to be almost deliberately driving Nicaragua along the Cuban road, though some elements in the US ruling class dissent. But Nicaragua is not an island like Cuba. It is far more vulnerable. If the US keeps up the pressure, Nicaragua is more likely to be a Guatemala — where a left-liberal government was overthrown in 1954 by a US-backed invasion — than a Cuba. Nor can Nicaragua simply shift into the economic and military protection of the Stalinist camp.

What the Sandinistas have done socio-economically is not exceptional by the standards of many Third World countries. It's *who they are* that alarms the bourgeoisie and the US. The Sandinistas are serious and determined revolutionaries, a conscious political formation. But they're a

Stalinist-type formation, and they have secure state power and a relatively very powerful military/political apparatus which gives the ruling faction the possibility of going down the Cuban road all the way, with little need to bother about internal opposition.

Up to now, the Sandinista welfare state, including food subsidies, has offset the low wages and softened the effects of the workers of the effective outlawing of strikes. But things are changing. Immense damage has been done and is being done to the Nicaraguan economy by both the counter-revolutionary guerrillas and the implacably hostile economic pressure of the US. Food subsidies have been cut and therefore the prospects are that there will be great pressure from the workers for compensating wage rises. How will the regime respond? The prospects are of severe repression of the working class by the Sandinista regime.

Solidarity

On a cold assessment it makes sense not to go for wholesale expropriation of capitalists, especially small capitalists, in an underdeveloped country like Nicaragua. Such economic cauterisation by a state which cannot, in a very poor economy, fill the function it suppresses, is no part of the socialist programme. Engels scoffed at the notion, and Trotsky rightly criticised Stalin for it in the far more favourable conditions of Russia after 1928. But if the Sandinista government cossets capitalists and bans strikes, socialists have to take a basic class line — 'everything for the workers'. Some of the Sandinista military spending is also questionable: it is necessary to distinguish between defence spending and spending on preparations for internal repression.

The crimes of US imperialism against the government and people of Nicaragua brand the US for what it is — a brutal imperialist power, which would if it can't overthrow the Sandinista government drive it into the blind alley of Cuba-style Stalinism in order to 'save it from communism'. It goes without saying that socialists must give their political aid and solidarity, and what practical help we can, to Nicaragua in its resistance to US pressure, sabotage and possibly invasion.

What the workers of Nicaragua do not need from socialists in Britain and other western countries is that we glorify what exists there as the very latest model of socialism. It is very far from that, and if it goes the full way towards the Cuban model of 'socialism', as a clone of Havana or a direct client of Moscow, it will be far from it still.

We need to argue for the political and trade union independence of the Nicaraguan working class from the state and to attack and criticise any infringements on those rights by the Sandinista government. We need to explain in the British labour movement that though the Sandinistas are better than Somoza and better by far than anything that the US will impose, neither their regime now nor any Cuba-style development of it is socialism. Nicaragua cannot grow into socialism without the Nicaraguan working class seizing power. The consolidation of a Cuba-style regime in Nicaragua — even if it is adorned by a marginally-free parliamentary election in a society heavily under the control of a Stalinist state — will not be a victory for the Nicaraguan and international working class but a defeat.

Defend and develop the Nicaraguan revolution — against US imperialism and against Stalinism!

Class politics or bloc politics?

The world view which increasingly dominates the Mandel/Barnes 'Fourth International' has been spelled out most sharply in a manifesto published by their Australian group (the Socialist Workers' Party). The following critique of this manifesto, 'The Struggle for Socialism', was written by Chris Reynolds and published by a Marxist faction in the SWP.

'The Struggle for Socialism' ('SFS') defines the objectives of the struggle and the forces involved as follows:

"This Leninist view sees the world revolution as a unity of three sectors: the struggle between proletariat and imperialist bourgeoisie in the developed countries; the conflict between imperialism and the oppressed nations; and the struggle between the socialist states and imperialism".

In other words, its fundamental concern is not class struggle between the working class internationally and its oppressors, but a battle of 'blocs' in which the working class is only one element in the bloc of 'socialist states' and 'oppressed nations'.

Read literally, the definition in *SFS* excludes any independent working-class struggle at all in most of the world. Only in 'the developed countries' does it refer to a specifically proletarian struggle; elsewhere the 'world revolution' is a matter of 'the oppressed nations' and 'the socialist states' as a whole.

The document does not quite mean to go so far. Elsewhere it refers to political revolution in the Stalinist states and a fight for workers' and peasants' governments in the Third World. But the downgrading and minimisation of independent workers' struggles in the Third World and the 'socialist states' is consistent. The gist of the argument is that the governments of the 'socialist states', and the middle classes in the Third World, can and will be to the fore in the bulk of the struggles of the 'world revolution'; the role of the working class is to add the final touches and clean up the result.

Politically this implies a tail-ending of Stalinism and Third World nationalism. Even worse, it implies a fundamental scaling-down of the whole socialist programme. Both implications are clear in the document.

The document mentions that the USSR is "totalitarian" (p.13) and that "the planned economy provides the bureaucrats with a standard of living not markedly inferior to what they might hope to achieve in a capitalist economy" (p.65: i.e. inequalities of income in the USSR are about as great as in the West).

But the general trend of the argument is much different. "The existence of proletarian states is a permanent weight in

the international balance of class forces on the side of the workers and oppressed nations" (p.61: what about the world's greatest concentration of oppressed nations, within the USSR?) The document blandly calls the USSR and similar regimes 'socialist states', with the lame excuse that that is how they "are usually described". It flatly declares that they "defend socialist property relations" (p.63).

"Even in the most highly bureaucratized socialist states", it continues (p.67), "the bureaucracy has been a relative, not an absolute, brake upon the development of the productive forces and the fulfilment of the tasks [of socialism]". If this means anything, it means that given time and patience even the Stalinist bureaucrats will lead us to socialism!

True, the existence of privileged bureaucratic castes is recognised (p.63) — except in Vietnam and Cuba — and they "act as an obstacle". In the enumeration of the reactionary activities of the bureaucracies, however, no mention is made of the main point: that they repress, suppress, and deny any political voice or freedom to the working class.

Political revolution

The programme outlined for the political revolution is correspondingly modest. "The political revolutions... consist merely of freeing existing society from the depredations of a caste of parasites... The political revolution will of course modify greatly the operation of various institutions of the proletarian state, but it will not destroy them. On the contrary, it will strengthen them" (p.69).

The KGB and Poland's Zomo will be delighted to hear that the coming revolution will only "strengthen" their institutions. The USSR or Polish workers, however, may be somewhat puzzled as to what this revolution will look like.

The armed forces of the 'socialist states' are also presented in a positive light: "misuse of the armed forces of a socialist state does not change the fundamentally defensive character of those forces..." (p.86); "The programme of the Eastern European 'peace movement' objectively weakens the socialist states because it does not distinguish between

the bureaucracy and the institutions of the state, especially the military forces" (p.89).

It looks as if the authors had been studying some ancient philosopher on the distinction between soul and body before they penned this passage. The institutions of the state, and especially the 'armed bodies of men', are controlled and staffed in their higher echelons by the bureaucracy; the bureaucracy is nothing other than the set of people staffing the higher echelons of the state institutions.

Is there a sacred proletarian soul to the state institutions distinct from their profane bureaucratic body? The materialist method of Marxism is better than this sort of metaphysics.

And what about the armed forces being 'defensive'? The reference is part of a rather garbled argument about the responsibility of capitalist imperialism for the war drive. (That responsibility is a fact, and an important one; but to try to twist it into the assertion that "war in the modern epoch is solely the product of imperialism" reduces it to a nonsense, making it impossible rationally to explain wars between Stalinist states or between Third World capitalist states).

Deformed workers' states

The supporting argument for the assertion that the armed forces of the 'socialist states' are 'defensive' is: "The economies of those states that have abolished capitalism... contain no inherent need to expand beyond their own borders..." Insofar as by 'the economies' we refer to the stasised economic base of those states, they certainly do contain an inherent need to expand beyond the borders. Even 'The Struggle for Socialism' concedes, though without comment, that a socialist society is not possible in one country but requires "a planned economy embracing the entire world" (p.63). The distinction between the post-capitalist economies and capitalism is not that the latter seeks expansion while the former is satisfied with national seclusion, but that capitalism expands through exploitation and national wars, while a workers' economy would expand through class war.

But the 'socialist states' do not just contain the stasised economic base, but also a whole social structure moulded by the bureaucracy. And that is what determines the nature of their armed forces.

Are those forces 'defensive'? The question is mis-posed. Marxists do not

decide our attitude to wars by trying to see who is 'aggressive' and who is 'defensive'. Each side in any armed conflict 'defends' its own interests and is 'aggressive' against the interests of the other side. The important question is, *what* is being defended? What is the conflict about?

The stasised property relations of the Stalinist states are potentially progressive. We should therefore defend them against capitalist imperialism, independently of and despite the bureaucracy. In a conflict about those property relations we would therefore side with the armed forces of the Stalinist states. But that does not mean giving a general certificate of benevolence and kindness to those armed forces. "In every case the Fourth International will know how to distinguish where and when the Red Army is acting solely as an instrument of the Bonapartist reaction and where it defends the social basis of the USSR" (Trotsky, 'In Defence of Marxism', p.36).

The armed forces of the Stalinist states frequently — and indeed, almost exclusively over the last 30-odd years — defend not "the social basis of the USSR" but the power, privileges, and greed for further power and privileges of the bureaucracies. Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968, Poland 1980-1 (though only in the form of threats), Afghanistan 1979-84... the armed forces of the USSR have frequently been a force of reactionary repression. And that is what they are within the USSR itself.

"Defence of the USSR", in the Trotskyist sense, does not mean endorsing the USSR's armed forces. "Our tasks, among them the 'defence of the USSR', we realise 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". (Trotsky, 'In Defence of Marxism', p.21).

Cuba and Vietnam

A 'political revolution' which leaves all the state institutions of the present Stalinist states unharmed, indeed "strengthened", is a very modest affair. Hungary 1956, and Poland 1980-1, indicate a much more radical programme, including at least:

1. Disbandment of the police and armed forces, replacement by a workers' militia;
2. Breaking-up of the bureaucratic hierarchy of administration, and its replacement by a regime of councils of elected and recallable workers' delegates, with a plurality of workers' parties;
3. Workers' control in industry; free trade unions;
4. Abolition of bureaucratic privileges; reorganisation of the economy according to a democratically-decided plan;
5. Abolition of the bureaucracy's monopoly over information: freedom for working-class newspapers, meetings, radio

stations, etc.

Not "a thorough reorganisation of society from top to bottom" (p.69)? Why not? Trotsky, while insisting on the precise term 'political revolution', pointed out that nothing could be added to the measures and scope of the revolution by calling it 'social' ('In Defence of Marxism', p.4). Historical experience since he wrote confirms his argument.

But in fact *'The Struggle for Socialism'* despite its character as a relatively lengthy and comprehensive manifesto, nowhere expounds a full programme of workers' democracy. Workers' councils are mentioned (p.28) only as a form of struggle within capitalism (and, indeed, only within the imperialist countries, not in the Third World capitalist countries). They are not advocated as a form of state. The socialism advocated in *'The Struggle for Socialism'* is in fact not workers' democracy but a cleaned-up version of Stalinism: the existing 'socialist states' modified by a few measures against privi-



Stalin

lege and for "encouraging mass control" (p.63).

No wonder: for Vietnam and Cuba are accepted as socialist models without criticism.

It may be true that the privileges of the bureaucracy in Vietnam and Cuba, as regards living standards, are scantier than in the other Stalinist states. However, the frequent Vietnamese condemnations of corruption and self-enrichment among the bureaucracy there — coupled with the lack of any real democratic control or supervision — compel scepticism. And on Cuba, we can read, for example, the testimony of Rene Dumont, a firm friend of the Cuban revolution:

"The delegation of full power to those whom Fidel trusts is almost feudal... His right-hand men have just received, free, luxury Alfa-Romeos... that they can use for their personal needs... Add in the beautiful villas of the magnificent beach at Varadero, where the officials and their families take free holidays... Add in the

sexual privileges of the 'new class', which count for a lot in Cuba... And so a new leading layer is being constituted in Cuba, certainly benevolent towards the workers and the poor people, but in a sense often paternalist: for the latter no longer have the right to speak out if they become too critical... ('Cuba, est-il socialiste?').

Cuba's political regime is probably significantly more flexible and popular than those of the USSR, Eastern Europe and China. Much less can be said for Vietnam, in view of the repressive attitude to all dissidence since Vietnam's 'hundred flowers' period in 1956-7.

But even in Cuba there is a qualitative difference between the regime and any sort of socialist democracy. The working class is denied any political voice. It has no free trade unions. It cannot form political parties. (The only legal party is the Cuban Communist Party: but that is not really a party. It is an administrative machine. It did not hold its first congress until 1975!) The media are completely controlled by the government.

The regime in Cuba is that of the administration of a bureaucracy over the working class. The bureaucracy is relatively intelligent, liberal, even well-intentioned: nevertheless, there is a qualitative difference between this regime and direct workers' power, even direct workers' power under the most difficult circumstances, as in the USSR in 1917-23.

Stalinist economies

'The Struggle for Socialism' also, as we have noted, flatly describes the Stalinist states as having "socialist property relations" (p.63). Such descriptions can only discredit us, and socialism in general, in the eyes of workers both in the 'socialist states' and in the capitalist states who rightly detest and abhor the Stalinist system. Trotsky characterised the property relations in the USSR much more accurately:

"It is perfectly true that Marxists, beginning with Marx himself, have employed in relation to the workers' state the terms state, national and socialist property as simple synonyms. On a large historic scale such a mode of speech involves no special inconvenience. But it becomes the source of crude mistakes, and of downright deceit, when applied to the first and still unassured stages of the development of a new society, and one moreover isolated and economically lagging behind the capitalist countries...

"State property becomes the property of 'the whole people' only to the degree that social privilege and differentiation disappear, and therewith the necessity of the state. In other words: state property is converted into socialist property in proportion as it ceases to be state property. And the contrary is true: the higher the Soviet state rises above the people, and the more fiercely it opposes itself as the guardian of property to the people as its squanderer, the more obviously does it testify against the socialist

character of this state property" ('Revolution Betrayed', p.237).

SFS also downgrades the international character of the socialist programme to the point where only a few saving phrases distinguish it from the ideology of 'socialism in one country'. As we have seen, the document asserts that what it calls the 'socialist property relations' have no inherent need to expand beyond national borders, and that even with the bureaucracy in control there is only a "relative" brake on the accomplishment of the tasks of socialism.

The alleged facts cited in support of this assertion are simply wrong: that 'none of the underdeveloped capitalist countries have matched the balanced and sustained growth and the improvement in mass living standards achieved by the less-developed socialist states. The growth rates of the socialist states consistently surpass those of the imperialist economies' (p.67).

It is true that the centralisation of resources in the hands of the state has permitted rapid growth in the Stalinist states, especially in the early stages of industrialisation; and that generally those states have better welfare provision, and less poverty, than the capitalist states. But everyday facts such as the wish of thousands of East Germans to migrate to capitalist West Germany show that naive propaganda about the "workers' paradises" is false — and, if it is meant to be a reply to boasts about the alleged prosperity and freedom in the capitalist world, simply counter-productive.

Here are some facts. National income per head in Cuba rose about 3% a year in 1961-75: fast, but slower than Brazil (5.1%, 1960-81), or Mexico (3.8%, same period).

Infant mortality in Cuba was cut from 66 per 1000 to 19 between 1960 and 1981. An impressive testimony to the welfare gains of the revolution, and a far better reduction than Brazil or Mexico in the same period: but Spain's reduction in infant mortality from 50 to 11 is comparable.

China's national income per head rose 5% per year in 1960-81: rapidly indeed, but more slowly than South Korea (7%) or Japan (6.3%). Infant mortality in China was cut from 165 per thousand to 71; in South Korea, from 78 to 33.

The USSR, as far as can be established, is now probably the only country in the world where infant mortality is rising. Its rate of growth of national income per head has slowed to some 2% a year from the late '70s: slower than the US.

We know the other side of South Korea's or Japan's impressive economic statistics: brutal exploitation, unrelenting repression. But it is no answer to justify or mitigate the bureaucratic dictatorships in the Stalinist states by reference to their rather-less-impressive similar statistics.

Trotsky — more perceptive from 45 years ago than the authors of 'The Struggle for Socialism' are when the reality stares them in the face — frequently pointed out in his later writings that as

the USSR moved from the most primitive stage of industrialisation to more sophisticated techniques, the bureaucracy would increasingly become an absolute, not just a relative, brake on development.

But the way that 'The Struggle for Socialism' makes propaganda for the living standards in the Stalinist states, in the spirit of 'socialism in one country', hangs together logically with its attitude to Vietnam and Cuba. For both the Vietnamese and Cuban governments do not distinguish themselves on any fundamental, decisive question from the foreign policy of the USSR bureaucracy. Differences in tone and emphasis are noticeable: but the Cubans, just as much as the Kremlin, advocate bourgeois not socialist revolution in Central America and oppose Solidarnosc.

Third world bourgeoisies

The positions of 'The Struggle for Socialism' would also lead the working class to tail-end behind the Third World bourgeoisies.

The centre-piece of its argument on the Third World is the 'anti-imperialist united front'. Now this concept, it is true, was advocated by the Leninist Comintern. But we should note three points.

First: the 'anti-imperialist united front' was advocated by the Comintern for the East. Not for the whole colonial and semi-colonial (as it then was) world; for the East.

Why? In Asia national revolutionary movements were emerging, but working-class movements were almost everywhere tiny, infant, or non-existent. The idea of the 'anti-imperialist united front' was that the new Communist groups should not sit in splendid isolation; while safeguarding their political independence they should get into the national revolutionary struggle, try to drive it forward, and try to break the best elements from the bourgeoisie.

The 'anti-imperialist united front' was not proposed for Africa, because national revolutionary movements had not yet emerged there; and it was not proposed for Latin America because, in several countries of that continent at least, substantial working-class movements did already exist.

Second: the decisions of the Comintern of this question were far from complete and polished. The Comintern was grappling with new political problems. Its definitions of the alignments of class forces and the goals in the revolutions in the East were far from clear.

Third: the development of political ideas did not stop in 1922. The ambiguities of the Comintern's strategy for the East were developed and argued out — on the one side, crystallised into a conservative neo-Menshevik strategy; on the other replaced by a clearer vision — in the course of the Chinese revolution of 1925-7.

'The Struggle for Socialism' tries to differentiate its 'anti-imperialist united front' from the 'bloc of four classes'

advocated by the Stalinists for China. 'This theory converted tactical alliances with bourgeois nationalist forces into a long-term strategic alliance...' (p.56).

In fact the differentiation is entirely spurious. The Stalinists used to refer complacently to their own 'prognosis... on the inevitable departure of the bourgeoisie from the national revolutionary united front and its going over to the side of the counter-revolution'.

Trotsky commented: "What does this so-called prognosis signify under the given conditions? Nothing but an empty phrase on the fact that the bourgeoisie, at a given stage of the bourgeois revolution, must separate itself from the oppressed masses of the people... This banality does not separate Bolshevism from Menshevism for an instant. Ask Kautsky, Otto Bauer and Dan, and the answer will be: the bloc of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie cannot last forever" ('Problems of the Chinese Revolution', p.82).

The difference is that a Bolshevik policy stresses the independence of the working class, seeks to mobilise the working class to win over the oppressed peasants from the leadership of the bourgeoisie, and considers alliances with the bourgeoisie for specific actions against imperialism (or, in Russia, Tsarism) as utterly subsidiary tactical operations.

But in fact 'The Struggle for Socialism' outdoes the Stalinists of the 1920s in its view of how "long-term" and "strategic" the "united front" with the bourgeoisie can be. It does after all applaud, with reference to the model of Nicaragua, the inclusion of bourgeois forces in a coalition government even after the victory of the revolution (p.54). It is difficult to see how the alliance could possibly be more "long-term" and "strategic" than that.

This position is justified by a long discussion (p.52-3) on the fact that the tempo of expropriation of the capitalists after a revolutionary victory need not be fast, especially in underdeveloped countries. The whole discussion is a red herring.

The tempo of expropriation in the USSR after October 1917 was slow — or at least was initially intended to be slow — not because the Bolsheviks hoped that a softly-softly policy would win over the middle classes, but because they were aware of their technical backwardness in relation to the task of running a statised economy and hoped for aid from revolutionary victories in the West. In any event they found that they could not stick to their initial plans for a slow tempo.

Generally it is crucial to move against the bourgeoisie as radically as possible at the high points of revolutionary mobilisation. But, yes, in principle, the tempo of certain economic measures can be slow — provided that state power is firmly in the hands of the workers.

In fact the slow tempo advocated by 'The Struggle for Socialism' implies blocking the workers' demands for radical measures at the high points of revolutionary mobilisation, and substituting instead a slower transformation from above

by push-and-pull between the bourgeoisie and the Stalinist or nationalist leaders of revolutionary movements. It is a stages theory which tells the workers: do not press ahead too fast at first, or you will frighten off the middle class.

It is different from the classical Stalinist stages theory, in that the world power of the USSR has made possible a different evolution from the classic model where the 'national united front' is broken by the bourgeoisie crushing the workers. In Yugoslavia, Cuba, etc., forces linked to the USSR were able to form coalition governments with bourgeois politicians and then later squeeze out the bourgeoisie to form systems on the model of the USSR. It is possible that Nicaragua, rather than consolidating a state-capitalist system, will become another Cuba. But the consequences in terms of the liberation of the working class are still negative. The stages theory still erects itself as an obstacle to the development of direct workers' power.

Imperialism

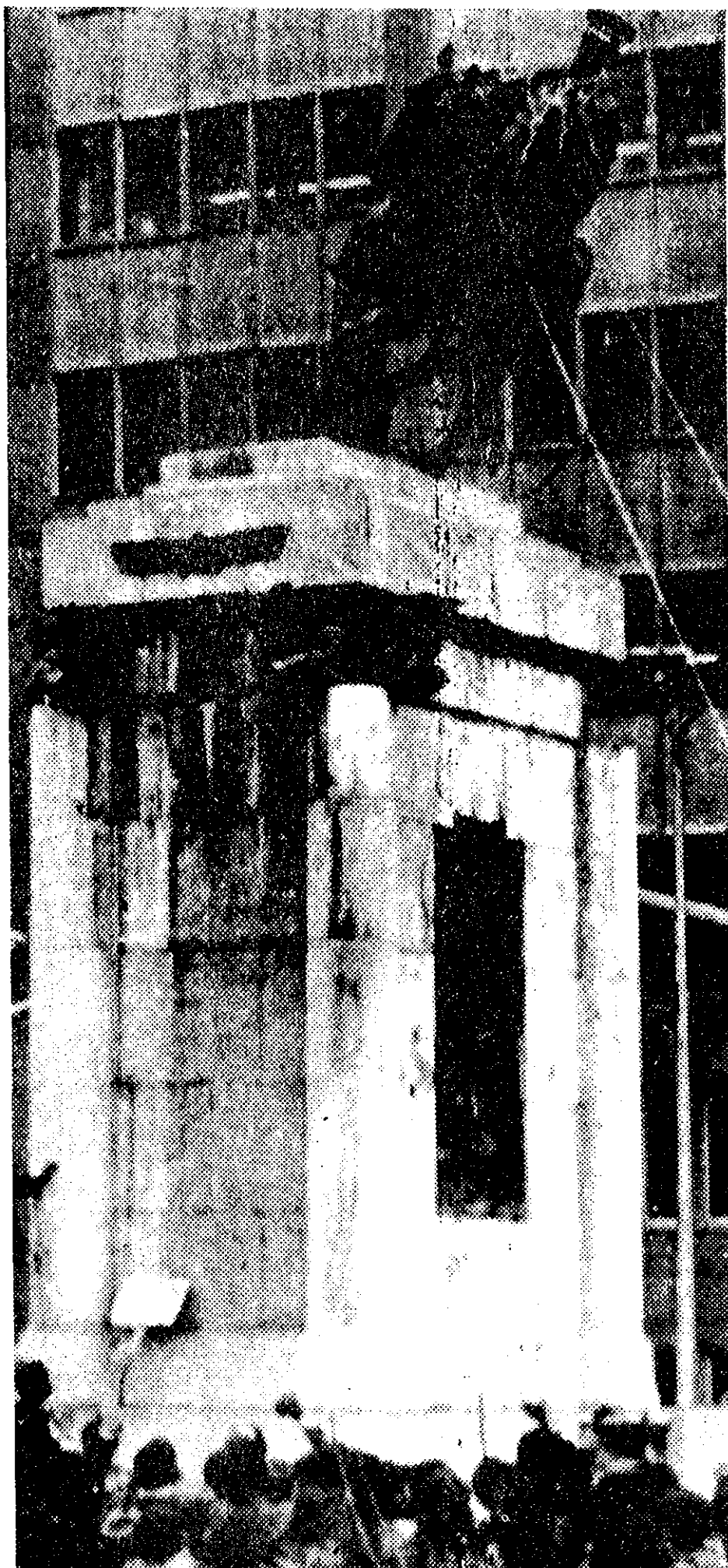
It is striking that although, *The Struggle for Socialism* stresses that "the chief enemy in each sector is the same: imperialism" (p.15), it nowhere defines what it means by imperialism.

The argument intended to prove that "the chief enemy" everywhere is "imperialism", it must first be said, proves nothing of the sort. "National liberation struggles that do not establish ties with the socialist states and the workers of the developed countries may be isolated in the face of imperialist intervention" (p. 16). "Ties with the socialist states", as the history of Communist Parties worldwide shows, are rather a curse than a blessing for workers' movements in the Third World. (Yet *SFS* refers to a counter revolutionary role for Stalinism only in the imperialist countries: p.13). In any case, why does the document only refer to "national liberation struggles"? What about independent workers' struggles in the Third World? Their first-line enemy is the local bourgeoisie — which, to be sure, is backed up by imperialism.

And in the 'socialist states'? "Workers in the bureaucratized socialist states will not win socialist democracy and may lose the gains of their revolutions if they mistakenly view imperialism as an ally rather than an enemy of their struggles". True enough: but that does not make imperialism — as opposed to the local bureaucracies — "the chief enemy". It could be said with equal truth, and with some relevance for the authors of *The Struggle for Socialism*, that: 'workers in the capitalist states will not win socialist democracy if they mistakenly view the Stalinist bureaucracies as allies rather than enemies of their struggles'.

But what of the definition of imperialism? What is this 'chief enemy'?

On page 7 we are told that imperialism is a system that rose and consolidated "around the beginning of the 20th century". It thus seems that the term imperialism is being used in Lenin's



Iran: the Shah is toppled.

sense, to refer to monopoly capitalism. (In which case the constant stress on an "anti-imperialist axis" is uncomfortably similar to the 1950s Stalinist line of an "anti-monopoly alliance", only extended to an international scale).

But then on page 13 we are told that imperialism is the system which brought colonial countries into the capitalist world market. In fact — as Marx sketched in *Capital* volume 1 — imperialism in that sense begins in the 16th century!

It would take too long to unravel the contradictory jumble of ideas that appear in *The Struggle for Socialism* under the title of imperialism. The gist of the matter is that imperialism is seen in crude 'Third-Worldist' terms as a sort of conspiracy by the richer capitalist states to prevent capitalist development in the Third World.

This perception has direct political consequences. It follows that "*the bourgeoisie of the semi-colonial countries... wishes to escape the poverty, exploitation and oppression which imperialism imposes on the underdeveloped countries...*" (p.46).

As regards the struggle for political independence, there is some truth to this. The bourgeoisies of the colonies and semi-colonies did desire political independence and did fight for it, always within the limits that they feared the working class more than they feared imperialism. It was right for the working class to ally tactically with the bourgeoisie in specific actions of the independence struggle, while always maintaining its political independence.

But that struggle for independence is — bar a few marginal cases — over. It ran its course between World War 2 and 1975. It has produced its final results: not very pretty results, given the domination that the bourgeoisie has been able to maintain, but the only results we will get. The job of socialists now is to start from the class contradictions in the new reality.

Even aside from its incompleteness and vagueness, what the Comintern said about Asia in 1922 is not suitable for direct application to the Third World today. The national revolutionary movements that were then just emerging have run their course and transformed themselves into incumbent governments. There has been 62 years' development of the working class — much of it quite rapid development.

The bourgeoisies of the Third World have escaped "*the poverty... which imperialism imposes on the underdeveloped countries*" quite adroitly. In India or Indonesia, in Mexico or Brazil, the bourgeoisie, and indeed a substantial middle class, enjoys the same living standards as the wealthy classes of the advanced capitalist countries. They profit from the "poverty which imperialism imposes".

Of course, they have their competitive conflicts with the capitalists of the more developed countries. And they are almost all verbally anti-imperialist. But there is nothing necessarily anti-imperialist in fact in their clashes with the bigger capitalist states. Or would the authors of *The*

Struggle for Socialism consider OPEC — led by the Shah of Iran and the King of Saudi Arabia — as an example of authentic anti-imperialism?

Indeed, some of the more powerful states in the Third World have emerged as 'sub-imperialisms', with their own plans for regional hegemony, their own foreign military interventions, their own multinationals and international banks, their own roles as suppliers of technology to less developed countries. Mexico in Central America, Brazil in South America, Saudi Arabia in the Middle East, and India in South Asia, are examples.

The Struggle for Socialism dismisses "*the limited industrialisation that has occurred in the underdeveloped countries*" (p.44) with the observation that it is limited to a few countries and a few industries. The same could be said about the industrialisation of Western Europe in the 19th century: but in any case the limits are constantly being surpassed. Certain Third World countries are developing a relatively wide and sophisticated range of technology — South Korea, Singapore, India, Brazil, Mexico — including heavy engineering goods and such products as computers. And almost all Third World countries show a very rapid growth of industry by historical standards. It is certainly true that poverty is growing as rapidly as industry. But the contradictions of capitalist development are not the same thing as the absence of capitalist development.

Argentina and Iran

In fact, it is one of the most developed bourgeoisies of the Third World — one which indeed on closer examination does not have a typically Third World economy at all — that *The Struggle for Socialism* chooses as its example of the 'anti-imperialist' role of the bourgeoisie. This is Argentina (p.47-8).

In the early years of this century there was a saying in France, "as rich as an Argentine". The Argentine bourgeoisie has had multinational enterprises since the 1920s, and today owns considerable interests in Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia, Uruguay, Peru, Panama and the US. The Argentine military was behind the Bolivian coup of 1980: today Argentina's civilian government helps prop up the Siles Zuazo regime which imperialism preferred to succeed the corrupt military. Argentina certainly still supplies arms to the US-backed forces in Central America, and probably (according to Argentine Christian Democrats) still supplies personnel, too.

So why should the Argentine working class "*throw itself fully into the war effort*" against Britain in 1982 behind such a bourgeoisie? Britain's war was a vile reactionary enterprise, for sure: British socialists had to insist that "the enemy is at home". But wasn't the main enemy "at home" for the Argentine workers too? What could they gain from Galtieri's mini-colonial venture? How could the success of that venture have in any way lightened the burden, or improv-

ed the conditions for struggle against, the conjoint exploitation of the Argentine workers by multinational capital and their own bourgeoisie?

For Iran, also, the approach of *The Struggle for Socialism* drives its authors into support for a reactionary war (p.51).

Socialists had to support the movement against the Shah, despite its reactionary leadership. But that is an entirely different matter from supporting or prettifying the regime now established by Khomeini.

Iranian capitalism remains fundamentally what it was under the Shah: a relatively powerful Third World capitalism, with sub-imperialist ambitions. In no way is it more progressive than Iraqi capitalism. Social reforms? The social reforms of the Khomeini regime are nowhere near as extensive as those of the 1958 revolution in Iraq — and the Saddam Hussein regime is as much the inheritor of that revolution as Khomeini is of the struggle against the Shah. Hostility to imperialism? Iraq has had hostile relations with the US for many years. It is true that the US tilts somewhat towards the Iraqi side in the present conflict, for various reasons: but it is equally true that Israel supplies weaponry to Iran. How does that fit in which the schema of an 'anti-imperialist' war?

Whose struggle for what

The method, approach and world view of *The Struggle for Socialism* thus leads it to act the attorney for some of the vilest regimes in the world. Let us put this in perspective.

Marx and Engels lived their whole lives without a revolutionary labour movement of any importance emerging in the country where they lived, the centre of world capitalism at the time, Britain. They did not, however, bow down to the facts of the moment.

From the late 19th century through to the 1920s, powerful revolutionary labour movements did exist in many countries. They were derailed, split, corrupted and bureaucratized by the conjoint work of social democracy and Stalinism.

Since then authentic Marxists have been fighting 'against the stream' again. There have, however, been sufficient glimpses of the possibilities of working-class revolutionary politics — Hungary 1956, France 1968, Portugal 1975, Poland 1980-1... — to convince us that, historically, our present isolation is only an episode.

As Trotsky put it, revolutionary impatience can easily change into opportunist impatience. Impatient with the delay in the victory of working-class socialism, many militants have instead opted to go along with the 'revolutionary process' as it is — to espouse various sorts of bureaucratic socialism. History has treated them cruelly. The loyal Stalinists of the 1950s were told brutally in 1956 that their entire activity had been based on lies and deceptions. The uncritical Castroites of the 1960s were thrown into disarray in 1968 when Castro endorsed the Peruvian military and the USSR's invasion of

Czechoslovakia. The enthusiasts of Maoism were disappointed and dispersed from the early '70s onwards, as the Chinese government multiplied its cynical deals with world capitalism.

The authors of *The Struggle for Socialism* are undecided. They know, presumably, that unless they embrace the "revolutionary leaderships" of Cuba, etc., fully — unless they dissolve themselves completely into world Stalinism — they cannot escape their status of being a small ideological group. All they can do by their applause for the 'socialist states' is to corrupt their ideology and give it a quirky twist.

At the same time they cannot bring themselves to break completely with the programme of working-class socialism. They do talk of political revolution, opposition to popular fronts, opposition to the bloc of four classes — even though, as we've seen, they empty these ideas of much of their meaning.

But the choice must be made: one side or another of the "river of blood" that

separates Stalinism and Trotskyism, one side or another of the class line that separates the working class from the Stalinist bureaucracies and the middle-class nationalists of the Third World.

The issue cannot be glossed over with lordly disdain, as where *The Struggle for Socialism* refers delicately to the Vietnamese Communist Party's "political errors and/or gross violations of Leninist norms. as in the execution of members of other tendencies... in 1945-6". Those 'other tendencies' included the Vietnamese Trotskyists — our comrades! With the victims, or with the executioners? The choice which the authors find so hard to make dominates and dogs their discussion of every question.

But does not Trotskyism have faults? Does it not need to be corrected and regenerated? Certainly it does. It is true that the Trotskyist movement has often fallen into sectarianism — though it is also true that it has equally often been opportunist. As a small, beleaguered movement, it has frequently been guilty

of dogmatism and ideological primitiveness.

But ideological regeneration can only start from a firm understanding, and a firm commitment, on the central issues that have divided the world labour movement for 60 years — not by washing away, softening, or trying to forget those divisions. Better tactical methods, free of sectarianism and opportunism, can only usefully be discussed once we are clear on the goal to be pursued by those tactical methods.

Whose struggle, for what? Ours is the struggle of the international working class for direct workers' democracy and international communism. The struggle of the Stalinist bureaucracies and the Third World bourgeoisies is a power-politics conflict with the big bourgeoisies, carried out on the backs of the working class but under the misappropriated banners of socialism and anti-imperialism. Whose struggle, for what? The authors of *The Struggle for Socialism* must choose.



Russian tanks in Czechoslovakia, 1968

For political revolution in Vietnam!

A document produced by the Vietnamese Trotskyist Group in France.

— 1 —

The Vietnamese Communist leadership is difficult to define, for it does not correspond to the norm which says that a bureaucratised leadership of Stalinist origin betrays the movement that it has the responsibility of leading. Like the Chinese and Yugoslav leaderships, it has been able to take the lead of a national liberation struggle and, through it, to seize power then install a workers' state.

— 2 —

The theoretical possibility that a Stalinist leadership could go further than it itself wanted on the road of breaking with the bourgeoisie had been envisaged in the Transitional Programme. In China, in Yugoslavia and in Vietnam, it was parties which were members of the Comintern which organised huge peasant masses militarily and politically around democratic objectives (national liberation, democratic liberties, agrarian reform).

Probably little disposed to jump through the stages and to rapidly give anti-capitalist objectives to the struggle that they were leading, they were led to do so in order to be able to conquer precisely the democratic demands that they had fixed for themselves. It was thus that three parties of Stalinist origin became the unexpected agents of that permanent revolution that they had been taught to fight against.

— 3 —

These three parties did not carry in themselves the germs of dissidence. For many years they were totally subordinated to the wishes of the Kremlin, even if their development suffered from it. The Chinese CP paid for its alignment in the '20s with an unprecedented disaster.

Tito reorganised the Yugoslav CP as from 1937 with the complete agreement of Stalin and the Comintern.

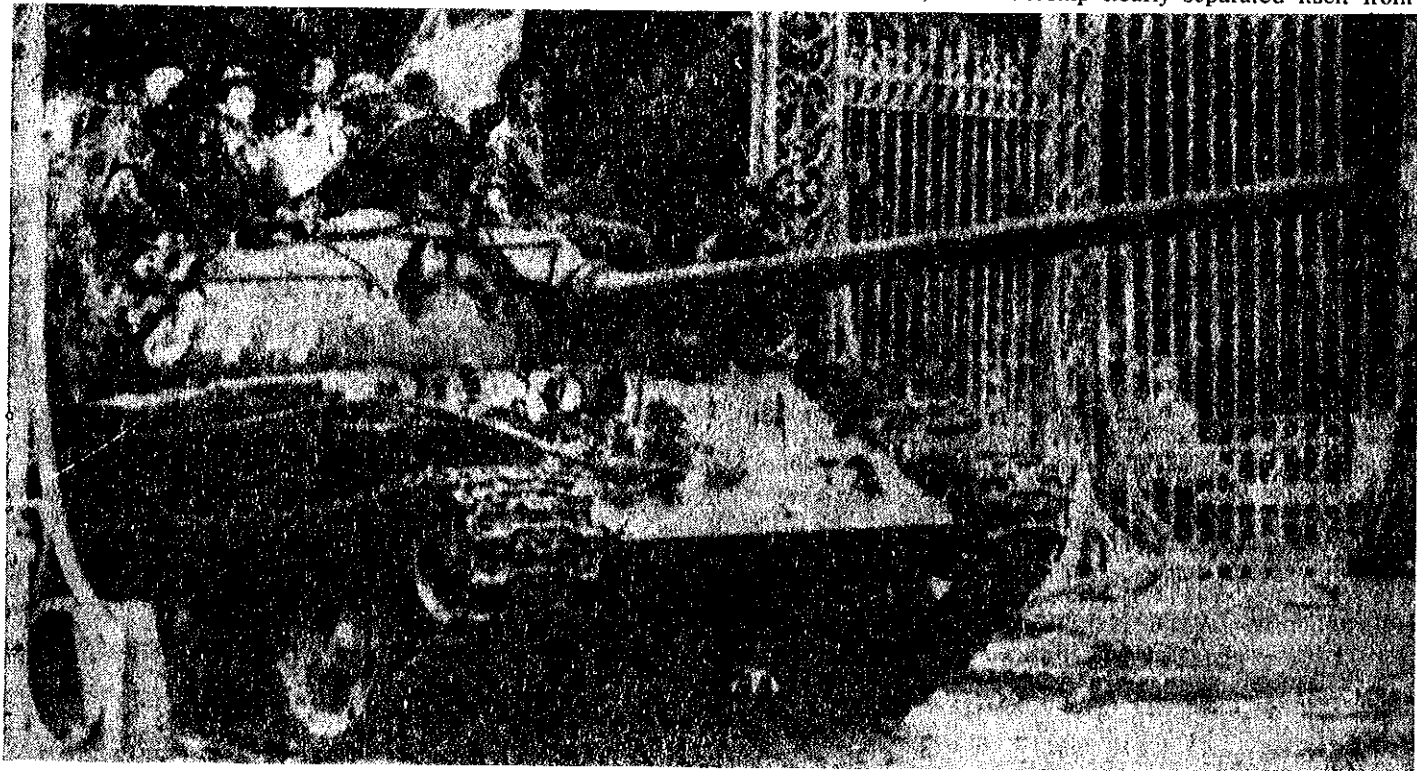
As for the Vietnamese CP, it is erroneous to present it as being relatively independent from Moscow since 1930. Like its founder, Ho Chi Minh, it has always tried to preserve its national interests without clashing with the Kremlin head-on. The episode of the united front with the Trotskyists in 1933 took place with the full agreement of the Third International and with the assistance of the French CP;

its break-up took place at the point when the Kremlin had had enough of it (even if the Trotskyists took the initiative for it).

The creation of the Viet Minh and the unleashing the armed struggle against the Japanese and the Vichyists was in the framework of the anti-fascist war. If the seizure of power in 1945 was not allowed for by the Potsdam Agreement, still this initiative of the Vietnamese CP [VCP], though not at all encouraged by Stalin, was not condemned by him either. He used it in his diplomatic dealings.

The extremely opportunist line of the VCP between 1945 and 1947 shows that in that period it quickly responded more to the counsels of moderation from the French CP and from Moscow than to the demands of the peasant movement, which it helped to dam up. The heroic struggle of the Viet Minh during the first resistance could not put the Vietnamese leadership in opposition to Stalin at a time when the cold war was going full blast. By signing and respecting the Geneva Accords of 1954, Ho Chi Minh and his comrades showed that the 'friendly pressure' of the Soviet (and Chinese) big brothers still had force of law for them.

It was only after the 20th Congress of the CPSU and the unleashing of the Sino-Soviet conflict that the Vietnamese leadership clearly separated itself from



Moscow and acquired an independent position, which it has preserved.

— 4 —

The Vietnamese communist leadership has often acted in an empirical fashion, but it is not possible to present it as a passive leadership, tossed around by events and restricting itself to reflecting the rise of the mass movement.

This rise did not exist in 1941 when a few dozen persecuted militants took the decision to go over to armed struggle; it did not exist in the 1960s, either, when the North was smashed by bombing and the South was strangled by the American army and the police and mercenaries of Thieu.

For the Vietnamese people to hold firm and win, it had to be led by a bitterly determined party, disciplined and linked to the masses.

In this respect, the VCP is differentiated from almost all its homologues, which have only been able to lead struggles to defeat. It owes this, to be sure, to the quality of the cadres that it has been able to form, to their revolutionary heroism, but above all to the fact that it found itself in the situation of being the bearer of the national aspirations of a whole people, the national bourgeoisie and its political formations having defaulted.

The triumph of the Yugoslav Communists is explained in the same way.

— 5 —

To define the Vietnamese leadership as 'empirical revolutionaries' is insufficient, and could generate illusions.

'Empirical revolutionaries' can educate themselves and eventually link up with revolutionary Marxism on the basis of their practical experience, their reading and their discussion. Such was the possible evolution of the Cuban leadership before the counterweight of massive Soviet aid intervened. Nothing like that can be envisaged for the Lao Dong [VCP], or for that matter for the comrades of Tito or of Mao.

Empiricism is a natural secretion of Stalinism, for which theory only serves to justify the past. But the empiricism of the VCP manifested itself within a strategy for the seizure of power which had been worked out for a long time. Although it allowed for the most risky and dubious tactical zig-zags, the continuity of the general line of these parties cannot be denied: to take the lead of the national liberation movement, to take power, and to install a regime taking its inspiration from the USSR and Red China.

To attain its objectives, the VCP showed an implacable revolutionary will and a constant concern to obtain the assistance of the 'socialist camp'.

It always knew how to manoeuvre so as not to abandon its objectives, without inconveniencing the Kremlin. It managed to do this right up to the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956.

The Yugoslav experience is quite comparable. A leadership chosen by Moscow took the lead of a worker and peasant

uprising to drive out the Nazi invader. The necessities of the struggle led it to politicise the movement — creation of proletarian brigades, use of the red star symbol, local organs of power, etc.

Much more than in Vietnam, the Soviets multiplied their warnings, advice, and reproofs. Then they bowed to the accomplished fact, and the heroic Yugoslav CP, once it had taken power, hurried to install a People's Republic inspired by the Soviet model (which did not correspond to Stalin's policy). It is well known that, although it was the only country of the buffer zone not liberated by the Red Army, Yugoslavia was also the only one which carried through the decisive overthrows making it a deformed workers' state as early as 1945.

The same could be said of the Chinese CP, which managed never directly to confront Stalin, while still pursuing its objective: to take power by military defeat of the Kuomintang. It reckoned, correctly, that a victory is always forgiven.

— 6 —

The Vietnamese Communist Party can be characterised today as a bureaucratized workers' party. Its ideology and its organisation come directly from Stalinism. It is ruled by bureaucratic centralism, and political discussions only take place at the highest level, in the Politbureau. The lower levels have no role beyond discussing the application of the line.

The education given to the militants has only a remote relation to a Marxist education which would aim to develop knowledge and critical awareness: essentially they study the editorials of the party paper, the speeches of the party leaders, and some chosen extracts from Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. Obedience and loyalty to the party are the cardinal virtues of the militant.

However, the relations which the leadership has with the masses differentiate the VCP profoundly from almost all the other CPs in power, and put it close to the Chinese CP.

The Lao Dong [party] rules by paternalist manipulation and control of the masses, and not by terror. This does not exclude the perfection of the police apparatus, and the impossibility of the slightest political opposition, but the VCP prefers to act through imposed consent rather than by brutal repression.

The aim is that the line worked out by the Politbureau should appear as the only correct line, and that every Vietnamese should apply it without even imagining that other solutions might be possible without being counter-revolutionary. The means are strict control of information, permanent and compulsory indoctrination (lectures, loudspeakers in the streets, multiple meetings, etc.), and the close linking of the cadres with the population.

The Vietnamese bureaucracy is defined less by the size of the material privileges that it disposes of than by its belonging to a rigorously codified, uncontrollable hierarchy, which has a mono-

poly of powers of decision. In this sense, it can be said that since the seizure of power there has been constituted, as in Yugoslavia, a bureaucratic layer whose material and social advantages depend on the hazards of the economic situation.

Its appearance has, to be sure, been very much favoured by what is called the objective circumstances (economic and cultural backwardness, shortage of cadres, isolation, etc.) but the decisive factor explaining the rapidity and the inevitability of the bureaucratisation was the deliberate will of the VCP to organise the party and the state on the inspiration only of the Soviet and Chinese experiences.

The privileges which the Vietnamese political cadres dispose of are rigorously copied from those granted to their counterparts in the other bureaucratized workers' states: special shops always supplied at official prices, official cars with chauffeurs, free holidays, reserved hospitals, trips abroad, lodgings with cooks (for the higher cadres), salaries depending on the party hierarchy, advantageous food cards, free medicines, political conference with expenses paid, etc.

In absolute value, these privileges would be disdained by a Soviet or Rumanian party secretary, but their existence alone is of enormous significance: there exists no mechanism to prevent them growing in proportion as the economy of the country is reconstituted, and it is again them that the political opposition that they will have given birth to will eventually crystallise.

— 7 —

To continue to see in Vietnam only a 'bureaucratic layer in process of formation' is insufficient. The experience of the Russian, Yugoslav and Chinese revolutions shows that in the absence of a clear awareness of the bureaucratic danger, a leadership in power rapidly becomes gangrenous. The defence of its power and of all the advantages (of every type) connected with it, becomes its principal motive.

The Vietnamese party has not even had an opposition capable of sounding the alarm, as took place in the Bolshevik party. Right from 1945, Ho Chi Minh and his comrades set about implacably applying the Stalinist devices which the USSR acquired only after an intense political battle: de facto one-party system, ideological monolithism, fusion of the party and the state, liquidation of opponents, official privileges, etc.

It can be said that the Vietnamese workers' state was born bureaucratically deformed and that it had no internal possibility of preventing the evolution towards bureaucratic degeneration. The sincerity and the revolutionary ardour of Ho Chi Minh, of Tito, and of Mao, are not put into question by this analysis: only, their integration into the world of Stalinism led them to install mechanisms which must inevitably transform the leading layer into a privileged and omnipot-

ent bureaucratic caste.

This phenomenon of the bureaucratisation of the leading layer of the party, once it is directing the state, had been well observed by Rakovsky in his pamphlet written in 1928, 'The Professional Dangers of Power'. He showed how the bureaucracy is born, starting from the fraction of the working class which exercises power: the differentiation is at first functional, and then becomes social when institutionalised advantages accompany the official positions.

It should be noted that Trotsky himself had to revise with a critical eye the assessment he had given of the Soviet bureaucracy of the 1920s. In 1935, he wrote for the first time that the bureaucracy could celebrate the tenth anniversary of Thermidor, that is, of its seizure of political power, displacing the proletariat. The necessary conclusion from this is that the problem of the violent overthrow of this bureaucracy was posed historically as from 1925 even if for tactical reasons it was not possible to pose it at that time to the Soviet proletariat.

When Trotsky came to consider that one year after the death of Lenin the bureaucracy already formed a caste with interests opposed to those of the proletariat, it is difficult to see how 30 years after the seizure of power by a leadership unaware of the dangers of bureaucratisation the appearance of such a layer could have been avoided in Vietnam.

The fact that the VCP has successfully led a revolutionary struggle does not contradict this assertion.

Like bourgeois democracies or fascist regimes, the workers' bureaucracies of Stalinist origin are not at all identical, even if they are genetically similar. To believe that a bureaucratic caste can only be cowardly and capitulatory is a blinkered view, and besides contradicted by the experience of the CPSU during the Second World War when it was fighting for its survival.

As from 1945, the Hanoi leaders knew that they could only triumph by making themselves the heroes of the liberation of all Vietnam. There was a tendency struggle in the apparatus at the end of the 1950s against the 'Khrushchevites' who wanted to abandon the south so as to build socialism in half a country alone,

but the majority came down in favour of resolute aid to the militants in the south.

It was precisely at that moment that the Vietnamese leadership clearly abandoned the Soviet fold to defend itself. As a workers' bureaucracy conscious of its fundamental interests, it knew that it would have an autonomous and stable existence only at the head of a reunified Vietnamese state: it was impossible for it to accept an American base on its doorstep, enslaving its compatriots and depriving it of the richest part of the country.

This is how the stubbornness of the VCP and its refusal to bow down before the American genocide is explained.

We can be certain that it will put the same determination into organising the reconstruction of the country. That will not be sufficient to secure the building of a socialist society in Vietnam.

North Korea was probably even more devastated. Pyongyang, the capital, had only two buildings intact, while Hanoi has not been destroyed. In Korea there was not a town, not a village, not a school, not a hospital, not a building that had not been totally smashed. And despite that, under the leadership of the Korean CP and its 'great leader', everything was rapidly reconstructed.

Who could claim that the regime of Kim Il Sung, with its nepotism, its bureaucracy, its stifling Stalinist ideology, has anything to do with a socialist democracy? It is however a workers' state whose infrastructure explains the economic and social progress.

It remains a fact that the Vietnamese leadership could on several occasions have capitulated to French or American imperialism, and it didn't. Even if it has never directly confronted Stalin or his successors, it has always known how to defend its interests before those of the Kremlin, while obliging the latter to come to its help: in this sense it is not a matter of a Stalinist leadership (and the type of relations that it has with the masses confirms this).

But if it is not Stalinist, it is nonetheless totally bureaucratized.

— 8 —

Foreign policy is always at the service of internal policy. While it was struggling

to drive out the Yankees, the VCP symbolised resistance to imperialism, and its attitude in face of American arrogance and duplicity was often exemplary. It showed that it was not necessary to possess computers and atom bombs to triumph in a revolutionary war, even if the use of rockets and modern armaments was shown to be indispensable.

Its example galvanised millions of people world-wide, and it can justly be considered as the godfather of the French May 1968 and of the revival of the far left in America, in Europe and in Japan.

But at the height of its struggle, the internationalism of the VCP was shown to be singularly narrow. A prisoner of the theory of socialism in one country, it always considered that its liberation struggle could fulfill all its internationalist duties. When the interests of a given working class entered into contradiction with what the Vietnamese leadership considered as important for itself, internationalism was brushed aside: it supported the repression in Ceylon and the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia. Less sectarian and more realistic than others, the VCP accepted all sorts of assistance (including from Trotskyists) to win. Victory once acquired, it becomes clear that it is being selective about its friends.

The fact is that the VCP does not have a principled attitude in relation to the world workers' movement: for it, only the official CPs represent 'the interests of the working class', and officially the VCP will do all it can to hush up the disagreements it has with them (for example with the French CP during the two Indochina wars).

Since the dispute with the USA is still acute, the Vietnamese leadership speaks in firm tones in relation to the former aggressors. The recent example of China suggests, however, that a damper will be put on when the USA, after the presidential elections, agrees to give economic aid, to re-establish diplomatic relations, and to let Vietnam enter the UN.

The opportunism of Vietnamese diplomacy is shown clearly in its support for the reactionary and repressive regimes of Ceylon and of India, not to speak of the windy rhetoric of Pham Van Dong about the 'non-aligned' countries. Its attitude towards the Thai regime is currently hardening, but this is due to the recent anti-communist coup d'état, which brutally interrupted a normalisation of relations which was well under way.

— 9 —

The Vietnamese leadership has two major preoccupations.

- To find varied foreign economic aid from workers' states and developed capitalist countries, so as to be able to preserve an independent position;

- Internally, to put to work a population which is physically and morally exhausted by the war, with a lack of technically competent cadres.

To achieve this without really giving the masses a chance to speak, the lead-

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ing bureaucratic layer is throwing itself into a more and more frenzied nationalism. The national glorification to which all the Vietnamese publications apply themselves no longer has anything to do with the reawakening of a people whose past and whose customs were long scoffed at: we have a Communist Party praising the kings and emperors who used to rule through the chances of factional struggle, we have 'Marxists' celebrating national virtues (warlike ardour, endurance, the high culture of its ancestors) and make their deceased president into a demigod whom people will come to adore in his mausoleum.

The construction of this ruinous mausoleum in a period of poverty says a lot about the 'post-mortem Bonapartist' role that the Vietnamese leadership wants to have the corpse of Ho Chi Minh play.

In face of the nationalist turning-inwards of the Vietnamese and Cambodjan, it is high time to relaunch the old slogan, 'Long live the socialist federation of the countries of Indochina!'

— 10 —

The current evolution of South Vietnam is repeating past experiences under our eyes.

Despite the lack of information available, there is no doubt that we are seeing there the development of a workers' state already carrying all the deformations which leave no chance of socialist democracy.

To be sure, there have been no defeats of the masses, while Stalin's victory was explained in the last analysis by the setbacks of the world revolution and the demoralisation of the Soviet workers. But beware of mythology. The Vietnamese people was bled white by the war. It must be imagined what thirty years of uninterrupted violence mean — the fantastic number of dwellings destroyed, families decimated and scattered, children maimed. The immediate demand is for a better life and for tranquillity.

Contrary to the clichés of official propaganda, the masses of South Vietnam did not rise up massively to destroy the Thieu regime — neither in the towns, nor in the countryside.

The victory was military-political: the army of the DRV [the North], supported by partisans (very much a minority in the towns) was the essential instrument. It smashed a rotten regime, half abandoned by its American protectors, while benefiting from the tacit support of a part of the population wearied by the war and the corruption.

Because of all these circumstances, the thousands of cadres that Hanoi has sent south to reorganise the country will have had little difficulty in establishing themselves. The liberation of the south was not even accompanied by the emergence of the workers' councils which could be observed in Germany, in Poland and in Czechoslovakia when the liberating Red Army advanced in 1944.

The committees of liberation were all set up and carefully controlled: the VCP does not like improvisation, especially

when it might lead the masses to act in an autonomous fashion.

The recent legislative elections, whose conduct and results (99%) recall the high points of Stalinism, may open the eyes of those who still hoped things were better.

— 11 —

Should we lose all hope? How to understand that a people which has given the world such a lesson of courage, of revolutionary ardour and of original initiatives, can be satisfied with a regime that gives it no free speech?

China and Yugoslavia are there to show us that in a country where the peasantry constitutes the overwhelming majority of the population, if the revolutionary party ignores the problem of bureaucratisation, the working class is incapable of opposing the degeneration of the victorious party.

Its leadership, despite its record of prisons, torture and exile, transforms itself into a privileged and uncontrolled caste.

It has the power and it will not abandon it. Its prestige due to the victory and to the gains of the revolution, and the immense exhaustion of the Vietnamese people, will give it a respite of several years.

But after that? Young people will come into political life who consider independence and the collectivisation of the means of production as an established fact. The aura of old combatants will not be able to mask the reality of the privileges and the mediocrity of intellectual life.

It will no longer be possible to black out news and to prevent the penetration of new ideas (new for Vietnam):

- the right for several workers' parties to coexist;
- right of tendency in the Communist Party;
- independence of the trade unions;
- democratic administration of the state by a pyramid of councils starting from rank and file level;
- freedom of the press;
- suppression of the privileges of the members of the party and of the state apparatus.

It is of course impossible to foresee what concrete forms the clashes between the masses and the ruling bureaucracy will take. All that can be said now is that Vietnam will not see the birth of a socialist democracy without the ruling layer, its bureaucratic structures and its party being overthrown by force. This is what the Trotskyist movement has always called a political revolution.

To say this does not mean rejecting all the cadres of the VCP. It is very unlikely that they will take the initiative, but it is certain that a mass upsurge against the bureaucrats will bring divisions in their midst. In Hungary, in Poland and in Czechoslovakia, the great majority of the cadres went over to the side of the revolution: many from fear or from calculation, others because the workers' pressure made them rediscover the revolutionary tradition. In those three cases

only the brutal intervention of the Kremlin enabled the process of political revolution to be blocked and bureaucratic power to be fully restored.

In China, it was on the occasion of a struggle for power between bureaucratic factions that the first phase of the political revolution was unleashed. Taking Mao's directives to the letter, the Red Guards wanted to go much further than the Great Helmsman wanted. He had the army put out the fire which he himself had lighted.

But, as in Eastern Europe, repression cannot bring the old status quo back. The subversive ideas of workers' democracy, of freedom of expression, of suppression of privileges, have seized millions of people, and only wait for the next chance to show their strength.

In Vietnam, the political revolution is only at the stage of its first stammered words. The task of the Fourth International is however to prepare so that it can be carried out in the best conditions for the workers and peasants: that is, so that a vanguard will have understood what the problems to be resolved are and what forces to base itself on.

While continuing to demonstrate militant solidarity with the DRV when imperialism threatens it, we must leave no illusions on the nature of its leadership.

Given the impossibility of carrying out militant activity in Vietnam at the present time (the political-police infrastructure would annihilate it in record time), the International should use to the maximum the comrades of the Vietnamese Trotskyist Group in France to publish papers, pamphlets and books which, distributed among Vietnamese emigrés, will certainly reach the country.

It is not true that serious, well-argued and responsible Trotskyist analysis can find no response in Vietnam.

The incessant campaigns against the corruption of the cadres and against the incompetence of the bureaucrats which are launched by the Lao Dong [party] testify in their own way to a certain unease at the top of the hierarchy about the risk of a breach between the cadres and the population.

Besides, hundreds of militants educated in France by the Fourth International have returned to Vietnam since 1947 and have done their duty during the revolution. Doubtless some of them will become conscious anti-bureaucratic militants as soon as their isolation ends.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that the dissident communist intellectuals of 1956-7 (grouped around Nhan Van) are still there. They have experienced in their own bones the Stalinist methods used by the ruling bureaucracy to smear and crush them at the same time as their Hungarian and Chinese colleagues were liquidated.

To make revolutionary Marxist ideas penetrate into Vietnam is a long-term job, full of difficulties.

But we have to begin at the beginning. Marxism and Leninism have to be rediscovered in Vietnam. Only the Fourth International is capable of carrying out this task.

Sandinism and permanent revolution

In a series of articles beginning in 1981 the leadership of the Socialist Workers' Party (USA) has explicitly repudiated the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution.

This has been expressed through a historical debate on the analysis of the Russian revolution.

In International Socialist Review (the magazine supplement to the SWP's paper 'Militant') of November 1981, Doug Jenness presents a review of the different perspectives in the Russian revolution. He omits all mention of Trotsky's perspective, and argues only the accuracy of Lenin's view of the dynamics of the Russian Revolution against the Mensheviks.

In ISR April 1982 Ernest Mandel points out the existence of Trotsky's perspective — and argues that it was vindicated against the others in the 1917 Revolution. In short, he repeats the traditional arguments current in the Trotskyist movement for over 50 years.

Jenness's reply (ISR June 1982) is startling.

Trotsky's pre-1917 strategy, insofar as it differed from the Bolsheviks, was wrong... It was a centrist amalgamation of the positions of the two principal trends. It underestimated the role of the peasantry.

The real significance of this debate, so I shall argue, is in relation to the SWP's current orientation towards Cuba, Nicaragua, etc.

But first let us examine the terms of the debate on Russian history.



Permanent revolution in Russia

All the Marxists in Tsarist Russia, from the earliest days of their movement, agreed that the principal immediate issues of struggle were those of the bourgeois-democratic revolution: breaking the feudal hold of the landlords over the peasants; replacing the arbitrary rule of the Tsar by a democratically elected assembly which would draft a constitution; self-determination for the oppressed nationalities of the Tsarist empire; legal equality for women; the eight-hour day and other reforms for the working class. There was no question of leaping over the struggle on these issues to some sort of peasant socialism.

In the early years of the 20th century, and most sharply from 1905, a division developed among the Russian Marxists on strategy for this bourgeois-democratic revolution.

The moderate Menshevik wing saw the question most schematically. Because the

coming revolution was bourgeois-democratic, it must be led by the bourgeoisie. The task of the socialists was to nudge and pressurise the bourgeoisie into fulfilling its role, at the same time remaining a party of opposition through the whole affair and defending the immediate interests of the working class.

The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, insisted on a more active role for the working class. The French bourgeois-democratic revolution of 1789-99, they pointed out, had owed its radical sweep not to the bourgeoisie but to the small craftsmen and other working people of Paris. The Russian working class should be directed not to pressurising the bourgeoisie but to an alliance with the peasantry.

The peasantry was bourgeois in its nature and aspirations — it wanted a piece of land as private property for each peasant family, not collective ownership of the means of production. But the peas-

ants' 'bourgeois democracy' was quite different from the 'bourgeois democracy' of the factory owners, the lawyers, and the professors.

The Marxists should fight for a provisional revolutionary government based on an alliance of the working class and peasantry. This provisional revolutionary government would sweep away medieval-type Tsarist institutions in the most radical democratic way possible — in contrast to the slow, moderate, limited, bureaucratic modernisation of Russian society preferred by the bourgeoisie.

The provisional revolutionary government could only go as far as bourgeois-democratic revolution — the backwardness of the peasantry made any more impossible. But the working class would immediately *begin* the struggle for the next stage — the socialist revolution.

Lenin called this provisional revolutionary government the 'democratic dictator-

ship of the proletariat and peasantry'. He stressed that the democratic revolution in Russia would give an impulse to the socialist revolution in Europe, and in turn would depend on the socialist revolution in Europe for the possibility of its radical victory.

Trotsky took the logic of the Bolsheviks' arguments further. The peasantry was, to be sure, the biggest mass force of the revolution. Yet as a dispersed, scattered class it could have no independent programme. It would either follow the bourgeoisie or follow the working class. Revolutionary victory presupposed that the working class had managed to gain the leadership of the bulk of the peasantry. But then the revolutionary government would not be an equal coalition, but the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasantry.

The working class in power could not restrict itself to a purely bourgeois-democratic programme. Against the sabotage of the capitalists it would have to proceed to socialist measures. Having liberated the whole of the peasantry from the landlords' domination, it would then carry the class struggle among the peasantry.

The 'two stages' would thus be intertwined. It was not a question of completing the democratic revolution and then proceeding as quickly as possible to the socialist revolution, but of *both* revolutions being realised by the working class in power.

After 1928 Trotsky generalised the theory as follows. Backward capitalist countries in the modern integrated capitalist world *combine* the beginnings of modern industry and an industrial working class with old, semi-feudal economic, social and political relations, especially on the land.

Democracy, land reform, national liberation, are the main issues of struggle in these countries. According to the theoretical norm of capitalist development, these are the issues of the bourgeois revolution against feudalism. But the weak bourgeoisies in the backward countries, closely tied to the landlords and to imperialism, will lead no consistent struggle on these issues.

The working class can lead the struggle for democracy, and on that basis form an alliance with the peasantry against the bourgeoisie. Indeed, it must do so, if there is to be any thorough democratic revolution. Otherwise:

"the struggle for national liberation will produce only very partial results, results directed entirely against the working masses" ('The Permanent Revolution').

"At a certain stage in the mobilisation of the masses under the slogans of revolutionary democracy, soviets can and should arise... Sooner or later, the soviets should overthrow bourgeois democracy. Only they are capable of bringing the democratic revolution to a conclusion and likewise opening an era of socialist revolution" ('The Transitional Programme').

The fight by the working class to take

power, with the support of the peasantry, can and must combine the democratic revolution and the socialist revolution. The concrete interrelation of democratic

From bowdlerisation to disavowal

The theory of permanent revolution has long been considerably debased in the post-war Trotskyist movement. From a programme of action by the working class, it is transformed into a description of an objective process, whereby any revolution in a backward country is bound to 'grow over' into a socialist revolution. From a theory requiring a concrete analysis of each concrete situation, it is transformed into a mechanically-applied schema.

The theory was originally formulated in polemic against some socialists (the Mensheviks) who held rigidly to a schema whereby the democratic revolution in backward Russia must be made in the 'normal' way by a 'normal' democratic bourgeoisie. *"Always and everywhere"*, Trotsky points out (1919 Preface to 'Results and Prospects'),

"the Mensheviks strove to find signs of the development of bourgeois democracy, and where they could not find them they invented them. They exaggerated the importance of every 'democratic' declaration and demonstration..."

Permanent revolution has now been transformed by some Trotskyists into a schema equally rigid, which leads them to exaggerate and hang on every 'proletarian' declaration and demonstration by the Stalinist or other petty-bourgeois forces at the head of what they dub an objective process of permanent revolution.

Nonetheless the SWP's formal repudiation is significant. Permanent revolution, like many other basic Trotskyist concepts, has been stretched out of shape by many attempts of the USFI current to reconcile the basic concepts with the desire to be in tune with the so-called revolutionary process. Yet the formal adherence — which is not purely formal, inasmuch as the USFI comrades sincerely believe the stretching to be a serious attempt to update theory — imposes certain limits to capitulation. If the desire to be in tune with a revolutionary process led by anti-Trotskyists overwhelms the formal adherence — and that is what seems to have happened with the SWP — then a limit has been removed. And the pressures that removed that limit can push the SWP a long way further.

As a debate on the history of the Russian Revolution and Russian Marxism, this dispute is perhaps interesting but not crucial. Its importance flows from its relation to current struggles — from the fact that Jenness and Mandel are in fact arguing, in 'coded' terms, about strategy for those struggles.

First, however, the debate should be dealt with on its own terms.

What about Jenness's charge that Trotsky underestimated the peasantry?

demands and socialist struggle in each country will, Trotsky stresses, depend on the specific conditions of the country.

In some articles he did express doubt about the revolutionary potential of the peasantry *as a whole*, focusing instead on the landless poor peasants as the revolutionary factor. (See 'The Permanent Revolution' p.48). This could have led to sectarianism towards the peasant struggle. *In fact it did not*. The crucial step for the worker-peasant alliance of 1917 — the Bolsheviks' adoption of the agrarian programme of the party with most support among the peasants, the 'Social Revolutionaries' — received Trotsky's full support. On the fundamental issue of orientation to the peasantry rather than to the liberal bourgeoisie, Trotsky was with the Bolsheviks throughout. And it was not just a matter of opinions on paper. Trotsky it was who organised and led to victory the mainly peasant Red Army.

The other main point of Jenness's argument is that the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' perspective was not refuted, but confirmed, by the 1917 revolution. Jenness in fact overdoes his argument, asserting that the 'democratic dictatorship' was realised *twice* — once by the February Revolution and once by the October Revolution! Then the dictatorship of the proletariat — the real proletarian revolution — was not until autumn 1918.

As Trotsky put it in relation to a similar argument,

"then it follows that two democratic revolutions were 'realised' in Russia. This is too much, all the more since the second is separated from the first by an armed uprising of the proletariat" ('The Permanent Revolution' p.105).

Jenness's argument is buttressed by point-scoring over incidental matters in Mandel's article, and by a great show of quotations from Lenin.

To get into a scholastic dispute on quotations is useless, especially with quotations from Lenin, who was fond of expressing himself in paradoxical and 'overstated' ways. What needs to be said on the quotations was said by Trotsky in 'The Permanent Revolution' (chapter 5). The essential point is that as from April 1917 Lenin dumped the slogan of the 'democratic dictatorship' and instead steered towards a 'state of the Paris Commune type' — i.e. a workers' state.

Lenin

He explained himself as follows in the April Theses.

"A new and different task now faces us: to effect a split within the soviets between the proletarian elements [the anti-defencist, internationalist, 'Communist' elements, who stand for a transition to the commune] and the small-

proprietor or petty-bourgeois elements [Chkheidze, Tsereteli, Steklov, the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the other revolutionary defencists, who are opposed to moving towards the commune and are in favour of 'supporting' the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois government].

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

A Marxist must not abandon the ground of careful analysis of class relations. The bourgeoisie is in power. But is not the mass of the peasants also a bourgeoisie, only of a different social stratum, of a different kind, of a different character? Whence does it follow that this stratum cannot come to power, thus 'completing' the bourgeois-democratic revolution? Why should this be impossible?

This is how the old Bolsheviks often argue.

My reply is that it is quite possible. But, in assessing a given situation, a Marxist must proceed not from what is possible, but from what is real.

And the reality reveals the fact that freely elected soldiers' and peasants' deputies are freely joining the second, parallel government, and are freely supplementing, developing and completing it. And, just as freely, they are surrendering power to the bourgeoisie — a fact which does not in the least 'contravene' the theory of Marxism, for we have always known and repeatedly pointed out that the bourgeoisie maintains itself in power not only by force but also by virtue of the lack of class-consciousness and organisation, the routinism and downtrodden state of the masses.

In view of this present-day reality, it is simply ridiculous to turn one's back on the fact and talk about 'possibilities'.

Possibly the peasantry may seize all the land and all the power. Far from forgetting this possibility, far from confining myself to the present, I definitely and clearly formulate the agrarian programme, taking into account the new phenomenon, i.e. the deeper cleavage between the agricultural labourers and the poor peasants on the one hand, and the peasant proprietors on the other.

But there is also another possibility; it is possible that the peasants will take the advice of the petty-bourgeois party of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, which has yielded to the influence of the bourgeoisie, has adopted a defencist stand, and which advises waiting for the Constituent Assembly, although not even the date of its convocation has yet been fixed.

It is possible that the peasants will maintain and prolong their deal with the bourgeoisie, a deal which they have now concluded through the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies not only in form, but in fact.

Many things are possible. It would be

a great mistake to forget the agrarian movement and the agrarian programme. But it would be no less a mistake to forget the reality, which reveals the fact that an agreement, or — to use a more exact, less legal, but more class-economic term — class collaboration exists between the bourgeoisie and the peasantry.

When this fact ceases to be a fact, when the peasantry separates from the bourgeoisie, seizes the land and power despite the bourgeoisie, that will be a new stage in the bourgeois-democratic revolution; and that matter will be dealt with separately.

A Marxist who, in view of the possibility of such a future stage, were to forget his duties in the present, when the peasantry is in agreement with the bourgeoisie, would turn petty bourgeois. For he would in practice be preaching to the proletariat confidence in the petty bourgeoisie [this petty bourgeoisie, this peasantry, must separate from the bourgeoisie while the bourgeois-democratic revolution is still on]. Because of the 'possibility' of so pleasing and sweet a future, in which the peasantry would not be the tail of the bourgeoisie, in which the Socialist-Revolutionaries, the Chkheidzes, Tseretelis, and Steklovs would not be an appendage of the bourgeois government — because of the 'possibility' of so pleasing a future, he would be forgetting the unpleasant present, in which the peasantry still forms the tail of the bourgeoisie, and in which the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Social-Democrats have not yet given up their role as an appendage of the bourgeois government, as 'His Majesty' Lvov's Opposition.

This hypothetical person would resemble a sweetish Louis Blanc, or a sugary Kautskyite, but certainly not a revolutionary Marxist.

(Louis Blanc was a reformist socialist active in the 1848 revolution in France. Karl Kautsky was known in the socialist movement before 1914 as 'the Pope of Marxism', but used his theoretical skills to cover opportunism with 'orthodoxy'. He took an equivocal position in World War 1).

i.e. to wait around for the peasantry to be ready to accomplish the 'democratic dictatorship' in the form foreseen by the Bolsheviks was to evade real tasks for the sake of a formula. The Marxists must map out a line of struggle for the working class — against the bourgeoisie — and then 'patiently explain' it (to use Lenin's phrase) in the Soviets, aiming to win over the peasants and soldiers.

One quotation by Jenness from Trotsky needs nailing before we proceed to the substance of the events of 1917.

"Only towards the autumn of 1918..." Jenness quotes Trotsky as asserting, "can one speak of the inception of a real dictatorship of the proletariat". Before then — i.e. before the major nationalisations were carried through — the Russian revolutionary regime was, Jenness argues, a 'democratic dictatorship'.

The quotation is ripped out of context from a 1933 article, 'The Class Nature of the Soviet State'. Trotsky was polemicis-

ing against those argued that the Stalinist USSR was no longer a workers' state, even degenerated. Such people, he wrote, only recognise a workers' state in an ideal, 'normal' form. They "often reach the conclusion that a 'real' dictatorship [of the proletariat], that is, one that conforms to their ideal norms, existed only in the day of the Paris Commune, or during the first period of the October Revolution..."

Trotsky replies that even these 'ideal' examples are not ideal: for example, the dictatorship of the proletariat departed from the norm up to autumn 1918 because the major nationalisations had not been carried out. The term 'real dictatorship of the proletariat' is used ironically — indeed, the conclusion of this passage is:

"To these gentlemen the dictatorship of the proletariat is simply an imponderable concept, an ideal norm not to be realised upon our sinful planet".

So much for quotations. The rational core of Jenness's argument, however, seems to be the following. The Soviets, representing an alliance of workers and peasants (and soldiers — peasants in uniform), were nothing other than the 'democratic dictatorship'. Between February and October they were a sort of parallel government. In October the 'democratic dictatorship' took power. It was transformed into a workers' state only by the class struggle in the countryside and the nationalisations in 1918.

But the soviets were not the 'democratic dictatorship' (despite any number of quotations from Lenin in early 1917 — not later — saying that they were). The February Revolution was, as Trotsky put it,

"the maximum of democratic revolution that could be realised as an independent stage"

i.e. a miserable half- or quarter-revolution. The soviets then, under Menshevik and SR leadership, were no dictatorship but the means by which the power of the workers and peasants was channelled to prop up the bourgeoisie.

The Bolsheviks set themselves the task of organising the revolutionary workers' opposition to the bourgeois provisional government and rallying the peasants round it. When they succeeded in doing this, and thus in convincing the soviets that they must stop propping up the bourgeoisie and take power themselves, the soviets became a dictatorship — but the dictatorship of the proletariat (supported by the peasantry).

The October Revolution was made by the working class. The new soviet power was led by the Bolsheviks, a working-class party. It had been agitated for by the Bolsheviks on the basis of democratic demands, to be sure, but also on the basis of slogans of workers' control, nationalisation of the banks, and nationalisation of the big monopolies. For years the Bolsheviks had put forward as one of the main tasks of the 'democratic dictatorship' the convening of a Constituent Assembly; the new soviet power dissolved the Constituent

Assembly, on the grounds that the soviets represented a higher form of democracy than a bourgeois parliament.

What was this new Bolshevik soviet power if not the dictatorship of the proletariat? True, its first measures were primarily radical bourgeois-democratic (though workers' control was also decreed). It proceeded slowly to socialist measures. But that was exactly as Trotsky had foreseen.

Between October 1917 and autumn 1918 the soviets became more solidly Bolshevik-dominated; they also, to tell the truth, became somewhat hollowed-out. But the soviet power did not change its class character. There was a contradiction between October 1917 and autumn 1918 between the working-class character of state power and the still-capitalist economy. But that contradiction does not justify Jenness's argument. *In fact the contradiction was never suppressed.* Even after central economic planning in the USSR was initiated (April 1921) the Bolsheviks consciously boosted market-capitalist forces in the economy (the New Economic Policy). To this day the USSR's economy stands much closer to capitalism than to socialism; only now, after the Stalinist counter-revolution, the political character of state power is actually counter-revolutionary. The contradiction is inverted. It could have been transcended in a progressive way only by the international extension of the revolution. But, one of the main traits of Jenness's argument is his neglect of internationalism.

In the years immediately following the October Revolution, no-one concerned themselves much about who had best predicted the perspectives of the revolution. More important questions were at hand. And both Lenin and Trotsky hesitated to formulate perspectives for other countries by the method of mechanically copying the perspectives developed for Russia.

Permanent revolution became an issue of controversy quite artificially in 1923-4. Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev, installing themselves in power after the death of Lenin, directed a torrent of written-to-order polemic at Trotsky, stuffed with quotations from Lenin and asserting mainly (just like Jenness!) that Trotsky "underestimated the peasantry".

Trotsky defended himself. But he still hesitated to make sweeping generalisations. When the Opposition – now including Zinoviev and Kamenev – did battle with Stalin in 1926-7 over the perspectives for the Chinese revolution, Trotsky went along with the slogan of 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' for China.

Analysing the experience in 1928, however, he quickly concluded that the slogan was misleading. The Kuomintang and the Left Kuomintang had shown *"the maximum of democratic revolution that could be realised as an independent stage"* – repressing the working class. It was disastrous for Chinese

communists to be seeking futilely for a peasant-party ally with which to realise a 'better' democratic revolution – the 'democratic dictatorship' – rather than steering clearly towards the working-class overthrow of the bourgeois Kuomintang leadership.

Working out a concrete analysis of permanent revolution for China, Trotsky also concluded that the same general perspective was relevant (more or less, and with concrete interpretation in each case) to all backward capitalist countries. His opponents, the Stalin faction, also generalised.

Given that the Bolsheviks had known when to consider the 'democratic dictatorship' slogan superseded, and when to discard the idea of the democratic revolution as an independent stage separate from the workers' revolution, in practice the Bolsheviks' line and Trotsky's perspective had coincided in the Russian Revolution. But when Stalin and his allies, after the Revolution, set about emphasising all the differences between Bolshevism and 'Trotskyism', that was a different matter.

"My adversaries", wrote Trotsky

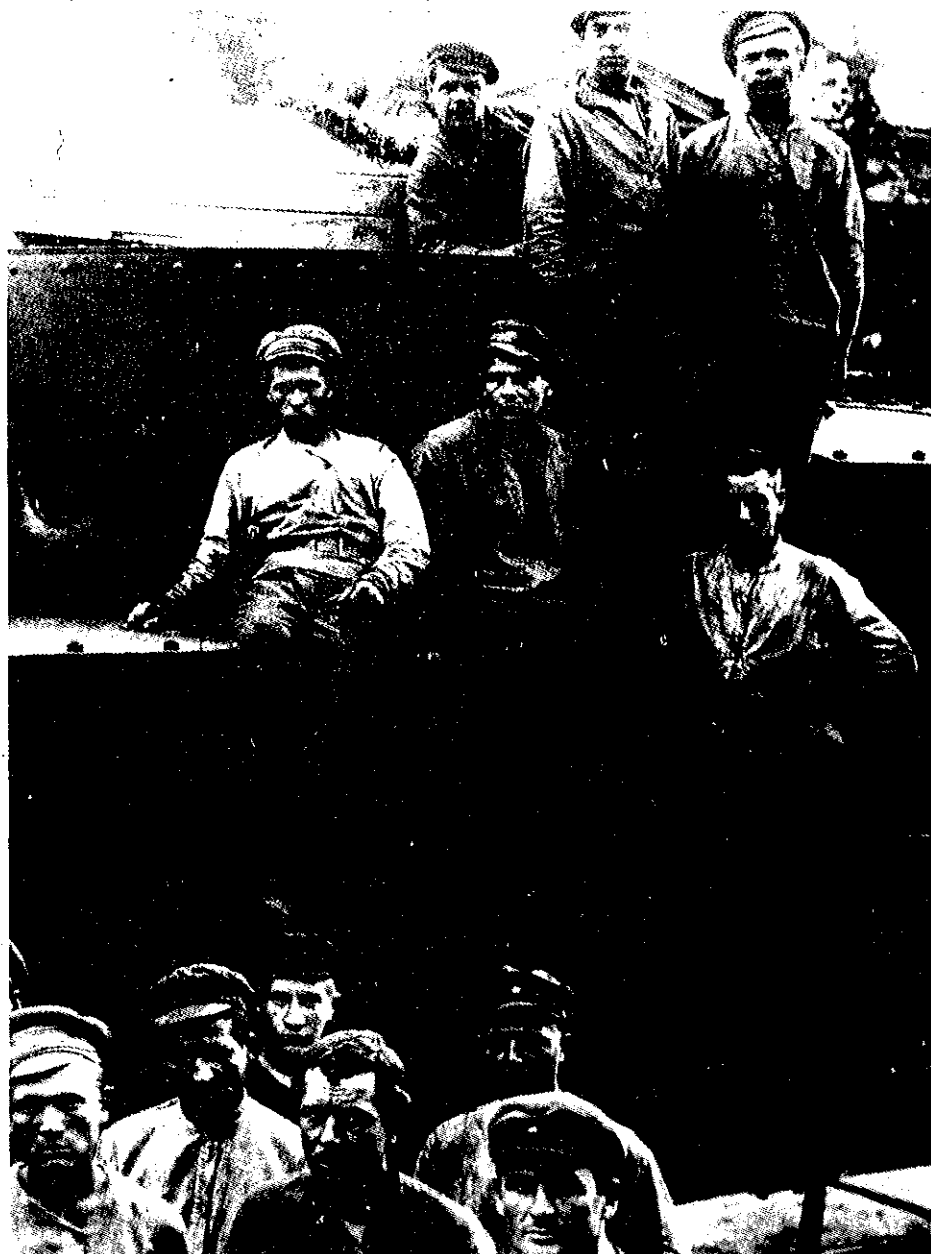
(*'The Permanent Revolution'*), *"did not, of course, foresee that in creating an artificial axis of struggle they would imperceptibly be compelled to revolve around it themselves and to manufacture, by the method of inversion, a new world view for themselves"*.

In 1929 Trotsky wrote:

"The dispute has so broadened and deepened that it now embraces in essence all the most important questions of the world revolutionary movement".

After further experience, Trotsky summed up in 1938 (*'The Transitional Programme'*):

"When the Comintern of the epigones tried to revive the formula buried by history of the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry', it gave to the formula of the 'workers' and peasants' government' a completely different purely 'democratic', i.e. bourgeois content, counterposing it to the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Bolshevik-Leninists resolutely reject the slogan of the 'workers' and peasants' government' in the bourgeois-democratic version. They affirmed then and affirm now that when the party of the



Bolsheviks with an armoured train, 1917

proletariat refuses to step beyond bourgeois-democratic limits, its alliance with the peasantry is simply turned into a support for capital".

The 'democratic dictatorship' had been shown to be reactionary not by closer examination of the history of the Russian Revolution, still less by more minute study of the old texts, but by subsequent experience.

It was one thing for Lenin to develop the 'democratic dictatorship' strategy as a formula for an active role for the working class within the broad general 'objective' perspective formulated by Russian Marxism in its first polemics against the populists — 'the coming revolution will be bourgeois-democratic' — and to sharpen it in polemic against the Mensheviks. It was entirely in line with this whole path of political development that Lenin in 1917 abandoned the formula of 'democratic dictatorship' but maintained the spirit of seeking the maximum active role for the working class.

When Stalin and his allies sought to gobackwards, and counterpose the pre-1917 differences between Lenin and Trotsky to the common struggle of 1917, it was quite a different matter. They stressed what in Lenin's thought was vestigial — the separation of the stages, the bourgeois character of the revolutionary government. They ended up with a formula scarcely different from the Mensheviks. The main difference was that the Stalinists subordinated the Chinese workers to the Kuomintang on the grounds that it was allegedly a 'workers' and peasants' party', whereas the Mensheviks would have done likewise on the more accurate basis that the KMT represented the bourgeoisie.

An analogy may clarify. In 1891 Engels wrote:

"If one thing is certain it is that our party and the working class can only come to power in the form of the democratic republic. This is even the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat..." ('Critique of the Erfurt Programme').

Engels was not counterposing parliamentary democracy to soviets. Soviets had not yet been created. He was expressing as clearly as he could, on the basis of the experience available, the idea that the working class in power needs the broadest, most flexible democratic forms possible.

Yet for an author today to fasten on Engels' perspective for 1891, insisting at length on its correctness as against the state socialists and elitists of the 19th century, and ignoring the later disputes over soviet democracy and bourgeois parliamentarism, would only be parliamentary cretinism.

The purpose and importance of the SWP's new interpretation of the Russian Revolution is not to mull over history, but to give a new framework for interpreting present-day revolutions. It must be judged as such.

In Trotsky's view of 1938, the 'democratic dictatorship', counterposed to the dictatorship of the proletariat, would only

subordinate the working class to the bourgeoisie. Is that the conclusion implicit in Jenness's polemic for the SWP's politics of today? Yes and no.

The period since World War 2 includes experiences entirely similar to those on which Trotsky based his 1938 conclusions: Indonesia 1965 for example. But there have also been new variants.

Imperialism, reshaped and reorganised after the war, has proved able to dispense with direct colonial rule. It took huge and heroic struggles by the colonial peoples to force the big powers to release their colonial grip, but on the whole they have done so, while of course retaining economic domination of the poorer capitalist countries.

Stalinism since World War 2 has been not merely an ideology or a deformation, but a big material force. Although the ruling bureaucracies are not social classes they are more weighty on the world scene than many a capitalist class.

These shifts — together with the conti-



Castro

nuing industrialisation in the backward capitalist countries, and the development of sizeable urban middle classes in many of them — have created a wider scope for radical petty bourgeois nationalism. The Algerian revolution could serve as archetype: winning national independence, carrying out some serious land reforms, nationalising industry, but with all these results partial and on the basis of rigid state control over the working class.

In Yugoslavia, Vietnam, China, and (under somewhat different circumstances) Cuba, radical petty bourgeois nationalists (in all cases but Cuba, Stalinists) went further. Linking up with the USSR, they expropriated the capitalists and established deformed workers' states. The economic results have been more substantial than in those countries where the revolution remained within capitalist bounds. But the Stalinist state structures set up (in all cases, though with differing degrees of rigidity) have been no less anti-working-class than the Algerian-type regimes.

These results confirm the continuing vitality and relevance of permanent revolution as a programme for the working class to take the lead in fighting for the liberation of the nation — though they also underline the need for new concrete analyses, in each concrete situation, of the terms and conditions of struggle.

The current of the USFI represented by Mandel has long interpreted the Stalinist-led revolutions as examples of a schema whereby:

"It matters little that their movement of revolt is at first clothed in this or that form, more or less clear and conscious politically... The colonial Revolution, once begun from the national-democratic level, has an irresistible tendency to develop into socialist revolution". (Pablo, 'The Coming War', 1952).

All that then remains in each particular case is to juggle facts and theory so as to fit the particular Stalinist leadership into the costume of a proletarian party.

The SWP always used to be more prudent. Their present reinterpretation in fact links up with a previous interpretation of the post-war social revolutions designed to avoid the USFI's excessive crediting of the leaderships of those revolutions as 'proletarian'.

At least, by using the term 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry'/'workers' and peasants' government' for the first stage of such revolutions, the present interpretation establishes an apparent continuity with that previous interpretation's use of 'workers' and peasants' government' for their initial phase. But the context is, as we shall see, quite different.

From July 1960, first in relation to Cuba but then applying the same analysis retrospectively in relation to China, Yugoslavia, etc., Joseph Hansen, a leader of the SWP who died in 1979, developed the notion that the 'workers' and peasants' government' in the sense discussed by the Fourth Congress of the Communist International (1922) was the key link in processes where petty-bourgeois leaderships had overthrown capitalist states in those countries and created deformed workers' states.

"By recognising the new Cuban government (after the removal of Urrutia and Pazos) as a 'Workers' And Farmers' Government' we indicate its radical petty bourgeois background and composition and its origin in a popular mass movement, its tendency to respond to popular pressures for action against the bourgeoisie and their agents, and its capacity, for whatever immediate reasons and with whatever hesitancy, to undertake measures against bourgeois political power and against bourgeois property relations" ('The Character of the New Cuban Government').

Hansen also described the Ben Bella government in Algeria in 1962-5 as a workers' and peasants' government, and cited its fate as:

"proof that the establishment of a workers' and peasants' government does not automatically guarantee the subsequent establishment of a workers' state" ('The Social Transformations in E.

Europe, China and Cuba', August 1969).

Hansen based himself on a passage in the Transitional Programme:

"One cannot categorically deny in advance the theoretical possibility that, under the influence of completely exceptional circumstances... the petty-bourgeois parties including the Stalinists may go further than they themselves wish along the road to a break with the bourgeoisie. In any case one thing is not to be doubted; even if this highly improbable variant somewhere and at some time becomes a reality and the 'workers' and farmers' government' in the above-mentioned sense is established, it would represent merely a short episode on the road to the actual dictatorship of the proletariat".

The 'workers' and peasants' government' formula had been used before, for the Chinese revolution, by some Marxists (e.g. Ernest Mandel). But Hansen systematised the theory.

It was, surely, a case of scissors-and-paste theorising. The Fourth Congress of the CI advanced the idea of the workers' and peasants' government as the highest form of the united front. The Communists would fight to force the parties based on the workers and peasants to break with the bourgeoisie, and under the control of their mass base to take serious measures against capitalist power. Such agitation would in any case be useful educationally. And in the event of the opportunist parties going so far as to create such a government, its first clashes with the bourgeoisie would spark off huge mass struggles which could only end victoriously in the full rule of the working class.

In the cases Hansen was describing, it is rather a matter of clashes between a petty bourgeois apparatus, based on a victorious armed struggle, and the bourgeoisie. It is not inconceivable that such clashes should provide an opening for working-class revolutionary action: in the actual cases they did not. The Fourth Congress reference to a workers' and peasants' government is to a condition of flux in state power where the alternatives are the workers mobilising and going over the head of the petty-bourgeois leaders in the government, to create a workers' state, or capitalist counter-revolution.

Hansen's reference is to a state of flux where these two alternatives may exist, but so may (and crucially did) two others: consolidation of a state-capitalist regime, with the old bourgeoisie to a serious extent elbowed out, or, where the old state has been smashed by the armed struggle, creation of a deformed workers' state. Hansen implicitly equates the 'deformed workers' state' outcome with the outcome of direct workers' power, and the 'state capitalist' outcome with straight bourgeois counter-revolution. The former equation illustrates a tendency in Hansen's thinking (as in the USFI's generally) to blur over the qualitative nature of the deformations of the deformed workers' state.

Moreover: since the bureaucratic deformations in China, Yugoslavia, etc. certainly did not suddenly spring into

being at the time of the consolidation of the new state power, surely we should be speaking of 'deformed workers' and peasants' governments'?... This conclusion adequately indicates the scholastic nature of the theory.

Nonetheless, Hansen's theory:

a) preserved a clear characterisation of the political leaderships of these revolutions;

b) characterised the transitional phase as one where state power is in flux;

c) pointed to the need for independent working-class initiative in that phase.

Or at least, potentially it did that. The actual record of Hansen and the SWP in the 1960s in relation to the Castroites was far from adequately independent.

The new theory being presented by the SWP, under similar labels, has a very different character. Now the 'workers' and peasants' government' — the transitional phase — is the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry'. But the 'workers' and peasants' government' ('democratic dictatorship' version) is quite different from the 'workers' and peasants' government' (Fourth Congress version).

In the 'workers' and peasants' government' (Fourth Congress version) the reference 'and peasants' did not mean peasant domination; the 'workers' and peasants' government' was a formula with the same essential drive as 'workers' government', only agitationaly adapted to the task of rallying the peasants behind the workers in countries with a large peasant population. The 'democratic dictatorship' was however distinguished from the dictatorship of the proletariat precisely by the expected *peasant predominance* which would limit it to (radical) bourgeois democracy.

The 'workers' and peasants' government' (Fourth Congress version) differed from the dictatorship of the proletariat in that it referred to a government which had *only begun* the decisive confrontation with bourgeois state power. Its programme was precisely to carry out that confrontation. The 'workers' and peasants' government' (democratic dictatorship style) was the government created *after the victory* of an uprising against the old state power. It differed from the dictatorship of the proletariat in its bourgeois limitations.

Thus, if the 'workers' and peasants' government' (Fourth Congress version) is a somewhat scholastic and inappropriate label for the transitional phases in Cuba or China, etc., the 'workers' and peasants' government' ('democratic dictatorship' version) is a wildly misleading label.

The 'democratic dictatorship' was to be the means whereby the widest democracy (within supposedly inescapable bourgeois limits) would be realised by means of the workers and peasants directly undertaking the overthrow of the old order themselves, not leaving it to the bourgeois or well-off petty bourgeois. The Chinese, Yugoslav, Vietnamese, Cuban revolutions certainly carried out radical bourgeois-democratic measures in land reform, national liberation, and emanci-

pation of women. But they also included suppression of independent trade unions and one-party states.

In China, among the first measures of the 1949 revolution were a ban on strikes and compulsory arbitration of labour disputes. The leadership was a bureaucratic apparatus elevated above the workers and peasants.

On the other hand, these revolutions have realised tremendous social transformations going beyond bourgeois limits. The SWP's new labelling turns everything upside down.

On a strictly ideological level, the SWP's new theory of revolution represents a rapprochement with Havana and the Sandinistas. All these currents now preach revolution by stages, though the Castroites used not to. Quite possibly immediate 'diplomatic' motives of appearing more acceptable to these currents have weight with the SWP.

But let us look at how the SWP's interpretation of the Russian Revolution, taken as a framework for today's revolutions, 'encodes' the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. The democratic revolution was the overthrow of Somoza. The workers' and peasants' government/democratic dictatorship is the present regime, in which the petty bourgeois Sandinista leadership, having smashed the old state apparatus in the civil war, precariously balances with the still-strong bourgeoisie. The socialist revolution will be realised if, under Havana influence, Nicaragua takes the Cuban road.

The 'coding' is not perfect. The independent workers' party and peasant parties which should form the democratic dictatorship are lacking. But clearly the Sandinista movement in this period is deemed to be what the soviets were in 1917. That we are in the democratic dictatorship stage implies that bourgeois measures are all that could or should be demanded now.

The SWP's passive waiting upon the Sandinistas to do wonders in their own good time is hardly Lenin's method. Nor was the SWP's declaration (after the event) that the Sandinistas' coalition with the anti-Somoza bourgeoisie had been '*obviously the correct, intelligent and revolutionary policy*' and that exclusion of the bourgeois ministers from the first Government of National Reconstruction would have been '*sectarian*' ('The Militant', 24.8.79, 'Intercontinental Press' 22.10.79). But such loss of the spirit of Lenin is inevitable when trying to parrot the letter anachronistically — and even more so when the letter of the theory is applied always to the task of after-the-fact rationalisation of what others have done.

Go along with the petty-bourgeois revolutionary nationalists in their strategy of 'national democratic revolution' as the 'first stage'; don't demand too much of them too fast; and hope that with Moscow or Havana Stalinist influence and example they will move to the expropriation of capitalism — that is the gist of the SWP's new theory. It is an adaptation to Stalinism and thus generally also indirectly to the bourgeoisie.



The development of capitalism in the 3rd World

Since Marx, Lenin and Trotsky wrote their classic works, the world has changed. In particular, the former colonies have won independence, and, especially since the early 1960s, the industrial working class in the Third World has expanded massively. Martin Thomas surveys the facts and some of their implications.

FAMINE in Africa has brought the plight of millions in the Third World sharply to our attention.

It brutally exposes the pettiness of the various versions of the left 'Alternative Economic Strategy'. How can socialists content themselves with discussing plans for rejigging Britain's national economy, behind protective walls of import controls and exchange controls, while outside those walls millions are starving? How can they fall for the argument that more capitalist investment in Britain is a supreme goal of socialist policy, while capitalist investment abroad is bad? Are there any national solutions to the evils of capitalism? Can nationally-focused policies deal with an international system?

Marxist critics of 'AES' politics have stressed the need for an internationalist and anti-imperialist content to socialist policies. Yet even those who criticise the politics and economics of 'Socialism in one country' as applied to Britain often fall into exactly the same shallow semi-socialist ideology when they come to discuss the Third World.

One striking example was Socialist Action's initial coverage of the famine in Ethiopia. An article by Jude Woodward (November 2, 1984) presented the whole affair as "created by" the US and British governments in some sort of conspiratorial fashion. The conclusion was angled much more to support for the Ethiopian regime in the diplomatic conflicts surrounding the famine than to the famine itself. "Socialists ... should demand the unconditional sending of any aid demanded by the Ethiopian government, in any form that it decides". Too bad for the peoples of Eritrea and Tigre who are fighting wars for independence against the Ethiopian government...

'Neo-colonialism'

The workings of the world capitalist system are thus reduced to the evil designs of some governments against others: the job of socialists is reduced to supporting the 'anti-imperialist' governments against the 'imperialist' ones.

The same line of thought was noticeable in the attitude of the Left on the British-

Argentine war of 1982. It was, of course, necessary to campaign against Britain's war; but most of the Left also positively supported Argentina's war, as being somehow part of the struggle of the Third World against imperialism.

Argentina, so the argument ran, is a 'semi-colonial economy'. Facts about poverty, the large foreign debt, and the big role of multinationals in Argentina's manufacturing industry, were cited to prove this. Therefore Argentina has no true independence; and the war against Britain was in essence, whatever the details, a fight for national liberation.

Two Argentine Marxists have summed up the problems with this sort of theory of 'neo-colonialism':

"The theory of 'neo-colonies'... seeks to equate the financial and diplomatic dependence of politically independent countries and of semi-colonies by giving overwhelming priority to certain economic features, in particular the role of direct foreign investment by transnational companies. Direct foreign investment, associated with other forms of 'penetration', is supposed to turn the different countries into semi-colonies, although it is never clear which are to be included in this definition. (Would it apply, for example, to countries like South Africa,

Canada or Spain, or only to 'Third World' countries?)

"According to this line of reasoning, bourgeois nation states would be progressive and anti-imperialist merely by opposing foreign investment, increasing customs duties and reducing the balance of external trade, or by linking themselves economically to the 'Socialist Bloc'. Marxism, however, regards such 'anti-imperialism' and such 'defence' of the principle of national self-determination as nothing more than an attempt to cover up competitive manoeuvres by capitals of different national bases, particularly by 'weak' monopoly capitals".

(Dabat and Lorenzano, p.8).

For the Third World, in other words, this ideology defines socialism essentially as the most extreme and thorough-going nationalism. The goal is national development; the obstacle is the external economic connections of Third World countries; the answer is to break these countries from the world economy; the merit of socialism is that it can do this while more moderate capitalist nationalism cannot.

This ideology is constructed by combining a few ringing phrases from Lenin on imperialism and national liberation with a crude version of more modern but less satisfactory Marxist theories of imperialism. For many tendencies on the Left, the influence of these more modern theories is probably in large part unconscious — derived not from reading the basic theoretical texts, but from agitational popularisations which have sunk into the Left's conventional wisdom.

An examination of that conventional wisdom in the light of current reality and of the Marxist classics is thus timely.

"The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black skins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production."

(Marx, Capital vol. 1, p.751)

The ascent of commercial capitalism in Western Europe from the 16th century went together with the creation of a huge new system of world trade and the *pre-capitalist* exploitation (plundering) and ruination of other areas of the globe.

"The shift in the centre of nascent European mercantile capitalism from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic also caused a crisis in Africa. This shift tolled, in the 16th century, the knell of the Italian cities, and at the same time it brought ruin to the Arab world and to the Black African states of the Sudan-Sahel zone. A few decades later the representatives of Atlantic Europe made their appearance on the shores of Africa."

(Amin, p.50)

Handicraft industries were ruined — even in India, which had been the world's greatest centre of manufactured exports for centuries. The European colonial powers allied with local *pre-capitalist* ruling classes, and turned *pre-capitalist* modes of production (in modified forms) to the needs of capitalist profit making. The mass of the people suffered the combined evils both of capitalism and of the *pre-capitalist* forms.

Export of capital and capitalist development in the Third World

In the 19th century, Britain (from early or mid-century) and other West European powers (from later in the century) began to export capital on a large scale.

The division of the international economy into a Third World beset by poverty and a relatively prosperous core area in Western Europe (and later North America) was not, however, created by that export of capital. The mould was set in the 16th century. The export of capital actually promoted capitalist development in the Third World.

It did so to a limited extent. International inequalities were not levelled out but reproduced on an increasing scale.

Western capital went overwhelmingly into strictly limited spheres: railways, public utilities, plantations, mining. The colonies were generally restricted to one or two export industries: cash-crops or minerals. The Western capitalists made good profits from those industries with relatively little investment and without training workers in many modern skills. Often *pre-capitalist* forms of exploitation were used until quite recent times.

To step onto a higher level of capitalist development in the Third World countries required vigorous action by the state. But those countries did not have their own state power: they were colonies. For the metropolitan powers, a vigorous policy of capitalist development in the colonies would be politically risky, expensive and probably in the short term harmful to the interests of metropolitan industrialists. They remained content with relatively primitive methods of exploitation, and siphoned out the profits to the metropolis.

The effect of the 1930s slump

But there was some capitalist development. Its character changed significantly after the great slump of the 1930s, when the world trade system went into deep crisis and trade contracted sharply. Third World countries — or at least the more developed ones — turned to 'import substitution'. Mainly, light industries developed, producing the consumer goods previously imported from the West.

This economic development created the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois classes which led the successful national independence struggles after World War 2 (and the nationalist/populist movements in Mexico, Brazil, Egypt, Argentina, Bolivia, etc.). Working classes were also expanded, but (mainly thanks to Stalinism) remained as a tail to bourgeois or petty bourgeois movements.

The cause of de-colonisation was generally supported by the US, which had become the world's 'super-imperialism' after World War 2, and which wished to secure free access to the areas colonised by the now second-rate West European capitalist powers. And the independence of the former colonies has severe limits, in that they remain weak and (all but a very few) small units in a competitive capitalist world economy in which, as in capitalist economy generally, the strong are constantly elbowing aside or subjugating the weak.

Substantial remnants of the former colonial-type economic relations continue. And a few Third World countries — some in Central America, some former French colonies in Africa — are still subject to such domination by a particular advanced capitalist country as to put them in the same category as the semi-colonies of the first half of this century.

All that said, it would be wrong to underestimate the winning of national independence by some hundreds of millions of people.

Hundreds of millions of people were

drawn into modern politics, and became aware of their own dignity and their own ability to change the world, for the first time. It is not merely a sham. The economic influence of the former colonial power has declined sharply in the ex-colonies. They have carried out extensive nationalisations, they pursue foreign policies often quite at odds with the former colonial power. No-one supposes that Algerian policy is dictated from Paris these days, or Ghanaian policy from London, or Libyan from Rome.

Following decolonisation, and the nationalist/populist movements in South America and the Middle East, a new phase of capitalist development has opened in the Third World. Most Third World countries have begun to develop their own manufacturing industry, some have done a great deal more than begin.

Manufacturing output in the Third World has grown around 6% per year, and output per head at around 3 to 4% per year, since 1950. This growth is twice as fast as the growth of British manufacturing industry in the 19th century, slightly faster (per head) than the advanced capitalist countries since 1950.

As late as 1960 the Third World made only 5% of the capitalist world's steel. By 1980 it produced 15%. Manufactured goods are rapidly overtaking traditional raw-material exports in the Third World's trade.

The resources put into education and health by Third World governments are almost everywhere smaller than those put into the armed forces. Nevertheless they are far greater than those invested by the colonial regimes.

At independence only one child in five in India got any primary education. Now 76% do. In Nigeria, 70+ years of British rule produced 15% adult literacy by independence in 1960. 20 years of independence raised the literacy rate to 34%.

Land reforms have been proclaimed practically everywhere in the Third World. They have been effective more rarely.

Nevertheless, several countries — from South Korea through Egypt and Algeria to Mexico — have seen dramatic changes in their structure of landholding. Elsewhere, capitalist relations in agriculture develop more gradually but nonetheless inexorably.

Together with this development in the Third World goes a continuation and even an intensification of social misery. The development, like all capitalist development, is extremely uneven. Whole groups of countries are stagnant or even declining. In the fastest-developing countries, vast areas of poverty remain — and even increase, since recent development in countries like Brazil and Mexico has gone together with a sharp increase in inequality. The development is punctuated by crises, and since 1980 some of the faster-developing underdeveloped countries have been in their worst crisis for decades.

Most Third World states are still relatively small, weak units in a devil-take-the-hindmost world dominated by the big multinationals and international banks based in the West. Most still have a heavy heritage of *pre-capitalist* economic structures. Most, as a result of these features, are still ripped off by the richer capitalisms.

Within capitalism, moreover, 'nothing succeeds like success'. The stronger capitalist countries, and a select few Third World countries, have the large and expanding markets, the good communications, the relatively healthy and educated workforce,



High technology in the Far East

and the stable administration which attracts new capitalist development. Most Third World countries do not.

But that development is accompanied by increasing misery does not mean that it is not development. What Lenin wrote against the Narodniks on the question of the development of capitalism in Russia is very relevant.

"A large number of errors made by Narodnik writers spring from their efforts to prove that this disproportionate, spasmodic, feverish development is not development..."

"...whether the development of capitalism in Russia is slow or rapid, depends entirely on what we compare this development with. If we compare the pre-capitalist epoch in Russia with the capitalist (and that is the comparison which is needed for arriving at a correct solution of the problem) the development of social economy under capitalism must be considered as extremely rapid. If, however, we compare the present rapidity of development with that which could be achieved with the general level of technique and culture as it is today, the present rate of development of capitalism in Russia really must be considered as slow. And it cannot but be slow, for in no single capitalist country has there been such an abundant survival of ancient institutions that are incompatible with capitalism, retard its development, and immeasurably worsen the condition of the producers, who 'suffer not only from the development of capitalist production, but also from the incompleteness of that development'..."

(Lenin, Development of Capitalism in Russia, p.597, 600)

"...there is nothing more absurd than to conclude from the contradictions of capitalism that the latter is impossible, non-progressive, and so on — to do that is to take refuge from unpleasant, but undoubted realities in the transcendental heights of romantic dreams..."

(Lenin, Development of Capitalism in Russia, p.58)

'Sub-imperialism'

In some underdeveloped countries this recent development has reached the point that they have their own relatively integrated industry, their own finance capital, and their own multinationals. They have become big powers, not on a world scale, but in their regions.

The term 'sub-imperialism' was coined to describe this development by Ruy Mauro Marini, analysing Brazil after the 1964 coup.

"The Brazilian military", he wrote, "has expressed the intention of becoming the centre from which imperialist expansion in Latin America will radiate."

It would be a junior partner to the USA, but a junior partner with its own interests and plans.

The military organised a huge influx of foreign capital (much of it in joint enterprises), and industrial expansion, on the basis of a brutal increase in the rate of exploitation. The mass of the workers and peasants were unable to provide a market for this industrial production. But the military organised a big push to win export markets, and also developed a limited local 'consumer society',

"created through a transference of income from the poorest strata to the middle and upper strata, in order to guarantee the market for a high-technology industry which is becoming more and more divorced from the real needs of the great masses..."

(An example is the government's measures to develop a local market for cars, with cheap fuel, etc).

Brazil as an example of sub-imperialism

The state itself was also a major market for this new industry, particularly with military expenditures.

"The militarisation of Brazilian capitalism is neither accidental nor circumstantial. It is the necessary expression of the monstrous logic of the system, just as Nazism was for Germany of the '30s. And just as with Nazism, war must be the result." Finally:

"Brazilian capitalism is carrying out its agrarian reform, and it is not in the least idyllic. The accelerated extension of capitalist relations to the countryside has the same inhuman and brutal character which defined it in England in the 16th and 17th centuries, and more precisely in Tsarist Russia as described by Lenin".

In the course of the 1970s, this theory of 'sub-imperialism' became quite widely accepted among Marxist economists. Frank (CITW) lists seven economies as sub-imperialist: Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, India, Iran, Israel, South Africa; and analyses each one.

The whole theory is questioned by the French writer Pierre Salama, with two arguments (Salama, p.77-79). The first argument Salama himself describes as "not fundamental": that Marini and others accept too easily the 'super-imperialist' status of the USA, without sufficiently

examining the rivalries with Japan, the EEC, etc. The second argument is that the drive to conquer markets comes principally from balance of payments problems caused by the policy by the governments (Salama refers to Argentina, Brazil and Mexico) of permitting large-scale repatriation of profits.

"This export policy is thus necessary — to the extent that it flows precisely from the attitude of these governments in relation to foreign investments — but it is not vital for the reproduction of the system."

This objection is unsound. The balance of payments problems of Third World countries are endemic, and have deeper causes than one episodic policy decision. Moreover, the point about Brazilian exports is not just that they have increased — though they have — but that they have changed in composition and direction.

In 1960 Brazil's exports were overwhelmingly dominated by coffee: only 3% were manufactured goods. By 1982, 41% of its exports were manufactured. In 1960, 13% of Brazil's exports went to other Third World capitalist countries; in 1982, 34%.

The 'conventional wisdom' of the left

The common view on the left is different from the actual facts as presented above. It presents the world as sharply divided into three camps: the 'socialist' (or degenerated and deformed workers' states); the underdeveloped countries, usually described as semi-colonies or oppressed nations, or exploited nations; and the imperialist nations. It asserts that the underdeveloped countries are all dominated by neo-colonialism and experience practically no development. If some development is admitted, it is defined away as being in some way spurious or not real development. National liberation for the underdeveloped countries still remains a central question.

Now our assessment of this ideology has to depend somewhat on who is expressing it.

Sometimes it expresses the progressive protest of Third World bourgeois and petty bourgeois democracy. Then our main job is not to dwell on the scientific inexactitude of the analysis, but to argue that the dominated, subordinate position of weaker but politically independent nations cannot be remedied on a national basis but only by international working class socialist revolution.

Pretty often, however, this account is used for their own purposes by bourgeois demagogues and Stalinists, against working class internationalism.

Now the national question is not finished in the Third World. In many areas the artificial frontiers inherited from colonialism are a major problem, needing to be replaced by larger, more rational units (Socialist United States of the Middle East, of South & Central America, etc).

Nevertheless, the colonial revolution — the fight for independence from the former colonial powers — is finished. Like all bourgeois revolutions, it has been finished incompletely, unsatisfactorily, and will be followed by supplementary revolutions. But the era when the winning of political independence from the colonial powers was the centre of politics is past.

The bourgeois demagogues and Stalinists try to keep national independence centre stage by redefining it. National independence is re-defined as independent econ-

omic development — something which under capitalism is as utopian as labour money. The — real enough — facts of the rapacity of the advanced capitalist countries' multinationals are pointed to as evidence that this national independence is not yet to be won. And so the working class is called to rally to a 'national' effort to win it.

Often enough it is said that socialism is the only way to win this national independence. But such rhetoric does not indicate any break from Stalinism or bourgeois nationalism. For bourgeois nationalism in the Third World often paints itself as socialist; and Stalinism no longer relies rigidly on its classic 'stages' theory. It is well enough content to patronise the socialist pretensions of Third World state capitalisms, and to promote such socialism as the way to 'national independence'.

The pioneer Russian Marxist George Plekhanov defined his difference from the Narodniks by writing that for the Marxist,

"he is convinced that not the workers are necessary for the revolution, but the revolution for the workers."

(Plekhanov, p.384)

Likewise, for the Marxist, national independence (and all other bourgeois democratic rights) are necessary for the workers; for the left nationalist, the workers are necessary for the national independence struggle. Now 'national independence' is defined in a mystified form so that the only rational form of the struggle for it is the various efforts at national self-assertion. And these are presented as a first step to socialist struggle, as an elementary form of 'anti-imperialism'.

The tactical conclusion of this line of argument is the 'anti-imperialist united front'. Now even when the national question is still central, this *united front* is a trap for the workers. Practical agreements with bourgeois nationalist forces for specific actions will be necessary: long-term political blocs can only leave the workers swindled by their bourgeois allies or perhaps by petty-bourgeois Stalinist forces.

When political independence has been won, the call for an anti-imperialist united front is simply a call for the workers to rally behind the 'anti-imperialist' gesturing of the local bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. Iran should have taught us this lesson.

'Anti-imperialism', fully-developed, means working class socialism. But used as something distinct from socialism, it means only the fight for political independence. 'Anti-imperialism' today is rather like 'anti-fascism' in the '40s: the universally accepted 'progressive' cause in the name of which class questions are obscured.

To the millions of workers and peasants who today define themselves politically as 'anti-imperialist', as to the millions who considered themselves 'anti-fascist' in the '40s, the task of Marxists is of course not to bring pedantic critiques but to try to show the way to a working-class programme. But the precondition is that the minds of the Marxists themselves are clear — free from the use of 'anti-imperialist' rhetoric to smear over class questions and to present bourgeois nationalism and proletarian socialism as simply more or less militant versions of the same 'anti-imperialism'.

This is doubly important because of the role of the sub-imperialist powers and the USSR as oppressors of nations.

Portugal was the last west European state to release its colonies. The reason was not Portugal's strength, but its weakness. It was not strong enough to maintain its position purely by economic means.

For similar reasons, the 'sub-imperialist'

powers — and some underdeveloped countries which can scarcely rank as sub-imperialist — are today more apt to seek direct political domination of subject nations than are the imperialisms of the big advanced capitalist countries. Iran, Turkey, Ethiopia are examples. So are Israel and South Africa, though other factors enter there.

But by far the greatest oppressor of nations today is the USSR. The reason why the Kremlin relies on such brutal, direct political repression is, surely, the fact that the bureaucracy does not have the solidity and the historic role of a ruling class. The bureaucracy's antagonism to its economic base differentiates it from imperialism (i.e. capitalist imperialism). It does not make the national oppression inflicted by the bureaucracy any less reactionary.

The difference between the USSR and imperialism is important in some circumstances: but, under the pressure of the strong influence of Stalinism on the Trotskyist movement since World War 2, it has often been crudified.

Trotsky's own answer to the question, 'Is the USSR imperialist?', was a lot nearer 'yes, but' than 'no'.

"Can the present expansion of the Kremlin be termed imperialism? First of all we must establish what social content is included in this term. History has known the 'imperialism' of the Roman state based on slave labour, the imperialism of feudal landownership, the imperialism of commercial and industrial capital, the imperialism of the Tsarist monarchy, etc. *The driving force behind the Moscow bureaucracy is indubitably the tendency to expand its power, its prestige, its revenues.* This is the element of 'imperialism' in the widest sense of the word which was a property in the past of all monarchies, oligarchies, ruling castes, medieval estates and classes. However, in contemporary literature, at least Marxist literature, imperialism is understood to mean the *expansionist policy of finance capital* which has a very sharply defined economic content. To employ the term 'imperialism' for the foreign policy of the Kremlin — without elucidating exactly what this signifies — means simply to identify the policy of the Bonapartist bureaucracy with the policy of monopolistic capitalism on the basis that both one and the other utilise military force for expansion. Such an identification, capable only of sowing confusion, is much more proper to petty bourgeois democrats than to Marxists."

(Trotsky, In Defence of Marxism, p.33-4)
(First emphasis added)

The inadequacy of 'anti-imperialism' as a basis for politics

Since Trotsky wrote the above works in October 1939, the Moscow bureaucracy has given repeated proof of its rapacity in striving to "expand its power, its prestige, its revenues". In 1946 the Fourth International raised the call for the withdrawal of the USSR's troops from Eastern Europe, even though the comrades regarded the East European states as capitalist and considered that a prolonged USSR occupation might result in the replacement of those capitalist relations by systems on the model of the USSR. In April 1948 the Fourth International felt obliged to clarify what "Defence of the USSR" meant. The comrades proposed "Defend what remains of the conquests of October" as a more precise formulation and emphasised:

"It will be necessary to continue this revolutionary class struggle consistently and uninterruptedly in the case of the occu-



Leon Trotsky

pation of any given country by the Russian army, even though the revolutionary forces clash with the Russian army, and also in spite of the military consequences which this might entail for the Russian army in its operations against the imperialist military forces...

"It would be the gravest mistake to apply the strategy of the 'defence of the USSR against imperialism' to the different tactical diplomatic or military manoeuvres of the bureaucracy..."

(FI: 'The USSR and Stalinism')

If the issue at stake in a given conflict is "what remains of the conquests of October" — the nationalised property relations — then the distinction between the USSR and capitalist imperialism is important. But to extrapolate from "defence of the USSR" to considering the subjugation of people by the Kremlin — as in Afghanistan — as an 'anti-imperialist' alternative, at any rate to be preferred to the risk of imperialist domination in the area, is to subordinate the struggle for emancipation of oppressed peoples to the empty phrases of 'anti-imperialism'.

To say that self-determination is supportable only as an anti-imperialist demand is to deny support to the most oppressed people today. To try to evade the problem by saying that those peoples oppressed by the USSR or by underdeveloped countries are 'really' oppressed by imperialism, the Kremlin or the bourgeoisie of the underdeveloped countries acting only as an agent of imperialism, is plainly absurd in some cases (Iran, Yugoslavia's struggle for independence from the USSR in the 1940s), and confining ourselves to a distorted one-dimensional view in others (Israel/Palestine).

To make 'anti-imperialism' a basic principle of our politics is at best to make our theory a set of empty phrases to be tagged onto conclusions reached for reasons having nothing to do with theory; at worst, accommodating to the bourgeoisie of the underdeveloped countries and to Stalinism.

'Anti-imperialism', 'anti-fascism', even 'anti-capitalism', are not concepts with the precision necessary to serve as a basis for Marxist politics. Our job is to work out the real tendencies of development, the real possibilities that the working class can fight

for, to formulate a positive programme. Arguing against P. Kievsy (Pyatakov), who wanted to replace the 'self-determination' demand by 'negative slogans' such as 'get out of colonies', Lenin wrote, aptly I think:

"There is not, nor can there be, such a thing as a 'negative' Social-Democratic slogan that serves only to 'sharpen proletarian consciousness against imperialism' without at the same time offering a positive answer to the question of *how* Social-Democracy will solve the problem when it assumes power. 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, p.51)

So much for the politics of the conventional wisdom. The direct influence of Stalinism in forming that conventional wisdom is clear. An indirect influence has been through a whole school of academic Marxist writers on imperialism.

The basic idea of this school is that the fundamental division within world capitalism is between the 'centre' (US, Western Europe, etc.) and the 'periphery' (the Third World). The centre develops by looting and 'underdeveloping' the periphery.

The first major text of this theory was Paul Baran's 'The Political Economy of Growth'. Although Baran was not an orthodox Stalinist, he makes his attitude plain by citing Stalin favourably as a Marxist authority and referring to the Stalinist USSR as a model of development. Many of the writers that have followed Baran, however, are non-Stalinist or even vocally anti-Stalinist. They have produced a lot of valuable work: it seem to me, however, that the core idea of their whole school is flawed.

and even in the advanced capitalist countries today. Nevertheless, Baran's ideas have had a great influence — and particularly the idea about the drain of surplus.

This idea is not very satisfactory theoretically. No-one contests that there is a substantial flow of profits from the underdeveloped countries to the advanced capitalist countries, nor even that this flow is generally greater than the reverse flow of capital export. But capitalist exploitation is not simply a system of plunder of existing resources, but rather a process of self-expansion of value. Suppose there is foreign capital to the amount of 1,000 invested in a country, and (through exploitation of labour) it expands by 20% a year. Then an outflow of 200 per year and an inflow of 100 per year can mean 10% growth per year.

But if the 200 did not flow out, then growth would be faster? It is not so simple. *Why* does the 200 flow out? The capitalists' lust for profit is no explanation. If local opportunities for investment are the best going, then lust for profit dictates not bringing the 200 out, but reinvesting it. Conversely, if opportunities for investment are better elsewhere, then the most national of capitalists will seek to direct their funds to the other place rather than investing in the underdeveloped country in question.

In reality investment patterns are not simply determined by profit maximisation in this way. The classic case for 'drain of surplus' is where foreign interests own a plantation or a mine in the underdeveloped country. The foreign capitalists are not very interested in diversifying into other industries in the underdeveloped country; the necessary infrastructure, trained workforce, etc., do not exist, and the home market in the underdeveloped country itself is small.

They are not even very interested in investing in new technology in the plantation or mine: abundant supplies of cheap labour make it unnecessary. They prefer to bring their money home to the advanced capitalist country and invest it there. When the underdeveloped country takes over the plantation or mine, however, it is likely to use the profits to build up infrastructure and heavy industry in the underdeveloped country.

Gunder Frank on 'centre/periphery'

But here the 'drain of surplus' is what is to be explained, not the explanation. It is an effect of 'underdevelopment', not the cause.

Frank argues that:

"...external monopoly has always resulted in the expropriation (and consequent unavailability to Chile [and the same argument goes for other underdeveloped countries]) of a significant part of the economic surplus produced by Chile and its appropriation by another part of the world capitalist system... [an] exploitative relation... in chain-like fashion extends the capitalist link between the capitalist world and national metropolises to the regional centres (part of whose surplus they appropriate), and from these to local centres, and so on to large landowners or merchants who expropriate surplus from small peasants and tenants, and sometimes even from these latter to landless labourers exploited by them in turn. At each step along the way, the relatively few capitalists above exercise monopoly power over the many below... Thus at each point, the international, national, and local capitalist system generates economic development for the few and underdevelopment for the many".

(CULA, pp.7-8)

There is thus a chain of metropolis-satellite relations, in which the drain of surplus from satellite to metropolis is simultaneously the cause of development of the metropolis and underdevelopment of the satellite.

For Frank this set-up is the major defining feature of capitalism, and he considers Latin America to have been integrated into a capitalist world system since about the 16th century. Imperialism, for him, therefore, is more or less synonymous with capitalism, and extends back into the 16th century.

The problem with this line of theory is shown, I think, in the way that in the excerpt above the relations of country to country, region to region, landlord to tenant, and peasant to landless labourer, are all placed under the same heading of *monopoly power*. This common feature does of course exist. But to focus on that is surely to miss out the *specific* features of the capitalist-worker relation — and the revolutionary implications which those specific features are held by Marxist theory to have.

The image of surplus being drained by a million threads from periphery to centre is a powerful one. But it is not a very satisfactory explanation of development/underdevelopment. Consider the capitalist/worker relation. For Frank this is an example of a centre/periphery relation. But does it make sense to say that this relation means development for the capitalist, underdevelopment for the worker? No. The relation means riches and power for the capitalist, poverty and alienation for the worker, and also *development of the capitalist/worker relation*. Accumulation of capital means increase of the proletariat, as Marx put it:

"Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolise all the advantages of this process of transformation... grows the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself".

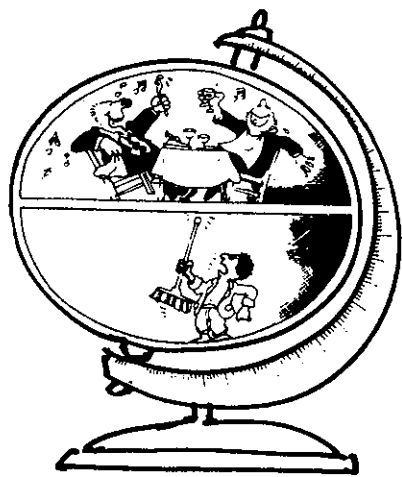
(Marx, Capital vol. 1, p.763)

Put it another way. What happens to the surplus when it finally drains through to the metropolis of metropolises — some US multinational HQ? It is not simply consumed by the bosses of the multinational. No: they seek to expand their capital still further — i.e. to *develop* the whole web of relations that brings them the surplus.

The image of the periphery/centre drain of surplus points to an explanation of why the workers and peasants are thrust into poverty. It does not point to an explanation of underdevelopment.

Plunder of the weak by the strong is a feature of all history since primitive communism. The centre/periphery theory essentially focuses on this feature. It really is a common feature. But Marxism focuses on the *differences* between, for example, the exploitation of peasants by feudal landlords (who directly consume most of the surplus) and the exploitation of wage-workers by capitalists (who use the surplus mainly to expand capital), for a good reason. It is in the differences that we can find the unfolding of the internal contradiction, the emergence of *new* elements, the potential of revolutionary change. Without that focus it is difficult to point to any reason why the plunder of the weak by the strong should be more likely to be overthrown today than 400 years ago.

Consider an analogy. Women's oppression is a feature of all societies since the matriarchy. It is possible to write its history



Baran's theory of the 'drain'

Posing the problem of why underdeveloped countries were underdeveloped, Baran answered that the main reasons were parasitism within the underdeveloped countries and the drain of surplus to the advanced capitalist countries.

Now in fact the level of productive investment in the underdeveloped countries is generally high, as compared to earlier periods in the advanced capitalist countries

in terms of a single, for-all-times concept of 'patriarchy'. But then why expect patriarchy to be overthrown today rather than 2,000 years ago or 2,000 years into the future? The reason why Marxist feminists focus on the *specific differences* of women's oppression under capitalism (e.g. the specific nature of housework under capitalism, quite different from previous societies) is that such a focus best identifies the *new possibilities* of revolutionary change.

Frank does write about contradictions, but really there is no internal, dialectical movement in his concepts. Brewer puts it like this:

[Wallerstein's analysis] "seems to me to amount to little more than a series of definitions and phrases together with his overall generalisation. What is lacking is a level of theory that would connect the two."
(Brewer, p.167)

Thus the comment of the 'centre-periphery' theorists on post-colonial development in the Third World is usually that not much has changed. The plunder of the weak by the strong remains. Only the forms are different. The point is, however, that the difference in forms is very important for class politics.

Clearly elements of the colonial-type set-up still exist — are still perhaps decisive in some countries. But overall to analyse modern imperialism in terms of 'neo-colonialism' — and that, I think, essentially, is what the centre/periphery theory does — seems to be to be misleading in roughly the same way as analysing capitalism as 'neo-feudalism'. Clearly feudal remnants exist, and may even be decisive in some societies. Clearly many common features are shared by feudalism and capitalism. But again, from a revolutionary point of view, surely what we should focus on is what is new, what is changing, where the potential is for further change.

The commonest criticism of the 'centre-periphery' theory — and one pretty widely accepted since it was first suggested by Laclau — is that it fails to focus on relations of production, instead looking mainly at relations of exchange. In essence this is the same point as I have argued above. The argument and its political implications are summarised by Brenner:

"Thus so long as incorporation into the world market/world division of labour is seen automatically to breed underdevelopment, the logical antidote to capitalist underdevelopment is not socialism, but autarky. So long as capitalism develops merely through squeezing dry the 'third world', the primary opponents must be core versus periphery, the cities versus the countryside — not the international proletariat, in alliance with the oppressed people of all countries, versus the bourgeoisie. In fact, the danger here is double-edged: on the one hand, a new opening to the 'national bourgeoisie'; on the other hand, a false strategy for anti-capitalist revolution".

(Brenner, p.91)

"Most directly, of course, the notion of the 'development of underdevelopment' opens the way to third-worldist ideology. From the conclusion that development occurred only in the absence of links with accumulating capitalism in the metropolis, it can be only a short step to the strategy of semi-autarkic socialist development. Then the utopia of socialism in one country replaces that of the bourgeois revolution..."

(Brenner, p.92)

In the periphery/centre view, nationalist, autarchic moves by the bourgeoisie of the underdeveloped countries appear as limit-

ed, initial forms of the struggle of the periphery against centre — which struggle, of course, ultimately, fully developed, is the struggle for socialism.

Socialism, in other words, appears as the broadest and most radical form of nationalism! Take as an example Peter Evans' intelligent and useful book on Brazil: he discusses different "definitions of nationalism", ranging from the Brazilian military's ("limited to elite local capital and the state"), through the more populist version of Mexico's rulers, to...socialism.

The periphery/centre view thus necessarily smears over class distinctions. This is shown strikingly, I think, by the contradictions in Frank's own writings.

He developed his theories in specific and vehement opposition to the Latin American Communist Parties and their strategy of supporting the nationalist bourgeoisie:

"The historical mission and role of the bourgeoisie in Latin America — which was to accompany and to promote the underdevelopment of its society and of itself — is finished. In Latin America as elsewhere, the role of promoting historical progress has now fallen to the masses of the people alone...To applaud and in the name of the people even to support the bourgeoisie in its already played-out role on the stage of history is treacherous or treachery."

(CULA, p.xvi-xvii)

Yet throughout his writings are scattered approving references to nationalist segments of the bourgeoisie as "progressive". For example this comment on Brazil before the 1964 coup:

"The progressive forces, including Brazilian nationalist business interests, had offered (president) Goulart an alternative... (but) Goulart again tried to put off demands of the progressive forces".

(UR, p.346-7)

Baran's book, which is the original source of many of the ideas of the centre/periphery theory is fairly explicitly moulded by Stalinism. In essence he advises those forces seeking development in underdeveloped countries, whichever class they may come from, to follow the model provided by 'socialism in one country' in the USSR. Many bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces in underdeveloped countries have followed this advice, with state-capitalist or Stalinist results.

Frank's political conclusions

Frank is sharply opposed to the Communist Parties. Yet, it seems to me, in the end he is tied by the same neo-Stalinist framework. As Brewer points out, he argues for socialism not by identifying a revolutionary class that can create it, but by indicting capitalism for its lack of capitalist development.

"The classical Marxists assumed that each country must go through successive stages of development; the capitalist stage performed the historic task of creating a proletariat and laying the material basis for the succeeding stage of socialism. Lenin and Trotsky argued that the bourgeoisie in Russia (then a relatively backward country) was too weak to carry through the political tasks of the bourgeois revolution, so that the proletariat had to take the lead and could then carry straight on to the socialist revolution. The evolution of a relatively backward country differed from that of the more advanced centres. This argument, however, still presupposes the existence of a proletariat adequate to the task, and thus a certain degree of capitalist development.

"However, in the first half of the 20th century, there were few signs of capitalist development in underdeveloped countries, and many Marxists came to argue a position almost diametrically opposed to that of the classics. Where it had been argued that capitalist development had to create first the *possibility* of a socialist revolution, it was now argued that the absence of capitalist development made socialist revolution *necessary*. Frank is the leading exponent of this view, summed up in the title of one of his books, *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution*. This shift of perspective entails a shift to a more voluntaristic concept of politics and to treating the peasantry or lumpenproletariat, rather than the industrial proletariat, as the revolutionary class. This trend in political thinking, was encouraged by the success of the Chinese and Cuban revolutions."

(Brewer, p.286)

For Marxists, the nature of socialism, derives from the nature of the agent of socialism, the working class. But Frank identifies no particular agent. So how is socialism defined? By what the Stalinists call "actually existing socialism". The forces fighting for development, whoever they are, are advised to follow that model.

The corruption of the theory of permanent revolution within the Trotskyist movement

Under the influence of centre/periphery theory and populism, many argue: a) national independence is central; b) it can be fully achieved only by socialism; c) the path forward is therefore through an anti-imperialist struggle, of which the most primitive form is bourgeois nationalism and the highest form socialism.

This ideology can be transformed into something resembling the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution just by adding some insistence on the need for working class leadership for the socialist culmination of the anti-imperialist struggle. But the resemblance is deceptive.

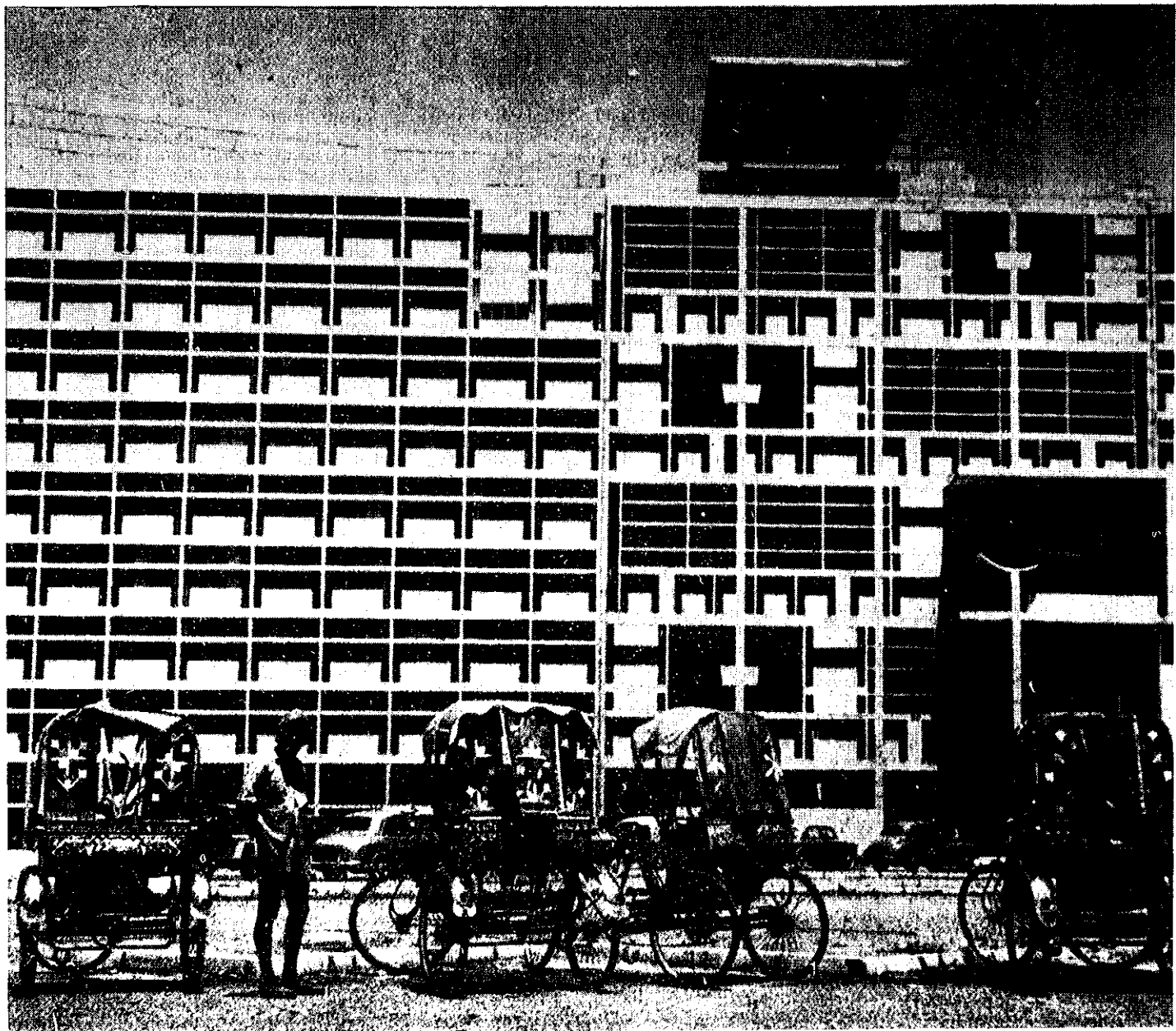
The theory summarised above means accepting 'national independence' — defined not precisely, but in utopian terms of 'independent development' — as central, whereas Marxism demands precise definitions.

It means accepting bourgeois nationalism as the first form of the anti-imperialist struggle, whereas Marxism surely demands counterposing the workers to the bourgeoisie *even in the fight for bourgeois democratic demands*.

It means smearing over the differences between bourgeois democracy and socialism under the general heading of anti-imperialism — *both*, after all, are defined as the fight for independent development — rather than strictly distinguishing.

Scenario thinking: the South Atlantic war and Ireland

Ideas not very different from this seem to dominate many minds in the Trotskyist movement. How else can they arrive at counterposing anti-imperialism to bourgeois democracy? How else can the Argentine invasion of the Falklands be seen as a first step in anti-imperialism, in a process of permanent revolution? How else can the Catholic struggle in Northern Ireland (which I believe, in contrast to the Argentine junta's adventure, has a real, progressive, i.e. bourgeois democratic content) be seen



Combined and uneven development: modern office block amid poverty in Chandigarh, India

as somehow bearing within it the socialism that will solve the problem of Catholic-Protestant working class unity? In both cases events are analysed not for what they are, but from slotting them into a preconceived scenario of escalating anti-imperialism, leading to socialist revolution — and then reading backwards.

This sort of scenario-thinking was established in the Trotskyist movement well before the theorisations of Frank and his co-thinkers:

"One must be prepared first of all to enter the struggle, confident that the logic of its development is infallibly that of the permanent revolution and grasping at the first handle offered by the situation (peasant movements, workers' strikes, or national demonstrations) to go with the masses, demonstrate with them and be the first ones against imperialism. Even though they may cry at the same time, 'Long live King Farouk', 'Long Live Mossadeg', 'Long Live Bourguiba', their second cry will inevitably be against the traitor king, the traitor paschas, the feudal-capitalist traitors, the cry of the Cairo demonstrators: 'War and revolution'".

(Pablo, p.34)

But by being merged with such theory it has been systematised and rationalised.

Trotsky's concept of permanent revolution

Trotsky's formulation of the theory of permanent revolution was quite different.

From the 1890s on, there was a debate between Marxists and Narodniks in Russia about the nature of the coming revolution. The Narodniks said it was socialist. The Marxists said bourgeois. Trotsky's theory started *firmly from the Marxist side*.

"No one in the ranks of the Russian Social Democrats (we all called ourselves Social Democrats then) had any doubts that we were approaching a *bourgeois* revolution, that is, a revolution produced by the contradiction between the development of the productive forces of capitalist society and the outlived caste and state relationships of the period of serfdom and the Middle Ages. In the struggle against the Narodniks and the anarchists, I had to devote not a few speeches and articles in those days to the Marxist analysis of the

bourgeois nature of the impending revolution".

The starting point for Trotsky's variant within the general Marxist analysis was, however, that:

"The bourgeois character of the revolution could not...answer in advance the question of which classes would solve the tasks of the democratic revolution and what the mutual relationship of these classes would be."

(Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution*, p.2-3)

Some years later, on Spain, Trotsky polemicalised against Andres Nin, who interpreted 'permanent revolution' as the assertion that the revolution was socialist:

"...Andres Nin began his broadcast declarations with the following thesis: 'the struggle that is beginning is not the struggle between bourgeois democracy and fascism, as some think, but between fascism and socialism'...The socialist character of the revolution, determined by the fundamental social factors of our epoch, is not, however, given ready-made and completely guaranteed right from the beginning of revolutionary development. No, from April 1931 onward, the great Spanish drama

has taken on the character of a 'republican' and 'democratic' revolution...The problem still remains, and therein lies the whole political task, to transform this hybrid, confused, 'half-blind and half-deaf' revolution into a socialist revolution. It is necessary not only to say what is but also to know how to use 'what is' as one's point of departure."

("The Spanish Revolution, p.294-5)

And in the Transitional Programme Trotsky summarised permanent revolution with great conciseness:

"As a primary step, the workers must be armed with this democratic programme [agrarian revolution, national independence, constituent assembly]. Only they will be able to summon and unite the farmers. On the basis of the revolutionary democratic programme, it is necessary to oppose the workers to the 'national' bourgeoisie. Then, at a certain stage in the mobilisation of the masses under the slogans of revolutionary democracy, soviets can and should arise. Their historical role in each given period, particularly their relation to the National Assembly, will be determined by the political level of the proletariat, the bond between them and the peasantry, and the character of the proletarian party politics. Sooner or later the soviets should overthrow bourgeois democracy. Only they are capable of bringing the democratic revolution to a conclusion and likewise opening an era of socialist revolution."

What is the difference between this and the vulgarised version of permanent revolution described above? The Trotskyist theory says: this is a bourgeois revolution. Organise the working class to fight for bourgeois democratic tasks in opposition to the bourgeoisie: on that basis win workers' power. The vulgarised theory says: this is a process of permanent revolution. Support the bourgeois nationalist first stage of it. Develop it.

It will 'grow over' into socialist revolution. Bourgeois democratic issues — like freedom of trade unions, political parties, etc. — are not very important here since socialism is higher than bourgeois democracy.

Permanent revolution 45 years on: the letter and spirit of Trotsky's theory

In the summary of 'The Permanent Revolution', Trotsky wrote:

"With regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of the permanent revolution signifies that the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving democracy and national emancipation is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses". (PR, p.152).

Following this, some comrades seem to argue that the underdeveloped countries must 'stand still' with respect to bourgeois transformation — the elimination of pre-capitalist survivals — until the proletarian revolution. To admit that the colonies have won national independence, for example, is to deny Trotskyism.

I think this is wrong. Trotsky always wrote on a short time-span. He was concerned about the revolutionary possibilities for the next period, not about what would happen if those revolutionary possibilities were defeated, a world war happened, and 35 years of capitalist development followed.

On Russia, Lenin repeatedly argued that

there were two alternatives for the country's bourgeois transformation:

"With the present economic basis of the Russian Revolution, two main lines of development and outcome are objectively possible:

"Either the old landlord economy, bound as it is by thousands of threads to serfdom, is retained and turns slowly into purely capitalist, 'Junker' economy...Or the old landlord economy is broken up by revolution, which destroys all the relics of serfdom, and large landownership in the first place..."

(Lenin, DOCR, p.32)

The first alternative — the 'Prussian road' — surely also applies to the countries Trotsky was referring to. In the 'Third International After Lenin', (TIAL, p.134) Trotsky refers to the possibility of the 'bismarckian way'.

To use the passage cited at the beginning of this section as a basis for assessing underdeveloped countries today would seem to Trotsky, I'm sure, as wrong as using Marx's writings on permanent revolution in Germany in 1848 to assess Germany in 1900.

Whatever else capitalism can do, it cannot stand still. If the working class proves unable to take the lead — as, mainly due to Stalinism, it did in the 1920s, and '30s and '40s — then the bourgeoisie will transform society in its own way. The variant is mentioned by Trotsky in passing:

"Then the struggle for national liberation will produce only very partial results, results directed entirely against the working masses". (PR, p.132).

Those results now exist. They are the reality we have to deal with. The job of socialists is to analyse and base ourselves on the class contradictions within that reality.

A final word is necessary on the theories of 'the end of imperialism'. The theories arguing that imperialism ended with decolonisation appear, at first sight, to be the radical opposite of 'centre-periphery' theory. In fact they are fundamentally offshoots of that theory.

Bill Warren launched an assault on standard radical thinking about imperialism with an article, in 1973, presenting facts on capitalist development in the Third World. I think it is undeniable that this initial article, despite its exaggerations, had a healthy impact in forcing Marxists to re-think their 'conventional wisdom'. But the further theorisations by Warren — a member of the British Communist Party and then of a Stalinist-Kautskyist sect, the British and Irish Communist Organisation — were not very useful.

Warren's argument is completely trapped by the thesis he is arguing against. On point after point he says no where the 'centre-periphery' theorists say yes, yes where they say no. This makes his account a contradictory jumble.

Example: 'centre-periphery' theorists say that colonialism hindered the development of the colonies, also that the removal of formal colonial rule has not removed those hindrances. Warren replies that colonialism helped the development of the colonies — and that the end of colonialism helped even more!

Example: 'centre-periphery' theorists attack the social and cultural effects of colonialism and imperialism. Warren responds with a vigorous defence of the historically progressive role of bourgeois culture — yet has little but scorn for a major example of that progressive role, the self-

assertion of the ex-colonial peoples through bourgeois national struggles.

Example: 'Centre-periphery' theorists say that imperialism generates underdevelopment — using 'underdevelopment' as a term to cover both lack of capitalist industry, and unevenness of industrial development, and mass misery within that development. Warren replies that imperialism generates development — meaning growth of capitalism, and increasing evenness of development, and increased social welfare.

If 'centre-periphery' theorists in some ways parallel the Narodniks in pre-revolutionary Russia, Warren parallels the Legal Marxists. Like them he paints the development of capitalism in the most glowing colours, not only recognising it (as Marxists must) but effectively praising and advocating it.

Everything that points to capitalist progress in the Third World is played up, the other side of the picture is played down. For example: Warren notes briefly that "Agriculture has failed..." in the Third World (his book, p.236), but rapidly moves on to *speculations* about favourable prospects for Third World agriculture in the future.

If you read closely, there are qualifications and reservations. But the drift of Warren's argument is that the world is moving towards more even development, with imperialist relations of economic domination being weakened. Yet capitalist development is in fact becoming *more* uneven. The economic domination of big states and international companies remains strong.

We may see major reshufflings in the imperialist hierarchy and the emergence of new imperialisms. The 'end of imperialism' is not foreseeable, this side of the socialist revolution.

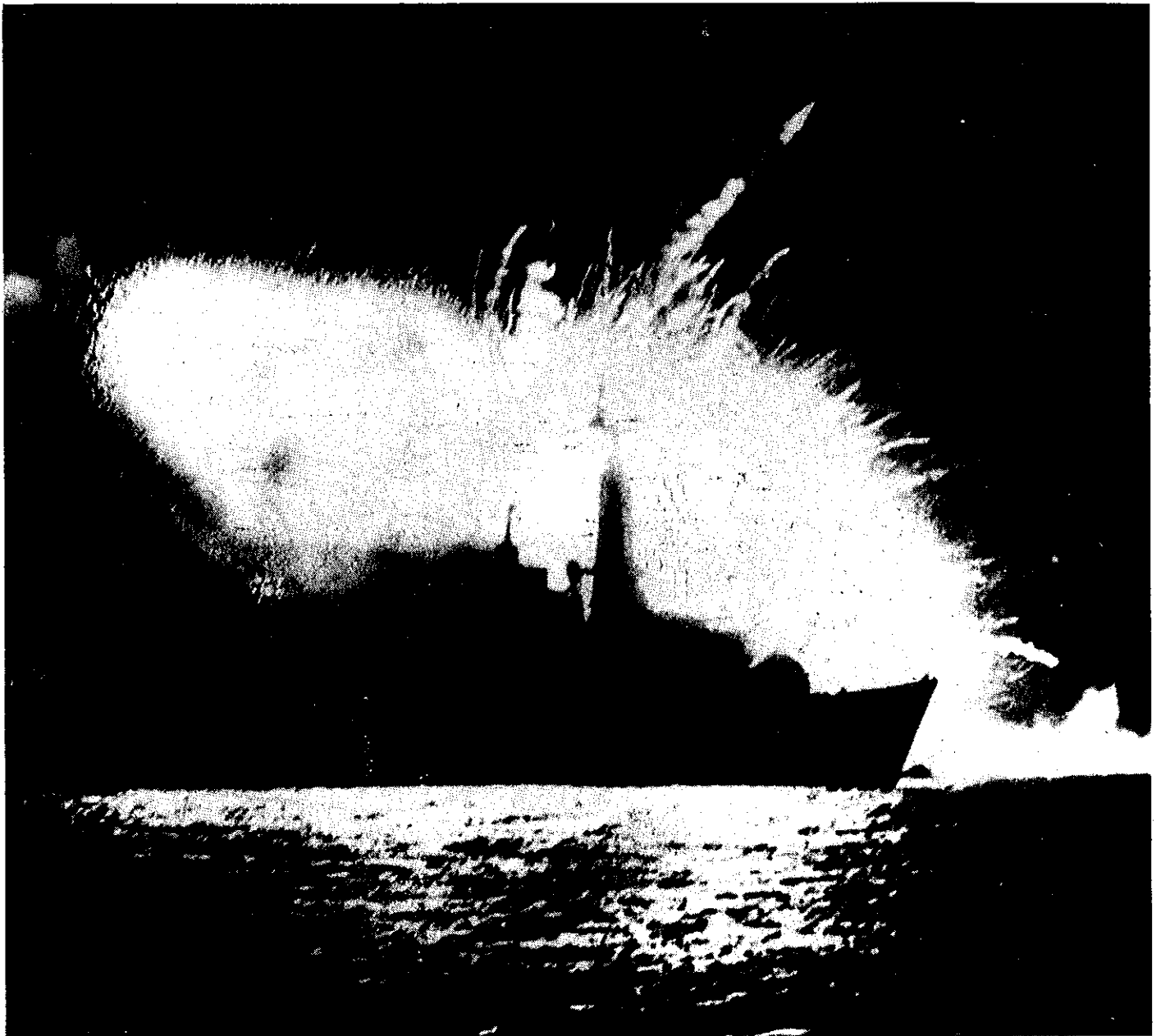
Another 'end of imperialism' argument, entirely different from Warren's, has been developed within, or on the periphery of, the Trotskyist movement.

Michael Kidron, of the International Socialists (now Socialist Workers Party) argued in the early '60s that imperialism was the 'highest stage but one' of capitalism. The SWP has since distanced itself from this view, but it was an organic part of a coherent overall theory — embracing state capitalism in the USSR and the 'permanent arms economy' in the West — which has not been renounced.

In 'western capitalism', Kidron argued, the permanent arms economy acts as a stabiliser. The original version of this thesis was, as Kidron himself points out, "heavily Keynesian". Implicitly accepting the Keynesian view that the fundamental cause of capitalist crisis is lack of market demand (due to insufficient psychological drive to consume and to invest at a given level of income), it proposed that the demand created by the state through military spending would (to some extent, for some time) fill the gap.

Later the permanent arms economy theory "underwent a marxist conversion" (Kidron 1977; and for a critique of the Marxist version, see Semp). But it was the 'Keynesian' version that linked in with the argument on imperialism.

The economic function of imperialist export of capital was interpreted fundamentally as providing a 'drain' for capital that would otherwise be surplus in the advanced capitalist countries. With the permanent arms economy providing an alternative drain, such export of capital was no longer necessary for the system.



The South Atlantic war: HMS Sheffield explodes. A blow for national liberation?

The Third World was also less and less important to the advanced capitalist countries as a source of raw materials, because of new technologies, use of substitutes, etc.

In short, imperialist exploitation of the Third World was no longer necessary for the West, and that explained decolonisation. However, Third World countries were left crushed and battered in the world of military competition between nation-states.

"The societies maimed and shattered by the imperialist explosion of the last century are again being maimed and shattered — by the growing economic isolationism of the west (an imperialist implosion as it were)..." (Kidron, WC, p.10)

The conclusions were similar to those of the standard 'centre-periphery' argument on the underdevelopment of the 'periphery' — with one modification. Rather than China, Cuba, etc. being pointed to as examples of development to contrast with the general underdevelopment, it was argued that they shared in the underdevelopment. In such countries there had been a process of 'deflected permanent revolution', whereby petty bourgeois groups presented themselves as the banner-bearers of socialism but actually installed state

capitalism — which, within the capitalist world economy, could offer no way out.

The idea that imperialism is fundamentally about providing a 'drain' for surplus capital is wrong. It is wrong whether the term 'imperialism' is used to mean capitalist imperialism in general, dating back to the 16th century, or in Lenin's narrower sense, to refer to specifically *monopoly-capitalist imperialism* since around 1898-1902.

Kidron and his 'drain' theory

In the earlier phases of capitalist imperialism there was no export of capital: on the contrary, as Marx put it, "treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement and murder flowed back into the mother-country and were turned into capital there". When export of capital to the Third World did begin, it was not an *overflow*. Capital does not necessarily exhaust all domestic openings for investment before turning abroad. Capitalism is not a system composed fundamentally of national units, with flows between those units generated only by the excesses and imbalances within them.

In any case, capital can be 'surplus' in a Third World country as well as in an advanced capitalist country. Capital becomes surplus, not because of the absolute level of development of an economy, but in relation to its tempo of capitalist development.

High levels of capital export from a country may be associated with low investment in that country — or, equally, with high home investment.

Capital has a drive to expand, to seek new fields of operation, to press outwards, which is inherently insatiable. One new field of operation only produces new profits which in their turn become capital and press for further new arenas.

Thus the argument that export of capital is no longer necessary for the West falls down. And in fact export of capital to the Third World in recent decades has been pretty rapid. (There are figures showing an apparent declining importance of foreign investment in the Third World: but that is only because export of capital between advanced capitalist countries has grown even more rapidly).

Magdoff argues in detail that Third World sources of raw materials are still important for the US (especially for arms



production). But the 'oil crises' of the 1970s surely settle this debate anyway.

In any case, *why* — in Kidron's view — does state capitalism offer no way out of underdevelopment? Crucial here is Kidron's argument that modern capitalist competition is primarily military competition between states — the argument that is central to his thesis that the USSR is state capitalist.

This argument that military competition defines a world of state capitalisms leads to the conclusion that no social revolution is possible unless it happens simultaneously in at least a large chunk of the world. Revolutions in the Third World (and perhaps in advanced capitalist countries?) are bound to end, under international pressure, in state capitalism.

This fatalistic conclusion is completed by a rejection (more or less out of hand, with references to Trotsky) of the notion of bourgeois revolutions in the Third World. Fortunately it is not necessary: military competition between states has been a feature of many different states over many centuries; it was a major factor in the era of the absolute monarchies, for example; it is quite distinct from specifically capitalist competition; and clearly it does not entirely determine, although it influences, the internal social relations of the competing states.

The political problems with Kidron's theory were expressed most dramatically in a celebrated controversy in the '60s. Commenting on the ex-Trotskyist LSSP's partici-

pation in a bourgeois coalition government in Sri Lanka, Kidron deplored the LSSP's action but said that unfortunately there was nothing much that socialists could do in countries like Sri Lanka anyway. Some leading IS/SWPers (then under considerable pressure from the Workers' Fight tendency within IS) sharply dissociated from Kidron. But he had the logic of their common theory on his side.

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South Africa: the case for a workers' party

In its response to the struggles in South Africa, Socialist Action has aligned itself more or less totally with the African National Congress (ANC), ignoring, or dismissing as sectarian, groups to its left like black consciousness and the non-racial trade unions. Tom Rigby examines Socialist Action's policy and the theories constructed to justify it.

SOCIALIST Action's long march away from working-class politics passed another milestone recently with the publication of an article by 'Dick Carter' (John Ross) on 'Revolution in South Africa' (1 November 1985).

The article is the most elaborate attempt so far by Socialist Action to theorise its political line on South Africa. It gives no facts, information or detail about what's going on in South Africa. Instead, it argues entirely by abstract logic. It says:

- The 'axis' of the revolution in South Africa is the democratic question.

- All political forces in the liberation movement are to be judged by their attitude to the democratic tasks of the revolution — i.e. redistribution of land; free trade unions; one person, one vote; an end to the apartheid system.

- Judged from this point of view, Socialist Action says that the new emerging black workers' movement in South Africa is not as politically advanced or developed as the African National Congress (ANC) and the United Democratic Front (UDF). (The UDF is a broad cross-class alliance of some 650 affiliated groups: it identifies with the tradition of the ANC, its Congress Alliance, and its leader Nelson Mandela, but also includes religious leaders such as Bishop Desmond Tutu and Dr Alan Boesak).

- As a result "In this fight for democracy Marxists seek unity in action with the revolutionary nationalist organisations in South Africa such as the ANC".

The struggle for democracy is to be carried through by the implementation of the ANC's programme, the Freedom Charter. But "these democratic tasks can only be carried through by transferring political power into the hands of the working class".

Leadership

Underlying this analysis is a conception of the ANC as part of an emerging 'new world leadership'. The other components of this group, says Socialist Action, are the NUM leadership in Britain, the leadership of Sinn Fein in Ireland, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, and the Cuban ruling elite around Fidel Castro.

In fact the article is a contrived and scholastic attempt to give a Trotskyist gloss to a position argued more frankly by the US associate of Socialist Action, the Socialist Workers' Party (USA) and its paper 'Militant'.

The recent SWP conference — according to 'Militant' — ended with the delegates chanting 'ANC! ANC! ANC!' The SWP's



FOSATU women's group

position on South Africa is to support the ANC 100% and uncritically and to ignore all the other forces in the South African liberation movement — black consciousness groups like Azapo, semi-Trotskyist groups like the Cape Action League, the independent trade unions, etc.

In the first place this falsifies reality. Though the ANC is probably the strongest single political influence in the liberation movement, other influences are sizeable, and the trade unions are probably the biggest organised force of the movement. In the second place the SWP's position represents, to a considerable degree, an alignment with the right wing of the liberation movement against the wing that wants a socialist revolution.

Socialist Action has the same line, only decked out with more pompous theory.

Ross's argument consists of a nominally Trotskyist framework and a Stalinist political content.

Take one of Socialist Action's central contentions: that the new non-racial independent trade unions are less politically advanced than the ANC/UDF. The unions are not one homogeneous force. A real genuine living movement of hundreds of thousands of workers cannot be. There are competing and very different strands within the unions. But the mainstream, as represented by the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), is not at all less politically developed than the ANC/UDF.

At the 1982 FOSATU congress, for example, general secretary Joe Foster rejected social democracy and Stalinism as models of working-class politics.

"In the capitalist economies these working class movements have power and organisation yet politically the working class is still subject to policies and practices that are clearly against their interests". And "as the struggle of Solidarity shows, even the fact that a country is said to be socialist does not guarantee that workers control their own destiny. Solidarity was not struggling

to restore capitalism in Poland, its struggle was to establish more democratic worker control over their socialist society".

He pointed out that the real world is not just one of apartheid and anti-apartheid, but of capital and labour.

"Behind the scenes of the great battle between the apartheid regime and its popular opponents the capitalist economy has flourished and capital emerges now as a powerful and different force. In the economy capital and labour are the major forces, yet politically the struggle is being fought elsewhere".

Moreover, from a working-class point of view the ANC's politics are alien. In particular: "To the major Western powers it has to appear as anti-racism but not as anti-capitalist. For the socialist East it has to be at least neutral in the super-power struggle and certainly it could not appear to offer a serious socialist alternative to that of those countries as the response to Solidarity illustrates. These factors must seriously affect its relationship to workers".

Nationalism

Foster also referred to the general experience of Third World nationalism.

"All the great and successful popular movements have had as their aim the overthrow of oppressive — most often colonial — regimes. But these movements cannot and have not themselves been able to deal with the particular and fundamental problem of workers. Their task is to remove regimes that are regarded as illegitimate and unacceptable by the majority. It is, therefore, essential that workers must strive to build their own powerful and effective organisation even whilst they are part of the wider popular struggle. This organisation is necessary to protect and further worker interests and to ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will in the end have no option but to turn against their worker supporters".

Some trade unionists have gone further. For instance, Moses Mayekiso, secretary of the Metal and Allied Workers' Union (a FOSATU affiliate) in the Transvaal:

"At present the FOSATU shop stewards' councils, and also MAWU, are discussing the political set-up. We are looking at the crisis and the solutions to the crisis. The general feeling is that the workers must have their own party and their own freedom charter..."

"The Charter [the Freedom Charter of the ANC] is a capitalist document. We need a workers' charter that will say clearly who will control the farms, presently owned by the capitalists, who will control the factories, the mines and so on. There must be a change of the whole society. Through the shop steward councils people are opposed to this idea that there will be two stages towards liberation: that we must clean up capitalism first, then socialism. It's a waste of time, a waste of energy and a waste of people's blood..."

On the questions of Stalinism, the independent role of the working class, workers' control, and democracy, the unions are very advanced indeed.

Politics

Anyway, even if the unions were political miles behind the ANC, revolutionary Marxists could not prefer the ANC to the real living, growing, workers' movement.

The working class as it actually exists and organises is our starting point. History is made by class struggle, not by the interplay of abstract concepts. The attitude of Marxists to cross-class nationalist organisations can never, even at its most sympathetic, be the same as to the workers. The ABC of Marxist politics is the self-liberation of the working class.

The ANC is an organisation which deserves our full solidarity in its fight against apartheid. It is not in any meaningful sense a workers' organisation. At the core of the ANC is a hardened Stalinist group, the South African Communist Party, who have a political perspective of a two-stage revolution — first 'democratic', then afterwards a class struggle for socialism. Around this core have been attached various liberal and democratic figures. Since it went underground in the early '60s, the ANC has been dependent on the material aid of Stalinist governments. Its magazine, for example, is printed in East Germany.

So the ANC cannot be judged just by what it writes on paper. And in terms of the actual aspirations of the black working class for democracy and workers' control, the programme of the ANC does not go very far at all.

From the angle of democracy the Charter has been criticised for 'liberalism' and in particular by the black consciousness movement for defining the oppressed blacks according to apartheid's categories of Coloured, Asian, and African. In relation to women's demands the Charter is very limited. Women in the new independent unions have won more in terms of maternity leave and benefits than is mentioned in the Freedom Charter.

The 'second stage' of the South African CP's 'two stage' strategy is much worse: it is 'socialism' on the model of the USSR. No advanced democracy there.

Actually, as might be expected from a Stalinist organisation, the ANC is very ultimatum and bureaucratic about the struggle for democracy. Rather than taking its cue from the actual mobilisations of workers and peasants over democratic issues, it uses those issues to reinforce the strength, prestige, and bargaining position of its

apparatus.

From the early 1960s until recently, the ANC's politics centred round guerilla armed actions, divorced from the working class. Today its slogans are 'make South Africa ungovernable' and 'no education before liberation'. It does not seek to help the masses formulate and win specific democratic gains, but rather to increase the disorder that harasses the regime.

It has no immediate democratic demands for those — half the African population — who live in the bantustans. It says, rightly, that the bantustans should be reintegrated into South Africa, and leaves it at that.

It has no specific campaigns for democratic rights for women. In the black townships, it supports the campaign to destroy the local councils that collaborate with the regime, but proposes no positive alternative — only 'ungovernability'. FOSATU leaders like Alec Erwin, by contrast, have proposed the building of democratic, accountable structures in the townships to lead struggles on issues like rents, fares, civil rights and so on.

The ANC's attitude to the democratic struggle for legal rights for trade unions has throughout been negative. Seeking to preserve for the exiled SACTU the position of sole representative of South African non-racial trade unionism (though SACTU organises no workers in South Africa), the ANC claimed that legal trade unions were impossible in 'fascist' South Africa. When the non-racial trade unions won semi-legal status, the ANC denounced them as economic and reformist. As Charlie van Gelderen has documented in 'International' no.1, the ANC is still slandering the unions today. It still opposes direct links between South African and British trade unionists.

The ANC's demands reduce to 'End Apartheid' and 'Free Nelson Mandela'. Neither is quite what it seems. 'End Apartheid' means 'hand over to, or at least negotiate with, the ANC'. 'Free Mandela' is in the first place a sectarian slogan: groups like Azapo have argued rightly that the slogan should be 'free all political prisoners'. And the ANC also insists that it will not accept the freeing of Mandela unless it is without conditions and other ANC prisoners are also released. The aim, in other words, is not so much to free Mandela as to highlight Mandela and the ANC as symbols of opposition to apartheid.

Support

True, the ANC has tremendous support among the black people of South Africa, support won by its status as a symbol (recognised by governments) of opposition to apartheid, and by the courage of its militants like Nelson Mandela. But, despite the heroism, the ANC is not a good leadership of the struggle for democracy. And with its general world-view it could not be. The struggle for democracy in South Africa is intertwined with the class struggle of the black workers and peasants. The fight for democracy needs a leadership dedicated to the maximum independent mobilisation of those workers and peasants.

To advocate a workers' party counterposed to the ANC is not, as Ross would have it, a 'sectarian' counterposition of socialism to democracy. The struggle for democracy itself calls for a workers' party.

Even from a democratic point of view, let alone a socialist, the ANC's programme and its strategy are not advanced but deeply flawed.

The mode of operation of the UDF is one that many worker militants are deeply suspicious of. It is an organisation with no formal democratic structures. Actions are

called without any consultation with the constituent bodies. The unions feel that they are being treated as a stage army by the middle-class leaders of the UDF. An example was the march on Pollsmoor Prison earlier this year. Called without consultation with the unions, badly stewarded and poorly organised, the march never left its starting point. Meanwhile the 'organisers' went by car to the prison. This points to the basic problem: though the UDF can mobilise thousands under its auspices, it is not trusted by large numbers of trade union militants who have a deep and profound commitment to democracy and rank-and-file control in the workers' movement.

Combine

The SWP-US (and its co-thinkers in Britain) are relatively consistent: they couple their alignment to the Stalinist ANC with a rejection of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. Ross, however, tries to combine the same practical conclusions with a formal acceptance of Trotsky's theory. So while saying "The solution of the democratic tasks of the South African revolution, which are its axis of development, can only be solved by the dictatorship of the proletariat" Socialist Action — apart from mangling the English language — ends up advocating a political perspective which means subordinating the working class to the programme of bourgeois democracy in a struggle led by a Stalinist political formation.

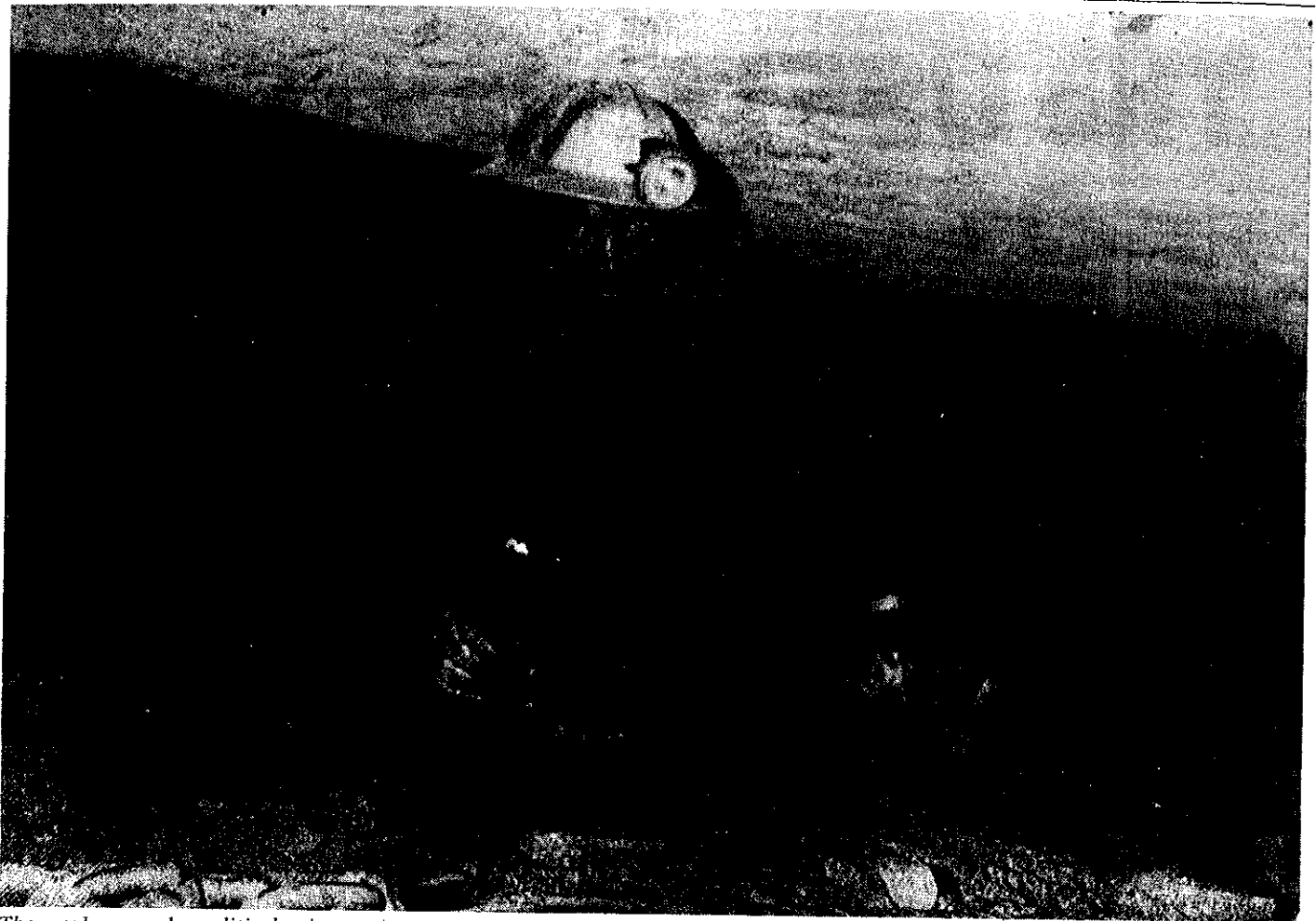
Now Trotsky's theory in its bare essentials is this: In a 'backward' or 'underdeveloped' capitalist society, one where elements of modern industry are combined with pre-capitalist political and social relations (feudalism on the land, colonial overlordship, medieval-type autocracy), the revolution against these pre-capitalist relations can be led by the working class and thus combined with a socialist revolution. In Russia the working class could lead the anti-Tsarist democratic revolution and therefore merge it with a socialist revolution; in South Africa the black working class can lead the anti-apartheid democratic revolution and make it part of a single movement together with a struggle for workers' power.

This perspective does not mean ignoring democratic issues. On the contrary: in Russia the main demands of the Bolsheviks and of Trotsky were land to the peasants, and of Trotsky were land to the peasants, the Constituent Assembly, the eight-hour day. Trotsky explained it like this: "As a primary step, the workers must be armed with [a] democratic programme. On the basis of the revolutionary democratic programme, it is necessary to oppose the workers to the 'national' bourgeoisie. Then, at a certain stage in the mobilisation of the masses under the slogans of revolutionary democracy, soviets can and should arise..."

The workers' movement must actively champion democratic demands, whilst integrating the fight for such demands into the tempo and logic of the class struggle. So class issues and democratic issues would be intertwined. Nevertheless working-class power — the rule of soviets (workers' councils) and public ownership of industry — would be necessary for victory.

In Ross's emphasis on democratic demands and the need for working-class power, he appears to be using the same ideas as Trotsky. But not so.

Trotsky posed no direct mechanical relation between democracy and socialism. He argued that democratic demands and direct working-class demands would interweave in a complex and changing way. The 'axis', to use Ross's word, of this relationship was not the struggle for democracy in abstraction



The workers need a political voice

but the living class struggle of the workers.

As Trotsky put it in 'Lessons of October': "Only on that condition [breaking from defensism] could the proletariat at the next stage become the axis around which the toiling masses of the village would group themselves".

Trotsky saw the workers as the axis. The pioneer Russian Marxist George Plekhanov expressed the same basic idea when he wrote that the Marxist — as against the populist — "is convinced that not the workers are necessary for the revolution, but the revolution for the workers".

Trotsky saw democratic issues as central, and argued therefore for a workers' party to take the initiative on those issues. Ross sees democratic issues as central, and argues therefore for workers' initiative to be subordinated to a Stalinist-bourgeois alliance.

The experience of the black workers' movement in recent years has refuted all scholastic conceptions of the relationship of democracy to class struggle.

The non-racial unions have fought for the most limited demands while not compromising their revolutionary aims. They have cooperated with broad cross-class organisations like the United Democratic Front on many issues while retaining working-class independence.

The relationship between the different aspects of struggle is similar to what Rosa Luxemburg observed in the mass strike movement in Russia in 1905.

But the movement, on the whole, does not proceed from the economic to the political struggle, nor even the reverse. Every great political mass action, after it has attained its political highest point, breaks up into a mass of economic strikes. And that applies not only to each of the great mass strikes, but also the revolution as a whole.

"With the spreading, clarifying and involution of the political struggle, the economic struggle not only does not recede, but extends, organises and becomes involved in equal measure. Between the two there is the most complete reciprocal action.

"Every new onset and every fresh victory of the political struggle is transformed into a powerful impetus for the economic struggle... And conversely...

"Cause and effect here continually change places; and thus the economic and the political factor in the period of the mass strike, now widely removed, completely separated or even mutually exclusive, as the theoretical plan would have them, merely form the two interlacing sides of the proletarian class struggle in Russia. And their unity is precisely the mass strike".

Imprint

But if experience of struggle provides the basis for an answer to the strategic problems, it does not automatically spell that answer out and imprint it on people's minds. It does not automatically sweep away false answers, misconceptions, and the influence of middle-class politicians on the working class. Still less does it spontaneously provide solutions to all the tactical problems that arise.

To do all that requires a workers' political party with a vigorous internal life. The non-racial trade unions, especially FOSATU, have been trying to develop working class politics. But trade unions, by their very structure, cannot substitute for political parties.

The best way forward would be a workers' party based on the trade unions. In

form it could be similar to the British Labour Party, which was founded as a federation of trade unions and socialist groups and later developed an individual membership structure in addition. It should be much more democratic than the British Labour Party, and could be so, given that the non-racial unions in South Africa do not have encrusted bureaucracies like the British unions already had to a considerable extent in 1900.

They have concentrated on building up strong rank-and-file organisation, shop stewards' structures and direct worker involvement. Strict accountability of leaders — who have to obtain mandates from their members for all that they do — has helped prevent the leaders from being coopted by industrial conciliation bureaucracy.

Full-time union officials are paid similar rates to the workers they represent.

Politically such a workers' party could be very different from the British Labour Party, developing a programme for working-class revolution rather than stodgy tinkering with the system. How successfully it did that would of course depend on the work of organised socialists and Marxists within the party. Already-existing semi-Trotskyist groups in South Africa, like the Cape Action League, could play a fructifying role here.

There are many difficulties with this project of a workers' party based on the trade unions, and consequently many South African trade unionists sympathetic to the general idea feel that now is not the time for it.

Those objections need to be discussed carefully. But Socialist Action is a different case. It has put itself on the wrong side of the central political divide in the South African liberation movement.

The USFI today

The whole history of the current now organised as the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) has been one of repeated political accommodation to Stalinist or nationalist forces leading big struggles. Since 1979 the USFI's US associate, the Socialist Workers' Party, has taken this method further, identifying 100% with the Cuban government. Clive Bradley surveys this turn and the response to it of the USFI majority led by Ernest Mandel.

IN 1983, a group of oppositionists — broadly in support of the Mandel tendency — were expelled from the SWP and set themselves up as a new group, 'Socialist Action'. Their founding statement gives some indication of current state of the SWP.

"Immediately after the party convention in 1981, with no possibility for anyone who disagreed to reply, Jack Barnes, the SWP's central leader, announced that he no longer accepted the idea of fighting for a directly socialist revolution in underdeveloped countries. [Then in an article in 1983] Barnes insisted that 'our movement must discard permanent revolution'."

They go on to look at the political results of what they consider to be "a serious adaptation to Stalinist ideology".

On Poland: "In 1981 it was clear that the SWP did not want to be too prominent in support of the Polish workers — this might embarrass the party in its relationship with [Cuba and Nicaragua]... The SWP rejected demonstrations of any kind, refused to participate in virtually all meetings of the Left to support Solidarnosc..."

"... Its official position is for 'political revolution'... [But] shortly after the beginning of 1982, this concept... virtually disappeared from 'The Militant'... In its place ambiguous formulas appeared that could be interpreted as calling merely for the reform of the Polish CP"

On Iran: "... the SWP's press refused for many months to defend any victims of repression... Universally known facts about torture of every variety of dissenter in Iranian prisons, military assaults on the Kurdish national minority areas... none of this could be found in 'The Militant'."

They got on: "You could not tell what was going on in places like Iran, Poland, Afghanistan, North Korea, Vietnam or Ethiopia from reading the manipulated accounts in 'The Militant'." And — though Socialist Action, because of their own politics, do not say this — for sure you cannot tell what's going on in Cuba or Nicaragua from the glowing reports in 'The Militant'.

The SWP's 1979 turn

The current phase of the SWP's politics began quite abruptly in 1979, after the death of their veteran theorist Joseph Hansen. But its roots can be traced back further.

In the early 1960s the SWP — as against their Healyite detractors — recognised that a revolution had taken place in Cuba, and that capitalism had been overthrown. But they went further. They played down the



Poland: the workers' struggles of 1980-1

elements of bureaucratic control in Cuba, and played up all the revolutionary internationalist and anti-bureaucratic aspects of Castroism — all this to the extent that they blurred over the fact that the Cuban government was controlled by a tiny handful of people (with popular support, but no real popular control), and that the working class had no independent political voice. They abandoned any project of building a Trotskyist organisation in Cuba: the Castroite leadership 'team', given further evolution and good advice, could become quite adequate.

What needs to be stressed, in the light of current disputes in the USFI, is that the SWP's analysis of Cuba was shared by the Mandelites. Even now, there is no fundamental programmatic dispute over Cuba in the USFI: the Mandelites no more call for independent working-class action and political revolution in Cuba than do the SWP.

From the late '60s to the late '70s, the SWP was more critical of Castroism than the Mandel faction. In particular the SWP opposed guerilla tactics in Latin America — often in a sectarian, almost parliamentarist, fashion.

In early 1979 the SWP published a speech by Jack Barnes on "20 years of the Cuban Revolution", enthusiastically dropping all criticism of Castro. For some months yet 'The Militant' continued to dismiss the Sandinistas' guerilla war against Somoza as futile, misguided, and petty-bourgeois. In July 1979 the Sandinistas triumphed — and 'The Militant' switched round 180°. From sour, negative rejection of the Sandinistas'

struggle, they turned to 101 per cent support of the Sandinista government and all its policies.

'The Militant' today makes very strange reading. The revolutions in Central America and the Caribbean dominate its pages, but in a curious way. There is extraordinarily little analysis, or even considered comment, on events in the region. There is much less coverage on El Salvador — where civil war rages — than on relatively stable Cuba. The bulk of the material consists of speeches, or articles hung around quotations, by Castro, or Ortega, or Bishop.

The SWP on Cuba

Its presentation has a tone, a mood, a feel that cannot easily be described. So here is an example. This is an extract from the second front page lead article of 'The Militant' of 25 January 1985.

"Tipitapa-Malacatoya, Nicaragua — In front of a huge sign reading 'July victory, people's victory, symbol of Cuba-Nicaragua friendship', a new sugar mill was inaugurated here January 11... The refinery is the largest in all of Central America and the largest single industrial plant in Nicaragua. It was built with extensive aid from Cuba.

"Present at the inauguration ceremonies was Cuban President Fidel Castro, who gave a two-and-a-half hour speech. He announced that Cuba is cancelling the \$73.8 million debt owed by Nicaragua..."

"... A speech was also delivered by Jaime

Wheelock [a Sandinista leader, who said]: 'Without the contribution of the Cuban revolution, it would have been totally impossible to build this refinery...'

The article goes on to take up the whole of page 9, which consists almost entirely of quotations from Castro's speech.

Both in style and in content, 'The Militant' is like a Cuban embassy news-sheet. The SWP has even set up a travel company to organise trips to Cuba and Nicaragua to 'see the revolution'.

The SWP consider the Sandinistas and — especially — the Cuban leadership to be Marxist. A resolution submitted to the USFI World Congress comments that:

"There is a political convergence between our world current and other revolutionists in the Americas, in the first place the leadership of the Communist Party of Cuba, who are charting a course in practice that leads to re-establishing continuity with the internationalist programme and strategy of the Communist International in Lenin's time".

Ethiopia, Poland, Iran

This claim has implications, of course, for how the SWP views the world. A case can be made that Cuban foreign policy in *Central America* is in the direction of aiding rather than crushing revolutions. But beyond Central America it is a different story — Cuba actively backs the Ethiopian dictatorship against the Eritrean people fighting for self-determination; Cuba backed Jaruzelski's crushing of Solidarnosc. (Two facts which alone ridicule the title of an SWP publication, 'Cuba's Internationalist Foreign Policy, 1975-80'). And even in Central America the argument is dubious: in Mexico, where there is a powerful workers' movement, Cuba has a warm attitude to the ruling party, the PRI.

This is a crucial point. Even where Castro aids revolutionary struggles, he does so from his own viewpoint, with his own aims. And that viewpoint, those aims, are not those of independent working-class action. Castro's whole conception of revolution and of socialism is different from ours.

At the peak of Cuban involvement in revolutionary struggles internationally, in the mid to late '60s, their concern was with the Third World and that alone. Castroism is a form of radical Third-Worldist populism: it rejects the very idea of working-class revolutionary action in the advanced capitalist countries. And in the so-called non-aligned movement, Cuba allies with thoroughly bourgeois and often dictatorial Third World governments. In the Third World, too, their perspective is not that of working-class self-liberation.

Of course, the SWP have had to try to cope with Castro's line on Poland. This, they admit, is a mistake — but a mistake committed by a revolutionary... Fine revolutionaries these, you may think, whose 'mistakes' consist of supporting counter-revolutionary violence against the class.

But such matters are of no importance. On the contrary, the Cubans "have set an example of proletarian internationalism in action", and have cleverly "refused to allow a wedge to be driven between Cuba and the Soviet and East European workers' states". Such a wedge — criticism of Jaruzelski? — is undesirable because of "the decisive role of economic and military aid to the Cuban revolution from the Soviet Union". In other words, the SWP has so lost its political bearings that it consciously covers up for the Cuban leadership, and justifies Cuba's political alignment with Moscow.

The SWP has completely collapsed independent working-class politics into a crude view of international power-politics 'blocs' or 'camps' — one that does indeed marry with Castroism very neatly. In the SWP's world there is only 'Imperialism' and 'The Revolution' fighting it out. Socialists must choose their camp.

This leads them to reactionary political conclusions.

"Should workers be 'neutral' in the war between Iraq and Iran?" 'The Militant' asks (18 May 1984). They answer emphatically no.

"We view this war — and all wars today — from the standpoint of the international fight against imperialism and the struggle to advance the world socialist revolution. [The Iranian revolution] strengthened the world working class. The Iraqi invasion... helped serve the interests of US imperialism... An Iranian victory in the war would be an inspiration for all those fighting imperialist oppression in the Mideast".

And what about Iranian oppositionists fighting the Khomeini regime? Certainly, 'The Militant' admits, there has been a clampdown on the left; the regime is bourgeois; and it is not as anti-imperialist as Nicaragua.

"In 1981, the regime took advantage of a terrorist campaign against the revolution — led by a petty-bourgeois radical group called the Mujahedeen — to carry out sweeping arrests and executions... [but the working class] refused to defend the Mujahedeen because they correctly saw its assassination campaign as aiding the imperialists and monarchists".

The SWP criticises government attacks on the left, on the working class, and on the national minorities. But there is no question of siding with opposition to Khomeini. It is all in the context of 'defence of the Iranian revolution'.

"The workers are in a stronger position to fight for their interests today — under the Islamic Republic — than they were under the Shah... Under conditions where the Iranian masses are not ready to replace the current regime with a workers' and peasants' government... overthrow of Khomeini can only be in the interests of imperialism".

In real terms, therefore, the SWP is against any opposition to the Khomeini regime. How is a workers' and peasants' government to be formed if not by socialists agitating? And to put forward even elementary democratic demands in present-day Iran would put militants in very sharp conflict with Khomeini.

The SWP's whole perspective is permeated with the 'campist' idea that 'the Iranian revolution' advances the interests of the masses regardless of what it — i.e. the Iranian state — does to them.

Workerism

The SWP have inevitably been led into support of the brutal regime of the Derg in Ethiopia (which is fully supported by Cuba). Reports of the Ethiopian famine in 'The Militant' say the Derg is not to blame at all; and they do not mention even the existence of Eritrea and Tigre, never mind the bitter wars of liberation taking place there against the Derg.

The SWP's international turn has gone hand in hand with some odd turns in their domestic orientation.

In 1978 they embarked upon a 'turn to industry' — that is, an attempt to send most of their organisation into industrial jobs. So far, so good. Others in the USFI objected that the turn to industry was how-

ever being seen as a 'cure-all'. That is an understatement. For the SWP the turn to industry is positively magical.

"... the concrete working-class outlook we gained by being based in industry oriented us to respond as a proletarian internationalist party to the revolutionary advances being registered by workers and exploited rural producers in the Americas" ('New International' vol.2 no.1, p.27).

So the adaptation to Castroism is justified via a workerism no less crude for being metaphysical. The SWP has become more proletarian and the Cuban revolution has become more proletarian; ergo, their paths converge.

The Mandelites and the SWP

Simultaneously the party programme has been amended. 'For a workers' government' has been replaced by 'For a workers' and farmers' government'. This in the US where the percentage of the labour force in agriculture (i.e. wage-labourers as well as the SWP's 'working farmers') is only 2%. It would be as rational to call for a 'workers' and small shopkeepers' government — probably more so.

SWP articles on the current — very real — agricultural crisis in the US sing hymns of praise to Cuban achievements to be adopted as a model — as if the two countries were remotely comparable.

Perhaps the sickest quirk of the SWP's turn in US politics is its attitude to the Jews. When during the presidential election Jesse Jackson referred to New York as 'Hymie-town', the SWP jumped to his defence.

SWP presidential candidate Mel Mason spelled it out:

"I strongly condemn the racist slander campaign against Jesse Jackson and Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Nation of Islam... In spite of Jackson's retraction of the remark, he, and all Blacks, were smeared as anti-semites..."

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It is clear, then, that the SWP today is a very long way indeed from revolutionary Marxism. Why is a party so hostile to Trotskyism part of a movement calling itself the Fourth International? And why does that 'Fourth International' tolerate them?

On some important issues, the Mandelites majority have stuck to a form of Marxist orthodoxy. They have stood by the theory of permanent revolution, for example. They — or at least their better sections, like the French, the West German or the Swedish — are recognisably trying to relate a body of ideas derived from historic Trotskyism to the actual events of today. The SWP, by contrast, appears to have lost any connection with historic Trotskyism and with large parts of reality; it is more like one of the Maoist groups of the early '70s, with Havana substituted for Peking, than even a decayed form of Trotskyism. The SWP is an isolated sect, internally a bureaucratic cult, which must appear bizarre to most US leftists. The Mandelite organisations are, as a rule, less degenerate.

Yet the Mandelite version of Marxist 'orthodoxy' is fatally coloured by the very

'campism' they seek to criticise.

Permanent revolution is not, for the Mandelites, a strategy, but a process. Maoists, Castroists, Sandinistas, are *compelled* by the 'historical process' to carry out the socialist revolution.

This notion leads the Mandelites into big theoretical difficulties.

Michel Lowy, a leading Mandelite theoretician, has produced a detailed theoretical exposition of their views on permanent revolution, entitled 'The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development'. Lowy confronts the theoretical problem — that capitalism has been overthrown by forces other than the working class led by genuine Marxist parties — in such a way as to define it out of existence rhetorically. Did these revolutions (Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam), Lowy asks, occur "under the leadership of the proletariat... and more precisely under the direction of a proletarian (communist) party"? (p.107). He answers yes. 'Communist' party equals proletarian party equals proletariat. The real problem — that the Chinese revolution, for example, was carried out by a peasant army — is thus not confronted but avoided.

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A view of permanent revolution such as this is no real answer to the SWP. It indicates that the Mandelites lack the theoretical tools seriously to challenge the SWP.

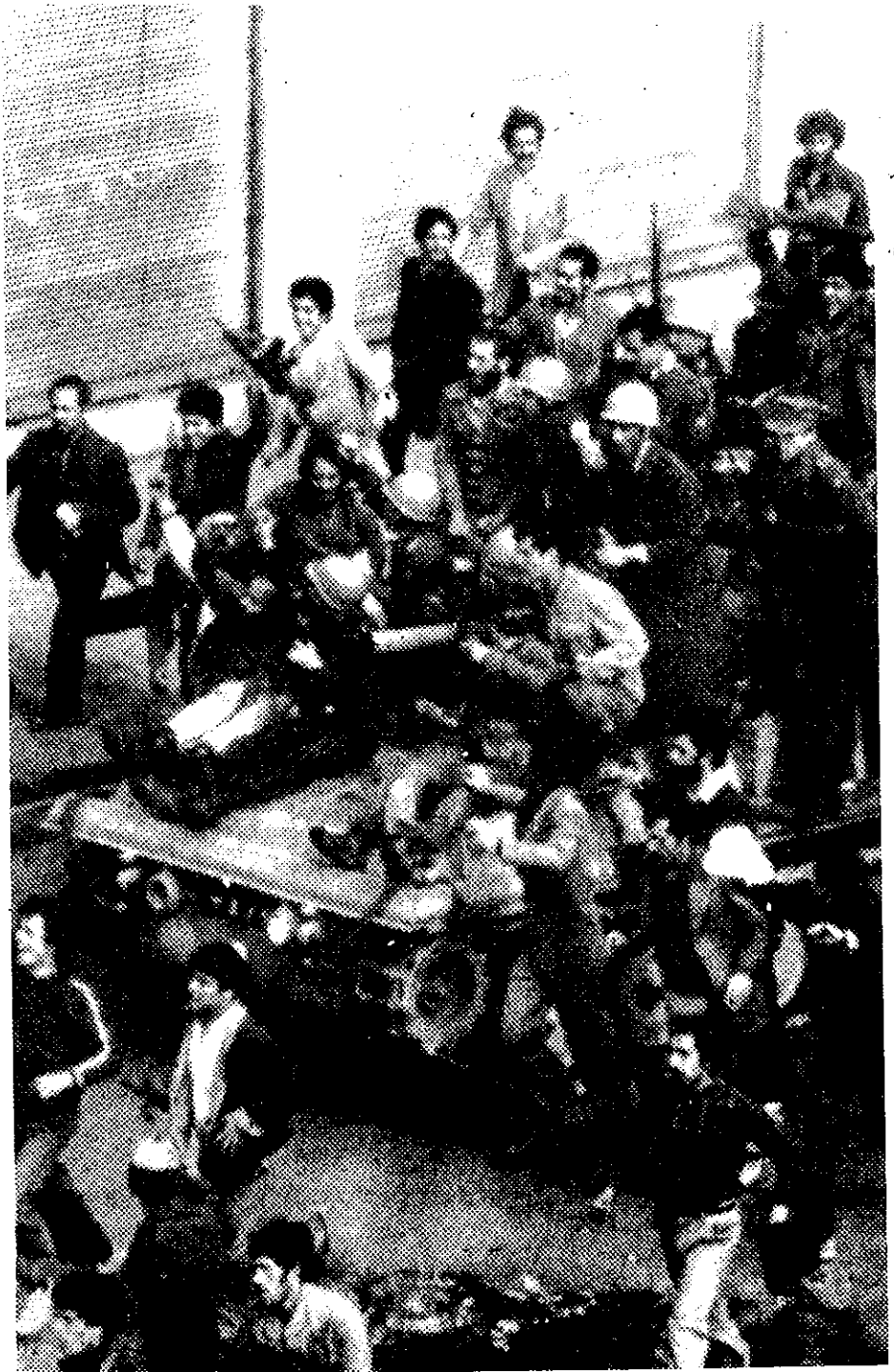
On Cuba, their differences are essentially to do with *assessment*: the Mandelites are slightly more critical. On Nicaragua, the Mandelites are if anything *less* critical: the debate at the 1985 USFI World Congress apparently focused on whether Cuba or Nicaragua is the real socialist model.

Daniel Bensaid, a leader of the Mandel current, spoke revealingly in an interview in 'International Viewpoint' (17 June 1985):

"... the Nicaraguan revolution represents a challenge for us. It is a revolution made by others, and at the beginning we understood it badly..."

"Did the Sandinistas lead their revolution in spite of themselves, despite their policy of alliances with sections of the bourgeoisie, despite their conception of economic transition?... Today... we recognise that the Sandinistas won *thanks* to their policy and not 'in spite of it'... The proletariat can have different allies at different times in the revolutionary process". (Emphasis added).

So the USFI have learned from the Nicaraguan revolution that... alliances with the bourgeoisie work! It is the same basic problem as with Cuba two decades ago: a failure to look towards an independent working-class perspective, combined in this case with bewilderment at their own irrele-



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Salah Jaber's theory

What it amounts to is a chronic inability to deal with reality without suffering gross illusions in 'revolutionists of action'. But it has to be *theorised*. And it has to be theor-

ised in counterposition to the SWP's revisions. Lebanese Mandelite Salah Jaber has performed the task.

In a long article in 'Quatrieme Internationale', 'Proletarian Revolution and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat', Jaber spells out what now seems to be common ground among the USFI majority. Paraphrasing Engels, he writes:

"Of late, the philistine Eurocommunist has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: Dictatorship of the

Proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at Nicaragua. That is the dictatorship of the proletariat" (November 1984, p.114).

Jaber surveys working-class history since the Paris Commune in a polemic directed against the SWP. His essential point is that the class character of the state is determined by the 'armed bodies of men'.

"The destruction of the armed forces of the bourgeoisie by the armed forces of the workers marks the birth of a workers' state" (p.63).

Whether or not the state carries out nationalisations is, he argues, completely irrelevant. And by these criteria Nicaragua has been a workers' state — not a 'workers' and farmers' government', as the SWP would have it — from the moment that the Sandinistas took power.

Previous USFI positions are, Jaber states, absurd. The SWP's notion that China, for example, became a workers' state around 1955 — after the final wave of nationalisations — is a theoretical confusion. There was a workers' state in China from 1931 when the Maoists established a regional government in Kiangsi.

On Cuba, Jaber is yet more forthright.

"A movement of the masses as proletarian, if not more, than those of the Paris Commune, endowed with an ideology at least as radical as that of the Commune, which totally destroyed the bourgeois army, to the gain of a rebel Army, as proletarian if not more so than the Federation de la Garde Nationale, what is that? A 'government of workers and peasants'? A 'dual power sui generis'? No, comrades: it is the dictatorship of the proletariat" (p.101). Moreover, "In this sense... Fidel better understands the Marxist-Leninist theory of the state than... Mandel [or] the SWP".

Squaring the circles

Jaber confuses a number of issues. His main argument, that nationalisations do not determine the class nature of the state, and that the old state apparatus — specifically the 'armed bodies of men' — must be smashed, is obviously true. But the notion that 'relations of production' have nothing to do with it is ridiculous.

A new state apparatus, installed by a revolutionary army, can be transformed into a refurbished bourgeois state. Only if we give full political trust to the Sandinistas could we say that their military victory immediately defined a workers' state.

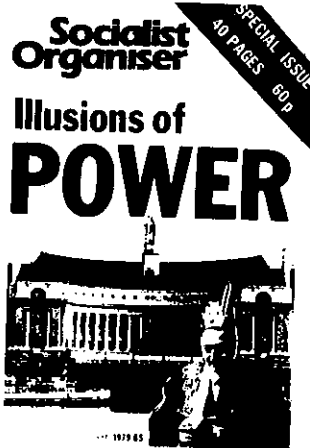
To square the circles of his theory, Jaber must eventually resort to the same fiction as Lowy: that the Yugoslav, Chinese, Vietnamese, etc. Communist Parties were politically workers' parties.

On some issues the Mandelites have quite sharp political disagreements with the SWP — notably Poland and Iran. But they are by no means uniformly clearer on basic tasks of independent working-class action.

In the South Atlantic war, the USFI majority shared the approach that viewed Argentina's war as 'a just national liberation struggle' — although one of the USFI groups in Argentina, Nuevo Curso, argued that the war was reactionary on both sides.

The Mandelites share with the SWP a political tradition and world view. The SWP have drawn out its logic more fully; but the Mandelites do not represent a real Marxist alternative.

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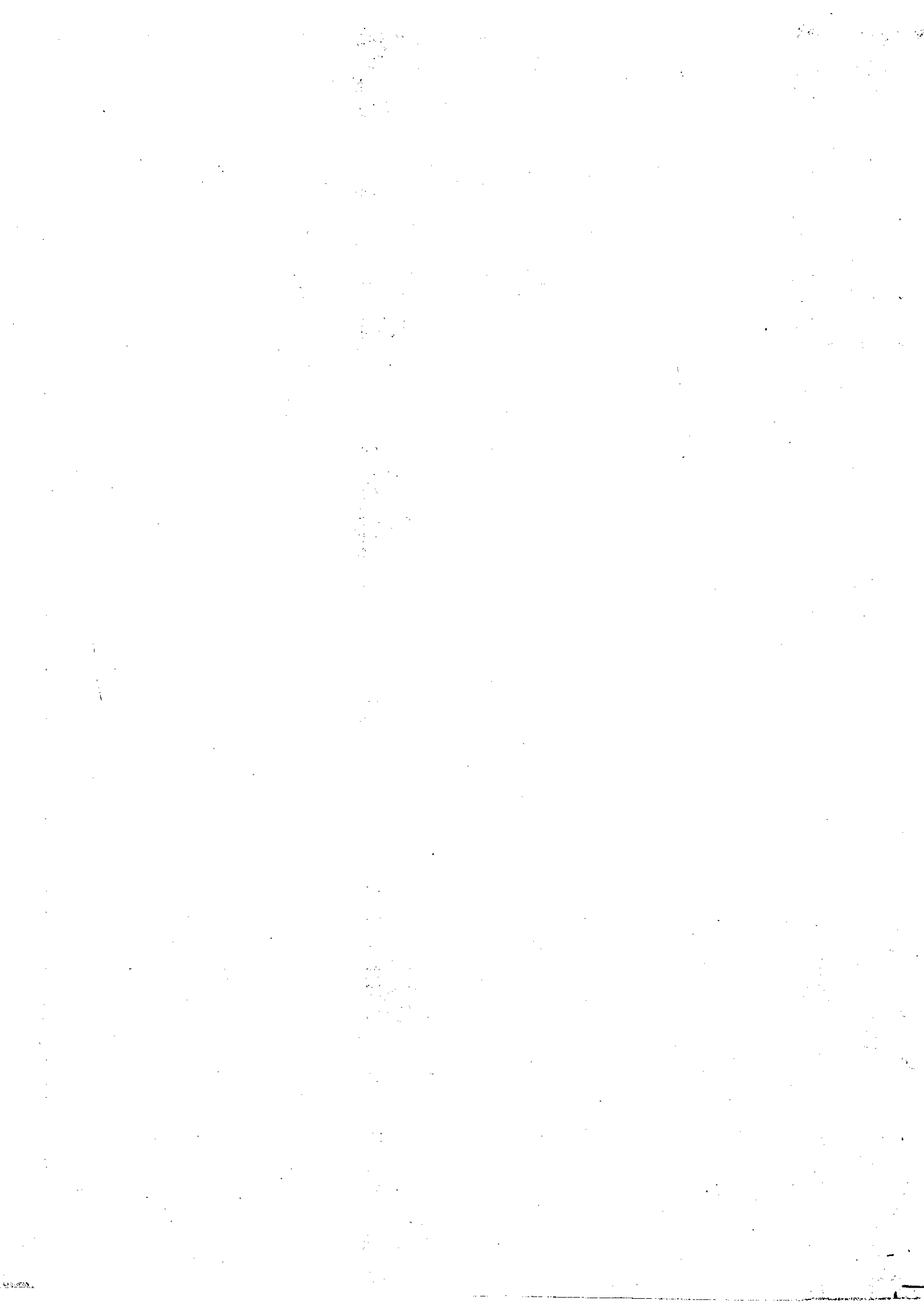
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The USFI today

The whole history of the current now organised as the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) has been one of repeated political accommodation to Stalinist or nationalist forces leading big struggles. Since 1979 the USFI's US associate, the Socialist Workers' Party, has taken this method further, identifying 100% with the Cuban government. Clive Bradley surveys this turn and the response to it of the USFI majority led by Ernest Mandel.

IN 1983, a group of oppositionists — broadly in support of the Mandel tendency — were expelled from the SWP and set themselves up as a new group, 'Socialist Action'. Their founding statement gives some indication of current state of the SWP.

"Immediately after the party convention in 1981, with no possibility for anyone who disagreed to reply, Jack Barnes, the SWP's central leader, announced that he no longer accepted the idea of fighting for a directly socialist revolution in underdeveloped countries. [Then in an article in 1983] Barnes insisted that 'our movement must discard permanent revolution'."

They go on to look at the political results of what they consider to be "a serious adaptation to Stalinist ideology".

On Poland: "In 1981 it was clear that the SWP did not want to be too prominent in support of the Polish workers — this might embarrass the party in its relationship with [Cuba and Nicaragua]... The SWP rejected demonstrations of any kind, refused to participate in virtually all meetings of the Left to support Solidarnosc..."

"... Its official position is for 'political revolution'... [But] shortly after the beginning of 1982, this concept... virtually disappeared from 'The Militant'... In its place ambiguous formulas appeared that could be interpreted as calling merely for the reform of the Polish CP"

On Iran: "... the SWP's press refused for many months to defend any victims of repression... Universally known facts about torture of every variety of dissenter in Iranian prisons, military assaults on the Kurdish national minority areas... none of this could be found in 'The Militant'."

They got on: "You could not tell what was going on in places like Iran, Poland, Afghanistan, North Korea, Vietnam or Ethiopia from reading the manipulated accounts in 'The Militant'." And — though Socialist Action, because of their own politics, do not say this — for sure you cannot tell what's going on in Cuba or Nicaragua from the glowing reports in 'The Militant'.

The SWP's 1979 turn

The current phase of the SWP's politics began quite abruptly in 1979, after the death of their veteran theorist Joseph Hansen. But its roots can be traced back further.

In the early 1960s the SWP — as against their Healyite detractors — recognised that a revolution had taken place in Cuba, and that capitalism had been overthrown. But they went further. They played down the



Poland: the workers' struggles of 1980-1

elements of bureaucratic control in Cuba, and played up all the revolutionary internationalist and anti-bureaucratic aspects of Castroism — all this to the extent that they blurred over the fact that the Cuban government was controlled by a tiny handful of people (with popular support, but no real popular control), and that the working class had no independent political voice. They abandoned any project of building a Trotskyist organisation in Cuba: the Castroite leadership 'team', given further evolution and good advice, could become quite adequate.

What needs to be stressed, in the light of current disputes in the USFI, is that the SWP's analysis of Cuba was shared by the Mandelites. Even now, there is no fundamental programmatic dispute over Cuba in the USFI: the Mandelites no more call for independent working-class action and political revolution in Cuba than do the SWP.

From the late '60s to the late '70s, the SWP was more critical of Castroism than the Mandel faction. In particular the SWP opposed guerilla tactics in Latin America — often in a sectarian, almost parliamentarist, fashion.

In early 1979 the SWP published a speech by Jack Barnes on "20 years of the Cuban Revolution", enthusiastically dropping all criticism of Castro. For some months yet 'The Militant' continued to dismiss the Sandinistas' guerilla war against Somoza as futile, misguided, and petty-bourgeois. In July 1979 the Sandinistas triumphed — and 'The Militant' switched round 180°. From sour, negative rejection of the Sandinistas'

struggle, they turned to 101 per cent support of the Sandinista government and all its policies.

'The Militant' today makes very strange reading. The revolutions in Central America and the Caribbean dominate its pages, but in a curious way. There is extraordinarily little analysis, or even considered comment, on events in the region. There is much less coverage on El Salvador — where civil war rages — than on relatively stable Cuba. The bulk of the material consists of speeches, or articles hung around quotations, by Castro, or Ortega, or Bishop.

The SWP on Cuba

Its presentation has a tone, a mood, a feel that cannot easily be described. So here is an example. This is an extract from the second front page lead article of 'The Militant' of 25 January 1985.

"Tipitapa-Malacatoya, Nicaragua — In front of a huge sign reading 'July victory, people's victory, symbol of Cuba-Nicaragua friendship', a new sugar mill was inaugurated here January 11... The refinery is the largest in all of Central America and the largest single industrial plant in Nicaragua. It was built with extensive aid from Cuba.

"Present at the inauguration ceremonies was Cuban President Fidel Castro, who gave a two-and-a-half hour speech. He announced that Cuba is cancelling the \$73.8 million debt owed by Nicaragua..."

"... A speech was also delivered by Jaime

Wheelock [a Sandinista leader, who said]: 'Without the contribution of the Cuban revolution, it would have been totally impossible to build this refinery...'

The article goes on to take up the whole of page 9, which consists almost entirely of quotations from Castro's speech.

Both in style and in content, 'The Militant' is like a Cuban embassy news-sheet. The SWP has even set up a travel company to organise trips to Cuba and Nicaragua to 'see the revolution'.

The SWP consider the Sandinistas and — especially — the Cuban leadership to be Marxist. A resolution submitted to the USFI World Congress comments that:

"There is a political convergence between our world current and other revolutionists in the Americas, in the first place the leadership of the Communist Party of Cuba, who are charting a course in practice that leads to re-establishing continuity with the internationalist programme and strategy of the Communist International in Lenin's time".

Ethiopia, Poland, Iran

This claim has implications, of course, for how the SWP views the world. A case can be made that Cuban foreign policy in *Central America* is in the direction of aiding rather than crushing revolutions. But beyond Central America it is a different story — Cuba actively backs the Ethiopian dictatorship against the Eritrean people fighting for self-determination; Cuba backed Jaruzelski's crushing of Solidarnosc. (Two facts which alone ridicule the title of an SWP publication, 'Cuba's Internationalist Foreign Policy, 1975-80'). And even in Central America the argument is dubious: in Mexico, where there is a powerful workers' movement, Cuba has a warm attitude to the ruling party, the PRI.

This is a crucial point. Even where Castro aids revolutionary struggles, he does so from his own viewpoint, with his own aims. And that viewpoint, those aims, are not those of independent working-class action. Castro's whole conception of revolution and of socialism is different from ours.

At the peak of Cuban involvement in revolutionary struggles internationally, in the mid to late '60s, their concern was with the Third World and that alone. Castroism is a form of radical Third-Worldist populism: it rejects the very idea of working-class revolutionary action in the advanced capitalist countries. And in the so-called non-aligned movement, Cuba allies with thoroughly bourgeois and often dictatorial Third World governments. In the Third World, too, their perspective is not that of working-class self-liberation.

Of course, the SWP have had to try to cope with Castro's line on Poland. This, they admit, is a mistake — but a mistake committed by a revolutionary... Fine revolutionaries these, you may think, whose 'mistakes' consist of supporting counter-revolutionary violence against the class.

But such matters are of no importance. On the contrary, the Cubans "have set an example of proletarian internationalism in action", and have cleverly "refused to allow a wedge to be driven between Cuba and the Soviet and East European workers' states". Such a wedge — criticism of Jaruzelski? — is undesirable because of "the decisive role of economic and military aid to the Cuban revolution from the Soviet Union". In other words, the SWP has so lost its political bearings that it consciously covers up for the Cuban leadership, and justifies Cuba's political alignment with Moscow.

The SWP has completely collapsed independent working-class politics into a crude view of international power-politics 'blocs' or 'camps' — one that does indeed marry with Castroism very neatly. In the SWP's world there is only 'Imperialism' and 'The Revolution' fighting it out. Socialists must choose their camp.

This leads them to reactionary political conclusions.

"Should workers be 'neutral' in the war between Iraq and Iran?" 'The Militant' asks (18 May 1984). They answer emphatically no.

"We view this war — and all wars today — from the standpoint of the international fight against imperialism and the struggle to advance the world socialist revolution. [The Iranian revolution] strengthened the world working class. The Iraqi invasion... helped serve the interests of US imperialism... An Iranian victory in the war would be an inspiration for all those fighting imperialist oppression in the Mideast".

And what about Iranian oppositionists fighting the Khomeini regime? Certainly, 'The Militant' admits, there has been a clampdown on the left; the regime is bourgeois; and it is not as anti-imperialist as Nicaragua.

"In 1981, the regime took advantage of a terrorist campaign against the revolution — led by a petty-bourgeois radical group called the Mujahedeen — to carry out sweeping arrests and executions... [but the working class] refused to defend the Mujahedeen because they correctly saw its assassination campaign as aiding the imperialists and monarchists".

The SWP criticises government attacks on the left, on the working class, and on the national minorities. But there is no question of siding with opposition to Khomeini. It is all in the context of 'defence of the Iranian revolution'.

"The workers are in a stronger position to fight for their interests today — under the Islamic Republic — than they were under the Shah... Under conditions where the Iranian masses are not ready to replace the current regime with a workers' and peasants' government... overthrow of Khomeini can only be in the interests of imperialism".

In real terms, therefore, the SWP is against any opposition to the Khomeini regime. How is a workers' and peasants' government to be formed if not by socialists agitating? And to put forward even elementary democratic demands in present-day Iran would put militants in very sharp conflict with Khomeini.

The SWP's whole perspective is permeated with the 'campist' idea that 'the Iranian revolution' advances the interests of the masses regardless of what it — i.e. the Iranian state — does to them.

Workerism

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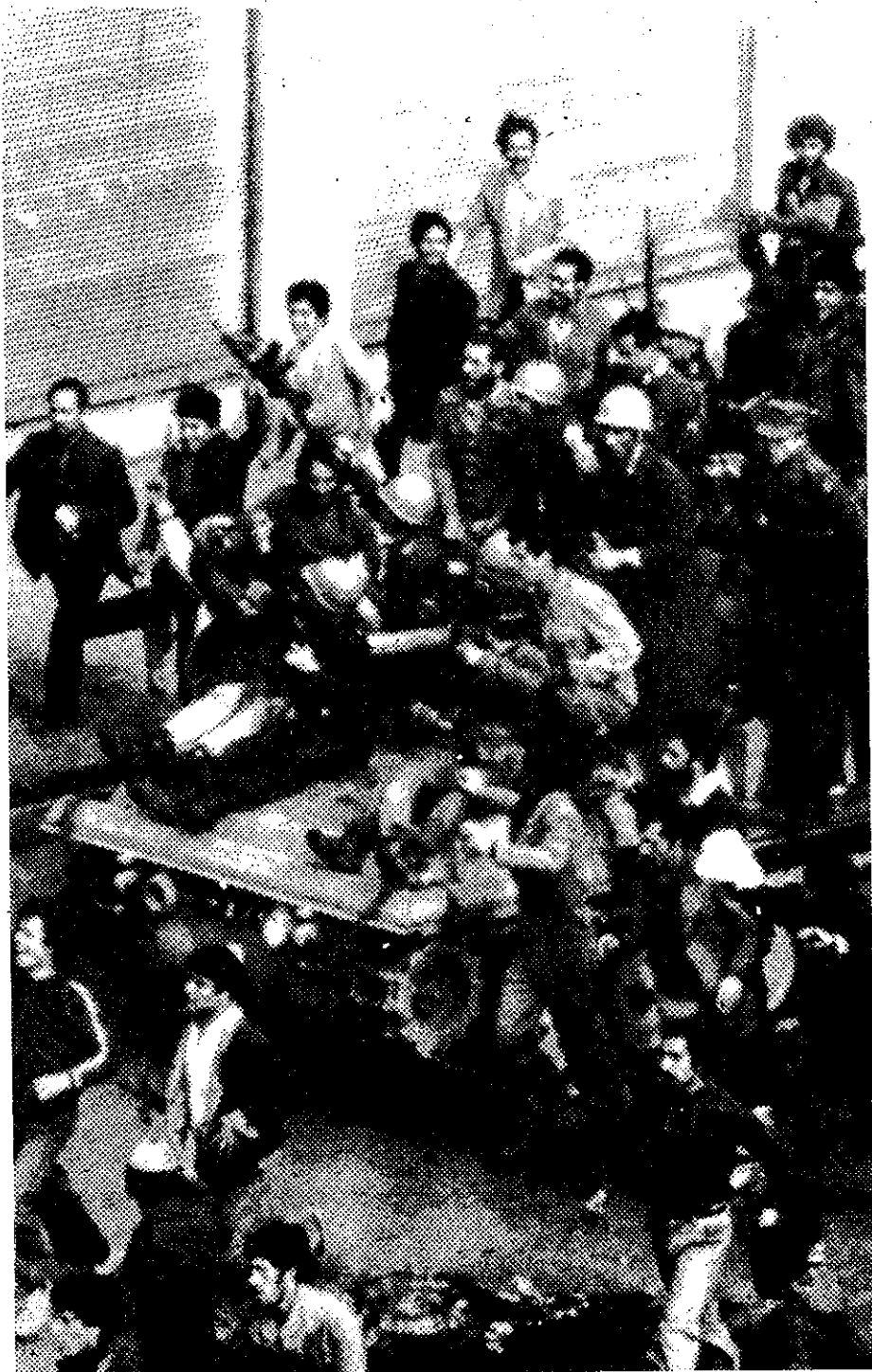
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Jaber confuses a number of issues. His main argument, that nationalisations do not determine the class nature of the state, and that the old state apparatus — specifically the 'armed bodies of men' — must be smashed, is obviously true. But the notion that 'relations of production' have nothing to do with it is ridiculous.

A new state apparatus, installed by a revolutionary army, can be transformed into a refurbished bourgeois state. Only if we give full political trust to the Sandinistas could we say that their military victory immediately defined a workers' state.

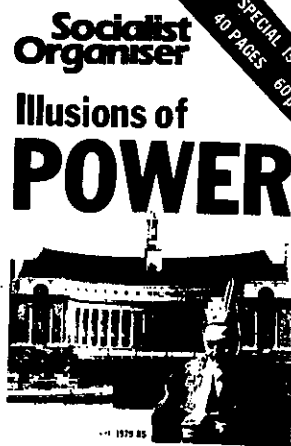
To square the circles of his theory, Jaber must eventually resort to the same fiction as Lowy: that the Yugoslav, Chinese, Vietnamese, etc. Communist Parties were politically workers' parties.

On some issues the Mandelites have quite sharp political disagreements with the SWP — notably Poland and Iran. But they are by no means uniformly clearer on basic tasks of independent working-class action.

In the South Atlantic war, the USFI majority shared the approach that viewed Argentina's war as 'a just national liberation struggle' — although one of the USFI groups in Argentina, Nuevo Curso, argued that the war was reactionary on both sides.

The Mandelites share with the SWP a political tradition and world view. The SWP have drawn out its logic more fully: but the Mandelites do not represent a real Marxist alternative.

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