

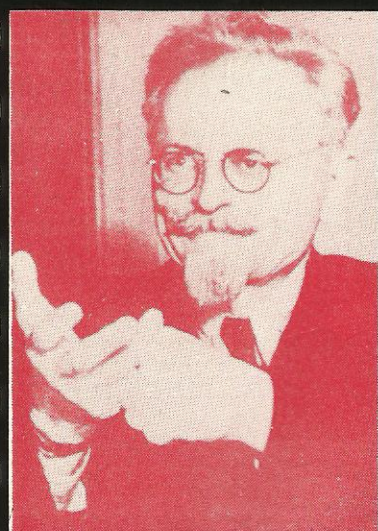
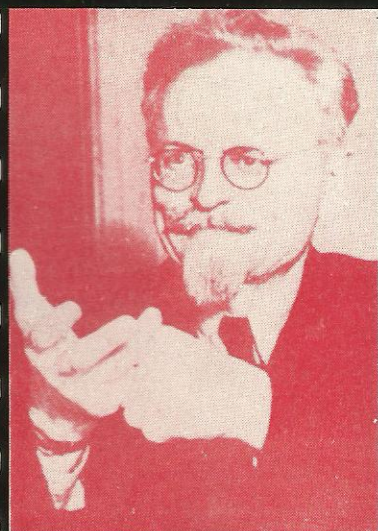
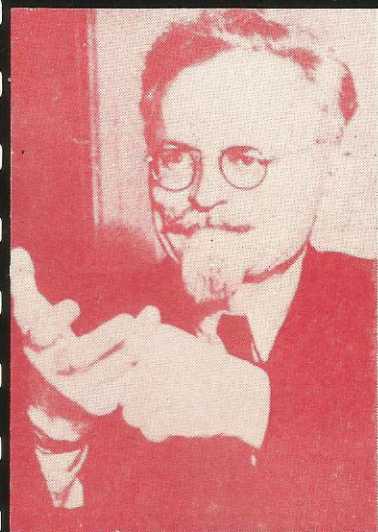
Trotsky's ideas today
— 50 years on

Militant International Review

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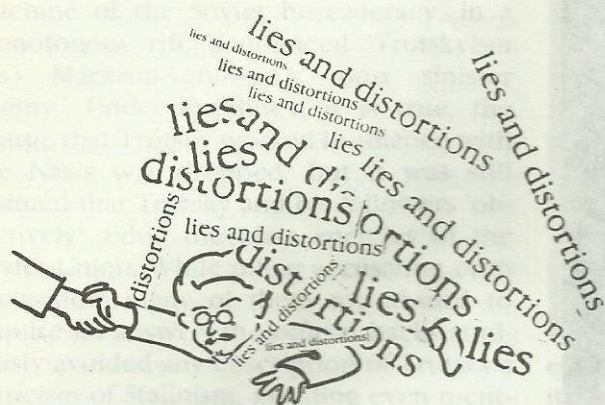
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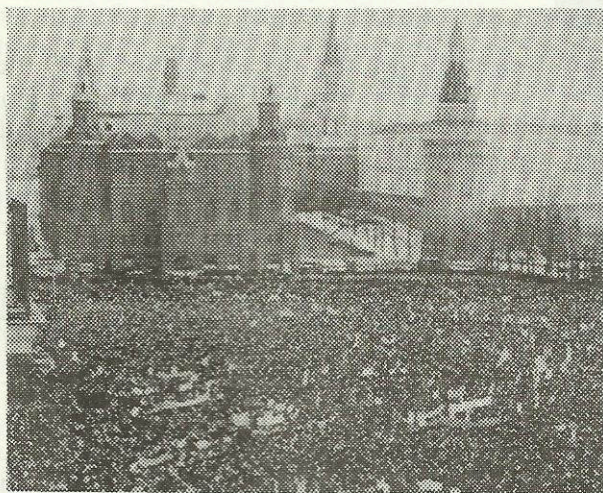
Issue 44

Editor: Lynn Walsh

3/13 Hepscomb Road London E9 5HB.



Open discussion of Trotsky, argues Lynn Walsh, is decisive in understanding the rise of Stalinism – and to providing a way out of the bureaucratic impasse.



Trotsky's ideas provide the key to the programme, perspectives, strategy and tactics for both the political revolution in the East and social revolution in the West. Ted Grant examines Trotsky's relevance today.

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Trotsky's ideas today — fifty years on



AUGUST 21, 1990, MARKS the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Leon Trotsky at the hand of Stalin's assassin. *Militant International Review* 44 is a special commemoration issue. We cover the background to Trotsky's murder: his unwavering 'defence of October' and his tenacious opposition to the development of Stalinist bureaucracy and its disastrous policies on the world arena. We also show how in the Soviet Union today the 'blank pages' of Soviet history are being filled up, with the beginning — somewhat tentative and confused — of a discussion of Trotsky's historical role, his theoretical contribution to Marxism, and the policies he advocated in relation to the first workers' state and the Communist International. We repeat the call for the full judicial, historical and political rehabilitation of Trotsky. Above all, this issue of the journal is dedicated to showing the relevance of Trotsky's ideas today.

The Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and the similar regimes in Eastern Europe have undergone many changes

over the last few decades. Since 1989 they have been convulsed by mass movements which toppled most of their governments. Nevertheless, Trotsky's fundamental analysis of the origin and character of Stalinism remains indispensable to understanding developments in the USSR and Eastern Europe. The developments of recent years have thrown up many new features, and the ideas worked out by Trotsky in the 1930s must be applied concretely to new developments. But the fundamental programme of the political revolution, based on the idea of the smashing of the ruling bureaucracy and the establishment of workers' democracy, has lost none of its relevance.

The complete degeneration of Stalinism, it is true, has opened the door to capitalist counter-revolution. This is now virtually complete in the case of East Germany, which has been absorbed by West German capitalism. At the same time, pro-restoration governments, which would like to steer society back along the capitalist road, have taken over in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hun-

gary, etc. This does not in any way confound Trotsky's method, which always took account of the interaction of international class relations. Capitalist restoration, if carried through in Poland and other Eastern European states or in the Soviet Union itself would, of course, place the social revolution on the agenda. Here too the programmatic ideas elaborated by Trotsky shortly before his death retain their fundamental validity.

Until very recently, the propaganda machine of the Soviet bureaucracy, in a monotonous riff, denounced 'Trotskyism (as) Marxism-Leninism's most sinister enemy.' Under Brezhnev, it is true, the charge that Trotsky worked in alliance with the Nazis was dropped. But it was still claimed that Trotsky and his followers 'objectively' aided the class enemies of the Soviet Union. While piling accusation onto accusation, many of them too absurd to require an answer, the official hacks studiously avoided any description of Trotsky's criticism of Stalinism, avoiding even mentioning the title of books like *The Revolution Betrayed*. One frequent assertion, for example, was that Trotsky opposed the defence of the Soviet Union at the opening of World War II, ignoring Trotsky's struggle within the international opposition movement to defend the gains of October, in spite of Stalin. Trotsky's contribution is documented in the book *In Defence of Marxism*.

It is one of the great ironies of history, therefore, that the current Gorbachev leadership of the Soviet Union is abandoning the defence of the planned economy and turning towards capitalism. Can it not be said with truth that they are 'objectively' succumbing to the pressure of world capitalism and acting as its cat's paw?

Late last year, Gorbachev said that in the early days of perestroika, shortly after he became general secretary in 1985, "we assumed that what was under discussion was, in the main, simply correcting particular deformations of the social organism, about perfecting the system which, on the whole, was considered to be sound." In other words, Gorbachev aimed to reform the bureaucratic apparatus in order to improve its performance and secure its continued existence. But by 1989, Gorbachev admitted, "we are speaking about the necessity of a radical re-making of the entire social



edifice — from its economic foundations to its super-structure." (*Pravda*, 28 November 1989) This, it is clear, entails the abandonment of socialised property relations and the plan of production.

The old Stalinist leader of the Finnish Communist Party, Otto Kuusin, once boasted that he had "cast his skin seven times in his life, like a snake." Stalin, Kuusin and their cohorts sloughed off support for world revolution, relying instead on a totalitarian state and a bureaucratic economy to preserve their own power and privileges. Now Gorbachev and company has sloughed off another skin, abandoning defence of planned production in favour of a return to capitalism.

Such is the organic degeneration of the Stalinist system, Gorbachev has been unable to carry through his policy of modernisation and reform. Since about the mid 1970s, the economy has been in a complete impasse. Planned production, even under a bureaucracy, allowed the foundations of a modern industrial economy to be built up. In the last period of Brezhnev's leadership, however, the bureaucracy exhausted its ability to take the economy forward — and there has been even a regression under Gorbachev. Moreover, the party of the bureaucracy, the so-called Communist Party of the Soviet Union, together with its official ideology and all the many institutions that it dominated, have been

Gorbachev.

The leadership around Gorbachev, despite its disclaimers, has turned down the road of capitalist restoration.

completely discredited throughout Soviet society. In a recent opinion poll, the newspaper *Sibirskaya Gazeta* asked people the question: "Whose interest does the party promote?" Eighty-five per cent replied: party functionaries. Only two per cent said 'the working class'. Gorbachev advocates a turn towards a 'regulated market'. In his opening speech to the 28th Congress of the CPSU in July, he attacked those "who sought a bourgeois regime... who link the solution of today's complex situation to a return to capitalism." He even repudiated his own Prime Minister, Nikolai Ryzhkov, whose proposed price rises, no doubt approved by Gorbachev at the time, were hastily withdrawn earlier in the year for fear of mass protests. Deputy prime minister, Leonid Abalkin, one of the architects of Gorbachev's current economic policies, also said: "we are against the development of private property with the use of hired labour. This is unacceptable and incompatible with the socialist choice made by this country."

Commenting on a policy statement presented by the leadership, even *Izvestia's* reporter had to say, "only a blind person will not notice this document abounds in contradictions and wishfulness."

In *Pravda* (4 June), Abalkin wrote that people must learn to forget the old negative connotations of the market — that is capitalism and soaring prices — and to concentrate on the end result which he defined as "the creation of a modern economy, highly efficient, flexible, responsive to scientific progress and orientated to the consumer."

Moreover, the implications of Gorbachev's new economic policies were spelt out in an interview with the semi-official news agency *Interfax* by Dr Nikolai Petrakov, now prominent in the president's inner circle of economic advisers. Gorbachev's 'plan', Petrakov said, would be "a programme of an accelerated transition to creating a modern full-blooded market." This would go together with "an austerity regime economising budgetary funds." The economy would be de-monopolised and opened up to private ownership. Not only workers but "enterprises and banks, including foreign banks and firms," would be allowed to buy apartments, houses, garden plots, shares in enterprises, etc.

Gorbachev and company are indulging in cynical double-talk. In one breath they

defend their commitment to socialism and the socialist character of the 'regulated market economy'. In the next breath, they call for acceptance of capitalist conditions.

GORBACHEV IS ALSO facing two ways in the ideological field. Formally he still defends Marxism. Marx, Engels and Lenin, he says, "bear no responsibility for the distortions (of the idea of socialism) that occurred when it was put into practice." (*Time*, 4 June 1990) However, Gorbachev sponsors spokesmen among his advisors who are attempting to provide an intellectual justification for the complete repudiation of Marxism. One of this circle, Alexander Tsipko, argues that Lenin and Stalin were faithful disciples of Marx. The fault, therefore, for the "deformations of socialism" plaguing the Soviet Union lies "not with the moustaches but with the beards" — that is, not with Stalin's 'interpretation' of Marx, but with the fundamental 'utopianism' of Marx's ideas.

Earlier this year, Gorbachev's aide Georgii Shakhnazarov wrote an article in the CP's theoretical journal, *Kommunist*, advising the leadership to abandon the idea of communism altogether. Rejecting Stalinist "state socialism" Shakhnazarov calls for a new model of "humane, democratic socialism." But while clinging to the label "socialist", however, Shakhnazarov in reality advocates western-style democracy and the market economy, that is, capitalism.

In an effort to provide theoretical justification for this, Shakhnazarov abandons one of the fundamental ideas of Marxist theory that the character of society is primarily determined by property relationships. A socialist system, according to Shakhnazarov's interpretation, can be built on the basis of either private, state, or co-operative ownership. A socialist society is simply a "society in which the collective predominates over the private." The "degree of socialisation of a socialist system," Shakhnazarov claims, "can be objectively measured... on the following scale: the predominance of organisation over spontaneity; of equality over freedom; of government over self-government; of the collective over the individual."

The most important distinction between societies, Shakhnazarov argues, is not whether they are socialist or capitalist, but whether they are democratic or tyrannical.

The primary task of the leaders of the USSR at the present time is to establish a system capable of providing for the welfare of the population, he argues. This, of course, begs the question of whether the economic system is capable of developing the productive forces, the basis of 'the welfare of the people'.

The leadership around Gorbachev, despite its frequent disclaimers, has turned down the road of capitalist restoration. How far they will be able to travel is another question.

The capitalists of the West, who were triumphantly congratulating themselves on the 'death of communism', are in no hurry to invest huge amounts of capital in the economies of the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe. "The early enthusiasm about Eastern Europe is turning to scepticism," commented the *Financial Times* (13 June): "If the transition to a market system is proving so difficult for Poland, will it not prove impossible for other countries which lack the unifying force of Solidarity and the Polish government's will to reform?"

At the same time, the leadership in the Soviet Union face massive opposition from the working class. In so far as 'the market' is identified with improved living standards and modern consumer goods, workers are in favour of the market. But there is deep-rooted resistance to the idea of private ownership of enterprises, to the growth of inequality, to the emergence of unemployment, and enormously higher prices for basic necessities like housing, food, and transport. The growing refusal to accept passively the seizing-up of the planned economy and the failure of perestroika is reflected in the growing number of strikes. During the first half of 1989 there were on average 15,000 workers on strike every day. During the second half of the year, that rose to 50,000. And in the first five months of 1990, there was an average of 130,000 workers on strike every day.

The potential power of the working class in the Soviet Union, and their likely resistance to the introduction of capitalist conditions, was explicitly acknowledged recently by Gavriil Popov, the opposition candidate who was elected mayor of Moscow last April. Known as 'radicals', people like Popov are even more openly pro-capitalist than Gorbachev and his circle. Popov acknowledges that "we could not have over-

thrown the powerful totalitarian system without the active participation of millions of ordinary people." However, there will now be a contradiction, he warns, between those 'left populist' forces and "the policies leading to denationalisation, privatisation and inequality."

Popov warns of a "renaissance of left-wing popularism." Calling these 'populist' forces 'New Communist', Popov deliberately tries to link the spontaneous opposition of millions of workers with the last-ditch resistance of Communist Party functionaries to being deprived of their power and privileges. Popov advocates rapid denationalisation and privatisation of property, to try to avoid being "attacked by waves of workers fighting for their own interests." He also calls for "new mechanisms and institutions for political power that will depend less on popularism," surely a veiled call for a dictatorial form of regime which could push through a restoration against the opposition of the working class.

As in Eastern Europe, the mass movement against the Stalinist system has been captured by 'radical' leaders who, in reality, constitute a wing of the ruling elite which has gone over to a pro-capitalist position. The majority of workers are much clearer about what they are *against* than what they are *for*. Undoubtedly, because of the prolonged economic growth in the West since 1980, workers also have enormous illusions in the viability of capitalism. In the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe the biggest 'deficit' (shortage) of all is that of consciousness. Profound revulsion at the counterfeit version of Marxism propagated by the bureaucracy has led to a summary rejection of the ideas of Marxism on the part of millions. Enthusiasm for change, on the other hand, has aroused massive support for 'radicals' who appear to offer an alternative, and whose real aims have yet to be made clear to the majority of workers. The events of the next few years, however, both in the Stalinist states and the capitalist world, will bring home to the working class the impossibility of finding solutions through a turn back to capitalism. Through their own experience of struggle, first the advanced workers, and then wider layers, will find the road back to the genuine ideas of Marxism. Then the theoretical legacy of Trotsky will be reclaimed by the proletariat in the land of the October revolution. □

The majority of workers are much clearer about what they are against than what they are for.

Rehabilitating Trotsky

The open re-appraisal of Trotsky in the USSR, argues Lynn Walsh, is the key to understanding the rise of Stalinism – and to formulating a programme which can provide the working class with a way out of the bureaucratic impasse.



"RESTORING HISTORICAL AND judicial justice is a matter of tremendous political importance today." This was the comment of *Pravda* (January 6, 1989) on a resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to speed up the review of Stalin's repression. "The Central Committee believes... it is necessary to accelerate the re-examination of the cases of those who were sentenced in the years of massive repressions."

Since Gorbachev came into the leadership in 1985, "judicial justice" has been restored to most of the prominent leaders purged by Stalin, including some of the leaders of the Left Opposition, like Christian Rakovsky. This process, however, has stopped short of the judicial rehabilitation of Leon Trotsky.

The annulment of the sentences on those purged, and the public admission that Stalin's Byzantine show trials were based on totally false charges and fabricated evidence, has opened the door to the objective re-examination of the role and ideas of those leaders. There has been wide discussion in Soviet journals, for example, of the ideas and role of Bukharin. But while there is much more discussion of Trotsky than before, this still falls far short of a full and honest examination of his record and ideas. Not only the hard-liners like Ligachev, who defend the power and privileges of the apparatus and the bureaucratic elite, but also the reformers fear the affect of Trotsky's ideas on the workers, especially on the younger generation.

Rehabilitation is not a mere formality – to allow Trotsky to be placed on a pedestal for public admiration. Trotsky, alongside Lenin, played a pre-eminent role in the revolution of 1917 and the civil war which followed. From 1923, Trotsky organised an opposition against the growth of bureaucratism on the basis of workers' democracy. Until Lenin's death in 1924, Trotsky also played a leading role in the Communist International, and subsequently led an international opposition to the disastrous policies of Stalinism on the international arena. Open discussion of Trotsky's ideas, therefore, based on the publication of his works and

public debate, is indispensable to an analysis of the origins and development of Stalinism.

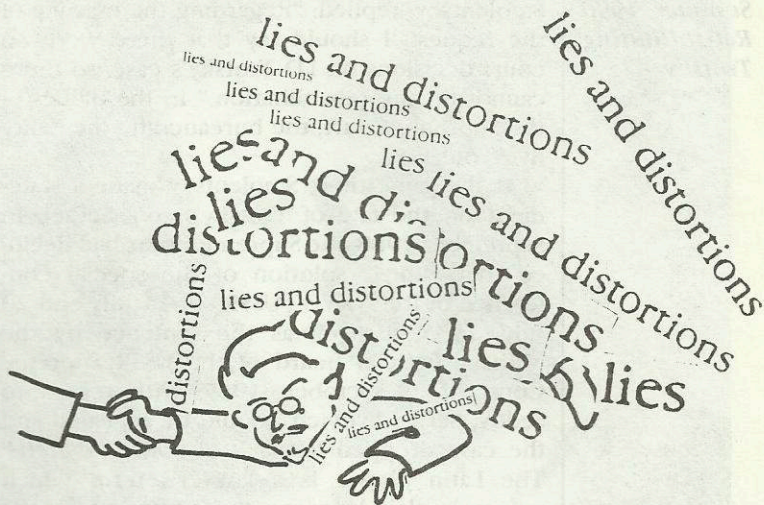
In 1985, the CPSU's Control Commission began to investigate the cases of former Party members who had not been rehabilitated during the period of Khrushchev's leadership. In April 1986, NI Muralov, an inspector general in the Red Army who supported Trotsky's opposition, was rehabilitated without publicity.

In July 1987, the Supreme Court declared null and void verdicts against 15 prominent Soviet economists in 1931-35. They included Kondratiev, known for his theory of 'long cycles' (taken up by Trotsky in *The curve of capitalist development*), and other prominent specialists. In 1930-31, they had been accused of belonging to an illegal 'Toiling Peasant Party'. Over 1,000 'members' of this 'party' were arrested; many of them were executed or died in labour camps. The Supreme Court declared in 1987, that the Toiling Peasant Party had never existed. This decision strongly implies that other alleged parties, such as the 'Industrial Party' and 'Menshevik Union Bureau', for which many were subjected to show trials, also were fabrications of Stalin's repressive apparatus.

In February, 1988, the Supreme Court cancelled the sentences on Bukharin, Rykov, Rakovsky, Chernov and six others tried by the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court in March 1938, the third Moscow show trial. The case was closed "owing to the absence of any crime in their actions". Ten of the others accused in the trial, including Krestinsky, Grinko, Zelensky and Bassonov, had already been rehabilitated. Of the twenty-two accused in the March 1938 trial, only Yagoda, head of the secret police (known as the GPU, or NKVD), was not rehabilitated.

In June 1988, the Supreme Court announced its annulment of those sentenced in the Zinoviev-Kamenev and Pyatakov-Radek trials of August 1936 and February 1937, the first and second Moscow trials. This meant that all the accused in all the major public show trials of 1936-8, (except Yagoda) have now been declared innocent.

In July 1988 the Politburo Special Commission made an announcement that the Party Control Commission had posthumously restored party membership to Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsy, in spite of 'certain mistakes' and their "special positions in relation to the roads and methods of socialist reconstruction"; to Trotsky's close associate Rakovsky, and to other party members tried in March 1938. In August the Commission further announced that the Supreme Court had legally rehabilitated the accused in several other trials, including the secret trials in 1932-3 and 1937 of Riutin and others. No statement was made, however, about the rehabilitation of Trotsky.



Early in 1990 *Moscow News* published a letter from an historian, Albert Nenarokov, calling for the rehabilitation of Trotsky. "Despite the fact that Trotsky — accused at all these and thousands of other trials with the most ridiculous things — was not formally convicted and sentenced, the USSR Supreme Court is, I think, obliged to clear his name, like the names of many of his comrades, of piles of dirt and lies. Similarly, the USSR Supreme Court, or its Presidium, ought to say what they think of the illegal exile of Trotsky and his wife, stripped of their Soviet citizenship. As for the rehabilitation of Trotsky and others in our history, this is proceeding much more slowly, and less radically than one would want because of the long years of lies, rigid mind-sets and simply professional ignorance."

The same issue of *Moscow News* also published an interview with Trotsky's grandson, Esteban Volkov, who had recently written to the USSR Supreme Court calling for Trotsky's rehabilitation. "I haven't received any official answer yet," Volkov told *Moscow News*. "But I have learned... the USSR's Supreme Court's position on the matter. It is, I think, casuistic. The implication is that Trotsky wasn't tried, so he can't be rehabilitated. But what about the fact that he was stripped of his Soviet citizenship and sent into exile? What about the thousands upon thousands of people shot on charges of being Trotskyists, those whose lives were ruined in Stalin's camps, the entire family shot on mere suspicion of connection with Trotsky? At issue here is not just my grandfather. Since Trotsky had not been cleared of the charges against him, the sentences passed by Stalin on innocent people seem justified, and consequently those people are not to be rehabilitated."

Asked for a comment by *Moscow News*, the

The mountain of distortion, lies and misconceptions has begun to crumble — but the huge pile of debris has yet to be cleared away.

chairman of the Supreme Court, Yevgeny Smolentsev, replied: "Regarding the essence of the request, I should say that there were no court decisions on LD Trotsky's case, so there cannot be any rehabilitation." In the offices of the Supreme Court, the bureaucratic mentality lives on!

At the same time, Smolentsev made a statement on the fate of Trotsky's son, Sergei. In September 1988, the Supreme Court had decided that, "the resolution of the special conference of the NKVD (USSR) of 14 July and 20 July, 1935, as well as the sentence by the Military Judicial Board of the USSR Supreme Court of 29 October, 1937, with regard to Sedov, Sergei Lvovich, should be repealed and the case dropped for lack of *corpus delicti*." The Latin phrase is a lawyer's term which means, in plain language, there was none of the ingredients necessary to obtain a conviction: no proper charges, no particulars of charges, and no evidence. This long overdue confession of judicial crime could hardly be more perfunctory. However necessary for the historical and political record, no official retraction can restore Sergei's life, nor the lives of other members of Trotsky's family who were murdered or driven to their deaths by Stalin.

The accelerated rehabilitation of the victims of the purges has taken place against the background of an increasingly open reassessment of Soviet history and public debate on the issues involved. But discussion of the ideas, writings and political role of Trotsky is only just beginning. The mountain of distortion, lies, misconceptions and political mythology has begun to crumble — but the huge pile of debris has yet to be cleared away.

In 1988 all history examinations throughout the Soviet Union were cancelled. The reason given by Yuri Afanasyev, appointed director of Moscow's State Historical Archive Institute in September 1986, was that "history textbooks in our country, especially those concerned with Soviet history, are completely falsified. They are not just falsifications in some aspects or minor details, but total falsifications. And to make teenagers repeat all these lies in the course of their exams is, quite frankly, immoral... There is not, and has never been in the world, a people and a country with such a falsified history as ours," (Interview, *New Left Review*, September/October 1988).

The writers and academics pushing for the opening up of historical debate have apparently been supported by Gorbachev. In a famous declaration to party editors in February 1987, Gorbachev said: "There should not be any blank pages in either our history or our literature... We must not put those who made the revolution in the shadow... We must let the socialist law of truth have its way."

When he first took over the leadership, however, Gorbachev was much more cautious. As on other issues, he has been pushed by events. At the same time, the hard-line Stalinists who still have a powerful position in the Party apparatus have kept up a guerrilla battle to maintain the shibboleths of the past.

On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of victory in the Second World War, in May 1985, Gorbachev was still praising the "gigantic work at the front, in the rear... led by the party and the State Committee of Defence headed by the General Secretary... Stalin." In February 1986, he told a correspondent of the French CP newspaper, *L'Humanite* that "Stalinism is a concept made up by opponents of communism and used on a large scale to smear the Soviet Union and socialism as a whole", adding that the CPSU had already "drawn proper conclusions from the past".

In June 1986, he told a group of Soviet writers that "If we start trying to deal with the past, we will lose all our energy... we'll sort out the past, we will put everything in its place. But right now we have to direct our energy forward." Clashes within the leadership, however, between the pro-reform group around Gorbachev and the hard-liners around Ligachev, who defended the Stalinist views of the past, pushed Gorbachev into supporting the opening up of more blank pages.

Again, in his report on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution, given on 2 November 1987, Gorbachev was hostile to Trotsky. He defended the Hitler-Stalin pact of August 1939, praised rapid industrialisation, and declared that "Bukharin and his supporters underestimated in practice the importance of the factor of time in the construction of socialism in the 1930s."

Nevertheless, Gorbachev, in contrast to Brezhnev, had to concede that "the understanding of our history which we achieved in preparing for the 70th anniversary of October is not something frozen and given once-and-for-all. It will be deepened and developed in the course of further research... For us, no smoothing out of history is acceptable. It already exists. And it is only a matter of showing it correctly."

While Gorbachev has declared himself in favour of free investigation of the past, he has continuously warned that new history should be written "responsibly and scientifically..." without a "thirst for sensations". "The impatience of public opinion is understandable," Gorbachev said to the February 1988 Plenum of the Central Committee, but "the wish to look as soon as possible at the closed pages of our past... cannot justify rash statements... It is impermissible that instead of real scientific research, time-serving snippets should be thrown

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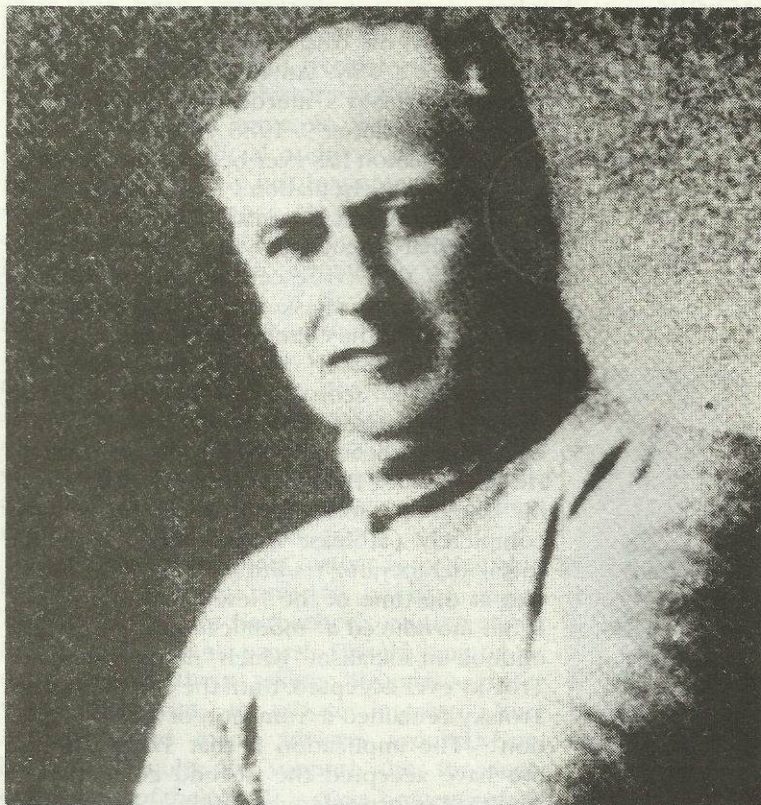
at the general public, which conceal rather than reveal the truth." Ligachev had also called for greater frankness about the past. But in July 1987, he began to criticise 'excessive emphasis' on the abuses of the Stalin period.

In March 1988, the *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, controlled by the Central Committee of the party and primarily covering the Russian Federation, (RSFSR), published a full-page letter by Nina Andreeva, under the heading 'I cannot give up my principles'. Andreeva is a chemistry teacher, but there is little doubt that her letter was written in consultation with Ligachev and his staff. The letter was an 'anti-Perestroika manifesto', used by hard-liners in many local CP branches. By 'principles' Andreeva really means 'the doctrine of the bureaucracy'.

The letter opened by supporting the historians who had strongly criticised the playwright Mikhail Shatrov, whose plays *Brest-Litovsk* and *Onward... Onward... Onward* were published in a prominent literary journal in 1987-88. Rather than portraying the usual Stalinist stereotypes, they presented the leaders of the Russian revolution, including Trotsky, as rounded-out personalities debating the aims, strategy and tactics of the revolution. Andreeva denounced as 'tendentious accusation' Shatrov's claims that Stalin was responsible for the murders of Kirov and Trotsky. While condemning the repressions of the 1930s, Andreeva defended Stalin as a great man, even citing Churchill's admiration for Stalin. One reference to Trotsky, moreover, revives the shameful strain of anti-semitism that has always run through Stalinist attacks on Trotsky. She complains about 'militant cosmopolitanism', and denounces Trotsky's 'internationalism' as being associated with the denigration of the *Russian* proletariat as 'backward and uncultured'.

Three weeks later, *Pravda* (5 April 1988) published a full page reply to Andreeva, criticising her letter as "an ideological platform, a manifesto of the forces against perestroika". Andreeva and her supporters, the editorial claimed, wanted "to retain the system under which bureaucratism, corruption, usury and petit-bourgeois degeneration flowered luxuriously". It accused her of "historical fatalism". However, in rejecting her favourable view of Stalin, the *Pravda* article failed to take up her points or argue the case against her hardline Stalinist assertions. It simply counterpoised the need to support perestroika.

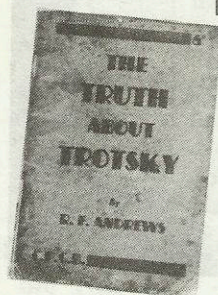
Nevertheless, more and more articles are appearing, notably in journals like *Moscow News*, discussing Trotsky's role in the revolution and civil war. Some journals have published excerpts from Trotsky's writings. The magazine *Voprosy Istorii* (number 7, 1989) has begun serialising his important book *The Stalin School of Falsification* (to which we will return).



One measure of the interest in Trotsky and the appeal of his ideas are the increasingly sophisticated attempts to discredit him. An article by Dr V Dolgov in the youth paper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (republished in *Soviet Weekly*, 19 November 1988) paid grudging tribute to Trotsky's revolutionary record, recognising that he was "a fine speaker and propagandist". "The young people of the time (1920) breathed and lived Trotsky." But, Dolgov continues, "they did not always see that, as the revolutionary process in Russia was progressing, he was losing his gilding of genuine socialism." Having paid a number of back-handed tributes, the article proceeds to catalogue all the various Stalinist calumnies: that Trotsky was 'superficial', was "doing everything to advertise himself", was "devoid of any profound theoretical analysis". While repeating all the old Stalinist formulas against Trotsky, however, this article, written in the era of 'glasnost' and 'perestroika', has a new twist. One of Stalin's main mistakes, it now asserts, was his failure to nip Trotsky's "all-out offensive on the Party" in the bud early in 1924. Stalin, it is now claimed, was "seeking a conciliation with Trotsky", and only got round to "crushing Trotskyism" in the Summer of 1924.

Even writers who are strongly anti-Stalin and not overtly hostile to Trotsky nevertheless perpetuate misrepresentations and false interpretations of Trotsky's ideas. In his book *Triumph and Tragedy*, for instance, (General) Dmitry Volkogonov sets out the details of Trotsky's

Left Opposition leader, Christian Rakovsky, in Siberian exile, 1932.



**British CP
 pamphlet, 1934.
 Stalinist lies
 published
 internationally.
 The author,
 Andrew
 Rothstein, still
 writes for the
 Morning Star.**

assassination, although commenting that it is unlikely that the true story will emerge "in the near future". Why? An extract from the book covering Trotsky's murder was published in *Pravda* (September 9, 1988), the first time that the assassination has ever been dealt with in an official mass-circulation newspaper. Volkogonov, however, repeats characterisations of Trotsky that originated with the bureaucratic leadership that coalesced around Stalin after 1924. For instance, asked why Trotsky, as "the second man of the October revolution", did not become the leader of the Party after Lenin (interview, *Moscow News*, 4 March 1990), Volkogonov says, "I believe many were repulsed by his arrogance and extreme radicalism." He then adds, "Trotsky's paradox is that, for all his extreme leftism, he did not break away completely (at least ideologically) from the social democratic tradition." Later, he claims that at the time of the New Economic Policy, Lenin introduced a "modification in our whole outlook on socialism" which "neither Stalin nor Trotsky ever accepted. Until the end of his days, Trotsky remained a 'romantic of world revolution'." The implication is that Trotsky would not have accepted the 'second correction', a "political reform adequate to the socio-political situation of the NEP", a 'correction' which the reformist Gorbachev wing of the bureaucracy now claim to be making.

It is surely Volkogonov's comments which are paradoxical. In 1917 Trotsky, alongside Lenin, supported the independent struggle for power by the proletariat, against the "old Bolsheviks" who advocated compromise with the provisional government. Yet Trotsky, according to Volkogonov, never broke away from 'the social democratic tradition'.

Then Volkogonov criticises Trotsky from the opposite direction. But in fact Trotsky was first to advocate a 'new course', of temporary concessions to the richer farmers, traders and private manufacturers, in order for the Soviet government to gain time and prepare the ground for the strengthening of economic planning. What is implied by Volkogonov, however, is that Lenin would have favoured, had he lived, a permanent turn towards the market, a conclusion for which there is no evidence in Lenin's articles or statements. The criticism of Trotsky here is that he would not have accepted a dilution of workers' democracy in order to facilitate a turn back to the market — a policy which neither Lenin nor Trotsky would have accepted.

Such confusion and distortion of history and theory, even by those like Volkogonov who are trying to fill in the 'blank pages', underlies the urgency of restoring the true historical and political record in relation to Trotsky. Yet even among the most politically conscious workers

in the Soviet Union there is skepticism about rehabilitation. Under the bureaucracy, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and even deathly grey functionaries like Brezhnev, were canonised as "great leaders". The real figure of Lenin was transformed into a wax-works saint — the better to exorcise what he really stood for. 'We don't need more political saints,' say some of the youth, reacting against decades of bureaucratic propaganda.

But nothing would be achieved by promoting Trotsky as a new political icon, as just another figure in the bureaucratic Pantheon 'whose time has come'. Such an approach would be alien to Trotsky's own personality and method. Rehabilitation is necessary because the open, thorough-going reappraisal of Trotsky in the Soviet Union is the key to understanding the rise of Stalinism — and to formulating a programme which can provide the working class with a way out of the bureaucratic impasse.

This is understood even by Yuri Afanasyev, who is quick to point out: "I am not a Trotskyist sympathiser," (*New Left Review*). "The question of Trotsky is a very special one... because getting rid of the stereotypes of Trotsky is a measure of our success in ridding ourselves of the last vestiges of Stalinism... It is impossible to get rid of the Stalinist legacy without getting rid of the Stalinist stereotype of Trotsky."

When a bureaucratic leadership began to crystallise around Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev at the time of Lenin's last illness and death, they attempted to justify themselves through the invention in 1924 of the legend of 'Trotskyism'. This was later admitted by Zinoviev and Kamenev in 1926, when they fell out with Stalin and temporarily joined the opposition.

Stalin's leadership began with relatively minor historical falsifications, particularly of the history of Bolshevism and the events of 1917. From 1923, Trotsky led an opposition to the emerging bureaucratic leadership on the basis of the *real* aims of October and genuine Marxism. 'Trotskyism' was invented to simultaneously identify the revolutionary essence of Bolshevism as an 'alien' doctrine, and to stigmatise Trotsky as a dangerous opponent of the revolution, now allegedly defended by Stalin and his cohorts.

'Trotskyism', as Trotsky explained from the very beginning, was the spindle around which all subsequent, monstrous falsifications were spun. The small, distorted cameos of 1924 became the 'hellish frescoes' of the show trials of 1936-37, travesties of 'revolutionary justice' which shocked the conscience of the world.

The attack on Trotsky and the repudiation of the Bolshevik tradition through the campaign against Trotskyism represented, in a negative

form, the creation of an ideology to justify the existence of an elite intent on consolidating its power and privileges. The monumental lies constituted a political weapon intended to ensure the subjugation of the Communist Party to the bureaucracy and to poison the consciousness of the ruling strata. False history and pseudo-theory, justified by a web of lies, became institutionalised 'truths'. Genuine traditions were crudely adapted to fit the needs of the bureaucracy and to confuse the workers. The new anti-Trotskyist ideology was used to pervert genuine Marxism, which aims to eliminate all inequality, and to legitimise the privileges of the elite.

The exposure of the bureaucracy's self-justifying falsifications was initiated by Trotsky himself at the very beginning of the process under the most adverse conditions of opposition. In 1924, Trotsky wrote *The Lessons of October* against the attempts by Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev to mis-interpret the strategy and tactics followed by the Bolshevik leadership in 1917. It was this article which prompted the 'troika' to fabricate the 'legend of Trotskyism'. In many other articles, Trotsky defended historical truth against Stalin and company.

In 1927 Trotsky wrote a systematic answer to the "falsification of the history of the October revolution, the history of the revolution, and the history of the Party". This was his *Letter to the Bureau of Party History*, written in reply to an *Istpart* questionnaire. "The *Letter*", Trotsky wrote, "circulated from hand to hand in the USSR in hundreds of copies, either retyped or copied by hand. Single copies, often inexact, filtered abroad. Translations of them appeared in several languages." Samizdat, illegal underground 'self-publishing', was not the invention of the dissidents of the Brezhnev era!

The letter to *Istpart*, together with other important speeches and documents, were brought together in *The Stalin School of Falsification*, first published in 1932. A brief glance at this book, moreover, illustrates another significant aspect of the current debate on history in the Soviet Union. Many of the controversial issues, which are only just beginning to be opened up for debate inside the Soviet Union, were long ago clarified in the writings of Trotsky and the *Bulletin of the Opposition*. While official archives remained locked in dark cellars and 'sensitive' books were segregated in the closed section of libraries, Trotsky published a wealth of documentary evidence drawn from his own personal archives. The documents Trotsky cited were invariably denounced by the Kremlin as forgeries. This did not prevent Stalin's agents from trying to destroy his archives through burglary or arson.

It is to some extent inevitable, because the political consciousness of the Soviet working

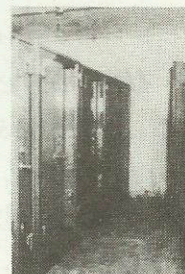
class has been profoundly set back under Stalinism, that a new generation of politically conscious workers and youth will have to rediscover their own history in their own way and by their own route. In this process, the opening up of official archives in the Soviet Union, which is only just beginning, will be of tremendous importance. No one who claims to stand on the ideas of Marxism can support the continued suppression of materials which can illuminate the history of the revolution, the development of Stalinism, the struggle of the Left Opposition, and the international dimension of developments in the Soviet Union. However, "ridding ourselves of the last vestiges of Stalinism," is not simply a technical question of opening up archives, publishing documents, and allowing professional historians the access needed to reappraise the past.

Reassessment of Soviet history is inescapably bound up with fundamental political issues. This is reflected in Gorbachev's caution about filling in the 'blank pages'. History cannot be reappraised without asking: 'Reappraise from what standpoint, in whose interest?' Yuri Afanasyev and many advisers around Gorbachev undoubtedly support the thorough opening up of the past. It is clear, however, they approach this task from the point of view of the repudiation of the real aims of the October revolution. Afanasyev supports the pro-capitalist policies of 'radicals' like Boris Yeltsin. They favour the historical rehabilitation of Trotsky, but they are using Trotsky's critique of Stalinism not only to bury Stalinism, but to bury genuine Marxism as well.

Our approach is entirely different. We stand for the rehabilitation of Trotsky precisely because, through the struggle of the international Left Opposition, Trotsky upheld the genuine ideas of Marxism against their Stalinist perversion. A clear understanding of his ideas is indispensable for a theoretical explanation of the development of Stalinism, including its prolongation up to the present time. Above all, his ideas provide the key to the programme and perspectives, strategy and tactics, for both the political revolution in the East and social revolution in the West (as explained in Ted Grant's article in this issue).

More and more of Trotsky's articles and books are beginning to be published within the Soviet Union. The debate on his record and ideas is spreading beyond relatively narrow circles of intellectuals and professional historians. We confidently predict that whatever the attitude of the ruling elite (whether diehard Stalinists or pro-capitalist 'radicals'), Trotsky's ideas will become known in the next few years to millions and millions of workers in the Soviet Union — and will be taken up as indispensable weapons in their political struggle. □

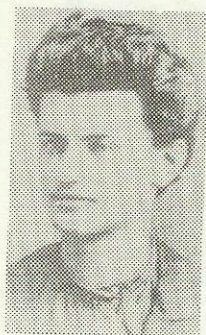
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Summer 1990
Rehabilitating
Trotsky



Basement of the Moscow Marx-Engels Institute, where all Trotsky's works were removed to in 1935.

Trotsky's relevance today

In the three sectors of the world — the Stalinist world, the capitalist world and the ex-colonial world — the ideas of Trotsky, argues Ted Grant, are an invaluable guide to the new forces of the working class which will develop.



Trotsky, 1897.

IT IS NOW the fiftieth anniversary of the assassination of Leon Trotsky by an agent of Stalin and more than one hundred and ten years since his birth on October 26, 1879. This has been an epoch of changes and upheavals greater than any other period of recorded history, perhaps the most disturbed century in the history of mankind.

Two world wars, the Russian revolution, the rise of Stalinism, the victory of the Soviet Union in the second world war, the Chinese revolution, the retreat from open military domination by imperialism to economic neo-colonial domination in the third world — these were the great events of this century which marked decisive stages in the history of the world.

Now a third turning point — the crisis of Stalinism in Russia and Eastern Europe — opens up a new stage in history. The representatives of the imperialist powers have been rubbing their hands with delight. Without firing a shot they have returned — they think — Eastern Europe back into their orbit and rolled back the menace of 'communism', in reality Stalinism. Yet history has still to say its last word. What we

have seen in Eastern Europe will be as nothing to the crisis — political, economic and social — that will develop in the West. And as the crisis develops, left forces will again come to the fore. 'Trotskyism', the policy of social revolution, will come into its own.

IN HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY, *My Life*, Trotsky relates how eight years before the revolution of 1905, a young group of revolutionaries with a hectograph (a hand duplicator), produced a leaflet attacking tsarism. This was the beginning of the revolutionary activity of Leon Trotsky. The forces of the revolution were much weaker then than they are at the present day. Yet eight years later there was the 1905 revolution and twenty years later in 1917 the empire of the tsars, which had endured for a thousand years, was overthrown.

The Russian Social-Democrats were organised in a centralised party. There was a split in 1903 which, while accidental — occurring over a secondary question, was indicative of the different paths the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks would take in future years. It showed the difference, as

Trotsky was to explain later, between 'hards' and 'softs'. Trotsky himself remained with the Mensheviks for about a year and then broke away from them, standing midway between the position of the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. Nevertheless, as Lenin's widow Krupskaya was to write to Trotsky a few days after Lenin's death, Lenin maintained the same attitude towards Trotsky throughout his life. He understood the role which Trotsky could play.

The 1903 split was not a simple question, as the Stalinists were later to try and pretend, of an immediate parting between the two factions of the Social-Democracy. There was the Unity Congress — the Stockholm Congress of 1906 — where for a temporary period, Bolsheviks and Mensheviks came together again. Lenin only finally came to the conclusion that there could no longer be unity for revolutionary purposes in 1912. Only then did the Bolsheviks come out as an independent party.

After 1904 Trotsky had stood outside both factions. But in 1917 he marched arm in arm with the Bolsheviks. In March 1917, when Trotsky was in New York and Lenin in Switzerland, they independently adopted exactly the same approach to the provisional government. After the February revolution, the Bolshevik leaders inside Russia, including Stalin and Kamenev, advocated union with the Mensheviks. Trotsky was inflexibly opposed, as of course was Lenin. Yet at that time, as Trotsky explained, "the movement that had found its symbol in Kerensky seemed all-powerful... Bolshevism seemed nothing more than an 'insignificant group'... The party itself did not realise the power it was to have on the day after, but Lenin was leading it firmly toward its greatest tasks. I harnessed myself to the work and helped him." *My Life*, p332.

On September 7, 1917 Trotsky wrote in *Pravda*: "To us internationalism is not an abstract idea existing only to be betrayed on every opportune occasion, as it is to Tzereteli and Chernov, (Menshevik and SR leaders — EG) but is a real guiding and wholly practical principle. A lasting, decisive success is inconceivable for us without a revolution in Europe... a permanent revolution verses a permanent slaughter: that is the struggle in which the stake is the future of man."

As Trotsky comments, while "in the years of reaction, one needed theoretical foresight in order to hold fast to the prospect of a permanent revolution, probably nothing more than political sense was needed to advance the slogan of a fight for power in March 1917." Yet "not a single one of the present leaders revealed such a foresight or such a sense... Not one of them stood the test of history." *My Life*, p330. In consequence, Lenin declared that after Trotsky had become convinced of the impossibility

of union with the Mensheviks, 'there has been no better Bolshevik'.

In *My Life* Trotsky also outlines how the Red Army was organised and how the battles took place which determined the fate of the revolution, at Kazan and other areas. "The first requisite for success," he explained, "was to hide nothing, our weakness least of all; not to trifle with the masses but to call everything by its right name". That was the policy which Trotsky continued for the whole of his life, never trying to hide the truth from the working class.

Trotsky accomplished marvels in the revolution of 1905, as president of the Petrograd soviet, and as chairman of the Military Revolutionary Committee in 1917, which organised the October revolution. This, with the organisation of the Red Army, would have been sufficient to put him in the historical 'hall of fame'. But in addition Trotsky, with Lenin, was the organiser of the Communist International — which they both considered of more importance than the Russian revolution itself. The Communist International united in its ranks the revolutionary workers of the entire world. It moved greater masses of people than even were organised in the rise of the world religions. It offered a conscious leadership to the inevitable movement of the working class. It could not create these movements but could take advantage of them and prepare the way for the world revolution.

That was the intention of Lenin and Trotsky when they founded the International. The Communist International was intended to prepare for the overthrow of capitalism and open the way for the new society of socialism. Its main work was to educate the new layers and new cadres thrown up as a result of the experience of the class struggle throughout the world, who would be capable of undertaking this task. That was the meaning of the work of the first four congresses of the Communist International. Their deliberations, with their theses and manifestos, many of them written by Trotsky, constitute an invaluable primer of revolution.

But reformism saved capitalism in the revolutionary events that immediately followed the first world war. The German revolution was betrayed by the social democracy which rejected the 'bloody path of Bolshevism' for a gradual, slow and peaceful transformation of capitalism. Fifteen years later Hitler came to power!

At this early stage, the workers' leaders in the Communist International were still young and theoretically underdeveloped. But they could have learned, and were learning, in the course of the great events that took place. The defeat of the revolution in Germany taught the workers

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Trotsky's
relevance
today

Trotsky considered the formation of the Communist International of more importance than the Russian revolution itself.

Stalin was an
empiric who,
at that stage,
did not
realise what
he was doing.

many bitter lessons, and the Communist Party grew on the basis of this struggle between revolution and counter-revolution to a party of millions.

In January 1923, after Germany defaulted on its war reparations, French imperialism invaded the Ruhr. This, with the crisis of German capitalism, led to the collapse of the currency. The mark went to billions to the pound. A revolutionary crisis developed in Germany. But the vacillations of the leadership of the Communist Party, together with the bad advice of Stalin and Zinoviev, led to a great revolutionary opportunity being missed.

The 1923 defeat in Germany strengthened the reaction which was developing in Russia from the disappointment at the isolation of the revolution and the terrible economic situation of the masses. The 'troika' of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin gained control of the leadership of the CPSU and commenced a struggle against 'Trotskyism'. In reality this was a struggle against the basic ideas of Lenin and the revolution itself.

The developing reaction in Russia was reflected in Stalin coming forward with the theory of 'socialism in one country' in 1924. In February 1924 Stalin published a book, *The Foundations of Leninism*, which reflected the orthodox Marxist idea of Lenin about the impossibility of building 'socialism in one country', especially a backward country like Russia. But six months later in a new edition, he published the opposite idea that Russia had sufficient resources to build socialism! This was supposed to act as a consolation for the masses, disappointed by the failure of the world revolution. In reality it reflected the interests of the new bureaucratic caste which was seeking control in the Soviet Union on the basis of the ebbing of the activity of the masses.

Trotsky gave a warning and a brilliant prediction: Stalin was an empiric who, at that stage, did not realise what he was doing or where the theory of 'socialism in one country' would end — in the nationalist and reformist degeneration of every Communist party in the world. This was a remarkable prediction, brilliantly confirmed by events.

Trotsky's faction in the Russian Communist Party led a struggle against the bureaucratic road between 1923 and 1927. They adopted the programme of extensive industrialisation which was fought against by Stalin and Bukharin — now lauded by the latter day supporters of Gorbachev — who wanted to 'build socialism at a snails pace'. Trotsky, in the brilliant work, *The Third International After Lenin*, explained the impossibility of building socialism in a single country, particularly a backward country like Russia. He fought for an internationalist line in foreign affairs and for the restoration of workers

democracy in the Soviet Union, the regeneration of the Soviets and power to be handed back to the working masses.

He fought against the course of Stalin and Bukharin, and to certain extent of Zinoviev, in relation to the British revolution, in which he predicted the general strike of 1926. He waged a campaign against the suicidal policy of the Comintern of support for Chiang Kai-shek in the Chinese revolution of 1925-27, which resulted in the massacre of the communists.

Yet, Trotsky's greatest contribution to world socialism and to the movement of the working class was his analysis of Stalinism in Russia. Without his work the movement would have been blind. He analysed mercilessly the zig-zags of 'socialism in one country' which turned the Comintern from an instrument of world revolution into a 'border guard' for the Soviet Union. In reply, in 1927 the 'Trotskyists' were expelled from the CPSU and exiled to Siberia.

In those years Trotsky conducted a struggle against what he called 'bureaucratic centrism'. This was the time when Stalin and other leaders of the Russian revolution genuinely desired the victory of the revolution in other countries but, first with opportunist policies and then with the madness of ultra-leftism, with the insane theory of 'social fascism' — that the social democracy and fascism were not enemies but twins — prepared the way for the victory of Hitler in 1933. The path of the Comintern in the years to 1933 was one of oscillation from ultra-leftism to opportunism and back again. In a series of writings Trotsky dealt with the criminal policies of the Comintern and warned of the danger of Hitler and the consequences the victory of fascism would have for the German and world working class. He advocated the united front of the social democrats and communists in order to prevent the coming to power of Hitler.

Yet the Comintern learnt nothing from the disastrous defeat in Germany and even claimed the coming to power of Hitler as a step towards the victory of the revolution! Even as late as February 1934, when the fascists conducted demonstrations against the liberal government of Daladier in France, the Communist Party actually demonstrated together with the fascists. Had they succeeded fascism could have come to power in France in 1934. Fortunately the French workers could see what was happening across the Rhine and forced the union leaders to organise a general strike. Although only one million workers were organised in the trade unions four million participated in the general strike as a warning to the fascists.

Trotsky, who had stood for the reform of the Communist International and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, now came forward

with the idea of a political revolution in Russia and the inevitable collapse of the Comintern as a force for revolution.

Subsequently the Comintern was to turn to the tactic of the 'popular front' which demanded the subordination of the proletariat to the liberals. Trotsky dealt with this in his writings on Spain and France. The Comintern tried to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' capitalists. Not using a class criterion and utilising the crisis of the system to overthrow capitalism – but forcing the workers to support the 'liberals' – disillusioned the workers and thus prepared the way for reaction. In France certain leaders, taking this reactionary idea to a ludicrous conclusion, demanded a National Front with 'good' French fascists and Mussolini against 'bad' German Nazi fascists!

The defeats of the working class paved the way for war. Trotsky believed that the second world war would be a decisive test for capitalism, resulting in revolutions in the West. And indeed, there was a post-war revolutionary wave throughout Western Europe. In Britain it brought the Labour government to power. In France, Italy and other countries it brought coalitions including the socialist and Stalinist parties to power.

But this new revolutionary wave was betrayed by Stalin. He was afraid that the effects of a victory of the workers in other countries would result in the collapse of the bureaucracy within the Soviet Union. In the same way in 1936, fearing the effects of the Spanish revolution within the Soviet Union, Stalin had launched his murderous purges and prepared the way for the ghastly frame-up trials of the 'old Bolsheviks' and Trotsky.

So capitalism was saved in this tight corner by the policies of the Communist parties, and of course the reformists, who continued the same policies as they had carried out after the first world war. However, this did not have the same consequences, because the situation was somewhat different to that which followed the first world war. What paved the way for the long economic upswing of 1950-73 was the domination of American imperialism in the post-war capitalist world. At that time America had 50 per cent of world production. She used her domination to force the opening of world markets to exports. There was an enormous expansion of world trade, through the lowering of tariffs and other barriers to trade. This expansion of world trade gave a temporary extension to capitalism, but on the other hand it had more progressive consequences as well. It resulted in the growth of the numbers, cohesion and power of the proletariat throughout the advanced capitalist countries, and even to some extent also in the underdeveloped world.



The policies of the Communist and socialist parties prepared the political basis for a relative stabilisation of capitalism. But Stalinism also emerged strengthened from the second world war. Only the Marxists understood the change in the situation that had taken place, explaining the consequences of the victory of the Red Army and the turn towards the policies of proletarian bonapartism in the countries of Eastern Europe. This was a new situation which could only be explained by using the *method* of Lenin and Trotsky, not just by repeating their ideas without taking into account the fundamental changes that had taken place.

NOWADAYS STALIN HAS been completely repudiated by the bureaucracy, who curse him as being responsible for all the ills that afflict Russia today. But Stalin was an expression of the apparatus, the representative of the bureaucracy. It was this which gave strength to Stalin, which enabled his victory over Trotsky in the battle between the Left Opposition and the bureaucracy.

Trotsky explained the degeneration of the Bolsheviks which took place between 1917 and 1924 by the changing conditions of existence under which they lived. In the chapter on *Lenin's death and the shift of power in My Life*, he describes the processes involved:

"To absorb a certain philosophic outlook into one's flesh and blood, to make it dominate one's consciousness, and to co-ordinate with it one's sensory world, is given not to everyone but to only a few. In the working masses, a substitute

**Left
Oppositionists
exiled to
Siberia
demonstrate on
the 11th
anniversary of
October.**

Without state ownership of the means of production there can be no question of a transition to socialism.

is found in the class instinct... But there are many revolutionaries in the party and the state who came from the masses but have long since broken away from them." (p503) With the changing circumstances, above all the economic situation and the series of defeats of the revolution on an international plane, they became exposed "to the easy penetration of foreign and hostile ideological influences." Stalinism, Trotsky concludes, was "above all else the automatic work of the impersonal apparatus on the decline of the revolution." (p506) It was the dictatorship of the apparatus over the party.

Trotsky further deepened and developed his analysis of Stalinism in a whole series of works. One of his last works, *In Defence of Marxism*, was written in the battle against those who wanted to change the attitude of Marxists towards the Soviet Union during the course of the second world war.

Trotsky maintained that the USSR was a deformed workers' state so long as there was state ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. This is the fundamental determination of a workers' state. *Without it there can be no question of a transition to socialism.* But without the necessary workers' democracy and workers' control and management of industry and the state, there cannot be a *healthy* workers' state. The bureaucracy became a privileged caste, lording it over and above society and the working class. Unable to take any steps towards a freer and more equal society, it tried to preserve the status quo, to maintain a hierarchical society, to increase its own power, privileges, prestige and income, ruling by totalitarian terror over the workers. It has taken five decades for these characteristics which Trotsky saw in 1940 to develop to their fullest extent.

At the heart of the dispute over the 'defence of the USSR' was the class nature of the Soviet Union. "The 'defence of the USSR', as interpreted by the Comintern", argued Trotsky, "like yesterday's 'struggle against fascism', is based on the renunciation of independent class politics. The proletariat is transformed — for various reasons in various circumstances, but always and invariably — into an auxiliary force of one bourgeois camp against another..."

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

"We must formulate our slogans in such a way that the workers see clearly just what we are defending in the USSR (state property and

planned economy), and against whom we are conducting a ruthless struggle (the parasitic bureaucracy and its Comintern). We must not lose sight for a single moment of the fact that the question of overthrowing the Soviet bureaucracy is for us subordinate to the question of preserving state property of the means of production in the USSR; that the question of preserving state property of the means of production in the USSR is subordinate to us to the question of the world proletarian revolution." (*In Defence of Marxism*, p17-21)

In Defence of Marxism answers the ideas of all sorts of quasi-Marxists' who were disorientated by the development of Stalinism, such as Isaac Deutscher, who wrote a biography of Trotsky. Deutscher imagined that the bureaucracy could move in the direction of socialism, that it could dissolve itself out of existence! Events today demonstrate that this is fundamentally false. On the other hand, we have people like Tony Cliff who put forward the idea of 'state capitalism', that the bureaucracy was a new social formation. This is also completely wrong.

The economy of a state with 100% ownership is entirely different to that of the economy of capitalism. The economic laws of motion of such a society are entirely different to those of capitalism. For example, there cannot be a crisis of over-production and slump as under capitalism. The crisis in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is of a different character.

Moreover, capitalism cannot function without capitalists being, in the words of Marx, the 'repository of the means of production'. In an economy of state ownership, the state is the repository of the means of production. The bureaucrats are not entrepreneurs. As economic functionaries and managers they are entitled to no more than the wages of superintendence. Insofar as they receive more they do so as pure parasites and not as a consequence of their economic function. A workers' state can only function properly under the democratic control of the workers. Otherwise all the negative phenomena of Russia and Eastern Europe are inevitable. Or, in the words of Trotsky, "if the bonapartist riff-raff (that is, the Soviet bureaucracy — EG) is a class, this means that it is not an abortion but a viable child of history." (p19)

On the one hand, state ownership has demonstrated it is possible to utilise the enormous advantages given by a plan of production. On the other hand, the bureaucracy has now reached its limits and can no longer even get the results that have been achieved under capitalism in a boom! As Trotsky explained: "The goal to be attained by the overthrow of the bureaucracy is the re-establishment of the rule of the soviets, expelling from them the

present bureaucracy... it is the task of the regenerated soviets to collaborate with the world revolution and the building of a socialist society. The overthrow of the bureaucracy therefore presupposes the preservation of state property and of planned economy. Therein lies the nub of the whole problem." This is a succinct programme which retains its validity even to the present day, more than 50 years after Trotsky wrote it.

Trotsky, using the method of Marxism, posed the question: "Does the bureaucracy represent a temporary growth on a social organism or has this growth really become transformed into a historically indispensable organ?" He answered by explaining that a "social excrescence can be a product of an 'accidental' (ie temporary and extraordinary) enmeshing of historical circumstances. A social organ (and such is every class, including an exploiting class) can take shape only as a result of the deepest rooted inner needs of production itself... the historical justification for every ruling class consisted in this — the system of exploitation that it headed raised the development of the productive forces to a new level. Beyond the shadow of doubt, the soviet regime gave a mighty impulse to economy. But the source of this impulse was the nationalisation of the means of production and the planned beginnings, and by no means the fact that the bureaucracy usurped command over the economy. On the contrary, bureaucratism, as a system, became the worst brake on the technical and cultural development of the country." *In Defence of Marxism*, p6.

The bureaucracy is now in the position where it can no longer develop the productive forces. It is now no longer a relative fetter on the development of society but an absolute brake. This, Trotsky explained, "was veiled for a certain time by the fact that the Soviet economy was occupied for two decades with transplanting and assimilating the technology and the methods of production of the advanced capitalist countries. The period of borrowing and imitation still could, for better or for worse, be accommodated to bureaucratic automatism, ie the suffocation of all initiative and all creative urge. But the higher the economy arose, the more complex its requirements became, all the more unbearable became the obstacles of the bureaucratic regime... the bureaucracy... came into irreconcilable contradiction with the demands of development. The explanation of this is to be found precisely in the fact that the bureaucracy is not the bearer of a new system of economy peculiar to itself and impossible without itself, but is a parasitic growth on the workers' state." (p7) This analysis has been brilliantly confirmed by the current impasse.

Trotsky goes on to explain: "The Soviet oligarchy possesses all the vices of the old ruling classes but lacks their historical mission. In the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet state it is not the general laws of modern society from capitalism to socialism which find expression, but the special, exceptional and temporary refraction of these laws out of the conditions of a backward revolutionary country in a capitalist environment." (p7)

"The October revolution was not an accident. It was forecast long in advance. Events confirmed this forecast. The degeneration does not refute the forecast, because Marxists never believed that an isolated workers' state in Russia could maintain itself indefinitely. True enough, we expected the wrecking of the Soviet state, rather than its degeneration; to put it more correctly, we did not sharply differentiate between these two possibilities. But they do not at all contradict each other. *Degeneration must inescapably end at a certain stage in downfall...* twenty-five years in the scales of history, when it is a question of the profoundest changes in economic and cultural systems, weigh less than an hour in the life of man." (p13-15)

The bureaucracy managed to maintain itself for a greater length of time than could have been foreseen. This was due to the victory in the war, which they were not responsible for but which reflected the determination of the masses in the Soviet Union not to be enslaved by Hitlerite fascism. But as Trotsky then went on to say, which again has been strikingly demonstrated at the present time, "in the USSR, the overthrow of the bureaucracy is indispensable for the preservation of state property." (p15)

THE COALITION POLICIES of the 'communists' in Europe at the end of world war two were a shameful betrayal of all the ideas of Marx and Lenin on the struggle against capitalism. They saved capitalism in this period and gave the necessary breathing space to prepare the political conditions for the economic upswing. Now the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe, or as the capitalists prefer to pretend, 'communism' has given an apparent further breathing space to the capitalists, further reinforced by the crisis of Stalinism in Russia.

But this crisis of Stalinism, which was predicted by the Marxists, is merely a forerunner of a crisis of capitalism in Western Europe and throughout the world. The next decade will be one of turmoil in the capitalist countries too. France 1968 was not an accident. It was a reflection of the inevitable movement of the working class under conditions of crisis.

The Guardian, 22 June, showed the situation that has developed in America: "The average

**"Degeneration
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voter has woken up to the fact that his household income has not improved for 20 years". Quoting a recent book, *The Politics of Rich and Poor* by Kevin Phillips, a strategist of the Republicans in 1968, *The Guardian* journalist comments: "Now that the figures are coming in, we can tell just how far the Reagan years swung the pendulum towards the plutocracy. In 1980 when Reagan was elected, the richest one per cent in the USA owned just eight per cent of the national wealth. By 1988 they had almost doubled their share to 14.9%.

"There are nearly two million American millionaires, over 150,000 deca-millionaires, (worth \$10 million) and 51 billionaires. The net wealth of the Forbes list of the 400 richest Americans nearly tripled in the 1980s. Chief executives of big corporations, who earned an average 40 times as much as the workers in 1980, now earn 93 times more."

This is the shadow of coming events. Exactly the same process took place between 1920 and 1930, preparing the slump of 1929-33. Trotsky, in his introduction to *The Living Thoughts of Karl Marx*, pointed out that: "As a matter of fact, the economic contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie was aggravated during the most prosperous periods of capitalist development, when the rise in the standard of living of a certain strata of toilers, which at times were rather extensive, hid the decrease of

the proletariat's share of the national income. Thus, just before falling into prostration, the industrial production of the US, for instance, increased by 50% between 1920 and 1930, while the sum paid out in wages rose only by 30%, which meant a tremendous decrease of labour's share in the national income." p25.

History repeats itself on a higher level. At least in that period, the share of the national income of the proletariat increased. Yet now the share of the proletariat has fallen over the last 20 years. That means that the contradictions in the economy have reached an even greater extent than they did in 1929-33. Of course, when the crisis will be, cannot be worked out with complete accuracy in advance. It may be some years, or there could be a collapse even in 1991. But what is certain is that the same economic causes produce the same economic effects.

The irony of history may be that the Soviet bureaucracy is preparing to capitulate to capitalism possibly on the eve of new capitalist economic and social convulsions. The 'fireworks' of Western capitalism will prepare an inevitable collapse at a later stage. The crisis that has taken place in Eastern Europe and Russia is a harbinger of a similar crisis of capitalism in the West in the coming epoch, in Europe, North America and Asia. There will be a decay of capitalism world-wide.

How shallow and frail the present economic and political stabilisation of capitalism is, was shown by the terror of the world bourgeoisie at the revolution which took place in Romania. There were even appeals from the Western capitalist powers — because of the fear of the effects of the revolution — for Gorbachev to 'intervene' against the revolution in Romania. The campaign in the press over the defence of the Iliescu government by the factory workers and the miners was another indication of this.

There will be enormous difficulties on the road of counter-revolution in Russia and in Eastern Europe. An explosion is being prepared in Poland. That is the fear of the ruling class. They are now clutching at straws, making mistakes together with Gorbachev rather than against the Stalinist regime.

The reactionary theory of socialism in a single country has been shown in all its futility and stupidity. Stalin believed that he had established a regime that would last for a thousand years. He had no idea of the crisis that would effect his system in a few decades. The leaders of the Communist International also did not realise what would happen when they adopted this reactionary theory.

Now, many of the gains of the October revolution, including the development of the

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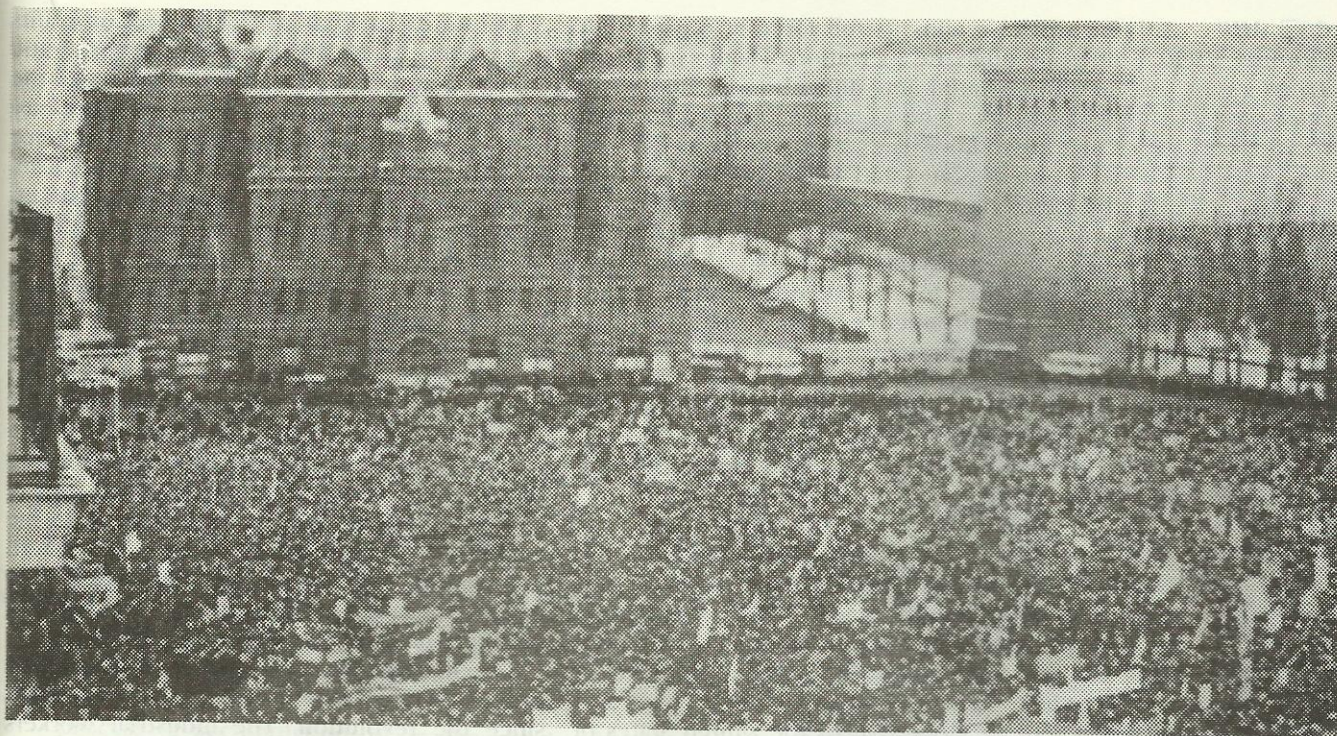
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Communist International throughout Europe and the world, have been destroyed. From being an instrument of international revolution, the Communist parties have become a remnant of national reformist organisations in the different countries. Each one is more reactionary than the other! In Greece, they made a coalition with a conservative government, the very forces which had crushed them in the civil war of 1944-47. In Spain they split into fragments. Even where the Communist parties remain a force, as in Italy and France, they have become an agency not of Stalinism but of the capitalists. They have deservedly suffered this fate, predicted by Trotsky.

The international followers of Stalin, and all his successors, were a tool of the bureaucracy's foreign policy. Even now they support Gorbachev blindly, even though he is moving in the direction of the restoration of capitalism. In the wake of the capitalist economic boom, the lefts in the socialist parties were incapable of orientating themselves. They followed the Stalinists in the most gullible fashion, propagating the idea that 'socialism' had been established in Russia and Eastern Europe. Now they are suffering the same fate as the Stalinists.

Momentarily, with the upswing of capitalism, the right-wing reformists are riding high. They are degenerate tools of capitalism. They have abandoned any pretence of 'socialism'. Where they are in government, in France, Spain, Sweden, Australia and New Zealand, the 'socialist' governments carry out conservative capitalist policies. In New Zealand and Australia they have actually turned to denationalisation. In Germany they abandoned long ago the

pretence of a socialist programme. They are even more degenerate in theory and in practical politics than their predecessors in the Weimar republic.

Yet it is in the nature of things that they should behave this way because they too are in the grip of the world market, the interpenetration of productive forces on an international scale. It is no longer possible to operate a purely 'national' policy. That is the explanation for the movement towards economic unification — which will not succeed — in the European Economic Community, and the fact that the other European capitalist powers have come into the orbit of the EEC.

This relatively progressive development of the productive forces resulted from the capitalists partially overcoming the crisis in which they found themselves — expressed in the slump of 1929-33 and two world wars — by overcoming the national limits of each capitalist economy. The economy has outgrown the restraints of private ownership and the national state. This will be demonstrated even more crushingly in the future.

Indeed, the capitalist world rests on the exploitation of the colonial and ex-colonial peoples. Throughout the 1980s, \$50,000 million was extracted each year from the poorest peoples of the globe. The repulsive hypocrisy of the capitalists lies in the fact that they shed crocodile tears, piously pretending to give aid while using the terms of trade to bleed these countries: giving with the left hand while taking much more back with the right.

Trotsky's work on the permanent revolution, which was aimed at the backward countries of

Demonstration in Moscow this year. There will be enormous difficulties on the road to counter-revolution.

**Eastern
Europe and
Russia are
still in the
balance.**

the world, retains its full force at the present time, although the aberration of Stalinism in this field too created new difficulties in theory and perspectives. The Chinese revolution, the Cuban revolution and others *began* as deformed workers' states and will inevitably go into the same blind alley as the Russian bureaucracy finds itself at the present time. Nevertheless they were enormously progressive in the sense that they did for a whole historical period develop the productive forces which could not be developed in the backward countries under capitalism. In the three sectors of the world, the Stalinist world, the capitalist world and the colonial world, the ideas of Trotsky are an invaluable guide to the new forces of the working class which will develop.

HISTORY HAS STILL to say its last word in relation to Eastern Europe. Eastern Europe and Russia are still in the balance. In Eastern Europe the programme of 'socialism in a single country' was carried to a ludicrous extent. The level of economic integration of the EEC was not reached, let alone that of the United States of America. Each country was pushed into a separate blind alley, after an initial period of enormous progress in developing the productive forces. There was not the control of the 'market' that at least partially exists under capitalism but nor was there any control whatsoever by the workers, which is a necessary concomitant to prepare the way to move in the direction of socialism. The impasse was reflected in the complete collapse of Stalinism beginning with Poland and Hungary. In the case of Hungary the Stalinists themselves initiated the process, probably with the encouragement of Gorbachev.

In the early decades following the second world war, the bureaucracy evinced an enormous satisfaction and self-confidence. In 1960 Khrushchev said to the capitalist powers, 'we will bury you!' Technically, economically and socially, particularly with the aid of China and Eastern Europe, this would have been entirely possible. If the same rate of growth which they had achieved up to that point had continued they would have outstripped the US by 1980. But the rapacious bureaucracy, the corruption, the incompetence, the impossibility of developing an economy of state ownership without the direct participation and control of the mass of the workers, ruled out any way forward on this basis.

Yet, all the bourgeois theoreticians and the reformist politicians imagined that the Stalinist system could maintain itself forever! Now the totalitarian granite foundation that was supposed to have been built has shown its ineptitude and incapacity to hold down the working class.

The bureaucracy is split. One section wants to go back to the blind alley of bureaucratic control. Another section wishes to move in the direction of capitalism. With the temporary upswing of capitalism, which has now lasted for decades, they want to swing back to capitalism, or rather, to use its pseudonym, the 'market-economy'. There will be an inevitable recoil from this.

What is most striking in all the countries of Eastern Europe and above all in the Soviet Union itself, is the fear of the bureaucracy of the working class. There is not a coherent and open component within the ranks of the bureaucracy with the idea of going back to the control of the working class as existed in the days of Lenin and Trotsky. Yet, the Russian and Eastern European workers have still to say their last word. In the coming battles in Eastern Europe, in Western Europe and in the world there will be time over and over again to develop the programme of international socialist revolution.

The Russian workers have gone through a process of development over three generations since the revolution. The industrial workers were diluted by large numbers of peasants, who now of course have become proletarians. But to a great extent, with the massacre of 'Trotskyists', the consciousness of the Russian workers has been lost. However, the new régimes which will come into force, still remain to be tested by events and by history. Very rapidly, the Russian workers and the workers of Eastern Europe can regain and revive the ideas of Marxism and its modern equivalent, 'Trotskyism'.

Even in the worst case, if the bureaucracy should succeed in establishing capitalism, a new October revolution would be inevitable, but on a higher economic and social level. From ten million workers, there are now 140-150 million. The regime which would be established would find itself in new contradictions, particularly as the crisis of capitalism develops on a world scale.

The Russian revolution has been justified historically, whatever the vicissitudes which Russia may go through in the next period. The work of Lenin and Trotsky is imperishable. Armed with the ideas and organisational methods of Lenin and of Trotsky, the proletariat will be invincible. Their revolt is absolutely inevitable. The gains in the standard of living in Europe, America and Japan are actually welcome from this point of view. They have strengthened the proletariat immeasurably in comparison with the pre-war period.

The process of organisation of the international market and the integration of the world economy, which led to a partial overcoming of the crisis of capitalism for a temporary historical period, will on the other hand enor-

mously exacerbate that crisis at a later stage. The development of the productive forces gave a respite to capitalism. But this will inevitably turn dialectically into its opposite. New barriers, new tariffs, will be constructed. There is the outline of new blocs and powers: a unified Germany and the EEC; Japan and Asia; the United States, Canada and Latin America. New and even greater rivalries will develop between the capitalist powers.

The progressive development of the interdependence of the world economy will collapse at a certain stage. Inevitably, the further development of the productive forces on the road which Trotsky deals with in *The Living Thoughts of Karl Marx* — the concentration and centralisation of capitalism to a level that has never been reached in the past — will prepare the way for new and even bigger slumps. The analysis of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky of the 'market', was correct. In the fact that capitalism depends on the unpaid labour of the working class lies the germ of the crisis which will develop in the future. The very process of accumulation, or in the words of Marx, 'over-accumulation', is in itself a guarantee of crisis in the future.

In avoiding crisis new massive contradictions have been created. The present 'prosperity' is very fragile. With credit, and with armaments spending which produces fictitious capital, with the concentration and centralisation of capital through parasitic takeovers, the ruling class is preparing future crisis.

Nevertheless, the development of the world economy lays the foundations for international socialism in computers, micro-electronics and automation. Now it is entirely possible in the main capitalist countries and in the Soviet Union to introduce a six-hour day and a four-day week without reductions in pay. This would give the necessary time for the proletariat to run industry and the state.

The material, political and social basis of socialism has been laid. What is lacking has been the consciousness and understanding of the proletariat and a mass revolutionary vanguard to harness the inevitable movement of the working class.

Trotsky explained time and again that internationalism is not for sentimental reasons but because of the integration of the world economy, which was capitalism's historically progressive task. This has been carried to an extent which could not have been even dreamed of by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. The world economy is one at the present time. This in its turn will prepare the way for enormous international movements of the working class.

Now not even the Soviet Union or the US can stand alone. They are part of a world economy.



Brezhnev had to reluctantly abandon the precept of Stalin about a 'self-sufficient' economy. Gorbachev has carried this further. But they have not done so with the purpose of preparing for the socialist revolution but on the contrary have ingratiated themselves with the capitalist powers. Gorbachev's leaning on the imperialist powers, appealing for aid to Kohl, Mitterrand, Bush and Thatcher, is a striking confirmation of the process sketched out by Trotsky in *In Defence of Marxism* of "the increasing independence of the bureaucracy from the soviet proletariat and the growth of its dependence upon other classes and groups both inside and outside the country." (p119) A super-power with tremendous resources, yet Gorbachev has to take out the begging bowl! He can only expect aid because, faced with insoluble contradictions, he has taken to the road of counter-revolution and the restoration of the market, ie capitalism.

Trotsky, developing the ideas of Marx and Lenin, explained that the activities of men and women are decisive. "The Marxist comprehension of historical necessity," he wrote in *In Defence of Marxism*, "has nothing in common with fatalism. Socialism is not realised 'by itself', but is the result of the struggle of living forces, classes and their parties." (p30) The activities of Marxists are absolutely vital. Without this the inevitable revolt of the proletariat would never be carried through to a successful conclusion.

Trotsky, 1937.

Kinnock, Mitterrand, Lafontaine, Craxi, Gonzales, Hawke and other leaders of the right wing of social democracy think they are 'realists'. In reality, they are not superior to the economic conditions which exist at the present time. They, in the last analysis, remain as tools of big business, in the grip of forces which are beyond their control. With the next turn of the wheel, as the economies change, they will be crushed.

The whole history of the last 70 years has demonstrated the correctness of the ideas of Trotsky. Again and again the masses will take to the road of struggle. 1968 in France was a harbinger of events on an international scale. Inevitably the ideas of Trotsky and Lenin — for the taking of power into the hands of the working class — will gain greater credence among the active layers of the working class and those conscientious intellectuals seeking a way out of the crisis of capitalism and Stalinism which will unfold in the coming years.

The 'liberal' face of capitalism in the West has come to the fore in the last few decades, with the 'enlightened' control by big business of freedom of speech, of the press and of organisation. Democracy in the advanced capitalist countries, Trotsky explained, rested on the "spoliation of the colonies," in the same way that "ancient democracy was based on slavery." Democracy is undoubtedly the most convenient and flexible method of domination by

the capitalists. But inevitably, once the revolt of the masses takes place, big business will change its tactics, as they did in the epoch between the wars. It is entirely superficial to imagine that democracy on a capitalist basis can be maintained.

In the event of the failure of a new wave of revolutions, it would be inevitable that they will turn to the methods of reaction of the past. Already in Hungary and Poland ideologists of the capitalist class are talking about the need for a dictatorship — a capitalist dictatorship. Walsea in Poland, who began his activity in struggle against Stalinist totalitarianism, is now advocating what would be in effect a totalitarian system in Poland, a complete dictatorship of capital in order to force through the changes necessary to establish the capitalist system in Poland. In reality, capitalism will reveal its impasse in the coming period. At the same time we see the impasse in the USSR. Both Stalinism and capitalism are doomed. A new wave of revolutions is inevitable and irresistible.

The outstanding characteristic of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky was faith in the capacity and understanding of the working class to carry through a transformation of society. They understood that the working class is the only through and through progressive class which can succeed in preparing the way for socialism.

Only the programme and method of Lenin and Trotsky will serve the needs and the interests of the working class. The revolutionary youth must study the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and especially Trotsky — particularly the inter-war works which have great topicality — if they are to equip themselves for the tasks of struggle which lie in the future.

As a theoretician Trotsky probably stands even higher than Lenin. He stood on the shoulders of Lenin, carrying the ideas of Marxism in the epoch of Stalinist reaction. The internationalists who have gathered in many countries of the world should not be worried by the smallness of their forces at the present time. Events will teach the masses. We have had a fresh demonstration of this in the campaign over the poll tax. With the method of Lenin and Trotsky, forces will be created which will stand the test of events. In this anniversary year of Leon Trotsky we can say to the 'Old Man', we salute you, internationally the Marxist tendency carries on your work.

We owe a debt of gratitude to that great man, Trotsky. Martyr to the Stalinist counter-revolution, inspirer, thinker, he will live forever in the memory of the working class when they achieve socialism. ☐

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The assassination of Trotsky

"Stalin conducts a struggle on a totally different plane. He seeks to strike not at the ideas of the opponent, but at his skull."

Lynn Walsh outlines the bureaucracy's bloody terror campaign against the Opposition.

ON 20 AUGUST, 1940, LEON TROTSKY was struck a fatal blow with an ice-pick by Ramon Mercader, an agent sent to Mexico by Stalin's secret police (the GPU) to murder the exiled revolutionary.

Trotsky's assassination was not just a malicious after-thought on the part of Stalin. It was the culmination of a systematic and bloody terror directed against a whole generation of Bolshevik leaders, and against the young revolutionaries of a second generation prepared to defend the genuine ideas of Marxism against the bureaucratic, repressive regime developing under Stalin. By the time the GPU reached Trotsky in 1940, they had already murdered — or driven to suicide — many members of Trotsky's family, scores of his closest friends and collaborators and countless numbers of the leaders and supporters of the International Left Opposition.

Despite the murder of a whole generation of Bolshevik-Leninists, however, and the bureaucracy's Herculean efforts to bury the ideas and historical personality of Trotsky under a mountain of distortions, lies, slanders and grotesque historical fabrication, Trotsky's ideas have never had more relevance or more appeal to working-class activists than they have today.

This will no doubt be grudgingly conceded

by even the capitalist press this August. But an enormous amount of rubbish will be written, whether through an inability to understand the real historical role of Trotsky or a deliberate effort to obscure and confuse the political issues involved.

Old questions (raised, for instance, by Max Eastman in the 1930s) will inevitably come up. Why, if Trotsky was one of the foremost leaders of the Bolshevik party and the head of the Red Army, did he allow Stalin to concentrate power in his hands? Why did Trotsky not take power himself? The idea will no doubt be put forward again that Trotsky was 'too doctrinaire', that he allowed himself to be 'outmanoeuvred' by Stalin. As a corollary, it will again be suggested that Stalin was more 'practical', a more 'astute' and 'forceful' leader.

Trotsky himself completely refuted these ideas, not just in answering Max Eastman, but through his whole analysis of the degeneration of the Soviet workers' state and his criticism of the bureaucracy's policies. From the standpoint of Marxism, it is completely false to pose the conflict that opened up after 1923 as a personal struggle for power between rival leaders.

"In view of the prolonged decline in the international revolution," wrote Trotsky in 1935,



Adolf Joffe.

"the victory of the bureaucracy — and consequently of Stalin — was foreordained. The result which idle observers and fools attribute to the personal forcefulness of Stalin, or at least to his exceptional cunning, stemmed from causes lying deep in the dynamics of historical forces. Stalin emerged as the half-conscious expression of the second chapter of the revolution, its 'morning after.'" (*Diary in Exile*, p38)

Neither Trotsky, nor any of the Bolshevik leaders in 1917, had imagined that the working class of Russia could build a socialist society in isolation, in an economically backward and culturally primitive country. They were convinced that the workers had to take the power in order to carry through the largely unfinished tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution; but in pressing forward to the imperative tasks of the socialist revolution, they could proceed only in collaboration with the working class of the more developed capitalist countries — because, as compared to capitalism, socialism requires a higher level of production and material culture.

The defeat of the German revolution in 1923 — to which the blunders of the Stalin-Bukharin leadership contributed — reinforced the isolation of the Soviet state, and the enforced retreat of the New Economic Policy speeded up the crystallisation of a bureaucratic caste which increasingly put its own creature comforts, desire for tranquility, and demands for privileges before the interests of the international revolution.

The ruling stratum of the bureaucracy was rapidly discovering that Stalin was 'flesh of its flesh'. Reflecting the interests of the bureaucracy, Stalin began a struggle against 'Trotskyism' — an ideological bogey which he invented to distort and stigmatise the genuine ideas of Marxism and of Lenin, upheld by Trotsky and the Left Opposition.

It was the bureaucracy's fear that the Opposition's programme for the restoration of workers' democracy would find an echo among a new layer of young workers and give new momentum to the struggle against bureaucratic degeneration that motivated Stalin's bloody purge against the Opposition. Its ideas were "the source of the gravest apprehensions of Stalin: that savage fears ideas, since he knows their explosive power and knows his own weakness in the face of them." (*Diary in Exile*, p66)

Answering in advance the false idea that the conflict was in some way the result of 'misunderstanding' or unwillingness to compromise, Trotsky related how, while he was exiled to Alma-Ata in 1928, a 'sympathetic' engineer, probably "sent surreptitiously to feel my pulse", asked him whether he didn't think some steps towards reconciliation with Stalin were possible:

"I answered him to the effect that at that mo-

ment there could be no question of reconciliation, not because I **did not want** it, but because Stalin **could not** make his peace with me. He was forced to pursue to the end the course set him by the bureaucracy. 'How will it end?' 'It will come to a sticky end,' I answered. 'Stalin cannot settle it any other way.' My visitor was visibly startled; he obviously had not expected such an answer and soon left." (*Diary in Exile*, p39)

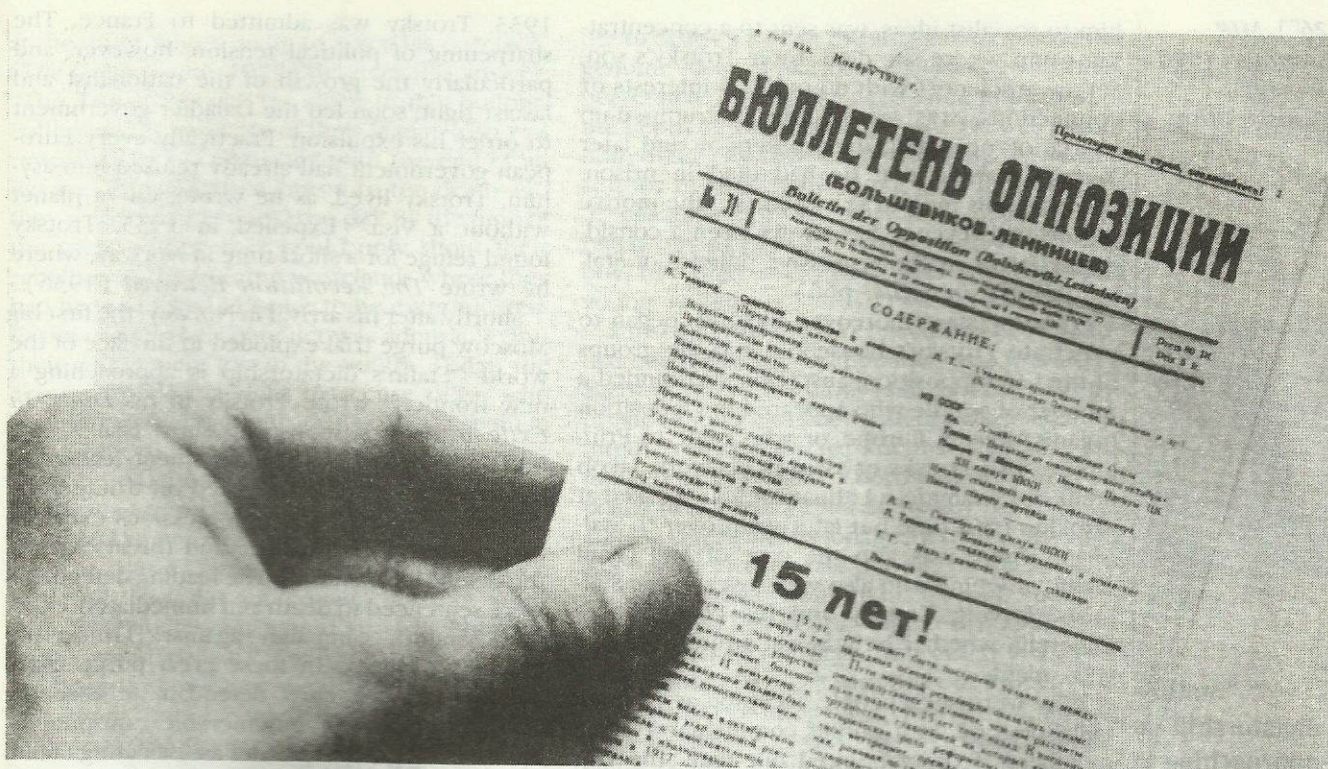
Beginning in 1923 Trotsky led a fight in the Russian Communist Party. In a series of articles (published as *The New Course*), he began to warn of the danger of a post-revolutionary reaction. The isolation of the revolution in a backward country was leading to the incipient growth of a bureaucracy in the Bolshevik party and the state. Trotsky began to protest at the arbitrary behaviour of the Party bureaucracy crystallising under Stalin. Shortly before he died in 1924, Lenin had agreed with Trotsky on a bloc in the party to fight bureaucracy.

When Trotsky and a group of left oppositionists began a fight for a revival of workers' democracy, the politbureau was obliged to promise the restoration of freedom of expression and criticism in the Communist Party. But Stalin and his associates made sure that this remained a dead letter.

Within four years — on 7 November 1927, the tenth anniversary of the October revolution — Trotsky was forced to leave the Kremlin and take refuge with oppositionist friends. A week later, Trotsky and Zinoviev, the first chairman of the Communist International, were expelled from the party. Next day, Trotsky's fellow oppositionist and friend, Adolph Joffe, killed himself in protest at the dictatorial action of the Stalin leadership. He was one of the first of Trotsky's comrades, friends and family to be driven to death or directly murdered by Stalin's regime, which through systematic and ruthless repression of its opponents, opened up a river of blood between genuine workers' democracy and its own bureaucratic, totalitarian methods.

In January 1928, Trotsky was forced into his third foreign exile. First he was deported to Alma-Ata, a small Russian town near the Chinese border, and from there he was deported to Turkey, where he took up residence on Prin-kipo Island, on the Sea of Marmara near Istanbul.

In an attempt to paralyse Trotsky's literary and political work, Stalin struck at his small 'apparat', which had consisted of five or six close collaborators: "Glazman, driven to suicide; Butov, dead in a GPU prison; Blumkin, shot; Sermuks and Poznansky, vanished. Stalin **did not** see that even without a secretariat I could **carry** on literary work, which, in its turn, could **further** the creating of a new apparatus. **Even the** cleverest bureaucrat displays an **incredible**



short-sightedness in certain questions!" (*Diary in Exile*, p40) All these revolutionaries had played important roles, particularly as members of the military secretariat or on Trotsky's armed train during the civil war. But Stalin, as Trotsky remarked, "was conducting the struggle on a different plane, and with different weapons."

If Stalin subsequently devoted such a large part of the resources of his secret police (known by its various abbreviated names: Cheka, GPU, NKVD, MVD and KGB), to planning and executing the assassination of Trotsky, why did Stalin allow his opponent to go into exile in the first place?

In an open letter to the politbureau in January 1932, Trotsky publicly warned that Stalin would prepare an attempt on his life. "The question of terrorist reprisals against the author of this letter," he wrote, "was posed long ago: in 1924/25 at an intimate gathering Stalin weighed the pros and cons. The pros were obvious and clear. The chief consideration **against** was that there were too many selfless young Trotskyists who might reply with counter-terrorist actions." (*Writings*, 1932, p19) Trotsky had been informed of these discussions by Zinoviev and Kamenev, who had briefly formed a 'ruling triumvirate' with Stalin, but later moved — temporarily — into opposition against Stalin.

But, Trotsky continued, "Stalin has come to the conclusion that it was a mistake to have exiled Trotsky from the Soviet Union... contrary to his expectations it turned out that ideas have a power of their own, even without an apparatus and without resources. The Comintern is a grandiose structure, that has been left as a holl-

ow shell, both theoretically and politically. The future of revolutionary Marxism, which is to say of Leninism as well, is inseparably bound up from now on with the international cadres of the Left Opposition. No amount of falsification can change that. The basic works of the opposition have been, are being or will be published in every language. Opposition cadres, as yet not very numerous but nonetheless indomitable, are to be found in every country. Stalin understands perfectly well what a grave danger the ideological irreconcilability and persistent growth of the International Left Opposition represent to him **personally**, to his fake 'authority', to his Bonapartist almightiness." (*Writings*, 1932, p19-20)

In the early period of his Turkish exile, Trotsky wrote his monumental *History of the Russian Revolution* and also his brilliant autobiography, *My Life*. Through voluminous correspondence with oppositionists in other countries and especially through *The Bulletin of the Opposition* (published from Autumn, 1929), Trotsky began to draw together the nucleus of an international opposition of genuine Bolsheviks. But Trotsky's prognosis that, using the GPU, Stalin would ferociously purge and attempt to destroy everything working against him, was soon borne out.

Towards the end of his Turkish exile, Trotsky suffered a cruel blow when his daughter, Zinaida, ill and demoralised, was driven to suicide in Berlin. Her husband, Platon Volkov, a young opposition militant, was arrested and disappeared forever. Trotsky's first wife, Alexandra Sokolovskaya, the woman who first introduced

An actual size copy of the Bulletin of the Opposition, 1932, for smuggling into the USSR.



Zinaida.

him to socialist ideas, was sent to a concentration camp where she died. Later Trotsky's son, Sergey, a scientist with no political interests or connections, was arrested on a trumped-up charge of 'poisoning the workers' — and later Trotsky learned that he had died in prison. Alongside his morbid fear of ideas, "the motive of personal revenge has always been a considerable factor in the repressive policies of Stalin." (*Diary in Exile*, p66)

From the start, moreover, the GPU began to penetrate Trotsky's household and the groups of the Left Opposition. Suspicion surrounded a number of people who appeared in Opposition organisations in Europe, or who came to Prinkipo to visit Trotsky or assist in his work. Jakob Frank, for example, a Lithuanian Jew, worked at Prinkipo for a time but later went over to Stalinism. There was also the case of Mill (Paul Okun, or Obin) who also went over to the Stalinists, leaving Trotsky and his collaborators uncertain whether he was just a turn-coat or a GPU plant.

"Stalin's dictatorship is approaching a new frontier".

Why were such people accepted as genuine collaborators? In a public comment on Mill's treachery, Trotsky pointed out that "the Left Opposition is placed in extremely difficult conditions from an organisational point of view. No revolutionary party in the past has worked under such persecution. In addition to repression by the capitalist police of all countries, the Opposition is exposed to the blows of the Stalinist bureaucracy which stops at nothing... it is of course the Russian section which is having the hardest time... But to find a Russian Bolshevik-Leninist abroad, even for purely technical functions, is an extremely difficult task. This and only this explains the fact that Mill was able for a time to get into the Administrative Secretariat of the Left Opposition. There was a need for a person who knew Russian and was able to carry out secretarial duties. Mill had at one time been a member of the official party and in this sense could claim a certain personal confidence." (*Writings*, 1932, p237)

Looking back, it is clear that the lack of adequate security checks was to have tragic consequences. But resources were extremely limited, and Trotsky understood that a phobia about infiltration and an exaggerated suspicion of everyone who offered support to the work of the Opposition could be counter-productive. With his positive, optimistic view of human character, moreover, Trotsky was averse to subjecting individuals to searching enquiries and personal investigation.

TROTSKY WAS EAGER to escape the isolation of Prinkipo and find a base nearer to the centre of European events. But the capitalist democracies were far from willing to grant Trotsky the democratic right of asylum. Eventually, in

1933, Trotsky was admitted to France. The sharpening of political tension, however, and particularly the growth of the nationalist and fascist right, soon led the Daladier government to order his expulsion. Practically every European government had already refused him asylum. Trotsky lived, as he wrote, on "a planet without a visa." Expelled in 1935, Trotsky found refuge for a short time in Norway, where he wrote *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936).

Shortly after his arrival in Norway, the first big Moscow purge trial exploded in the face of the world. "Stalin's dictatorship is approaching a new frontier," wrote Trotsky in his *Diary in Exile*. In the first monstrous show trial, Zinoviev, Kamenev and other prominent leaders of the Bolshevik party were tried on trumped-up charges — based on false confessions extorted by brutal pressure, torture and threats against the defendants' families. The leading defendants were sentenced to death and immediately executed. Stalin's campaign against 'Trotskyism' reached a climax. In these great purge trials, Trotsky was the chief defendant in absentia, accused of staging innumerable conspiracies with the alleged purpose of assassinating Stalin, Voroshilov, Kaganovich and other Soviet leaders, and of acting in secret collusion with Hitler and the Emperor of Japan in order to bring about the downfall of the Soviet regime and the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

At the same time, Stalin exerted intense pressure on the Norwegian government to restrict Trotsky in order to prevent his replying to and refuting the vile charges hurled against him in Moscow. To avoid virtual imprisonment, Trotsky was obliged to find an alternative refuge, and he eagerly accepted an offer of asylum from the Cardenas government in Mexico. En route, Trotsky recalled his open letter to the politbureau in which he had anticipated Stalin's "world-wide bureaucratic slander campaign" and predicted attempts on his life. With chilling premonition, Trotsky added: "Stalin conducts a struggle on a totally different plane. He seeks to strike not at the ideas of the opponent, but at his skull." (*Writings*, 1936/1937, p44)

The purge in Russia was not confined to a handful of old Bolsheviks or Left Oppositionists. For every leader who appeared in a show trial, hundreds or thousands were silently imprisoned, sent to certain death in Arctic prison camps, or summarily executed in prison cellars. At least eight million were arrested in the course of the purges, and five or six millions rotted, many of them to death, in the camps. It was undoubtedly the supporters of the Left Opposition, adherents of Trotsky's ideas, who bore the heaviest repression.

In his memoirs, Leopold Trepper, a genuine revolutionary caught up in the machinery of the GPU, posed the question: "But who did protest

at the time? Who rose up to voice his outrage?" (*The Great Game*, 1977) He gives this answer: "The Trotskyites can lay claim to this honour. Following the example of their leader who was rewarded for his obstinacy with the end of an ice axe, they fought Stalinism to the death and they were the only ones who did. By the time of the great purges, they could only shout their rebellion in the freezing wastelands where they had been dragged in order to be exterminated. In the camps, their conduct was admirable. But their voices were lost in the tundra. Today, the Trotskyites have a right to accuse those who once howled along with the wolves. Let them not forget, however, that they had the enormous advantage over us of having a coherent political system capable of replacing Stalinism. They had something to cling to in the midst of their profound distress at seeing the revolution betrayed. They did not 'confess', for they knew that their confession would serve neither the party nor socialism." (p56)

The purges in Russia were also linked to Stalin's direct, counter-revolutionary intervention in the revolution and civil war which erupted in Spain in the summer of 1936. Through the agency of a bureaucratic leadership of the Spanish Communist Party controlled from Moscow, the apparatus of Soviet military advisers, and through the GPU's 'Special Tasks Force', Stalin extended his terror to the anarchists, left-wing militants and especially the Trotskyists who stood in the way of his policies.

Meanwhile, Stalin's secret police also intensified their measures to destroy the centre of the International Left Opposition, based in Paris and under the direction of Trotsky's son, Leon Sedov.

Sedov had been indispensable to Trotsky in his literary work, in preparing and distributing *The Bulletin of the Opposition*, and in maintaining contacts between groups of oppositionists internationally. But Sedov also made an outstanding, independent contribution to the work of the opposition. Early in 1937, however, he was taken ill with suspected appendicitis. On the advice of a man who had become his closest collaborator, 'Etienne', Sedov entered a clinic — which subsequently turned out to be run by both 'White' Russian emigres and Russians with known Stalinist leanings. Sedov appeared to recover from the surgery which was carried out; but shortly afterwards he died with extremely mysterious symptoms. The evidence, and the opinion of at least one doctor, pointed to poisoning, and further investigation produced a strong suggestion that his illness had in the first place been produced by sophisticated, virtually undetectable poisoning.

Trotsky wrote a moving tribute to his dead son, *Leon Sedov — Son, Friend, Fighter*. (In *Writings, 1937/1938*, pp166-179) He paid trib-

ute to Sedov's role in the struggle to defend the genuine ideas of Marxism against their Stalinist perversion. But he also gave some indication of the depth of the personal blow. "He was part of both of us," Trotsky wrote, speaking for himself and for Natalia: "Our young part. By hundreds of channels our thoughts and feelings daily reach out to him in Paris. Together with our boy has died everything that still remained young within us."

Subsequently it was revealed that Leon Sedov had been betrayed by 'Etienne', who was a GPU agent far more insidious and ruthless than the previous spies and provocateurs who had infiltrated Trotsky's circle. Etienne was later unmasked as one Mark Zborowski who was exposed in the late 1950s as the key figure in the GPU's American espionage network. By then, Zborowski already had a long trial of duplicity and blood behind him. In his US trial, Zborowski confessed that he had 'fingered' Rudolf Klement, (Trotsky's secretary, murdered in Paris in 1938), Erwin Wolf (a supporter of Trotsky who was murdered in Spain in July 1937), and Ignace Reiss (a top GPU agent who renounced Stalin's terror machine and declared his support for the Fourth International, murdered in Switzerland in September 1937).

Zborowski had contact with the agents of the GPU's 'Special Tasks Force' in Spain, which was responsible for the murder of Erwin Wolf — and which included in its ranks the infamous Colonel Eitingon. It was this man, under numerous pseudonyms, who was to direct the assassination attempts against Trotsky in Mexico, in conjunction with his GPU associate and lover, Caridad Mercader, and her son Ramon Mercader, the agent who eventually murdered Trotsky.

TROTSKY, NATALIA SEDOVA, AND a handful of close collaborators, arrived in Mexico in January 1937. The administration of General Lázaro Cárdenas was the only government in the world that would grant Trotsky asylum in the last years of his life. In marked contrast to his reception elsewhere, Trotsky was given a flamboyant official welcome and went to live in Coyoacán, a suburb of Mexico City, in a house lent by his friend and political supporter, Diego Rivera, a well-known Mexican painter.

Trotsky's arrival, however, coincided with a second Moscow show trial, shortly followed by a third, even more grotesque trial. "We listened to the radio," related Natalia, "opened the mail and the Moscow newspapers, and we felt that insanity, absurdity, and outrage, fraud and blood were flooding us from all sides, here in Mexico as in Norway..." (*The Life and Death of Leon Trotsky*, p212). Once again Trotsky exposed the internal contradictions of the manufactured evidence used in these monstrous frame-ups, and in a stream of articles complete-



Ignace Reiss.



Trotsky with Erwin Wolf, 1936.

Trotsky was
aware that
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sentence.

ly refuted all the accusations against him and his supporters.

It proved possible, moreover, to organise a 'counter-trial' presided over by the liberal American philosopher, John Dewey, and this commission completely exonerated Trotsky of the charges hurled against him. Trotsky warned that the purpose of the trials was to justify a new wave of terror — which would be directed against all those who represented the slightest threat to Stalin's dictatorial leadership, whether as active opponents, potential bureaucratic rivals, or simply embarrassing accomplices from the past. Trotsky was well aware that the death penalty pronounced against him was far from being a platonic sentence.

From the moment of his arrival, the Mexican Communist Party, whose leaders loyally followed the Moscow line, began to agitate for restrictions to be placed on Trotsky to prevent him answering the show trial allegations, and ultimately to bring about his expulsion from the country. The newspapers and journals published by the Communist Party and the Communist controlled trade union federation (the CTM), poured out a stream of slanderous allegations, to the effect that Trotsky was plotting against the Cardenas government and allegedly collaborating with fascist and reactionary elements. Trotsky was well aware that the Stalinist press was using the language of people who decide things not by votes but by the machine gun.

In the middle of the night on 24 May, 1940, came the first direct assault on Trotsky's life. A group of armed raiders forced their way into Trotsky's house, raked the bedrooms with machine-gun fire, and set off incendiaries evidently intended to destroy Trotsky's archives and cause the maximum possible damage. Trotsky and Natalia narrowly escaped death by lying on the floor beneath the bed. Their grandson, Seva, was slightly injured by a bullet. A large bomb left by the raiders fortunately failed to go off. Afterwards, it was found that the raiders had been let in by Robert Sheldon Harte, one of the secretary-guards, who was apparently tricked by someone in the raiding party he knew and trusted. His body was later found buried in a lime pit.

All the evidence pointed to the Mexican Stalinists and, behind them, the GPU. Through a detailed analysis of the Stalinist press in the weeks before the raid, Trotsky clearly showed that they had foreknowledge of, and were preparing for, an armed attempt on his life. The Mexican police soon arrested some of the minor accomplices of the raiders, and their evidence soon incriminated leading members of the Mexican Communist Party. The trial led to David Alfaro Siqueiros, like Diego Rivera a well-known painter, but unlike Rivera, a leading member of the Mexican CP. Siqueiros had also been in

Spain and had long been suspected of connections with the GPU. Despite the Stalinists outrageous attempt to portray the attack as 'self-inflicted', supposedly organised by Trotsky to discredit the CP and the Cardenas government, the police eventually arrested the ring-leaders, including Siqueiros. But as a result of pressure from the CP and the CTM, they were released in March 1941 for 'lack of material and incriminating evidence'!

Siqueiros did not deny his role in the assault. In fact, he openly boasted about it. But the Communist Party leadership, clearly embarrassed not so much by the attempt itself but by the way it was bungled, tried to disassociate itself from the raid, blaming it on a gang of 'uncontrollable elements' and 'agents provocateurs'.

The Stalinist press alternated between proclaiming Siqueiros a hero, and, on the other hand, a 'half-crazed madman' and even... as being in Trotsky's pay! With shameless 'logic', the CP press asserted that the attack was an act of provocation directed against the Communist Party and against the Mexican state — and therefore Trotsky should be expelled immediately.

Thirty-eight years later, however, a leading member of the Mexican CP admitted the truth. In his memoirs, *My Testimony*, published by the Mexican CP's own publishing house in 1978, Valentin Campa, a veteran member of the party, flatly contradicted the official denials of the party's involvement and gave details of the preparation for the attempt on Trotsky's life.

Campa relates how, in the Autumn of 1938, he, together with Raphael Carrillo (a member of the CP's central committee), was summoned by Herman Laborde (the party's general secretary) and informed of "an extremely confidential and delicate affair." Laborde told them he had been visited by a Comintern delegate (in reality, a GPU representative) who had informed him of the "decision to eliminate Trotsky" and had asked for their co-operation "for the task of carrying out this elimination." After a "vigorous analysis", however, Campa says that they rejected the proposal. "We concluded... that Trotsky was finished politically, that his influence was almost zero, moreover we had said so often enough throughout the world, besides, the results of his elimination would do great disservice to the Mexican Communist Party and the revolutionary movement of Mexico and to the whole international Communist movement. We therefore concluded that to propose the elimination of Trotsky was clearly a serious mistake." For their opposition, however, Laborde and Campa were accused of 'sectarian opportunism', of being 'soft on Trotsky', and were driven out of the party.

The campaign to prepare the Mexican CP for the murder of Trotsky was carried through by a number of Stalinist leaders already experienced



Left to right:
Jan Frankel,
Leon Sedov,
Natalia, Jiri
Kopp and
Trotsky in
Prinkipo.

in ruthlessly carrying out the orders of their master in Moscow: Siqueiros himself, who had been active in Spain, probably a GPU agent since 1928; Vittoria Codovila, an Argentinian Stalinist who had operated in Spain under Eitingon, probably involved in the torture and murder of the POUM leader Andreas Nin; Pedro Checa, leader of the Spanish Communist Party in exile in Mexico, who actually took his pseudonym from the Soviet secret police, the Cheka; and Carlos Contreras, alias Vittorio Vidali, who had been active with the GPU's 'Special Tasks Force' in Spain under the pseudonym of 'General Carlos'. Co-ordinating their efforts was the ubiquitous Colonel Eitingon.

After the failure of the attempt by Siqueiros and his group to take Trotsky's house by storm, Campa writes: "a third alternative was put into practice. Raymond Mercader, who was living under the pseudonym Jacques Mornard, assassinated Trotsky on the evening of the 20 August, 1940."

Trotsky regarded his escape from the Siqueiros raid as 'a reprieve'. "Our joyous feeling of salvation," wrote Natalia afterwards, "was dampened by the prospect of a new visitation and the need to prepare for it." (*Father and Son*). The defences of Trotsky's house were strengthened and new precautions were taken. But unfortunately — tragically — no efforts were made to check up more thoroughly on the man who turned out to be the assassin, despite the suspicions that several members of the household

had about this strange character.

Trotsky resisted some of the additional security measures suggested by his secretary-guards: for a guard to be stationed by him at all times, for instance. "It was impossible to convert ones life solely into self-defence," wrote Natalia, "...for in that case life loses all its value." Nevertheless, in view of the vital, indispensable nature of Trotsky's work and the inevitability of an attempt on his life, there is no doubt there were serious deficiencies in the security — and that tighter measures should have been implemented. Shortly before Sheldon Harte's abduction, for instance, Trotsky had noticed him allowing workmen strengthening the house to pass freely in and out of the courtyard. Trotsky complained that this was very careless, and added — ironically, this was only a few weeks before Harte's tragic death — "you might prove to be the first victim of your own carelessness." (Natalia Sedova, *Father and Son*).

Mercader met Trotsky for the first time a few days after the Siqueiros raid. But the preparations for his attempt had already been in hand for a long time. Through Zborowski and other GPU agents who had infiltrated Trotsky's supporters in the United States, Mercader had been introduced in France to Sylvia Ageloff, a young American Trotskyist who subsequently went to work for Trotsky in Coyoacan. The GPU agent managed to seduce Sylvia Ageloff and make her the unwitting accomplice of his crime.

Mercader had an 'elaborate cover', which



Ramon
Mercader and
Sylvia Ageloff,
Paris, 1938.

although it aroused many suspicions, unfortunately served its purpose well enough. Mercader had joined the Communist Party in Spain, and became active in its ranks in the period 1933-36 when it was already a Stalinised party. Probably through his mother, Caridad Mercader, who was already a GPU agent and associated with Eitingon, Mercader too entered the service of the GPU. After the defeat of the Spanish republic, aided by Stalin's sabotage of the revolution in Spain, Mercader went to Moscow where he was prepared for his future role. After meeting Ageloff in Paris in 1938 he later accompanied her to Mexico in January 1940 and gradually ingratiated himself with members of Trotsky's household.

After gaining the acceptance of Trotsky's household, Mornard arranged to meet with Trotsky personally on the pretext of discussing an article that he had written — which Trotsky considered to an embarrassing degree banal and devoid of interest. The first meeting was clearly a 'dress rehearsal' for the actual assassination.

The next time he came was on the morning of 20 August. Despite the misgivings of Natalia and Trotsky's guards, Mornard was again allowed to see Trotsky alone — "three or four minutes went by," Natalia relates: "I was in the room next door. There was a terrible piercing cry... Lev Davidovich appeared, leaning against the door frame. His face was covered with blood, his blue eyes glistening without spectacles and his arms hung limply by his side..." Mornard had struck Trotsky a fatal blow in the back of the head with a cut-down ice axe concealed in his raincoat. But the blow was not immediately lethal; Trotsky "screamed very long, infinitely long," as Mercader himself put it — and courageously grappled with his assassin, preventing further blows.

"The doctor declared that the injury was not very serious," says Natalia. "Lev Davidovich listened to him without emotion, as one would a conventional message of comfort. Pointing to his heart, he said to Hansen in English, 'I feel... here... that this is the end... this time... they've succeeded'." (*Life and Death of Leon Trotsky*, p268)

Trotsky was taken to hospital, operated on, and survived for more than a day after that, dying at the age of 60 on 21 August 1940.

Mercader seems to have hoped that, after Siqueiros' lenient treatment, he too might get a light sentence. But he was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment, which he served. But even after his identity had been firmly established by finger-prints and other evidence, he refused to admit who he was or who had ordered him to murder Trotsky. Although the crime was almost universally attributed to Stalin and the GPU, the Stalinists brazenly denied all responsibility. There is ample evidence, however, that Mer-

cader's mother, who escaped from Mexico with Eitingon, was presented to Stalin and decorated with a high bureaucratic honour for her son and herself. Mercader himself was honoured when he returned to Eastern Europe after his release. In spite of his silence, a chain of evidence, which can now be constructed from the elaborate testimony of Russian spies brought to trial in the United States, top GPU agents who defected to Western countries at various times, and the belated memoirs of the Stalinist leaders themselves, clearly link Mercader to Stalin's secret terror machine based in Moscow.

In the end, Stalin succeeded in murdering the man who — alongside Lenin — was indubitably the greatest revolutionary leader in history. But, as Natalia Sedova wrote afterwards: "Retribution will come to the vile murderers. Throughout his entire heroic and beautiful life, Lev Davidovich believed in the emancipated mankind of the future. During the last years of his life, his faith did not falter, but on the contrary became only more mature, more firm than ever. Future mankind, emancipated from all oppression will triumph over coercion of all sorts..." (*How It Happened*, November 1940).

MANY ATTEMPTS HAVE have been made to portray Trotsky as a 'tragic' figure, as if his perspective for socialist revolution in the capitalist states and for political revolution in the Soviet Union was 'noble'... but hopelessly idealistic. This is the view implied by Isaac Deutscher in the third volume of his Trotsky biography, *The Prophet Outcast*, in which he denigrates Trotsky's efforts to re-organise and re-arm a new international Marxist leadership, dismissing Trotsky's tenacious, painstaking work as futile.

But if there is a tragic element in Trotsky's life, it is because his whole life and work after the victorious Russian revolution was inseparably bound up with the revolutionary struggle of the international working class — in a period first of retreat and then of catastrophic defeats. For the very reason that Trotsky played a leading role in the October revolution, his past dictated that with the ebbing of the revolution he would be forced into exile and political isolation. But while fainthearts and sceptics abandoned Marxist perspectives and made their peace with Stalinism or capitalism — or both — Trotsky, and the small handful who remained committed to the ideas of the Opposition, struggled to re-arm a new generation of revolutionary leaders for the future resurgence of the working class movement.

In exile, Trotsky enriched the literature of Marxism with magnificent works: but he was far from accepting that his role would simply be that of historian and commentator on events. "I am reduced," he wrote in his *Diary in Exile*,

p53-54, "to carrying on a dialogue with the newspapers, or rather through the newspapers with facts and opinions.

"And I still think that the work in which I am engaged now, despite its extremely insufficient and fragmentary nature, is the most important work of my life — more important than 1917, more important than the period of the civil war or any other.

"For the sake of clarity I would put it this way. Had I not been present in 1917 in Petersburg, the October revolution would still have taken place — on the condition that Lenin was present and in command. If neither Lenin nor I had been present in Petersburg, there would have been no October revolution: the leadership of the Bolshevik party would have prevented it from occurring — of this I have not the slightest doubt! If Lenin had not been in Petersburg, I doubt whether I could have managed to conquer the resistance of the Bolshevik leaders. The struggle with 'Trotskyism' (ie with the proletarian revolution) would have commenced in May 1917, and the outcome of the revolution would have been in question.

"But I repeat, granted the presence of Lenin, the October revolution would have been victorious anyway. The same could be said of the civil war, although in its first period, especially at the time of the fall of Simbirsk and

Kazan, Lenin wavered and was beset by doubts. But this was undoubtedly a passing mood which he probably never even admitted to anyone but me.

"Thus I cannot speak of the 'indispensability' of my work, even about the period from 1917 to 1921. But now my work is 'indispensable' in the full sense of the word. There is no arrogance in this claim at all. The collapse of the two Internationals has posed a problem which none of the leaders of these Internationals is at all equipped to solve. The vicissitudes of my personal fate have confronted me with this problem and armed me with important experience in dealing with it.

"There is now no one except me to carry out the mission of arming a new generation with the revolutionary method over the heads of the leaders of the Second and Third International. And I am in complete agreement with Lenin (or rather Turgenev) that the worst vice is to be more than 55 years old! I need at least about five more years of uninterrupted work to ensure the succession." □

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Trotsky's
assassination

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A difficult road to restoration

Of all the countries of Eastern Europe, Romania, argue the capitalist commentators, is 'furthest behind' in progress towards re-establishing capitalism. Alan Woods examines why.

How events will unfold is not a foregone conclusion but the product of a struggle of living forces.

THERE IS NO doubt that what we are witnessing in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union represents a turning-point in world history. Such turning points pose difficult theoretical questions which cannot be answered by the mechanical repetition of old formulas. Marxists must answer the question: what is the real content of the processes taking place and in which direction are they heading?

For the capitalist politicians and their echo in the right-wing of the labour movement, the answer is quite simple. 'Communism' and 'socialism' have failed everywhere. The tide of history is flowing irresistibly in the direction of the market economy and capitalist 'democracy'.

The shock-waves produced by the collapse of Stalinism are all the greater because these regimes lasted for so long — longer than anyone could have expected. For decades, the regimes in Russia, China and Eastern Europe seemed to be stable. So much so that some even thought they saw in them a new socio-economic formation ('bureaucratic collectivism', 'state capitalism', and so on).

Only the Marxists who took their starting point from the analysis of Leon Trotsky — now brilliantly confirmed by history — predicted that these bureaucratic regimes would inevitably collapse under the weight of internal contradictions and the movement of the working class.

But Trotsky left open the question of what would happen thereafter. He did not exclude



the possibility of capitalist restoration or of a victorious political revolution of the working class which would regenerate society on the basis of a genuine regime of workers' democracy. The result was not a foregone conclusion but the product of a struggle of living forces, conditioned by a whole series of objective and subjective factors.

That these hideous regimes lasted so long has been a major factor in determining the attitude of the masses, whose hatred of the bureaucratic totalitarian regime knows no bounds. In the first stage of the movement, for example in East Germany, there was no hint of a pro-capitalist tendency. The crowds in Leipzig sang the *Internationale*. But in the absence of a clear alternative, an organisation, a party and a programme, the movement took a different direction. The proximity of West Germany, the most powerful and wealthy capitalist state in Europe, acted as an irresistible magnet in a situation where no alternative was offered. In general, the fact that the crisis of Stalinism has coincided with the continuation of the boom in the West has given a powerful impetus to restorationist tendencies, not least within the bureaucracy itself.

But it would be entirely wrong to present developments in Russia and Eastern Europe in a one-sided manner. Already the thinking representatives of capitalism are having second thoughts about the prospects for capitalist restoration in the East. They understand, as the



Marxists have understood, that the collapse of Stalinism in the given historical context contains **not only a counter-revolutionary potential, but a revolutionary potential as well.** The clearest example of this so far was the magnificent revolution of the Romanian working class last December. Despite all the attempts of the Western media to twist and distort its true significance, here was an example of the working class overthrowing a Stalinist dictatorship in a movement which had many of the classical features of the political revolution, with sections of the workers forming committees and taking up arms against the reaction.

If the workers had possessed an organisation, a party with a Marxist programme and leadership, it would have been entirely possible for the Romanian working class to have carried through a successful political revolution. Such a victory in Romania would have had an explosive effect throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Nevertheless, the overthrow of the Ceausescu dictatorship, in spite of the fact that the workers were unable to take power into their own hands, was just as decisive an event as the overthrow of the tsar in 1917. It meant that the masses in Romania went far further than in the other countries of Eastern Europe, at least at this stage. It is the decisive entry of the masses onto the arena of struggle, and the consciousness of the workers that they overthrew the hated dictatorship of Ceausescu and the Secur-

itate, which conditions the psychology of all classes and groups in Romanian society and gives the revolution in Romania its peculiar character.

Reading through the articles of the so-called 'experts' in the West, one cannot but be struck by the tone of spiteful malice which they adopt when writing about Romania. They are clearly much happier when singing the praises of Havel, Walesa or even Gorbachev. But when it comes to Romania, the smiling mask slips to reveal a snarl of rage and frustration.

The massive electoral victory of the National Salvation Front was greeted with shock and disbelief by the media in the West. The media coverage of the election campaign was a total disgrace. Abandonning all pretence at objectivity, they openly sided with the opposition parties, the National Liberal Party of Campeanu and Ratiu's National Peasant Party. Public opinion in the West was led to believe that these openly pro-capitalist parties had enormous reserves of support, and would easily win the elections, if only these were not rigged by the Front...

But even the Western observers, including Tory MP Edwina Currie, who went with the clear intention of muckraking, were compelled to admit that the elections had been fair. No serious irregularities were ever proved.

The result of the election was a slap in the face for all these pundits. *The Economist*, 26 May 1990, published a surly article with the title: 'Back to Front'. But all the chagrin of the

The revolution had many of the classical features of the political revolution with sections of workers forming committees and taking up arms.



Marian
Munteanu.

bourgeois could not conceal that fact that their chosen candidates had suffered a shattering defeat. The NSF won 66% of the vote and two-thirds of the seats. Iliescu's personal vote was still higher — a massive 85%. The humiliation of the opposition was total: Campeanu got 11% and his party, the Liberals, only 6%. Ratiu saw the Peasant's Party pushed into fifth place, behind the Hungarian Party and the Greens. The peasants voted solidly for the Front. Naturally the defeated politicians called 'foul'. But with a victory of this magnitude, not even their Western admirers dared to take this up.

The election result could come as no surprise to anyone with first-hand experience of the situation in Romania. The fundamental reason is the fact that the Romanian workers made a revolution and their consciousness is determined by this fact. The overwhelming majority of workers are suspicious of capitalism and hostile to privatisation. They do not want their factories to be sold off to capitalists, whether foreign or Romanian.

It is undeniable that, while all the parties (the Front included) accept the idea of a market economy, Ratiu and Campeanu made the central theme of their electoral campaign the speedy introduction of capitalism. They accused the leaders of the Front, as 'Communists', of being insincere and half-hearted about privatisation. There can be no doubt that the vote against Ratiu and Campeanu was a vote against capitalism.

Of course, there were other factors. Both men had lived out the years of the Ceausescu dictatorship in comfortable foreign exile in France and Britain. Ratiu's case was particularly glaring. The sight of this elderly millionaire with his dinner jacket and outsized bow-tie, summed up the class basis of the opposition. Silviu Brucan, one of the Front's leaders, commented acidly that "Mr Ratiu speaks exquisite English. I only wish his Romanian was as good."

Before the War the National Peasants Party was a major force in Romanian politics. It had a majority in 1928-38. But many older people remember what life was like under capitalism. Romania was an extremely backward agricultural economy with very little industry. The majority of the population were poor peasants subjected to brutal exploitation by the landowners, who dominated the state. Romania was dominated by foreign imperialism, first France, then Germany. Nor was it a democracy, but was run by a series of particularly corrupt monarchist regimes, and later by the German puppet, Antonescu. Behind the coat-tails of the National Peasant Party the sinister fascist 'Iron Guards' carried out brutal pogroms against the Jews, some of whom were hung from meat-hooks in the central Bucharest abattoir with placards inscribed 'Kosher meat.'

The Western media lavishes praise on the 'democrat' Ratiu but is silent about the anti-semitic element which still characterises the National Peasant Party. As in the rest of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, forty years of Stalinism has had the effect of a monstrous brake on consciousness. Nowhere does this have a more baneful effect than on the national question. Anti-semitism has again raised its murderous head in Russia, Hungary, Poland, East Germany and Romania. The Peasants Party deliberately tried to exploit the Jewish origin of some of the Front's leaders like Petre Roman and Silviu Brucan.

As in all revolutions, the whole of society has been politicised. The general mood in the period leading up to the election was reminiscent of scenes from the Portuguese revolution in the period 1974-75. Heated discussions break out on street corners. One man starts talking and a group gathers round to join in. Frustrated factory managers complain that, since the revolution, workers no longer want to work. At the slightest pretext, work stops and political discussions begin.

It is also a highly polarised situation. As in other East European countries, the majority of students and intellectuals support capitalism in varying degrees. On the extreme right there is a fanaticism which breeds a psychology not too far removed from fascism. In a conversation with a representative of the Spanish Students' Union, the leader of the Romanian Students' League, Marian Munteanu, confessed that he preferred fascists to Communists or Socialists.

NOWHERE HAS THE hypocrisy of the Western media been more clearly seen than in the coverage of the events which followed the election. The impression was given that the students (and others) who came into conflict with the regime were a group of peaceful and sincere democrats, whereas the miners were variously described as 'rent-a-mob miners', 'dirty-faced runts' (*The Observer*), 'burly proletarians, miners and others of the sort' (*The Independent*).

Particularly disgusting was the Italian 'Communist' newspaper, *L'Unita*, which characterised the miners as 'fascist groups' who had allegedly organised a 'pogrom against intellectuals.' The 'liberal' British *Guardian* was more subtle when it talked of 'peasants and factory workers, the millions kept in total ignorance by decades of dictatorship.' This 'educated' formula serves as a fig-leaf to cover a deep-seated contempt for the Romanian workers and peasants. The very people who fought, and in many cases died, to overthrow the monstrous Ceausescu dictatorship are now slandered by these cultivated ladies and gentlemen sitting in the comfort of their *Guardian* offices, as ignorant brutes who, in effect, do not deserve the blessings of Western

'democracy'.

It is quite true that, mixed up with the counter-revolutionary pro-capitalist elements, there were layers of honest youth who wanted to fight the bureaucracy. But Marxists have to separate the essential from the non-essential, the accidental from the necessary, and clearly identify the reactionary and progressive sides to every social phenomenon.

There is absolutely no doubt that the main thrust of the movement around University Square was in favour of capitalist restoration. The leaders, such as Munteanu, made no secret of their reactionary political views. When the student-controlled radio station, *Radio FUN*, run by a liberal, broadcast an interview with myself which criticised capitalism for half an hour, it was Munteanu who led the assault on the station, in which a gang of right-wing hoodlums beat up and ejected the staff — whom they falsely described as 'Communists' — and closed the radio. This incident was, to my knowledge, never reported in the Western press. So much for 'free speech' — and not only in Romania!

The election results were a clear indication that the open advocates of capitalist counter-revolution had been decisively rejected by the people. What was the reaction of these self-styled 'democrats'? Dissident poet Doina Cornea told *The Independent*, 22 May, 1990: "There was no civil society here. How could it be otherwise? I have come to the conclusion that universal suffrage — at least when you are moving from a dark night into daylight — is not fair. There are a few people who have maintained moral values and who see that we are threatened with another night. The rest don't see it."

So there we have it. Behind the facade of 'democratic ideals' we have the intellectual's elitist contempt for the 'ignorant masses'. And behind this, in turn, not too far beneath the surface, lies the yearning for a comfortable life and well-paid job paid for by the labour of these same masses. The election results were a death-blow to the hopes of the openly pro-capitalist elements who backed the protest in University Square. After the elections the students were completely isolated. The demonstration was maintained but numbers dwindled to a couple of hundred. Predictably, the Front decided to send the police in to break it up. This was the signal for a new offensive movement of the students, which went far beyond the scope of any kind of demonstration.

Labour MP George Galloway was present in Bucharest at the time and witnessed the events: "I watched the crowd of what the minister (William Waldegrave) described as student demonstrators invade the Interior Ministry which is the Romanian equivalent of the Home Office. They stormed that building and set it



ablaze. I followed them as they moved on to the central police station which is their equivalent of Scotland Yard. They smashed a police truck through the station's locked doors. I saw them invade the central police station and set it ablaze. They freed prisoners and they looted artefacts in the police station. They even broke into an armoury and had begun to liberate weapons before the police opened fire." And he adds: "If that was not the beginnings of an attempted coup, I do not know what was." (*Hansard*, House of Commons debate, 28 July 1990).

The accusation that the protestors were involved in some kind of a coup attempt has been generally dismissed in the West as government propaganda. But it is well known, at least in Romania, that a few days before the elections, the meeting in University Square was addressed by an army colonel who said that many army officers were on the side of the students. It is clear that many of the junior officers, in particular, are discontented at their prospects for promotion. Many of these would support a quick transition in the direction of capitalism, and, under certain conditions, might back a coup d'état. One of the main factors which forced Iliescu to appeal to the workers was the fact that he could not trust the army. Indeed, the army was conspicuously slow to react. The police were worse than useless, which is probably due to the fact that they are terrified of being accused of repressive acts after the role they played in the dictatorship, and the revenge the people took on the Securitate. On the other hand, they do not possess the sophisticated range of anti-riot weaponry that is in the hands of the 'democratic' police forces in the West. It

Iliescu with Ceausescu, 1976. It is true that despite the heroic efforts of the masses, the old state machine remains largely intact.

The main thrust of the movement in University Square was in favour of capitalist restoration.

would be a matter of using firearms directly, which they were afraid to do, for fear of the consequences. Hence, the only force which stood between the government and the insurgents was the working class.

The theory of an attempted coup is rooted in the very circumstances of the rising. After the NSF's overwhelming victory at the polls, the student leaders could have been under no illusions that their actions would now spark off another December — the original strategy behind the University Square protest. The mass of the workers and peasants would not come to their aid. It was clear that the students, **by themselves**, could not hope to take power — yet that was the only possible explanation of the attack on strategic targets like the central police station and the television station. The only forces which might have tipped the balance would have been the military. A bold action which initially succeeded in occupying key points in the capital might have given sufficient heart to the dissident officers to join in. *The Telegraph*, 18 June, 1990, admitted that "the arrival of the miners and Mr Iliescu's announcement of a new National Guard, were prompted by fears about the army's reliability... It is clear that General Victor Stanculescu, the Defence Minister, resisted demands for troops to quell last Wednesday's anti-government riots." *The Guardian*, 18 June, 1990, published the remarks of a dissident in Timisoara, boasting that "soldiers from the Group for the Democratisation of the Army (set up by discontented officers) have come and said they are on our side... We are not afraid of the miners." But if the leaders of the movement were counting on this scenario, they were doomed to be disappointed. The army initially waited on the sidelines — and then came down on the side of the government.

It was the decisive action of the workers — not just the miners but the workers of Bucharest — which quickly put paid to the plans of the bourgeois counter-revolution.

George Galloway reported the slogans he heard from the 'golani', or 'tramps' as the opposition demonstrators are known: 'Out with the Spanish yid, Roman', (Petre Roman's mother is Jewish) and 'Iliescu was a whore-master presiding over a brothel of reds and yids.' "For the nationalists and anti-semites in the crowd, the terms 'communist' and 'Jewish' were entirely synonymous."

From the opposite of the political spectrum, the theory of an attempted coup found unexpected backing from Conor Cruise O'Brien who wrote in *The Times*, 22 July, 1990: "This was no protest, but a student-led attempt at a *putsch* against the recently elected government of Romania... The great difference between the two sets of mob violence is that the first was directed against the elected government, while

the second was initiated by the elected government in its own defence."

Iliescu seems to have panicked after the attack on the police headquarters on the afternoon of June 13. The pathetic showing of the police and the disturbing signs of unreliability in the tops of the army forced him to make a radio appeal to the workers of Bucharest to 'defend the government and democracy'. The response was immediate. The factory sirens blew and the workers of the capital poured onto the streets with improvised weapons, reminiscent of the scene in Barcelona in 1936.

An hour later the rioters attacked the TV station, which is a strategic point every bit as important as the telephone exchange was in Barcelona in May 1937. The army was still hanging back, presumably waiting to see how things would go. It was the workers of Bucharest who re-took the TV studios and kicked out the students. The army only turned up later, when it was all over.

The miners from the Jiu valley turned up at dawn on the morning of 14 June after a television appeal by Iliescu. These miners have been variously described as 'privileged elements' and even a 'praetorian guard.' It is true that their wages, as in many countries, are higher than other workers. But their working conditions and safety are appalling, and despite their nominally 'high' wages, they did not escape the general poverty which was the lot of the entire Romanian people under Stalinist rule. Far from being a pampered 'praetorian guard' of the regime, the miners led the way in the fight against the Ceausescu dictatorship with the heroic strike of 1977.

The action of the miners has aroused heated controversy not only in the West, but in Romania also. It is true that excesses were committed. Violence was exercised at times in an indiscriminate fashion. Innocent people, caught up in the action, were beaten, and so on. Such scenes provoked sharp disagreements even in the factories of Bucharest, with part of the workers criticising the miners, and part defending them. The criticism that the miners went 'too far' has some truth in it. But once again, it is a question of separating the essential from the non-essential. Did some of the miners use excessive violence in putting down the counter-revolutionary movement of the students? Probably. Does this fact mean that we should support the students against the miners? Absolutely not.

A Marxist must set out from a class point of view. The movement of the 'golani' was definitely a counter-revolutionary movement aimed at the establishment of capitalism in Romania, by provoking a coup d'etat against the NSF government. The miners were fighting to defeat the restorationist elements, and in this any Marxist would have been duty-bound to support them.



Petre Roman.

committees, apparently originating in Timisoara, where the revolution began on December 17. A lot of play was made of this fact by people who styled themselves the 'December 17 Committee'. The fact that the revolution was won by the intervention of the working class in Bucharest on December 22 was played down by these people. They complained bitterly that 'their' revolution was 'hijacked'. There is even a theory that the revolution of December 22 was a 'coup' by a section of the bureaucracy, which had organised the National Salvation Front in advance with the idea of removing Ceausescu from the top, but were taken by surprise by the revolution.

That sections of the bureaucracy were toying with the idea of a coup is highly likely. The crazy rule of the Ceausescu clan was putting the whole bureaucratic regime in danger. In Russia also, sections of the tsars' court played with the idea of a 'palace revolution', as Trotsky explains, in order to forestall a revolution from below. But the whole thing came to nothing, and the would-be conspirators were overwhelmed by the February revolution, just as Iliescu and Roman were overwhelmed by the December uprising. Of course, given the absence of a revolutionary alternative, they quickly stepped into the vacuum. But the 'theory' that the Romanian revolution was 'only a coup d'etat' is merely a reflection of the contempt in which the counter-revolutionary intellectuals hold the workers. Similarly they explain away the election results in terms of the workers' alleged 'stupidity'. At bottom, these expressions of arrogant disregard of the masses expresses only the impotence of the intellectual.

Of course, the students played an important role in December, but the movement of the students represented only the opening shots of the revolution. They acted courageously as a catalyst. But by themselves they were powerless to determine the outcome. It was the decisive movement of the proletariat which settled the fate of the old regime. As one worker expressed it to me in an angry comment on the exaggerated claims of the students in University Square: 'Where would Timisoara have been if it had not been for Bucharest?'

The resentment and frustration of the students flows from the feeling that somehow the revolution has slipped out of their hands. There is a widespread sensation among a layer of society that, despite all the deaths and sacrifices, 'nothing has changed'. And indeed, there is an element of truth in this assertion. Despite the Herculean efforts of the masses, the old state machine remains intact. The old officials and functionaries are still in their offices. Even the majority of Securitate agents are still at liberty — they have merely changed their jobs and now function under the control of the army. The old

'communist' nomenclature still retains its key jobs, big salaries and privileges. Many of them hold leading positions in the Front.

To that extent, the frustration of the students is understandable. It would be wrong to think that all the people in University Square were conscious counter-revolutionaries. Mixed up with them were young people who in a confused way want to fight the bureaucracy. But once they were identified with the open advocates of a return to capitalism they opened up an abyss between themselves and the big majority of the working class.

The tactics of the demonstrators in University Square could not have been more calculated to infuriate the workers. Their main demands were that the election should be postponed and that no ex-leader of the 'communist' party (Ceausescu) should be allowed to stand for election. After 40 years of totalitarian rule, the Romanian people were in no mood to listen to the demand for calling off the elections and surrender the right to express their opinions for the first time in their lives! The campaign against Iliescu also backfired for reasons already referred to.

AT FIRST SIGHT, the dismay of the bourgeois at the Front's victory seems hard to understand. After all, the NSF's programme also stands for capitalism, albeit with a 'gradual transition', hedged around with conditions to 'protect the workers', and leaving certain key sectors, such as transport and defence industries, in state hands.

Very soon after the elections, the NSF government appointed a 'Minister for Privatisation', one Adrian Severin, who advocates a rapid devaluation and a convertible lei in 18 months, the privatisation of small and medium enterprises, and the break-up of big state-owned industries, even at the cost of inflation and unemployment.

But the suspicious attitude of the bourgeois towards the NSF is not an accident. They understand that in politics, what is important is not only what is said, but also who says it and for what purpose. That a section of the NSF leaders wants to go back to capitalism is beyond doubt. But the NSF, unlike the National Liberals and the National Peasant Party, is forced to lean on the working class. And the attitude of the Romanian workers towards privatisation is clear to everyone.

This is what the bourgeois most fear. Their fears are shared by a section of the NSF leadership. Iliescu himself has always been very cautious in his pronouncements on privatisation, stressing the need to proceed slowly to avoid social tension.

In all the countries of Eastern Europe, the move towards capitalism will inevitably provoke social convulsions. Nowhere is that clear-

er than in Romania. Despite the enormous popularity of the Front, workers are by no means uncritical, nor have they given the government a blank cheque.

At the moment, the regime has a certain room for manoeuvre. Its crushing electoral victory gives it a certain stability. The opposition has been reduced to a shambles.

The economy is in a bad way after decades of bureaucratic mismanagement and corruption. It is estimated that the Ceausescu family sent up to eight billion dollars to Swiss banks, while subjecting the population to near starvation. They also spent countless millions on the notorious 'House of the People', Ceausescu's palace which boasts the second biggest chandelier in Europe with 984 lightbulbs, at a time when each Romanian home was limited to a single 40-watt bulb. This money alone would have been sufficient to modernise key sectors of the economy and ensure a decent living standard for all Romanians.

Instead, the infrastructure has been left to decay. Roads, railways, airports, communications, hospitals, are more reminiscent of a third-world country than a European economy. It is calculated that at least two billion dollars a year would be needed to modernise the economy.

Ceausescu's mad idea of squeezing the population to pay off all Romania's foreign debts was one of the causes of the regime's downfall. It was crazy, but it did mean that Romania's eleven billion foreign debt was actually paid off, though at the price of inhuman suffering. In fact, some three billion dollars are actually owed to Romania and the country has a certain amount of foreign currency reserves. Part of this was used to buy food in the run-up to the election.

Provided the harvest is a good one, the supply of food should improve in the next few months. Severin's idea is obviously to push through a programme of privatisation while the going is good. But the revolution has aroused people's expectations. In recent months there have been a rash of strikes of dockers, miners, transport and metalworkers, who have won concessions. These are now threatened by the programme of privatisation. The period ahead will clearly be a stormy one.

After the initial euphoria, doubts are beginning to creep into the pages of the bourgeois press about the prospects for privatisation in Eastern Europe in general. In its issue of April 14, *The Economist* carried an editorial which warned that: "The political risks are formidable. Privatisation will necessarily involve a huge redistribution of wealth. If wrongly handled, it will produce accusations of corruption, resentment against the new owners and suspicions that the nation is being sold off on the cheap to foreigners. All this could give capitalism a bad



name just when East Europeans need it most."

The same issue carries a feature on privatisation in Eastern Europe which points out that: "Everywhere in Eastern Europe, privatisation will be a leap in the dark, a change so sweeping that some of its social, economic and political side effects are as yet impossible to discern... East Germany is a special case: privatisation there will advance as German unification does. Neither Romania nor Bulgaria has gone far enough in political transformation to begin talking about the ownership of industry. Romania is furthest behind: it has been hard to own a private cow there let alone a private company."

Whether Romania is 'behind' or ahead of the rest of Eastern Europe depends on your class point of view. But the fact is that *The Economist*, which has been beating the drum for privatisation in Eastern Europe, is now having serious misgivings about the likely results. Only East Germany appears to be regarded with much optimism, and is correctly described as a 'special case', an exception to the rule. In all the others, the authors of this article, and not only they, see trouble ahead.

The first steps in the direction of capitalism in Poland have had catastrophic results. True, the queues have disappeared and the shops are now full of goods. But real wages fell by a third in the first three months of 1990: 60% of the average family budget now goes on food. Prices have rocketed: electricity and fuel have gone up by between 400% and 600%, while wages are held below the rate of inflation. The average month-

Ceausescu's
'Palace of the
people'.

The struggle
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revolution
and counter-
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factor.

ly wage is only enough to buy 100-150 loaves of bread. At the same time, the new rich display their new Volvos and Mercedes and eat at restaurants where a dinner costs the equivalent of the monthly wage of several university professors. And on top of everything, there is the threat of mass unemployment and recession by the year's end.

No wonder *The Economist* grumbles that: "Inevitably, objections will be raised by what one Polish official calls 'the people who carry communism in their hearts.' Those who are accustomed to thinking of state property as theirs already, especially the workers whose privileges will be curtailed by privatisation, will not like watching it purchased by those who 'don't deserve it.'" (*The Economist*, 14 April 1990).

Thus it turns out that the attitude of the Romanian masses towards capitalism is not such a peculiar thing as Western propaganda would have us to believe. Far from being 'a lesser breed without the law', the Romanian workers have much the same standpoint as their brothers and sisters in the rest of Eastern Europe, or, for that matter, in the rest of the world.

Insofar as there is a difference, it is due to the fact not that the Romanian workers drag behind their counterparts in Poland, East Germany and Czechoslovakia, but precisely because they went much further. In other countries, the ruling bureaucratic caste made concessions just in time to head off the movement of the masses. In Romania, because of the peculiar nature of the regime, Ceausescu clung onto power and provoked a revolution. The same possibility was implicit in the situation in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, or even Hungary where it was revealed that sections of the bureaucracy were contemplating a coup. If they had not moved to reform from the top (under pressure from Moscow, terrified of the prospect of political revolution in Eastern Europe), the workers would have moved from below, as in Romania.

There is no question of the capitalist counter-revolution succeeding in a peaceful 'cold' way in any of these countries. The struggle between revolution and counter-revolution may well be complicated and protracted, because of the weakness of the subjective factor. But in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the next period will see titanic upheavals which will once again put the question of revolution back on the agenda. When the workers see what capitalism means in practise, a violent reaction will set in: this is precisely what *The Economist* means when it warns of the possibly dire consequences of this 'leap in the dark'.

Indeed, it is not at all certain that countries like Romania will ever enjoy the dubious privilege of even a temporary return to capitalism. While Severin and, it seems, Petre Roman, advocate a rapid move in the direction of capit-

alism and reject the 'timid approach', others, probably including Iliescu, are not too sure. There are colossal difficulties in the way. Already Dan Pascariu, the deputy chairman of the Romanian Bank for Foreign Trade warns: "The whole Eastern Europe region is in turmoil and the (foreign) bankers are nervous." (*The Independent*, 5 June, 1990). His fears were confirmed by Tom Butler, general manager of one of the two foreign banks which actually operate in Romania: "Romania at this stage is not that bankable," was his laconic reply.

Just as in Britain, the big majority of workers who vote Labour have never read the party programme, so in Romania the big majority of workers who voted for Iliescu almost certainly do not know that the Front's programme includes the idea of a market economy. When told that the Front also supports capitalism, most workers respond with total disbelief. After all, that was the programme of Ratiu and Campeanu — how could Iliescu be the same as them?

Any attempt to push through the kind of programme advocated by Severin will provoke exactly the kind of social turmoil Iliescu has been trying to avoid. After an initial honeymoon period, which could last a few months, there will be new struggles, strikes and demonstrations — and this time, not of the students.

The NSF itself is not a homogenous organisation. Originally formed as an organisation of dissident bureaucrats, it has since proclaimed itself a political party and in the election campaign was joined by a large number of workers. Under pressure from the working class, it is doubtful whether the NSF leadership will hold together. Neither capitalism nor Stalinism can guarantee the future of the workers of Eastern Europe. The present confused and contradictory situation, the inevitable consequences of decades of Stalinist misrule, will become clarified to the degree that the masses learn from experience the right road to take. In particular, the attempt to introduce capitalism represents a colossal blind alley. As *The Economist* anticipates, it will inevitably cause a massive recoil in one country after another.

At present, the ideologues of capitalism are crowing about the alleged demise of 'socialism'. But what we are witnessing, after a long delay, is the demise, not of socialism, but of Stalinism. The real ideas of socialism, workers' democracy and internationalism will be rediscovered by the workers of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, when life itself demonstrates that capitalism offers no way out for them. The inevitable ending of the present long boom in world capitalism will, in its turn, prepare new social upheavals in Western Europe, Japan and the USA, which will make the revolution in Eastern Europe look like a tea-party. □