

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;

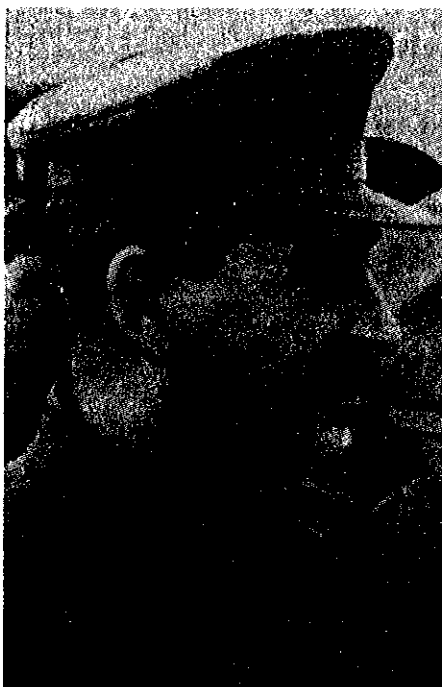
4. Abolition of bureaucratic privileges; reorganisation of the economy according to a democratically-decided plan;

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 statified 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

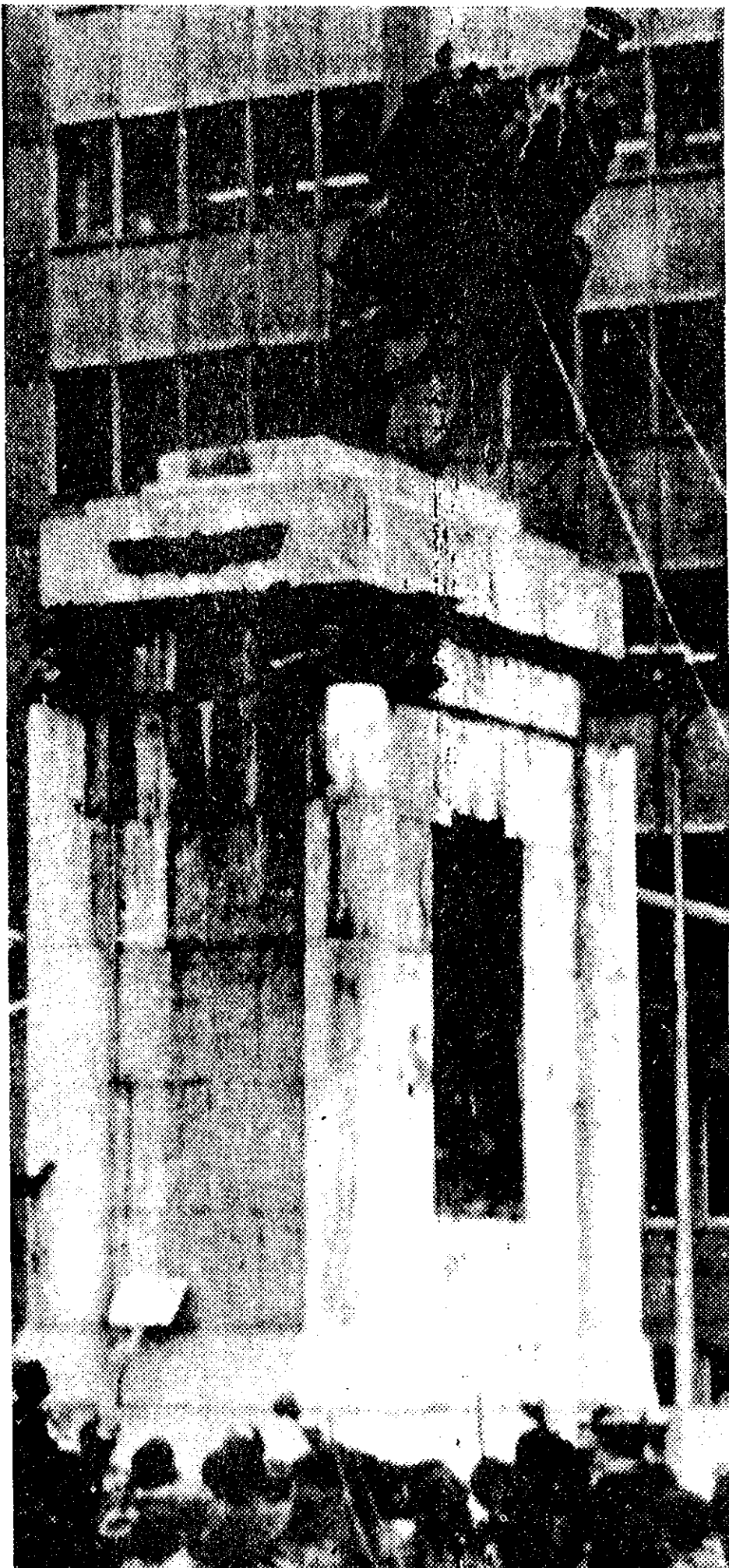
It is striking that although, *The Struggle for Socialism* stresses that "the chief enemy in each sector is the same: imperialism" (p.15), it nowhere defines what it means by imperialism.

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