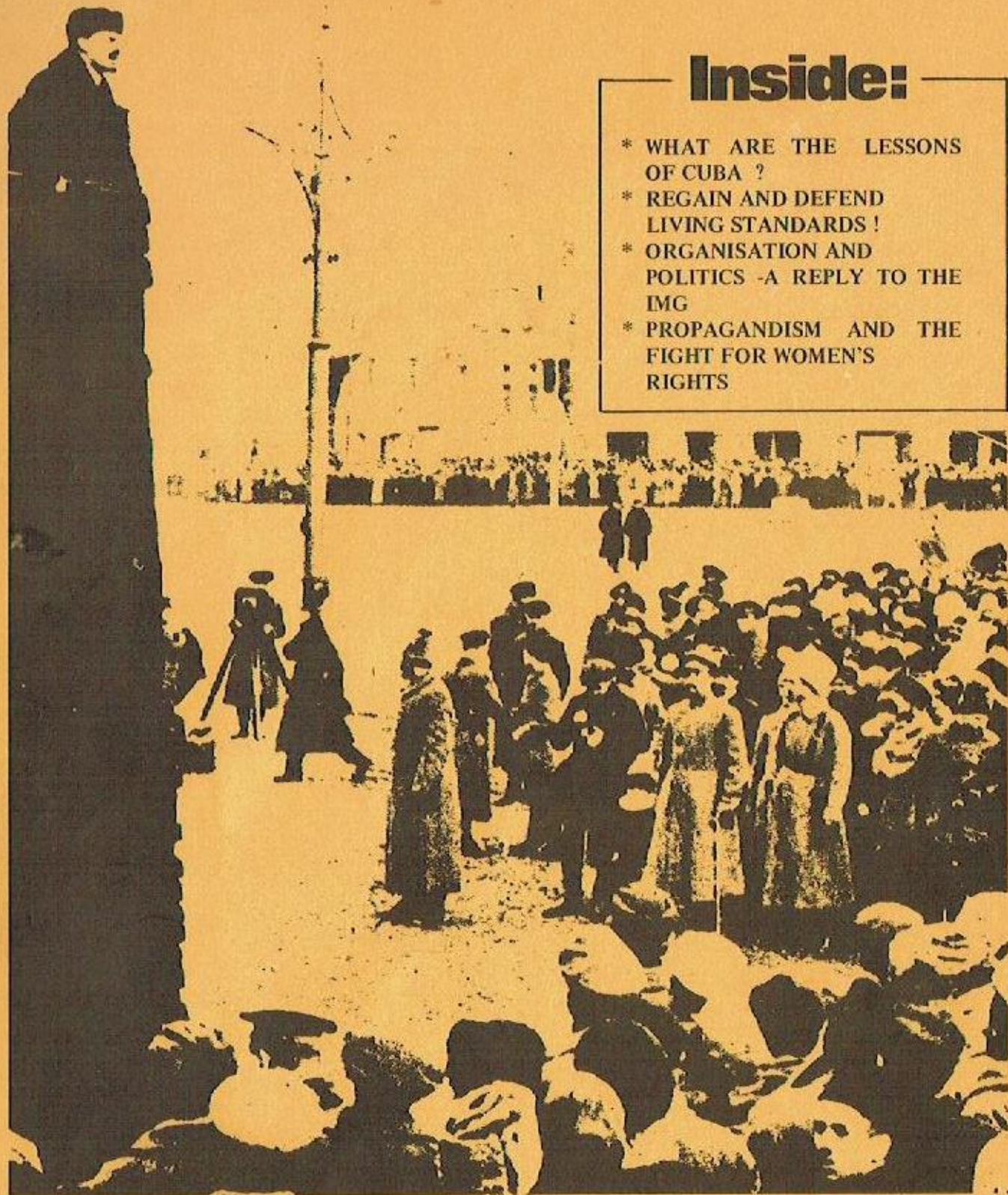


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# TROTSKYISM TODAY ★

THEORETICAL  
JOURNAL OF THE  
WORKERS SOCIALIST  
LEAGUE.

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# EDITORIAL

*Trotskyism Today* began as the pull-out supplement to the Workers Socialist League paper *Socialist Press*. Its independent appearance as the theoretical journal of the WSL coincides with a sharp turn in the class struggle in Britain, characterised in detail in the WSL National Committee statement on Page 3.

In such periods the task of preparing a *qualitative* political leadership with roots within the working class movement must be the primary concern of those claiming the title of revolutionary Marxists.

The role of our new theoretical journal is thus completely linked to the needs of the present situation. In fighting for a new leadership politically independent of Stalinism and reformism, we must fight two pernicious tendencies.

On the one hand, movements such as the International Marxist Group seek to throw aside serious discussion on the fundamental differences and unresolved historical problems that have divided the post-war Trotskyist movement—and launch a frenzied campaign for “unity” between left groups regardless of the price in terms of forsaken principles and programme.

But on the other hand there are those tendencies—exemplified by the Revolutionary Communist Group—which set aside the necessity for practical intervention in the day-to-day struggle in the name of developing “theory”—which inevitably becomes completely divorced from the living struggle.

Neither road in our view offers any way forward for the building of Trotskyist parties. One way offers the liquidation of the Trotskyist programme in the name of “uniting” the movement—the other offers the liquidation of the movement as a practical force in the class struggle, in the name of “theory”.

These positions are not of course completely exclusive. Indeed both flow from a failure to recognise and seize the opportunities opening up now within the working class movement itself for the training of principled cadres capable of intervening within and leading mass struggles.

But they sum up the basic problems of method to be confronted in the building of a revolutionary party in Britain, and of course, repeated on a world scale, similar positions stand as the main block to the struggle for the reconstruction of the Fourth International.

The new *Trotskyism Today*, in setting out to tackle these obstacles, will therefore undertake two related and simultaneous tasks.

We will carry basic information and educational material on the history and struggles of the international workers’ movement; and we will carry polemical and discussion material aimed at pressing our demand for a discussion between all those groupings internationally laying claim to be Trotskyist, with the perspective of reconstruction of the Fourth International.

Future editions will be open for readers’ letters and comments on published material.

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WORKERS SOCIALIST LEAGUE NATIONAL COMMITTEE STATEMENT

# REGAIN AND DEFEND LIVING STANDARDS

The political defeats suffered by the TGWU and NUM leaderships last week reflect the complete rejection of wage control by the working class. In the face of these developments Chancellor Healey's attempts to enforce wage control confirm that we are now at a decisive turning point in the class struggle in Britain.

Most fundamentally, the demolition of the carefully laid plans of the TUC to impose a rigid Phase 3 indicates a political turn by the working class parallel to the 1966 Seamen's strike—the first mass struggle by the working class against a Labour government—and the 1974 miners' strike, in which mass, active hostility to wage controls led to the bringing down of the Heath government.

In the wake of the destruction of Phase 3, a wages offensive is already opening up. There is no doubt that section after section of workers will now seek to seize their chance to make up for the last two years of vicious cuts in real wages.

The readiness of workers to struggle in pursuit of these demands is shown by the scale of the mobilisations in support of the Grunwick strikers, and the tenacious blacking action by postal workers in defiance of UPW leaders, employers and courts.

And at the same time the defeat of Jones at the TGWU Conference has clearly shaken the authority of the union bureau-

cracy at all levels and challenged its ability to sabotage and disrupt through bureaucratic decree the struggles of their members to defend their living standards.

But it has not removed their room for manoeuvre. Rather, it has forced them to turn increasingly to utilise the left talkers and the Communist Party to assist them in heading off and diverting militant struggles on wages.

Already in Fords and at Longbridge Stalinist-dominated leaderships have rushed in after the TGWU vote to submit claims for basic increases of no more than 15%-20%.

Even if such claims were won in full they would still amount to a substantial wage cut under present inflation. And workers are clearly prepared to fight for much bigger claims.

The sole purpose of these "responsible" claims is to take the steam out of the wages movement by arguing the need to keep the employer viable.

We say that the priority must be the restoration of the living standards of the working class to 1974 levels, and the defence of this through linking wages to the cost of living through a sliding scale of wages.

The defeats suffered by the bureaucracy have killed any possibility of an agreed Phase 3, and caused Liberals to question the future of the Lib-Lab coalition deal.

But they have *not* slackened the iron determination of Healey and Callaghan to press ahead with their alliance with the Liberals, and impose wage restraint, if necessary without the formal support of the TUC.

They have drawn closer to the Liberals to set themselves free of pressure from the working class—whether through the unions, or through the Labour Party itself.

At the same time the government is aware it can count on the energetic efforts of TUC leaders to stifle militant wage struggles by any means at their disposal.

Scanlon has already announced that the AUEW will uphold the '12 month rule' and honour annual agreements.

More dramatically, the TGWU leadership has violated the specific vote of this month's conference by circulating full time officers informing them that the return to free collective bargaining is to begin only after the end of existing contracts.

The TGWU conference rejected this position and voted for unfettered collective bargaining as of August 1.

It is with these moves in mind that Healey has made it clear that the government is prepared to press ahead *without* any formal deal with the TUC.

From the government end, all wage claims in the public sector will be resisted; rigid cash limits will be imposed, and, working with the CBI, Healey will back

employers in their fight to hold down wages.

And from the union bureaucracy will come continual stalling the watering down of legitimate claims, the sabotage of official and unofficial action and unceasing efforts to shackle the working class to the requirements of a crisis-ridden capitalist system.

The idea floated by some Labour ministers of using an amended price code to forbid any price increases attributed to wage rises outside the government target shows the perspective of the government.

They intend to use the threat of economic chaos, roaring inflation and mass sackings to intimidate those fighting for wages.

But the Healey-Callaghan policy has one fatal flaw—it satisfies nobody:

\*The TUC are unlikely to see in Healey's proposals any chance of cobbling together even the vaguest agreement on wage targets—though they will attempt to uphold the 12 month rule.

\*To the mass of union members faced with the constant erosion of living standards, the tax cuts offer nothing.

\*And the Tories, together with the ruling class as a whole, clearly have no real confidence in Callaghan's ability to control this latest move by the working class.

But nor are the Tories confident of their own ability to contain the present situation.

Suddenly aware of the scale of militancy they would confront from the working class on wages and union rights should they topple the Callaghan government, the Tories have encountered obvious divisions within their own ranks.

From an all out onslaught on the rights of trade unionists ten days ago, in which nearly every Tory front-bencher was sounding off demands for legislation to restrict picketing, and legal action against the postmen, the Tories have wilted away to the level of Whitelaw's pathetic appeal for Rees to seek a *voluntary* "code of conduct" on picketing.

Indeed Labour minister Booth, in promising new laws on picketing, now stands to the right of many Tory statements.

Even the extreme right wing within NAFF have descended from threats of civil actions against the Cricklewood postmen to sneaking around the country late at night posting illicit mail.

The Tories had clearly planned

to use Grunwicks as a set-piece in their preparations for an all-out bid for power.

Yet now they are visibly faltering in these moves and pulling back from any call on the government to resign—even after the disastrous Labour showing in the Saffron Walden by-election.

Thatcher herself issued no call for a general election even at a mass rally of 15,000 Tories in Blenheim last Saturday, showing that the Tories are all too aware of the new situation.

The central question now confronting the working class is that of leadership.

The efforts of union leaders, 'left' talkers and Stalinists will be to divert the spontaneous militancy and strength of the working class and to preserve the coalition government.

Against this perspective we advance a clear programme to direct the mass movement towards the most central political issues.

In the wages debate at the TGWU Conference a crucial struggle was carried through both to direct the main attack on the platform and to put forward the demand for a sliding scale of wages as a conscious alternative to wage controls.

A third of the conference voted for this policy, indicating that it is beginning to draw a mass response.

Our role in developing the pay struggle is therefore crucial.

As the government wields the threat of raging inflation and chaos, our reply is that wages can only be defended by linking them to the rises in the cost of living, as assessed by elected trade union committees.

Wherever this policy is adopted we advocate the development of prices committees, to establish a cost of living index independent of the biased figures quoted by Healey.

As struggles for these demands develop, we must aim to draw together the strength of all sections of workers in struggle through the fight for *councils of action* rooted in this mass movement.

In line with this perspective we call for a recall conference of the Campaign for Democracy in the Labour Movement to be convened as soon as possible.

As a block across the path of the struggle to regain and defend living standards comes the Callaghan-Steel government.

We must bring right into the wages struggle the need to remove Healey and Callaghan, the open spokesmen of the ruling class within the labour movement, and to establish a government based on the interests of the working class.

For three months the 'left' Labour MPs have diplomatically refused to acknowledge that the coalition government exists.

Now they have all greeted with approval Healey's proposals for continued wage cuts—fooling themselves that this represents a leftward turn.

In fact the Labour leaders are only moving closer into alliance with the Liberals to throw their weight against the wages struggle.

The Labour 'lefts' may be prepared to posture on the Grunwick picket line.

But they are not prepared to call for extended postal blacking or in any way develop the independent struggles of the working class, let alone align themselves with the struggle to break the Social Contract and break the coalition government.

There must be a fight both in the trade unions and in the Labour Party for the demand that the Labour 'lefts' break from Healey and Callaghan and the coalition government and take upon themselves the task of establishing a socialist programme for the next general election.

In this way their 'left' postures can be exposed in the course of the class struggle, and the way opened up for the construction of a new leadership within the working class.

We call for a lobby of the September Congress of the TUC with the demand that there be *no* undercover wages agreement with the government; *no* 12 month rule; and *full support* declared for any section of the working class in struggle.

18.7.77.

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# WHAT ARE THE LESSONS OF CUBA?

BY BOB SUTCLIFFE AND ADAM WESTOBY

The overthrow of Batista's dictatorship in 1959, Castro's vast expropriations of capitalist property in 1960 and the successful repulse of the United States sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 were a drastic challenge to the theory and practice of all movements claiming to adhere to revolutionary Marxism.

The most fundamental questions were raised: what was the nature of the Cuban state and its rulers? What did the Cuban experience show about the role of the revolutionary party? Was the Cuban experience unique or was it comparable to previous historical events elsewhere? Could it be repeated? Revolutionary theory, strategy and tactics were all put to the test in answering those questions.

In the major organisations claiming to be Trotskyist the Cuban question took on special importance. Agreement that Cuba was a workers' state became one of the principal axes of the pact in which in 1963 the majority of the American Socialist Workers Party and the Pabloite International Secretariat reunified into the "United" Secretariat of the Fourth International after 10 years of organisational division.

On the other hand a denial that Cuba was any form of workers' state was one of the points used by Gerry

Healy and the Socialist Labour League leadership as a programmatic base from which to oppose the reunification.

Within this discussion of Cuba some important theoretical contributions were made by the SWP minority; but the leaders of the two leading organisations of the Trotskyist movement, the USFI and the International Committee sacrificed a deeper theoretical discussion to tactical advantage. As a result both the USFI and the IC have remained committed to positions on Cuba which were erroneous at the time and which have in the succeeding 15 years become increasingly exposed by further developments in Cuba. Both parties have consistently failed to revive a discussion which was stifled in its infancy.

This article is a contribution to the necessary revival of this discussion. It is part of a longer study to be published shortly in the form of an introduction to Tim Woforth's 1963 essay on the *Theory of Structural Assimilation*.

In this introduction the links will be analysed between the Cuban case and that of Eastern Europe and China. In all these cases the expropriation of the capitalist class and the foundations of a planned economy were laid without the intervention of

a proletarian revolutionary (Trotskyist) party. It is this fact which has disconcerted the theoretical leaders of the USFI and the IC.

Although in the case of Cuba they produced apparently opposite answers, there was a methodological error common to both making them embrace wooden, one-sided solutions: either there was no proletarian



Castro

revolutionary leadership therefore there could be no workers' state (Healy) or there was a workers' state therefore there must have been an (unconscious) proletarian revolutionary leadership (USFI).

Cuba, however, was an exceptional example, but an example nonetheless, of the *contradictory* process by which workers' states have been created in the period since the Second World War.

If we wished to express the paradox of the last three decades in a nutshell, it would be this: that the Stalinist cancer which infected the proletarian social revolution has not been destroyed by the extension of the revolution, but, on the contrary, has extended with it. Not only that, but Stalinism has made itself the organising instrument of destroying capitalism and forming the post-war workers' states, in Eastern Europe, China, Korea, Cuba, and Indochina, just as it has made itself the equally deliberate organiser of class compromise and counter-revolution in the states reserved to imperialism.

Cuba, like the Eastern European buffer states, became structurally assimilated to the degenerated Soviet workers' states. In the Cuban case the form of this assimilation involved the integration of the island's economy with that of the USSR, the political integration of Castro's petty-bourgeois political movement with the Cuban Communist Party into a single bureaucratised Stalinist party and the assimilation of Cuba's international policy into the counter-revolutionary world strategy of the Soviet Union.

The Cuban Revolution of 1959-63 was one which was not sought either by Moscow or by the Cuban CP (which called itself the Popular Socialist Party), but in which they came, very soon after Castro took power, to play an essential role. It is important to distinguish clearly the different stages in the part played by Stalinism in Cuba, partly because of the myths which now surround it both in Stalinist and revisionist 'histories'.

During the Second World War the CP was involved in an open 'popular front' alliance with Batista: they supported him in the elections of 1940 and 1944 and had two ministers (one of whom was Carlos Rafael Rodríguez) in his Cabinet. After the war they shifted their allegiance to another section of the bourgeoisie, Grau's Authentic party, until Grau drove them into illegality. After Batista's re-seizure of power in 1952 they remained in an ambiguous symbiotic relationship with his dictatorship. In exchange for a kind of semi-legality they held in check

the organised labour movement in which they held a dominant position.

In 1953 they denounced Castro's attack on the Moncada barracks as putschist and ultra-leftist. This, though formally correct, was done for entirely opportunistic reasons. In April 1958, by refusing to back a general strike which was called by Castro's 26th July Movement, they guaranteed its failure. At this time, however, a section of the CP began through Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, (a leading CP intellectual and a minister in Batista's wartime government) to have contacts with Castro's guerillas. Less than a year later (1 January 1959) Batista fled and Castro's forces took Havana.

The Rebel Army, the 26th of July Movement and the other smaller organisations which overthrew



Kruschev

Batista were under a radical, nationalist petty bourgeois leadership. The bulk of the movement's support had come from the urban petty bourgeoisie and from the peasantry, though it also gained some base in the trade unions. After the revolution Castro's initial statements (reflecting the views of many of his closest supporters) were anti-Soviet and frequently anti-communist. He spoke of building a society which was 'neither capitalist nor communist'. In the 18 months after the seizure of power, he formed a coalition government with sections of the liberal bourgeoisie, though his policy of reforms rapidly frightened off the more right-wing elements.

Castro's initial reforms were aimed at dismantling Batista's state apparatus and expropriating the great landholders and certain sections of foreign capital, especially the American sugar monopolies. Initially, the policy led to economic pressure from American imperialism. This intensified in step with the reforms,

and as the liberals left the government. In the summer of 1960 the US broke off its agreement to buy sugar, the bedrock of the Cuban economy. The US also gave material assistance to armed counter-revolutionary groups. Then, in April 1961, Kennedy — evidently acting on highly optimistic intelligence reports, compiled by the CIA largely from Batista supporters in Florida — launched the disastrous 'Bay of Pigs' invasion which was totally routed by the mass mobilisation of the Cuban people. A few days later Castro was to declare the 'socialist' character of the revolution.

Over the previous year the Soviet Union had moved swiftly into an uneasy political alliance with Castro. This was cemented by the great economic influence which the Soviet Union acquired when, in 1960, it guaranteed (along with China) the sugar exports which had previously gone to the USA. In 1960 over three-quarters of Cuban trade was still with the USA; in 1961 over three-quarters of trade was with the workers' states. And the Soviet Union had begun to grant large loans to Castro to cover the trade deficit.

During 1962, following the further nationalisation of US property in Cuba, Kennedy imposed an economic blockade — thereby deepening Cuban economic reliance on the Soviet Union. In this situation Cuba's political and social development came to be dominated by the problems of Soviet policy as a whole: culminating in the Cuban 'missile crisis' of October 1962 and the subsequent 'settlement' whereby Kennedy promised there would be no further attempts to invade the island (though this did nothing to inhibit attempts at internal subversion, including a series of exotic CIA plots to assassinate Castro).

The 'missile crisis' of October 1962 had its roots in the complex political and economic crisis of the Moscow leadership and its relationship with imperialism. Krushchev was still battling to secure his control in the Party apparatus, mainly through the selective 'destalinisation' launched at the twentysecond CPSU Congress (October 1961). His attempts to boost agricultural production were unsuccessful; the Berlin crises and pressure from the military hierarchy for increased spending in Europe, together with the crash programme of missile construction, imposed a rising burden on resources. Krushchev's promises to increase consumption could not be met at the expense of heavy industry, and when (in June 1962) hikes in food prices were announced there was at least one

serious riot. On top of this Khrushchev's public claims that the USSR had equalled or passed the US in nuclear striking power were false (and were strongly suspected of being so at the top levels on either side). Previous attempts at 'detente' notwithstanding, Khrushchev was therefore under strong pressure to find a cheap way of compensating for the US advantage in inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and the rising of US bases in allied states around the Soviet Union — cheaper at least, than the enormous cost of a comparable body of ICBMs based on Soviet soil.

Hence the secret dispatch (on Khrushchev's initiative) of 'intermediate range ballistic missiles' (IRBMs), much less costly than ICBMs to Cuba in the summer of 1962. When fully installed they would have threatened effective retaliation against most major cities in the east, southern and central USA.

But, before they were set up ready for use, Kennedy, acting on Intelligence reports, issued his October 22nd ultimatum, imposed a naval blockade of Cuba, and brought to immediate readiness plans to bomb the missile sites and for a full-scale US invasion. Khrushchev, after six days of secret negotiation, was forced to withdraw the missiles, but with the major quid pro quo of an American 'hands off' Cuba.

That the plan to secretly install the missiles had its origin in Soviet world policies, and not in the defence simply of Cuba was highlighted by — firstly — the fact that the proposal came from Khrushchev, not Castro, and — secondly — that alternative more cautious methods of protecting Cuba against American invasion were not mooted. It would have been quite possible, for example, in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs and with increasing reliance by Khrushchev on the deterrent effect of a major nuclear retaliatory strike, to have simply 'integrated' Cuba into the Warsaw pact alliances, declaring that any invasion would be treated in the same fashion as, say, an invasion of NATO forces into East Germany. But no such 'costless' political steps were taken. Relations between the Cuban leadership and the Kremlin were severely strained after Khrushchev's retreat in the 'missile crisis' — reflecting Castro's recognition that the fate of Cuba was being determined in the wake of relations between the two super powers. The 'missile crisis' was handled direct between Washington and Moscow. It was brought rudely home to Havana that there could be no such thing as 'national independence' — 'socialist' or otherwise — in one country.

Thereafter, however, the social transformation of Cuba continued in conditions of relative external security, though Soviet aid was not provided under conditions which would allow the Cuban economy to escape its traditional dependence on sugar.

In parallel with the development of the alliance with the USSR went a growing, but 'uneasy, intimacy between Castro's political forces and the Cuban CP. CP members had taken many posts at lower levels in the new state administration and from 1960 the Party began to move into a closer political relationship with Castro's government. But this was not based merely on Castro's growing economic and political ties with the USSR. The CP leaders realised that they could not maintain any independent following, even the immense popularity of Castro, unless they moved towards him. At the same time Castro required the support of the CP as the only serious organised political party at the time of the revolution. The organisation of the 26th July Movement was so loose as to be almost non-existent.

In May 1961 a first attempt was made to fuse Castro's movement and the old CP into a single political organisation, the Integrated Revolutionary Organisation (ORI). And in February 1962 Carlos Rafael Rodríguez became the first PSP member to be appointed to a senior government post when he became the head of the Agricultural Reform Institute (INCRA) in succession to Fidel Castro himself.

But the ORI virtually collapsed within months when in 1962 the General Secretary of the organisation, the stalinist Anibal Escalante, was denounced by Castro for attempting to seize power through 'micro-factional activities' and was exiled to the USSR. Although most CP leaders took their distance from Escalante, this event soured relations between Castro and the CP. A second step towards a fusion was made in 1963, with the formation of the United Revolutionary Socialist Party (PURS). But this proved equally abortive. The result of these efforts, however, was to put a virtual end to any organised political activities outside the state bureaucracy. Political parties were in effect suspended. It was not until 1965 that the Cuban Communist Party was finally formed, entirely as a bureaucratic construction; it was not to hold a Congress for 10 years.

Despite the fusion of Castro's political allies with the stalinists, Cuba's profound economic dependence on the Soviet Union and from 1966 Castro's public hostility to China, the political ties between Moscow and Havana were still not mechanically close. During the 1960s Cuban support for guerilla struggles provoked splits in several Latin American CPs. The bonds were nonetheless very real, as 1968 was to demonstrate. The 'Prague spring' was reported by the Cuban press without comment. And even for three days after the Soviet invasion Soviet and Czechoslovakian (ie. pro-Dubcek) press agency statements were printed



Prague, 1968

side by side. Then, after a long session of the CP Central Committee, Castro made a speech which, though bitterly critical of the inadequacy of Soviet assistance to Cuba (and to Vietnam) completely supported the Soviet invasion.

But already weeks before this, Castro had given scarcely any support to the French general strike, and certainly issued not a breath of criticism of the French CP's role in destroying it. And after 1968 Cuban support for Soviet international policies became more and more close until by the early 1970s it had become sychophantically uncritical, although on occasions performing as a kind of licenced left face of world stalinism.

Virtually all support for guerilla movements was withdrawn. Castro gave more or less uncritical support to 'revolutionary' military dictatorships in Peru and then Panama. The Popular Front government of Allende received total support from Cuba and mild criticisms were reserved for after its destruction by the 1973 military coup. Through all this period a string of visits took place from CP leaders from Latin America, Eastern Europe and eventually Western Europe, too — all of them elaborately feted.

The Cuban revolution was the immediate stimulus to Wohlforth's essay — via the internal crisis produced in the International Committee by its disputes over Cuba. However, *The Theory of Structural Assimilation* does not embrace or discuss Cuba in any concrete way. This was because Wohlforth — at that time — acquiesced in the pressure brought by the Healy leadership of the SLL. Healy argued that to grant that a social transformation had taken place in Cuba, and that it had become a workers' state, would be to concede that a political leadership other than a Trotskyist party could destroy capitalism and would therefore, be to capitulate politically (a. the SWP majority leadership were doing) to Pabloism. Thus, argued the SLL leadership, Cuba had to be regarded as still a capitalist state, though of 'a special type'. Wohlforth, under pressure, finally accepted this position. In retrospect it is easy to see both the historically inaccurate character of the SLL's conclusion (more precisely, premise) and its purely formal, logical content, and also the basic flaw which it imparts to Wohlforth's essay, which is written so as to emphasise at all points the differences — even if they are not truly relevant — between developments in Cuba on the one hand, and in Eastern Europe and China on the other.

Yet in fact this basic thesis of 'structural assimilation' — that the social transformation of the post-war workers' states, and the establishment of full-blown stalinist bureaucracies based on the exercise of national state power, was closely connected with the exigencies of Soviet military and political strategy in maintaining its balance with imperialism — applies in its essential respects to Cuba itself. During 1962 Khrushchev sought, in the most direct way possible, to use Cuba as a military point of pressure — like the 'buffer zone' — for defence and deterrence against the main imperialist states; the most obvious difference — important, but not absolutely so — is that Cuba is not adjacent to the Soviet Union. The post-war development of both nuclear fusion (hydrogen) bombs and long-range missiles made this, however, less and less of a crucial factor. Like the forces of production themselves the nature of state (and military) power, has taken on not just international, but world-wide contours. The great states exercise power not just within their frontiers but on a world-wide basis. In the Cuban missile crisis, for example, matters were settled (including the class nature of the state in Cuba) direct on the telephone between Washington and Moscow, with scarcely a reference back to Havana on Khrushchev's part.

The masses in Cuba provided the forces which enabled Castro to oust Batista, propelled him towards expropriating the landowners and capitalists, and formed the bedrock of popular support for his regime which made it impossible for any merely 'pump-priming' counter-revolutionary attempts (such as the Bay of Pigs) to succeed against him. But the political character of the Castro leadership ruled out their appealing, for the defence of the Cuban revolution, to the international working class. Like stalinism, Castro's movement had national origins, a national outlook, and, as it developed into a fully-fledged bureaucracy, national interests.

Taken as a whole therefore, the Cuban revolution confirms, precisely in its 'exceptional' features, the general thesis of 'structural assimilation'. For all the talk of 'national independence', 'socialism in one country' is (and was even more in the early 1960s) an absolute and immediate economic impossibility. It was a question either of making peace with imperialism, or dependence on and integration with the Soviet bloc economies. Hand in hand with this went the internal political fusion of Castro's movement with Stalinism, and in due course, the complete alignment of Cuban with Soviet foreign policy.

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While a study of the history of Bolshevism in Russia can be of great educational value in showing the paths through which Lenin was able to lead the revolutionary seizure of power in October 1917, it is also of interest to study the ways in which latter-day pretenders to the heritage of Bolshevism seek to tailor events to conform to their own subjective and factional interests today. This article by John Lister and Mark Hyde examines the ways in which the International Marxist Group have undertaken such a rewriting of history in their series of articles on 'Faction and Party'.

# ORGANISATION AND POLITICS

By Mark Hyde and John Lister.

From the time he wrote *What Is To Be Done?* in 1902 Lenin fought to build a disciplined party of trained revolutionaries in the Russian working class. The Bolshevik Party was able to take and retain state power in 1917 only because of Lenin's struggle against every tendency which was in any way hostile to the independence of the working class and its party.

Between 1903 and 1912, as Lenin tells us in *Left Wing Communism*:

There were periods of several years in which we were formally united with the Mensheviks in one Social Democratic Party." (p. 69).

It was here, in the main workers' party, part of the mass forces of the Second International, that the Bolsheviks were able to place the central political questions before the advanced sections of workers. In the fight to test out the programme agreed in 1903 it was necessary to struggle for proletarian discipline against the antics of the Mensheviks. This raised again and again the question of the nature of the revolutionary party and the independence of the working class. On this basis alone was it possible to expose Menshevism as a *bourgeois* influence in the working class.

"We never stopped our ideological and political struggle against them as opportunists and vehicles of bourgeois influence upon the proletariat"

(*Left Wing Communism*, p. 69)

This was the political basis for the

Bolshevik fight for the unity of the RSDLP. It has nothing in common with the sham unity of unprincipled blocs and compromise pursued by the so-called 'United Secretariat of the Fourth International' and its British offshoot, the International Marxist Group.

Throughout 1976 the IMG's paper, the now dissolved *Red Weekly* carried several attacks on the 'sectarianism' of the Workers Socialist League. They centred these attacks on the WSL's refusal to unite with the IMG on a "merge now, pay later" basis. In producing arguments to support their line the IMG twisted and distorted Lenin's struggle for the Bolshevik Party in a series of articles entitled 'Faction and Party'. The purpose of this exercise was to present Lenin as a practitioner of a-political unity along the lines of the IMG today.

In *Socialist Press* of March 24 1976 the WSL replied:

"In essence the IMG leadership seem to be saying 'If Lenin and the Mensheviks could be members of the same party for a decade, shouldn't the WSL and the IMG combine today?—though they diplomatically steer clear of who corresponds to whom!'"

Sadly, but not unpredictably, the *Red Weekly* did not change course. The November issue of its 'theoretical' supplement *Battle of Ideas* carried a long and extravagantly foot-noted piece entitled 'The Bolshevik Faction and the Struggle

for the Party'. The authors, John Marshall and Adrian Yeeles, revealed more sharply than ever the anti-Marxist approach which constitutes a stumbling block to a clarification of the political differences which separate the WSL from the IMG.

These differences are rooted in the political positions, and, more deeply, in the method of approach to political questions and orientation towards the working class that the IMG has acquired in the course of the history of the post-war Trotskyist movement.

Particularly important in this respect are the issues that were central to the 1953 split in the Fourth International, issues which have yet to be objectively discussed by any of the international groupings now claiming to be Trotskyist.

The IMG in the 'Faction and Party' series approached the 1953 split as an *organisational* question—brushing aside the enormous political crisis which brought it about. And in the Marshall-Yeeles article they use a similar method in order to examine Lenin's fight in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.

The authors tell us the WSL has failed to understand Lenin's "organisational principles". But, for Marxists, organisational questions must flow from political principles—not vice versa. And political principles rate scarcely a mention

from start to finish of their article.

Indeed much of Marshall and Yeeles' argument centres on the notion that Lenin was at all times opposed to any split with the Mensheviks on what they call "political" grounds. Lenin would only carry through a split on "organisational" questions, they tell us, and sum up the differences between Lenin and the Mensheviks as the Mensheviks' refusal to submit to party discipline.

From this starting point the IMG authors conclude that the split in 1912 between the Bolsheviks on the one hand and the Mensheviks who proposed winding up the RSDLP on the other, was an 'organisational' split. Up to that time, they tell us, no Bolshevik Party existed. There was nothing more than the Bolshevik faction of the RSDLP.

*Socialist Press* has already spoken on the question of whether a split with a group that actively calls for the liquidation of the movement can be termed an 'organisational' step:

"One member publicly advocates winding up the party-the other members are prepared to die to defend it. By what stretch of the imagination can this be described as an organisational question?"

Have not the different political assessments of the liquidator placed him organisationally outside the party in all but the most formal, literal interpretation?

More tangibly, if IMG members produced a newspaper, or wrote in *The Guardian* that the IMG was "dead", and others began advocating winding up your independent apparatus would you be content to brand them as "in breach of discipline"—and not seek the political motivation of such action?"

(March 24, 1976)

But there is an even harder problem Marshall and Yeeles blindly run into. We all know there are many quotes from Lenin which refer to the Bolsheviks as a faction of the RSDLP. But unfortunately for the IMG and the USFI there are also many from Lenin and other Marxists which make it clear that Lenin considered the Bolshevik Party to have been in existence since 1903.

For the formal thinkers like Marshall and Yeeles, who see to it that all developments are placed into neat categories, the answer to this is simple. One set of quotes must be right, and used accordingly. The other set must be wrong; and either ignored or explained away. They proceed throughout in this manner, mechanically separating the organisational from the political questions involved, and the Bolsheviks' activities as a faction in the RSDLP from the struggle to build a homogeneous revolutionary party.

Of course, the 'contradictory' statements of Lenin about factions and parties arise from the *real* contradictions of the development of Bolshevism—the fact that, while a party in all but name during certain

periods, it operated as a *faction* of the RSDLP. This necessary process can not be subjected to the crude formula 'either a faction or a party'. Such a method owes everything to Aristotle's Law of the Excluded Middle, and nothing to Marxism.

As Trotsky wrote:

"A Marxist party should, of course, strive to full independence and to the highest homogeneity. But in the process of its formation, a Marxist party often has to act as a *faction* of a centrist and even a reformist party. Thus the Bolsheviks adhered for a number of years to the same party as the Mensheviks."

Unable to see the development of the Bolshevik Party in anything but a completely one-sided way Marshall and Yeeles have to make a contemptuous dismissal of Lenin's reference to a pre-1912 Bolshevik Party in *Left Wing Communism—An Infantile Disorder*. We are told to ignore 'half a sentence' of Lenin's writings on this question.

If we are generous we can assume that this flows out of complete ignorance rather than conscious distortion. *Left Wing Communism* was distributed to every delegate at the Second Congress of the Communist International. Its importance lay in the fact, among other things, that it contained Lenin's assessment of the development of Bolshevism in Russia. Anyone who takes the trouble to read it will see that it contains not 'half a sentence' but an entire analysis of the development of the Bolshevik Party since 1903. It will do here to assemble a few quotations (some of which were used in the earlier articles in *Socialist Press*).

"As a current of political thought and as a political party, Bolshevism has existed since 1903. Only the history of Bolshevism during its *entire* period of existence can satisfactorily explain why it has been able to build up and maintain, under most difficult conditions, the iron discipline needed for the victory of the proletariat." (p.6).

"Of all the defeated opposition and revolutionary parties, the Bolsheviks effected the most orderly retreat, with the least loss to their "army", with its core best preserved, with the least (in respect to profundity and irremediability) splits, with the least demoralisation, and in the best condition to resume the work on the broadest scale and in the most correct and energetic manner."

Lenin goes on in this passage to explain the necessary role of expulsions in the development of the movement, dealing a heavy kick in the teeth to the IMG peddlers of easy-going "unity":

"The Bolsheviks achieved this only because they ruthlessly *exposed and expelled* the revolutionary phrase-mongers who refused to understand that one had to retreat, that one had to know how to retreat, and that one had absolutely to learn how to work legally in the most reactionary parliaments, in the most reactionary trade unions, cooperative societies, insurance societies and similar

organisations." (pp 11-12).

"Overcoming unprecedented difficulties, the Bolsheviks thrust back the Mensheviks, whose role as bourgeois agents in the working class movement was clearly recognised by the entire bourgeoisie after 1905." (p. 12. Emphasis added).

It is not clear whether the IMG want us to believe Lenin was for seven years in favour of unity with these "bourgeois agents in the working class movement", or whether they feel that Lenin was less aware of the Mensheviks role after 1905 than was the Russian bourgeoisie.

"the struggle that Bolshevism waged against 'left' deviations within its own party assumed particularly large proportions (...). In 1908, the 'left' Bolsheviks were expelled from our Party for stubbornly refusing to understand the necessity of participating in a most reactionary "parliament" ". (emphasis added).

So ultra-left elements were expelled by Lenin for the *political* offence of "refusing to understand" a policy! So much for the IMG's line of "unity" on any level, and splits only on "organisational" questions.

We should compare this passage in *Left Wing Communism* to Lenin's contradictory statement at the time of these expulsions, when he wrote:

"We do not have a split in the Party, but in the faction."

Lenin was not suffering from a bad memory when he wrote *Left Wing Communism*. But he clearly considered that the Bolshevik Party existed in 1908 as a *faction* within the RSDLP.

But perhaps the most telling passage in showing the way Lenin approached the question of 'unity' with the Mensheviks occurs in the section entitled "No Compromises?". Lenin, in challenging the ultra-leftism of the inexperienced Comintern parties, catalogues some of the temporary compromises and manoeuvres made during the history of Bolshevism. And the question of unity with the Mensheviks comes, without comment, in the *middle* of a list of temporary blocs with bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties:

"The Bolsheviks have always adhered to this policy. Beginning with 1905, they systematically advocated an alliance between the working class and the peasantry against the liberal bourgeoisie and Tsardom, never, however refusing to support the bourgeoisie against Tsardom (for instance during second rounds of elections, or during second ballots) and never ceasing their relentless ideological and political struggle against the bourgeois revolutionary peasant party, the "Socialist Revolutionaries", exposing them as petty-bourgeois democrats who falsely described themselves as socialists. During the Duma elections in 1907, the Bolsheviks [not the RSDLP!] for a brief period entered into a formal political bloc with the "Socialist Revolutionaries". Between 1903 and 1912 there were periods of several years in which we were formally united with the

Mensheviks in one Social Democratic Party; but we never ceased our ideological and political struggle against them as opportunists and vehicles of bourgeois influence among the proletariat. During the war we concluded certain compromises with the "Kautskyites" with the Left Mensheviks (Martov) and with a section of the "Socialist Revolutionaries..." (P. 69)

"Unity" with the Mensheviks was no more a fixed principle for Lenin than any of these other political arrangements. At certain points it became objectively necessary—at others it became a political liability.

And in case the IMG feel inclined to dismiss even the whole of *Left Wing Communism* as an unfortunate "slip of the pen" by Lenin or an exception to the rule, we should point out that this view was explicitly adopted by the Executive Committee of the Communist International in 1921. In 'Directives on the United Front' we find the following.

"18. The ECCI considers it useful to remind all brother parties of the experiences of the Russian Bolsheviks, that party which up to now is the only one that has succeeded in winning victory over the bourgeoisie and taking power into its hands. During the fifteen years (1903-17) which elapsed between the birth of Bolshevism and its triumph over the bourgeoisie it did not cease to wage a tireless struggle against reformism, or, what is the same thing, Menshevism. But at the same time the Bolsheviks often came to an understanding with the Mensheviks during those fifteen years. The formal break with the Mensheviks took place in the spring of 1905, but at the end of 1905, influenced by the stormy developments in the workers' movement, the Bolsheviks formed a common front with the Mensheviks... and these unifications and semi-unifications happened not only in accordance with changes in the fractional struggle, but also under the direct pressure of the working masses who were awakening to active political life and demanded the opportunity of testing by their own experience whether the Menshevik path really deviated in fundamentals from the road of revolution... The Russian Bolsheviks did not reply to the desire of the workers for unity with a renunciation of the united front. On the contrary. As a counterweight to the diplomatic game of the Menshevik leaders the Russian Bolsheviks put forward the slogan of 'unity from below', that is, unity of the working masses in the practical struggle for the revolutionary demands of the workers against the capitalists. Events showed that this was the only correct answer. And as a result of those tactics, which changed according to time, place, and circumstance, a large number of the best Menshevik workers were won for Communism."

(Communist International Documents, Degras, Vol 1, p. 314, emphasis added).

The explicit reference to "unifications and semi-unifications" in this passage is testimony to the tactical and partial nature of the arrangements themselves. And the reference to Bolshevik-Menshevik unity as a "united front" is a clear statement that two independent parties existed.

But much more is contained in this quotation. It actually gives an

insight into the political background to the splits and unifications; and the political basis on which they took place. Such a view is avoided completely by the IMG. It is worthwhile examining the early years after 1903 to show how the picture can be falsified if the political questions are ignored.

In 1903 the RSDLP divided into two factions: the Bolsheviks on the one hand, and the Mensheviks, around Martov, on the other. While the Mensheviks succeeded in defeating Lenin's proposal for a strict definition of the responsibilities of membership of the Party under the Party Rules, Lenin's supporters took a majority on the editorial board of *Iskra* and all three places on the Central Committee.

While the question of the Rules was by no means a minor one, the Bolshevik majority in the leadership meant that there was no political necessity for Lenin to call for an immediate split with the Mensheviks. The struggle against their opportunism had opened up—and could for a while be pursued within the united RSDLP.

But the Mensheviks forced the split. Martov took the line that he would only work on the Editorial Board if three more Mensheviks were co-opted on to it, and Plekhanov, who up to then had sided with Lenin, swung in Martov's support. The Mensheviks in this way took the majority in defiance of the Congress decision, and Lenin withdrew from the Editorial Board, taking up a fight for an alternative leadership within the Party. In December 1904 he established a grouping of local party committees that supported the Bolsheviks—the Bureau of Majority Committees. And this grouping then launched its own newspaper, *Vperyod*, as a direct rival to the now Menshevik *Iskra*, and went on to call its own Third Congress of the RSDLP in 1905.

The IMG, as British section of the 'United Secretariat', is part of an "International" in which it is not uncommon for there to be two or more national sections in any one country each producing competing, independent newspapers. For this reason they probably see this state of affairs in 1904-5 as perfectly normal. But the very fact that Lenin's supporters went on to call a Congress independently of the Menshevik wing, and then described this as the RSDLP congress indicates that Lenin was far from concerned with the question of "unity" at this point of time.

In the first edition of *Vperyod*, for example, Lenin writes:

"We have made all possible concessions

and several quite impossible ones in order to continue working in one party with the "Minority". Now that the Third Congress has been obstructed and the disruptive tactics have been directed against the local committees, all hope of achieving this is lost."

(Time to Call a Halt, Dec. 22, 1904, emphasis added).

In a letter to Bogdanov, Lenin makes the point more firmly:

"The split is now complete; for we have exhausted all means. It is the Third Congress against the will of the Central Committee and the Council and without them. Complete rupture with the Central Committee. An open statement that we have our own Bureau. The complete removal of the Mensheviks and now-Iskraists everywhere."

(January 10, 1905, Lenin's emphasis)

These statements prior to the Third Congress were confirmed by Lenin's stand after the Congress itself. The subsequent call to unity was to unite around the programme and rules adopted at this Bolshevik Congress. And Lenin put this call for unity in terms of inviting the Mensheviks, now regarded as outside the Party, to rejoin the (Bolshevik-led) party.

"The party crisis solved itself by the mere fact that the Congress was convened. The root cause of the crisis, as everyone knows was the stubborn refusal of the minority at the Second Congress to submit to the majority. The agonising and protracted nature of the crisis was conditioned by the delay in convening the Third Congress, by the fact there was virtually a split in the Party, a split that was kept hidden and secret beneath a hypocritical show of unity, while the Majority was making desperate efforts to find a quick and direct way out of the impossible situation. The Congress provided this way out by bluntly asking the Minority whether it accepted the decisions of the Majority, is whether Party unity was to be restored or to be formally and completely broken. The Minority chose the latter course. It preferred a split..."

The Minority has split away from the Party; that is an accomplished fact. Some of them will probably be brought to see by the decisions of the Congress, and still more by its proceedings, how naive the sundry tales about mechanical suppression, etc., are; they will come to see that the rights of the Minority in general are fully guaranteed by the new Rules, that the split is harmful; and this section of the Minority will re-enter the Party."

(The Third Congress, Coll. Works vol 8, pp442-3). (Emphasis added).

Under these conditions the proposal of unity to the Mensheviks on the basis of revolutionary discipline, when the Mensheviks' whole position was steeped in petty bourgeois individualism and indiscipline, was anything but a conciliatory move. It was the highest form of struggle against them.

When in 1906 Lenin proceeded towards re-unification, it was firmly on the political starting point of the Second and Third Congresses which had agreed:

"on the necessity for the Party to participate practically and most energetically in the armed uprising and to give

it leadership; and on the Party's perspective of a provisional revolutionary government."

The political situation was one in which:

"the vast majority of Social Democratic workers are exceedingly dissatisfied with the split and are demanding unity."

Under these conditions Lenin was supremely confident that the Bolsheviks would win the support of these workers in a united RSDLP. He advised Bolshevik supporters:

"these elements can be influenced, and they will submit to the influence of the steadfast and solid core of Social Democrats." (Emphasis added: note that the "core of Social Democrats" is the Bolsheviks.)

None of these factors have the slightest influence on *Red Weekly*. They ignore the influx of workers demanding unity. They ignore the political platform on which Lenin demanded unity. They ignore the complexities of the split itself. Instead they offer us the shabby device of a censored quotation, with the political heart torn out. The authors tell us that Lenin said the wish for unity is:

"Surely legitimate, historically necessary and psychologically comprehensible . . . Let us then unite to make this revolution."

But it is those tell-tale dots which indicate a section has been omitted. In reality the quotation should conclude:

"We have already written a very good and comprehensive programme for the democratic revolution. Let us, then, unite also to make this revolution." (emphasis added).

There can be little doubt that this omission by the IMG is a conscious attempt to avoid political embarrassment; a deliberate falsification of a quotation to force it into supporting their own case.

The Unity Congress of 1906 found the Bolsheviks in a minority on both Central Committee and Editorial Board. The response from Lenin was to stress and insist upon the autonomy of local committees in carrying out the general line adopted at the Congress. Lenin was convinced that in this way the class conscious worker members would be brought rapidly to reject the Menshevik line of concluding an electoral alliance with the bourgeois Cadet party.

This is where we find Lenin stating bluntly that:

"The Bolsheviks plainly stated, in the committee appointed by the [Unity] Congress to draft the Party Rules, that any attempt to curtail the autonomy of the local organisations and the rights of the opposition as formulated by the factional Third Congress will inevitably lead to a split." (On the Question of Organisation, CW p. 406.)

And the political groundwork for this fight in the local organisations

had also been laid, even during the Unity Congress itself.

"Any infatuation with quasi-constitutionalism, any exaggeration of the 'positive' role of the Duma by anybody, any appeals of the extreme Right Social Democrats for moderation and sobriety—we have in our possession a most powerful weapon against them. The weapon is Clause 1 of the Congress resolution on insurrection."

The Unity Congress of the RSDLP has recognised that the immediate task of the movement is to wrest power from the autocratic government. Whoever forgets about this immediate task, whoever attempts to push it into the background, will infringe the will of the Congress; and we shall fight all who are guilty of this in the sternest fashion." (Report on the Unity Congress, CW vol 10, p. 381).

This last report was published in the Bolshevik daily paper *Volna*; the Bolsheviks maintained their own daily papers throughout the spring and summer of 1906. And they set up a secret Bolshevik organising centre even during the Unity Congress itself at Stockholm. Lenin's concept of "unity" with the Mensheviks was clearly one which placed primary emphasis on the integrity and development of the Bolshevik cadres.

We have shown some of the complexity of this, possibly the most contradictory period of all. The Bolsheviks organised as a party within a party. But they also argued as a *tendency* within a single party. In Lenin's retrospective, considered analysis, the Bolsheviks were a party throughout this period.

The conclusion must be that the fight for the *political* continuity of Bolshevism, for the preservation of the revolutionary core emerging from the 1903 divisions, was Lenin's primary objective for which tactical moves and manoeuvres towards the Mensheviks were a *means* and not an end in themselves.

It is not accidental that during the 1905 revolution and after 1912 when the Russian working class resumed its forward movement, the split in the RSDLP was absolutely in the open. That in the period in between it was possible to preserve formal unity. Lenin's fight to direct revolutionary agitation and the ideas of Marxism towards the Russian workers in the struggle for a revolutionary party was consistent throughout, but the particular form it assumed differed from period to period.

During the periods of the rising struggle of the working class the priority was given to the open mass work of which the Bolsheviks could take advantage; during the periods of retreat to consolidation of the gains made; to the preparation of the core of the party inside the RSDLP for the coming upsurge. During the

stormy periods the vanguard of the working class was to be found and mobilised on the streets and in the Soviets, during the lulls the central area of work was the faction struggle in the RSDLP.

Far from lamenting the 1905 period in which there was an absolutely open split as a period of party 'disunity' Lenin described it as the period in which 'The revolutionary parties . . . were learning how to attack.' This was the 'dress rehearsal' for the 1917 revolution. The rise of the revolution itself could not have permitted unity between Bolshevism and Menshevik opportunism.

Marshall and Yeeles set aside this historical context to the splits and unifications conducted by the Bolsheviks. And in doing so they attempt to drag into their support historian Brian Pearce, whose account of Lenin's tactics they mysteriously describe as "excellent".

If the reader actually looks at Pearce's account, it reveals the complete opposite of the IMG view. Pearce shows how Lenin used the fight for revolutionary unity to politically defeat the Menshevik leaders and win workers to Bolshevism:

" . . . a decision was taken (1909) against agitation for a separate Bolshevik Congress to be convened at once, as advocated by some comrades indignant at the degeneration of Menshevism into 'liquidationism'. The latter development had aroused misgivings among many of the Menshevik rank and file who, though they disagreed with the Bolsheviks on some important political points, shared with them the conviction that the workers must retain an independent party of their own, organised for illegal as well as legal activity. If the Bolsheviks played their cards properly they could win over a substantial section of this Menshevik rank and file; at this stage it would be wrong to take the initiative in splitting the party, though a split was inevitable in the not too distant future. A fight must be waged under the slogan of 'preservation and consolidation of the RSDLP'."

In fact this period provides an excellent example of how the struggle for *unity* on a revolutionary basis can be used to *split off* revolutionary from non-revolutionary elements.

The paper *Zvezda* run by the Bolsheviks and 'pro-party' Mensheviks between 1910 and 1912 set out to organise the revolutionary forces in the RSDLP on a 'definite party line'. The fact that the pro-party Menshevik faction soon disappeared after 1912 was the vindication of Lenin's fight for regroupment and unity on a firm ideological basis.

Marshall, Yeeles and the *Red Weekly* obscure these points. Mesmerised by the prospect of *organisational* unity they ignore the question of the struggle for *political*

unity. Instead we are told that the 'size of the differences' between the WSL and the IMG are not as great as those between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, Trotsky and Stalin.

This is simply ahistorical nonsense. The question of the 'size' of differences is not a fixed and immutable thing; a question of arithmetic, which can be determined by formal agreement on this or that question at any particular time. Centrism and revisionism today do not take as their point of departure for activity the writings of Axelrod or Martov.

While it is true that the *content* of revisionism (its turning away from the question of revolutionary leadership and the independence of the working class from the bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie) remains the same, the *form* grows out of a struggle against Marxism. At each stage in history revolutionary tradition is used as a cover for anti-Marxist theory and practice.

Lenin's bitter struggle against the Mensheviks began on apparently 'minor' questions. It was successful, as *Socialist Press* has shown in its articles dealing with the subject, because he understood from the start that these 'minor' questions were a pale reflection of a very deep opportunism; he organised his supporters for struggle on the basis of that understanding.

"If you must unite, Marx wrote to the Party leaders, then enter into agreements to satisfy the practical aims of the movement, but do not allow any bargaining over principles, do not make 'concessions' in questions of theory..."

Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. This though cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity. Yet, for Russian Social Democrats the importance of theory is enhanced by three more circumstances, which are often forgotten: firstly by the fact that our Party is *only in the process of formation*, its features are only just becoming outlined, and it is yet far from having settled accounts with other trends of revolutionary thought which threaten to divert the movement from the correct path... Under these circumstances what at first sight appears to be an "unimportant" mistake may lead to most deplorable consequences, and only shortsighted people can consider factional disputes and strict differentiation between shades inopportune or superfluous. The fate of Russian Social Democracy for many, many years to come may depend on the strengthening of one or another "shade"..." (What Is To Be Done? [Peking, 1973] p.28).

Today the 'minor' differences with the IMG reflect themselves in a completely different orientation towards the working class and the tasks which face it; we have no doubt (and the experience so far has con-

firmed this) that these differences will widen unless the IMG is able, as a result of the fight of the WSL, to radically break with its past, absorb new lessons and undergo a transformation on all levels. To speak of the 'size' of differences has no meaning in this context. In their time Lenin and Trotsky always faced towards the advanced workers that could be won to Marxism.

It is this that makes a comparison between the IMG and the WSL with the Mensheviks and Lenin or the Stalintern and Trotsky a futile exercise. The RSDLP and the Second International as a whole, despite the bourgeois opportunism of the leaders, contained the cream of the working class—the most serious and advanced workers who had come to understand the need for a working class party to struggle for socialism.

The Comintern likewise was the party of those workers who had developed on the strengths of the early Second International and had come to recognise fully the need for revolution and proletarian dictatorship.

It is laughable to put the IMG or the 'United' Secretariat on a par with movements like these. The WSL prefers, after Lenin and Trotsky, to turn away from circle politics, and towards the working class and its advanced sections.

We disagree with those like the IMG who claim that to win the advanced workers it is helpful to seek "unity" on a "lowest common denominator" basis between groups claiming to be Trotskyist. Such a position is only one step away from the absolutely liquidationist "mass" politics of the Socialist Workers Party today—for whom new recruits need only be generally in favour of socialism, against capitalism, and not racists—or of the "Trotskyist" Workers Revolutionary Party.

We should recall instead the way Trotsky approached the issue of fusion between the inter-district Mezhrayontsi organisation (of which he was then a member) with the Bolshevik Party in July 1917. He published the following statement in *Pravda*:

"There are in my opinion at the present time no differences either in principle or tactics between the inter-district and the Bolshevik organisations. Accordingly there are no motives which justify the separate existence of these organisations." (History of the Russian Revolution Vol 2, Page 296).

Trotsky, in other words, has closely scrutinised the principles upheld by Lenin's party, and their tactical methods of translating those principles into practice. And he has found complete agreement, on which political basis he proposes fusion.

How different from the IMG's call to "unite" and "fuse". The IMG seek out no discussion on political principles. They pursue no discussion on the brazenly obvious tactical differences that place an enormous question mark over the possibility of a unified movement. They make no attempt to prove either to their own members or to the WSL that any political basis for fusion actually exists. Instead they attempt to assure all and sundry that political differences are secondary to so-called "organisational principles".

For the IMG to play any serious role in the fight to reconstruct the Fourth International this downgrading of political principle, this striving to adapt at each point to the latest forces on the scene, must be consciously ended.

And the political method that has led its leadership to such a position must be examined, together with its roots, which are to be found in the post war crisis and disorientation of the Fourth International.



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# LEYLAND: PASSPORT TO INTERNATIONAL REPRESSION

By Bob Sutcliffe.

Despite the financial catastrophe suffered by some of its subsidiaries (in Spain, Italy and Australia), British Leyland remains a vast international company. And, wherever it operates, it shows the same arrogant hostility to workers' demands as it shows in every dispute in Britain.

In Italy on November 26 1975 Leyland announced the complete closure of its Innocenti workers and tried to sack all 4,500 workers.

Although the company put every possible obstacle in the way of the workers' organisations, especially the elected factory council, the workers occupied the plant.

After five bitter months, during which Leyland refused to pay a penny in compensation to the sacked workers, the occupation ended because of the betrayal by the leaders of the Italian Communist Party. They cooked up a deal with the government and Italian capitalists to 'rescue' the factory—an agreement which left the workers without a thread of security.

Leyland prefers to operate in countries where the activities of the workers are under firmer state control—in places like South Africa and India where a combination of starvation wages and brutal repression of workers by the state in alliance with Leyland management have produced high profits.

In South Africa Leyland has three factories. At Blackheath near Cape Town it manufactures and assembles cars; and at Mobeni in Durban and at Elandsfontein in Transvaal it makes vans and trucks.

Since 1973 Leyland South Africa has been involved in a long dispute with its 800 or so black workers. Through a policy based on lies, hypocrisy and collusion with the racist repression of the state, Leyland has refused to recognise the trade union to which its black workers belong.

The Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) first began to recruit members in the Mobeni plant in April 1973. Within three months 95% of the black workers had joined.

MAWU applied for recognition which Leyland

refused, saying it was illegal.

In fact, though under South Africa law black unions are denied any of the facilities given to white unions, they are not as such illegal, nor is it illegal for individual companies to negotiate with them.

Faced with Leyland's refusal the union retreated and tried instead to elect representatives to the plant 'works committee'. Leyland refused to recognise these representatives.

At the beginning of 1974 Leyland tried to set up a management-dominated 'liaison committee'. The workers boycotted it and demanded a referendum of the workers.

Leyland refused and so the union called the first recognition strike for many years. The company sacked all the striking workers and, when the union was forced to retreat, refused to employ anyone who had played a part in organising the union.

MAWU tried to spread its recruiting to the Elandfontein plant but the Union secretary and other workers organising within the plant were promptly arrested by the Security Branch and threatened with various charges.

That was three years ago. The MAWU campaign for recognition has continued. And Leyland continues to refuse recognition.

Union organisers have been incessantly intimidated and victimised. Leyland claims, with unbelievable hypocrisy, that to recognise the union now might set back the cause of African trade unionism.

The truth is that any increase in the power of the black workers (whose wage in 1974 was £10 a week) would set back the cause of Leyland's profits and might threaten its lucrative deals with Vorster's racist dictatorship.

A very large proportion of Land Rover production, for example, is sold to the South African army and police—and are widely used in internal security operations.

The British Leyland Combine Committee voted last year for a black on supplies going to the South African subsidiary until MAWU gained recognition.

Len Murray, Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon claim to support this demand. But in accordance with their class collaborationist policies in Britain, they have done absolutely nothing to enforce it.

Meanwhile Leyland is trying to crush the union in South Africa by moving its Mobeni operations to Blackheath in the Cape where MAWU has no strength.

Leyland's activities in India have been even less publicised than those in South Africa. But they reveal the same ruthless hostility to its workers.

At Ashok Leyland in Ennore in Madras a manufacturing and assembly operation employs 4,000 workers making old models using old machinery on which the intensity of work is very high.

Skilled workers at the plant receive about a fifth of the wage of an unskilled worker in Britain.

A British trade unionist who managed to visit the plant last year during Dictator Gandhi's emergency reports that it is ringed by wire fences and bristling with state police.

There is a police station at the entrance to the plant and the police continuously intervene inside the factory. He reported finding a 'ruthless management hated by the workers'.

There is a long history of violence and intimidation in the factory against trade union militants.

This takes the form of a struggle between the independent unions and the stooge unions run by the Congress Party and backed up by the management and the police. The stooge unions regularly hire armed thugs to terrorise shop floor militants.



The Leyland management was in the forefront of the brutal strikebreaking actions taken by employers to crush the widespread strikes in Madras in 1972.

The factory is run by British senior managers backed up by a group of sychophantic Indian middle managers. It was some of these who told the visiting British trade unionist that 'the English managers have told us that what Mrs Gandhi has done in India (the emergency and suppression of trade union rights) the British government should do there'.

Leyland management, like that of other multinational firms in India have been firm supporters of the Gandhi emergency.

Leyland's brutal and reactionary actions in India, like those in South Africa, must be taken up by the workers' movement in Britain.

## MORE DETAILS

We are always willing to supply further information about the Workers Socialist League, its aims and its work.

WSL Perspectives (25p) can be obtained from, and queries should be addressed to:

WORKERS SOCIALIST LEAGUE,  
31, Dartmouth Park Hill,  
London NW5 1HR.

# PROPAGANDISM AND THE FIGHT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

By Julia Kellett and Steve Piercey.

The Revolutionary Communist Group set themselves the task on their formation of re-establishing a Marxist tradition and of raising the level of ideological debate on the left. To this end they created as their public face not a newspaper, since they believe that the theoretical basis for one did not exist, but a quarterly theoretical journal. The RCG laments that the left groups have shown a contempt for theory in not replying to the positions they have developed.

This article is devoted to a critique of the main article in *Revolutionary Communist* 5, "Women's Oppression Under Capitalism". It is in this article more than any other published by the RCG that they have the opportunity of putting forward a concrete analysis.

The purpose of our reply is not simply to show how the RCG go wrong on the question of women but why they necessarily go wrong on all issues, since their whole conception of how theory is developed and the nature of its relation to the practice of the working class is radically wrong. For this reason we begin with the RCG's general methodo-

logical approach and then go on to illustrate the consequences of this approach in their analysis of women's oppression.

## METHOD

The RCG believe that a precondition for the development of revolutionary theory is an understanding of the social relations of production as analysed by Marx in *Capital*. This is true in so far as a revolutionary programme which does not base itself on an understanding of the social relations of production and the forms under which they appear under capitalism will inevitably be superficial and inadequate. It will not be able to penetrate beyond the appearances of capitalist production to the content of the social relations which lie behind them. An analysis at the level of appearances remains trapped within bourgeois ideology and leads to a reformist political practice.

It does *not* follow, however, that the programme of the revolutionary party is no more than a logical deduction from the categories contained in *Capital*. It is not even

simply a matter of showing the form that the general laws of capitalist production are taking in a particular concrete situation and drawing out the political conclusions. This is the method of the RCG. They see politics as a bare reflection of the movement of capital in its process of accumulation. They assume that the correct politics for the working class movement follow once the material basis of a particular problem is known.

This is a completely mechanical and undialectical view of the relation between economics and politics which does not see the essential interaction between the two. Although events at the level of production precipitate the capitalist crisis and determine the general terrain under which the class struggle is fought out, the *form* which the class struggle takes and its outcome depend on many political and even cultural factors.

In *Capital* Marx laid down the theoretical foundation of the revolutionary movement by showing that the possibility of socialism is born

out of the womb of capitalism, which prepares the material foundation for a higher form of society. He shows the necessity for revolution by the fact that the limited social basis of capitalism (the irreconcilable interests of Capital and Labour) means that the forces of production are developed unevenly, anarchically and through a process of periodic crisis. The barrier to the further development of the productive forces is capital itself. Only the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist social relations of production can resolve the crisis in the interests of the working class.

In *Capital* Marx was not concerned to present a history of capitalism nor an analysis of capitalism at a particular stage of its development.

*Capital*, although a historical analysis, is a general analysis of the foundation of bourgeois society. The form of analysis employed by Marx in *Capital* is not adequate for a perspectives article. It necessarily leaves out the active, conscious side of the class struggle as it is actually fought out. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx gives a model of a conjunctural analysis, showing how the general laws of capital interact with political and cultural factors as parts or moments of a dialectical whole rather than as functions of the movement of capital. For the RCG, economics are the directly determining element from which politics can be deduced. Engels took such positions to task in 1890:

"According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this Marx and I have never asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure . . . also exercise their influence upon the course of events and in many cases preponderate in determining their form. There is an interaction of these elements . . . the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary . . ."

Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasise the main principle vis-à-vis our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or opportunity to give their due to the other elements involved in the interaction. But when it came to presenting a section of history, that is, to making a *practical application*, it was a different matter and there no error was permissible." (1)

Only through such a dialectical approach can consciousness be seen as the result of social being. The fact that the RCG deny this and see consciousness as the bare reflection of the material appearances of capitalism, means that they cannot

understand how theory and practice are united in the activity of the working class through the medium of the programme of the revolutionary party. This theoretical weakness is not limited to the RCG—it is rampant on the left in Britain. But the RCG show it in its purest form. This can best be illustrated by considering the RCG's conception of the problem of reformism.

### REFORMISM

The RCG see the main problem in the working class as being the fact that the working class and its leadership share the views of the bourgeoisie on the cause and the cure of the crisis. The way to answer this problem, the RCG argues, is to take a



Lenin

Marxist understanding of the crisis, women's oppression and other issues into the labour movement so that the working class can answer the ideological offensive of the bourgeoisie with its own independent class view.

Although it is true that the chief task of the revolutionary party is to transform the spontaneously reformist consciousness of the working class into a revolutionary consciousness, the party does this by developing the activity of the working class, not by simply equipping the working class with propaganda to oppose bourgeois ideology.

From a Marxist standpoint the revolutionary process is one in which there must be continual interaction between the social activity and the social consciousness of the working class in the class struggle. By transforming the activity of the working class, the party transforms its consciousness.

To locate the problem of reformism as a problem of "wrong ideas" and to see the solution as "taking a Marxist understanding" of the nature of the crisis and women's oppression into the working class is both abstract and idealist. Marx demolished this conception of trans-

forming consciousness early on in his development when he lambasted the Young Hegelians:

"This demand to change consciousness amounts to a demand to interpret reality in another way, i.e. to recognise it by another interpretation . . . they are in no way combatting the real existing world when they are merely combatting the phrases of this world". (2)

This resort to idealism is the means by which the RCG vainly attempt to transform themselves from contemplative materialists to revolutionaries. Given their starting point that consciousness is simply the reflection of the material appearances of capitalism, they are faced with the problem of how, in line with Marxist orthodoxy, consciousness becomes a revolutionary force. The problem is "solved" by the RCG, as by earlier mechanical materialists such as Robert Owen, by hoping for an idealist leap in consciousness when the working class comes into contact with correct ideas. With its new understanding of the crisis, inflation and women's oppression the working class hopefully discards its chauvinism and bourgeois ideology and proceeds unimpeded to the task of changing society—or so the RCG believe.

Nowhere in this conception of the revolutionary process does the revolutionary party and its programme appear. In the final sentence of their long analysis of women's oppression in *Revolutionary Communist 5*, we are told that "the building of a revolutionary party is essential to overthrow capital." (3) But this is pure formalism, no more than a genuflection to Leninist orthodoxy. In the preceding thousands of words of analysis the RCG have not demonstrated in any way why a party and a programme are necessary. For them there is simply a need for a dedicated band of professional theoreticians who devote themselves to elucidating theory in a form suitable for the masses in their daily battle against bourgeois ideology.

For the RCG theory is developed outside the practice of the class struggle. This is a truly elitist stand point. As Marx said of these sort of self-proclaimed "theorists" who stand above the class struggle:

" . . . it is essential to educate the educator himself. This doctrine must, therefore divide society into two halves, one of which is superior to society". (4)

When Lenin said that theory has to come to the working class "from without" he meant that revolutionary theory does not arise from the class struggle as it spontaneously develops.

Although Marx said that 'when theory grips the masses it becomes a material force', theory does not grip the masses in pure form. There

has to be a form of *mediation* between theory and practice. The form of mediation is the *programme*. The programme gives theory a concrete form in a system of demands which advance a course of action through which workers can come to an understanding of the necessity of revolution as a result of their *own* activity and experience.

The essential method of Trotsky's Transitional Programme is the changing of consciousness through active struggle and experience. This is why the demands have an expansionary character. They begin with the defence of the basic material interests of the working class and are therefore able to relate to the present consciousness of workers. Once the demands are taken up they reveal their offensive *content* by involving workers in struggle for control over production and finally a struggle for state power. Each development of the struggle marks a step forward in the development of consciousness.



Marx

The fact that the RCG do not see consciousness in relation to activity leads them to make no distinction between the reformism of the present bureaucratic leadership of the working class and the reformism of the mass of the working class.

The reason why it is essential to distinguish between the mass of the working class and its bureaucratic leadership is that they do *not* occupy the same position in the social structure of capitalism or play the same role in the class struggle. It may be true that both the mass of workers and their leaders share similar reformist illusions *but this is not the main point*, if consciousness is looked at dialectically.

As Marx points out:

"The question is not what goal is envisaged for the time being by this or that member of the proletariat, or even by the proletariat as a whole. The question is *what is the proletariat* and what course of action will it be forced historically to take in conformity with its own nature." (5)

This passage could be repeated with regard to the present bureau-

cratic leadership of the working class; for the essential difference between the working class and the bureaucracy is not one of immediate consciousness but one of *action* which each "will . . . be forced historically to take in conformity with its own nature."

If it were true that the nature of the working class and the nature of the present bureaucratic leadership are the same, then why should the leadership assume the form of a *bureaucracy*?

The fact that the RCG do not make a political distinction between the two means that they are unable to see that bureaucracy is *not* an inevitable, inherent part of the working class movement, but a formation, an excrescence as Trotsky called it, which arises under certain historical political conditions to play a definite role in the class struggle.

The bureaucratic form of leadership in the working class originated historically with the advent of imperialism whose high monopoly profits "makes it economically possible to bribe the upper strata of the proletariat, and thereby fosters, gives shape to, and strengthens opportunism." (6) The bureaucracy seeks as its basis of support the top layers of the working class who have been detached from the broad masses of the proletariat.

"Opportunist organisations by their very nature concentrate their chief attention on the top layers of the working class and therefore ignores both the youth and woman worker." (7)

The fact that in a period of crisis the social basis of the bureaucracy tends to be eroded only intensifies the conflict between the privileged sections of the working class and the mass of the working class. Even when the social basis of the bureaucracy is disappearing, it still has a definite social position to defend and a definite role to perform in the workers movement. This role is to mediate between the opposed class interests of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

The leadership of the working class becomes bureaucratic, freeing itself as much as possible from control below and attacking all forms of democracy because that is essential if it is to achieve its historical role of demobilising the working class.

In the active process of the class struggle, the nature of the working class forces it to reach beyond its own immediate consciousness. But the nature of the bureaucracy forces it to stamp on every independent movement and to become "masters of the mass movement in order to render it harmless" (8) Precisely because of this the question of

leadership in the working class is central.

The WSL does not argue that the working class already has a revolutionary consciousness and that the only thing necessary is to sweep away the existing leadership.

We agree that consciousness has to change, but it will only change through the independent mobilisation of the working class on the basis of an independent programme. The bureaucracy is the fundamental barrier to this process even beginning. It is for this reason that the struggle for the independent mobilisation of the working class is necessarily simultaneously a struggle against the present bureaucratic leadership. The problem of reformism, then, is only a problem of wrong ideas at a very abstract level. In concrete political terms the problem of reformism is a problem of the *leadership* of the working class.

### THE FAMILY

The RCG's mechanical materialism threads through its analysis on women's oppression and is shown very clearly in their one-sided view of the family. They begin with some correct points: that women's oppression is not rooted in the family per se but in the form of the family under capitalism. The development of capitalism creates a separation between domestic labour and social labour. Domestic labour, performed by women in the family, becomes privatised and outside social production. The extent to which domestic labour can be socialised is limited absolutely by capital itself. It is this economic function of the family, as a producer of free domestic services for capital, that enslaves women within the family, and materially ties them to their role of domestic workers.

For women to achieve real social equality "the quality possessed by the individual family of being an *economic* unit of society must be abolished." (9). The demand which revolutionaries should raise in relation to the family is for the socialisation of domestic labour and the abolition of the family as an economic unit. The demand "abolish the family" and theories which do not distinguish between the family as an economic unit and "family life" "obscure the revolutionary significance of women's oppression". (10) In any case the family cannot be abolished; it has to be replaced. Thus *Revolutionary Communist* concludes:

"Under capitalism family life is destroyed, while at the same time the family as an economic unit is maintained. Under socialism the reverse will be the

case. Family life will take on a new form as the family as an economic unit is destroyed." (11)

Although theories which focus entirely on the position of women in family life do lead to reactionary conclusions, the RCG go to the other extreme and confine their analysis to the family as an economic unit. While the *starting point* of an all-round analysis of the family must be its economic role under capitalism, an analysis that *ends* with this discovery has hardly begun.

The RCG can dismiss the social and cultural aspects of the family because for them "under capitalism family life is destroyed." This is nonsense. It is only possible to say that capitalism "destroys the family" if one has an ideal, a-historical conception of the family. If the RCG's "materialism" allowed them to see anything more than mechanical forces they would realise that the social and cultural aspects of the family assume a definite form of immense political importance to revolutionaries. The non-economic aspects of the family are *not* secondary in political terms.

The general social subordination of women in relation to men does not derive from legal and political discrimination, but from their position of domestic worker in the family. As Engels describes the relation between men and women:

"The inequality of the two before the law, which is a legacy of previous social conditions is not the cause but the effect of the economic oppression of women". (12)

The dominant position of men in society means that, as Engels puts it, "in the family he is the bourgeois, the wife represents the proletariat" (13). This is a consequence of her role as domestic worker which gives her a socially subordinate position in both family life and public life. But as Engels points out, the *form* in which women's oppression appears is male domination. This appearance is not just an illusion. It is no accident, therefore, that feminists, unable to penetrate beneath the appearances of women's oppression to the real content which explains those appearances, see men as the cause of their oppression.

The task of revolutionaries is not to ignore the reality of the male dominated form of family life under capitalism, but to develop the consciousness of both working class men and women in a struggle against the form of family life under capitalism. This is done, practically, by demonstrating to both male and female workers the political importance of involving women in the class struggle. Only in this way can sexual chauvinism be fought in practice. It is the role of the *family* as a social

barrier to the involvement of women in political life, their stifling confinement within the narrow sphere of domestic toil and personal relations, that is of immediate practical concern to revolutionaries. As Trotsky noted:

"As long as a woman is chained to her housework, the care of the family, the cooking, the sewing, all her chances of participation in social and political life are cut down in the extreme". (14)

The RCG show their inability to assess the family as a social unit in their discussion of Stalin's resurrection of the bourgeois family in Russia. Stalin's reversals of the early measures taken by the Bolsheviks to provide social equality for women through the socialisation of domestic labour were the consequence, they argue, of the economic difficulties inherent in the policy of 'socialism in one country'. (15)

At no point do they assess Stalin's deification of the family as part of a process of political counter-revolution by the usurping bureaucracy. The link between the cult of the family (in all its aspects) and political reaction is vital. The Stalinist bureaucracy bolstered the family not simply to "provide an economic basis for its survival", (16) but also to provide the *political* basis for its survival.

As Trotsky said:

"The most compelling motive for the present cult of the family is undoubtedly the need of the bureaucracy for a stable hierarchy of relations and for the disciplining of youth by means of 40 million points of support for the bureaucracy." (17)

An essential part of Stalin's political counter-revolution was the destruction of the seeds of workers' democracy. There was an intimate connection between the destruction of workers democracy and the resurrection of the bourgeois family.

The bureaucracy required the demobilisation of the masses and their exclusion from public life. For this the bureaucracy turned to the social role of the family, its ability to enforce discipline and to isolate the

masses in the narrow private life of individual family cells.

The RCG's account of the re-emergence of the family in Russia in terms of economic considerations hardly even gives a partial picture of what was involved. The cultural backwardness of the masses, their exhaustion in the civil war, the decimation of the working class, the liquidation of the Left Opposition—these were ultimately the decisive factors in the Thermidor of the family.

There is no one to one mechanical relation between the family, particularly its social and cultural aspects, and the social relations of production.

Trotsky points out that the establishment of a workers state by no means guarantees that the form of the family will automatically change in line with general political and economic changes. The struggle to transform the family is part of the struggle for culture:

"The change in political regime, the change even of the economic order of the state—the passing of the factories and the mills into the hands of the workers—all this has certainly had some influence on family life, but only indirectly and externally . . . A radical reform of the family and, more generally, of the whole order of domestic life requires a great conscious effort on the part of the whole mass of the working class, and presumes the existence in the class itself of a powerful molecular force of inner desire for culture and progress." (18)

The relation between political reaction and the family can be seen very clearly today in the ideological campaign by the bourgeoisie to drive women back into the family. The attempt to increase the domestic burden on each individual family with calls to 'shop around' and 'make do' recognises the importance to capitalism of the family as an economic unit—its ability to disguise and lessen the effects of the fall in living standards of workers.

The ideological campaign is also connected with the political and social importance of the family to capitalism, its reactionary function of fragmenting and atomising the working class, of demobilising workers by splitting them into individual family cells. Workers are called upon to seek an *individual* solution within the family to problems which are social and demand a *class* solution.

The bourgeoisie is aided in its attempt to bolster the family by the present bureaucratic leadership of the working class. The labour bureaucracy helps the bourgeoisie demobilise the working class by preventing as far as possible class problems being solved in a collective class way—by the independent mobilisation of the working class. The bureaucracy



Stalin

hate and fear the movement of the mass of the class which would threaten to develop beyond their control and jeopardise their own privileged position within the labour movement.

The extent to which women can emerge from the family to participate in political life depends on revolutionary leadership—the sensitivity of the revolutionary party to the specific oppression of women and the way this is reflected in its programme and activity in raising the consciousness of the working class as a whole.

### DEMOCRATIC DEMANDS

Central to this task of raising the consciousness of the working class as a whole on the question of women's oppression is the way in which the revolutionary leadership fights for democratic demands. In their discussion on equal rights for women the RCG demonstrate their ability to criticise all and sundry for not having a Marxist analysis and their inability to advance a practical alternative for the working class.

The attainment of political equality for women can only guarantee formal equality while their social subordination in the family continues. A legal right can never be a social freedom in bourgeois society. Marx succinctly makes the connection between rights and social freedom with the economic basis of society: "Right can never be higher than the economic structure and its cultural development conditioned thereby" (19). A legal right in bourgeois society can be no more in reality than a right to inequality, a reflection of the unequal position of capital and labour.

Despite this, the struggle for equal rights, for democratic demands, cannot be by-passed by the revolutionary party. The RCG paraphrase Lenin's argument on the issue:

"We show that demands for legal reforms under capitalism can only be in the interests of the working class insofar as they are taken up from a consistently revolutionary standpoint. Revolutionaries take up the struggle for democratic rights not as ends in themselves, but in order to train the working class in the spirit for democracy and to lay bare that it is the capitalist system, not lack of rights, which perpetuates oppression." (20)

Having adhered to Leninist orthodoxy, the RCG absolve themselves of developing any programmatic conclusions from the principles Lenin outlined. Instead they chart the history of the British suffragette movement and demonstrate how the struggle for equality from a feminist standpoint inevitably ties the interests of women to those of the bourgeoisie.

In their discussion of the issue of abortion they conclude:

"While we support the demand for free abortion, this will not free women from domestic toil, nor overcome their unequal position at work... A campaign on the question has to go beyond the question of this legal right to show the working class as a whole the real obstacle to social equality." (21)

Just how this should be done is left to the reader's imagination. The RCG consistently pose problems and then refuse to answer them.

They put forward a lengthy criticism of the slogan, "Free Abortion on Demand: A Woman's Right to Choose" on the correct basis that it raises the issue at a moral level of individual conscience and implies that women have the freedom to choose their social position. We then find that the only way the RCG distinguish themselves from the feminists in terms of the demands they raise is by linking the issue of contraception to abortion in the demand: "Free and safe contraception and free abortion on demand" (22).

Far from going beyond the question of abortion, the RCG fail even to take one step forward to the door of the NHS to fight for a sliding scale of state expenditure drawn up by independent workers' committees and the opening of the books of the drug supplier industries to the NHS. The RCG ignore the fact that cuts in the NHS affect not only the ability of women to obtain free and safe contraception and abortion, but go on to reverse the gains won by the working class for adequate health treatment for all workers.

It is no accident that the RCG are unable to develop concretely how democratic demands have to be taken up from a consistently revolutionary standpoint. In seeing the problem of reformism abstractly as one of "wrong ideas" they reduce the question to an *academic* fight for a Marxist analysis.

The RCG's failure to make a distinction between the reformism of the mass of the working class and the reformism of its bureaucratic leadership means that they are unable to understand the active role played by the bureaucracy in blocking the avenue to women's active involvement in political life.

For this reason they are unable to reply adequately to the advocates, such as the CP and the ICL, of 'positive discrimination' in favour of women in the unions. The RCG correctly argue that this is an adaptation to feminism in implying that the problem of the unions is one of male domination rather than political orientation. But to leave the issue

here, as the RCG does, lets off the hook those in the unions who are responsible for the political orientation. While criticising those who adapt to feminism the RCG *themselves* adapt to the bureaucracy.

The same lack of an alternative is shown when they take up the CP's perspective of achieving equal rights by involving women in the trade unions and relying on the spontaneous union struggles. The RCG argue that while it is necessary to draw women into the unions, the CP's standpoint ignores the specific oppression of women because it ignores women outside social production—domestic workers and unemployed women. Nowhere do the RCG argue *why* they believe "it is essential to draw women into the trade unions" (23).



Trotsky

What all this illustrates is that the RCG do not even have a conception of a programme, let alone a programme itself. When Lenin said that democratic demands have to be fought for from a revolutionary standpoint he meant that they have to be fought for not in relation to an abstract Marxist analysis, but in relation to a programme which represents the interests of the working class as a whole on all issues. Democratic demands, fought for alone, separated from such a programme, mean confining the struggle to the framework of bourgeois democracy. The working class must always fight from its own independent class position.

Unlike bourgeois democracy, which rests on the *exclusion* of the masses from active political life, workers democracy rests on the active involvement of the *whole* of the working class and the oppressed. In particular, organisations of workers democracy have the ability to mobilise and represent those sections of the working class—women, the unemployed, blacks, youth etc.—who are not normally represented in the mass organisations

of the working class. Although an essential task for revolutionaries is to recruit these sections into the trade unions, both to involve them in struggle now and to force the bureaucracy to take up their interests, they will only be mobilised in mass numbers in the struggle for control.

It is for these reasons that the fight for women's emancipation, from an independent working class standpoint, must centre not on exclusively women's demands as the RCG implies, but on relating the special needs and problems of women to the Transitional Programme and the fight for workers control. Only by linking the struggle against women's oppression to the fight for workers' control, for forms of workers democracy, is it possible to raise in a practical manner the question of what form of democracy and as part of what type of state can create the social conditions for the emancipation of women.

This does not mean, of course, that we have to await the emergence of organs of workers control before taking up a fight against women's oppression. We fight for women to be involved in political life now both so that their interests can be more adequately represented in the organisations of the working class, and because this process can begin to undermine their position of social subordination in the family. Obviously it is essential to fight for those demands which relate specifically to women—adequate maternity leave on full pay, free nurseries, trade union branch meetings to take place at times accessible to women with creche facilities, etc.

The general principles involved are the independent interests of the working class. This means that the issues which relate to workers democracy apply at all times, not simply when committees of workers control are emerging. This can be illustrated by considering the attitude of revolutionaries to the Tribunals set up to implement the equal pay and sex discrimination Acts.

The RCG do not even mention the Tribunals in their long article on women's oppression, although the editorial in *Revolutionary Communist* congratulates the Trico women for not relying on them!

The main point about the Tribunals for Marxists is not that they overwhelmingly rule in favour of the employers, but that they are organs of the bourgeois state. Even if they were far less blatantly biased, the Marxist position would remain one of complete opposition to them. In fact the "fairer" they appear the

more dangerous they become in fostering illusions about the neutrality of the bourgeois state and what can be achieved through its democracy. The fact that Tribunals are organs of the bourgeois state means that the solutions they offer, even when they rule in favour of women, are necessarily of a form which can in no way develop the political consciousness of either women or the working class as a whole. They promote an individual rather than a collective class solution and one which does not involve the active participation of women in public life; they isolate women from men and the possibility of united struggle; they foster the illusion that social equality can be gained through a bourgeois institution and within the framework of bourgeois democracy.

An independent working class position is that equal pay and sexual discrimination should be fought for by class methods such as strikes and occupations. But it is necessary to go further than this and argue that the implementation of measures such as equal pay should be under the control of elected committees of workers of both sex.

The RCG can paraphrase Lenin; they cannot understand him. They do not understand what it means in practice to fight for democratic demands from an independent working class standpoint or to train the working class in its democratic tasks.

This means that they are unable to show how in practice the struggle for women's emancipation and the struggle of the working class against capitalism can be united. They are content merely to show the material basis of the unity between the two struggles by showing that women's oppression is rooted in the social relations of production of capitalism and that women, like the working class, will not achieve emancipation until capitalism has been overthrown:

"... there is no separation between the interests of women and the independent interests of the working class as a whole. Both interests can only be defended by overthrowing capitalism. This is the only standpoint from which a revolutionary perspective for the defence of women's interests can be developed". (24)

Perfectly true. The trouble is the RCG do not take a single step towards developing such a perspective programmatically. As usual, having identified a number of problems, they give no indication of how they are to be solved, apart from the maximalist call to overthrow capitalism.

Apart from the obstacles to unity

inherent in the confinement of large numbers of women to the home, there are serious obstacles even when women are brought into social production.

Women are brought into social production as wage labourers when capital requires them and returned to the home and domestic toil when no longer needed.

One of the essential functions of this reserve army of labour is to depress the general level of wages. In a period of economic crisis the bourgeoisie attempts to strengthen itself in relation to the working class by increasing the reserve army of labour by creating unemployment. Besides being necessary to maintain profitability, this serves the political purpose of weakening the resistance of the working class to further attacks and opens the way for large scale wage cutting. In a period of boom, although wage levels tend to rise, the bourgeoisie can combat this tendency to some extent by bringing into production the reserve army of labour at lower than average wages.

In addition, the employment of women in industry on a large scale has been a result, historically, of the general tendency under capitalism to simplify the production process and to replace skilled labour with machinery. This process has resulted in the employment of women at lower rates than men and the fall in men's wages as skilled processes have been broken down.

As a result of all this, when women have been brought into social production they have tended to be seen by male workers as a threat to their wage levels and as competitors for scarce jobs. The reformist perspective of the trade union leaders of accepting redundancies combined with the view that 'a woman's natural place is in the home' has meant that women are usually the first to go when redundancies are declared. *Revolutionary Communist* gives historical examples particularly the experience of the two wars when women were drawn into industry on a massive scale, to show that the response of the leadership of the trade unions has at best been to make no serious attempt to organise women and to defend their interests and at worst to resist their employment altogether.

The problem remains: how are these obstacles to unity to be overcome? The RCG correctly reject an approach to unity through a conception of formal equality between men and women. This approach argues that women demand no more than any other branch of labour demands in relation to capital. This complete-

ly ignores the special position of women and leads to accepting that women should do night work, heavy work, etc. *because men do it*, and rejects all protective measures in relation to women. Such a position derives from a bourgeois conception of formal equality, and, as the RCG show, it has been the bourgeois feminists, historically, who have fought for such a position and the revolutionary Marxists who have fought against it by including demands in their programme for protective measures in relation to female employment which recognise the special needs of women. For example, the Bolshevik programme in 1917 called for the prohibition of night work for women and of all work injurious to women's health.

Although under socialism women will occupy the same position as men, Lenin pointed out:

"Here we are not, of course, speaking of making women the equal of men as far as productivity of labour, the quantity of labour, the length of the working day, labour conditions, etc. are concerned; we mean that women should not, unlike the man, be oppressed because of her economic position." (25)

The point that Lenin is making is that what revolutionaries fight for is the abolition of *social* inequality between women and men, which is the product of capitalism; they recognise that there remain special problems faced by women and make provision for this in their programme.

In recognising the special needs of women, and in taking control of the implementation of protective measures for women, the working class is asserting its own conception of democracy against bourgeois democracy which is purely formal and without content. Workers democracy recognises that social equality for women will be devoid of content if they are treated "the equal of men as far as productivity of labour, the length of the working day, labour conditions etc."

The task for revolutionaries, then, is to put forward a programme which can unite men and women around their common interests while making provision for the special needs of women. The RCG do not define their tasks in this manner. For them, "the immediate practical task for revolutionaries is to take a Marxist understanding of women's oppression into the labour movement". (26) This is pure idealism. No mention of party or programme, not even a single demand in this "practical task", simply the need for a Marxist understanding which, for the RCG, like Hegel's absolute idea, solves all practical problems in its unfolding.

A genuinely practical point (which the RCG could not be expected to make, since it is genuinely practical) is that working class men and *working class women* have more interests in common than they have interests which divide them. As Krupskaya said:

"That which unites working women with working men is stronger than that which divides them. They are united by their common lack of rights, their common needs, their common condition, which is struggle and their common goal..." (27)

Failure to make this distinction between women in general and working class women leads to an adaptation to feminism on the question of women's oppression. They see the forces which divide men and women on a sexual basis as more powerful than the forces which unite the working class men and women on a class basis. This leads them to put forward women's demands as a separate category from demands for the working class as a whole, in the belief that women can only struggle on the issue of their specific oppression.

The RCG explicitly reject any truck with feminism. They argue that a movement led from a feminist standpoint remains trapped within the framework of bourgeois society; they attack the feminist views of the IMG and ICL that only women have an interest in their liberation; they point out the relationship between feminism and the economism of the Working Women's Charter. Despite this they show that they themselves have not broken from feminism. They argue:

"Woman will only be convinced of the political unity between the struggle for their liberation and the struggle against capitalism when the working class movement begins to fight against the specific oppression to women." (28)

This view is a feminist one. It is a perspective for unity which is true in respect of petty-bourgeois feminists, but not in respect of working class women. Petty-bourgeois feminists, it is true, will only be won in mass numbers to the side of the working class at a fairly late stage, after the working class movement has established a consistent record of fighting against women's oppression. For working class women the obstacles to unity are not nearly so great precisely because they are members of the working class.

It is no accident that feminist movements overwhelmingly attract petty-bourgeois women and fail to make much of an impression with working class women. Feminism reflects the position of petty-bourgeois women in capitalist society who see their main problems in life

as lack of equal political and legal rights and sexual discrimination in job opportunities etc., in a male-dominated society. Although working class women face these problems as well they also face general class problems—wage-cutting, unemployment, cuts in social services etc.—in a way that petty-bourgeois women do not.

It is for this reason that in many cases working class women will be mobilised, initially, not on the question of their specific oppression but on general class issues. It does not follow of course that the revolutionary party should approach working class women simply as members of the working class, the same as men. Working class women face particular problems because of their sex, but in many cases they are most likely to confront the obstacles and problems they face as women through the experience of struggle; for example women in struggle inevitably confront the family as an obstacle to full involvement in political life.

We do not deny the importance of involving working class women in struggle on the issue of their specific oppression, but to argue that this is the only basis for their mobilisation is to adapt to feminism. Whatever the issue on which working class women are mobilised, the revolutionary party must at all times be sensitive to the connection between the social position of working class women as members of the working class and the specific problems they face as working class women.

The RCG's failure to understand feminism is shown most clearly in their assessment of the Women's Liberation Movement. Of this movement they say:

"The bourgeois character of the Women's Liberation Movement is not merely a result of its largely petit-bourgeois following but is expressed by its political stand which sees all men, not capitalism, as the perpetrators of female oppression. There is no basis, therefore, in the ideas of feminism for a common struggle with the working class to overthrow the capitalist system." (29)

The task which the RCG see as following from this, and which the left has abandoned, "is to ensure that a Marxist view of women's position in capitalist society was brought to this movement", (30) and that the "radical left has abandoned the leadership of the movement to the feminists". (31)

The RCG see its feminism as no more than a set of "wrong ideas", divorced from the activity of a particular class in capitalist society.

They completely fail to realise the connection between the "political stand" of the WLM and its

class basis, "its largely petit-bourgeois following". They see a connection but have no idea of its significance. The reason why the WLM has a feminist perspective is *not* primarily because it coincides with the appearances of capitalism, but because it expresses the aspirations of petit-bourgeois women under capitalism.

The political character of the WLM—a movement basing itself entirely on democratic demands which relate to women of all classes, leading inevitably to a cross-class alliance of all women who see the obstacle to liberation as men—is a spontaneous reflection of the position of petty-bourgeois women in capitalist society. This is not something that can be brushed aside as sociological; it is fundamental to a Marxist political assessment. A Marxist approach to a movement is neither simply: What is its programme? nor simply: What is its class basis? But rather, what is the relation of its programme to its class basis?

The answer in the case of the WLM is clear; it is a petty-bourgeois movement through and through. Although individual members of the WLM may be won to the revolutionary movement, the WLM itself, like other bourgeois democratic movements, will never be transformed politically.

Under no circumstances should the revolutionary movement merge with a bourgeois democratic movement. The position of attempting to gain the leadership of such a movement runs completely counter to the whole tradition of Marxism. As Lenin said:

"Of course the proletariat should not merge with the bourgeois democratic movement; Marx and Engels did not merge with the bourgeois democratic movement in Germany in 1848, we Bolsheviks did not merge with the bourgeois democratic movement in 1905." (32)

Although a bourgeois democratic movement *does* have a progressive side, the revolutionary party must maintain both an organisational and ideological separation from it. This does not rule out any intervention under the discipline of the party in such a movement, but the object is not to attempt to take over the leadership of the movement but to intervene on the basis of a programmatic alternative to separate any worthwhile forces from it.

#### CONCLUSION

What our critique shows is the RCG's utter inability to develop a concrete programmatic alternative to anybody. They, of course, would say, as they never stop telling every

one, that they distinguish themselves by their theory, their Marxist analysis. Seldom in the revolutionary movement can such tricks have been played with the word 'theory'. For it is not simply a matter of the RCG's analysis being cut short, of a failure to concretise theory in the form of programmatic demands; the RCG's theory itself falls far short of what is required for the working class. They go wrong from the beginning because their whole conception of how theory is developed and how it relates to practice is wrong. Indeed the RCG have a wrong conception of Marxist revolutionary theory.

Their approach to theory is static, contemplative and divorced from practical activity; in short it is undialectical. They see social and political forms and consciousness as the passive reflection of material forms. We have shown several examples of this in their analysis of women's oppression: their failure even to consider the social and political aspects of the family, their failure to see consciousness in relation to activity as shown by their identification of the reformism of the working class and the reformism of its bureaucratic leadership.



*The 1905 Russian Revolution*

Their idealist conception of how consciousness is changed is a direct consequence of their contemplative materialism which separates consciousness from activity. It is the only means, given their restricted framework, by which they can make theory an active force. Their failure to understand how theory and practice are united through the revolutionary programme and consciousness changed through the activity of the working class means that they are unable even to have a correct conception of a programme,

let alone a programme itself. Most of our critique is concerned to show that the RCG do not understand issues programmatically. It is important to emphasise that this is no accidental oversight by the RCG. It is their *method* itself, rather than a failure to develop the method, which prevents them understanding the programmatic significance of issues.

To compound their errors, the RCG in their blind arrogance (only the arrogance of a petty-bourgeois could reach such crass proportions) throw to the wind the one enduring asset that is at hand in the attempt "to retrieve a whole tradition of revolutionary politics" (33)—the past theoretical gains of the revolutionary Marxist movement, particularly the Transitional Programme.

Trotsky's Transitional Programme was the culmination of decades of revolutionary struggle; it expressed the continuity of Bolshevism in a wholly practical manner. True, the material basis of the Transitional Programme is an understanding of the social relations of production, but not simply an abstract understanding. What lies behind the programme is an understanding of what it means *in practice* to struggle

against the social relations of production under capitalism.

The Transitional Programme is still relevant today because it is a programme adequate not simply to the crisis of the 1930s, (although it obviously bears the marks of that period), but to the general crisis of the transitional or imperialist epoch. Its starting point is the material and political conditions of the imperialist epoch. The strategic orientation which flows from this understanding is relevant to today's crisis because it

is a particular form of the crisis of the imperialist epoch.

This does not diminish the importance of theory or absolve revolutionaries from the essential task of developing theory. If the Transitional Programme and its demands are to live and to be wholly adequate to today's conditions the programme has to be developed in the light of an understanding of the present crisis as it has emerged from the long post-war boom. The RCG are correct to emphasise the importance of understanding the present crisis in its relation to the reconstruction of capitalism after the Second World War and the ensuing post-war boom. But theory as a material force can only be developed in relation to the practical activity of the working class. This requires both theory and practice to be the collective experience of a party. The point at which theory and practice are unified, interacting and developing each other is the party's programme. In this way the programme is not an ossified catalogue of dogmas but a living, developing entity.

The RCG do not see their tasks in this way. For them, the Transitional Programme, as with other basic theoretical works by Lenin and Trotsky are in no way adequate for

today's conditions. With no practice in the working class, and no hope of ever having one, the RCG cast aside the theoretical gains already made and appoint themselves the task of developing theory and a programme from scratch. They write:

"We must demonstrate anew that the prerequisites of socialism have been established and that the problems facing the working class pose the necessity of revolution." (34)

In other words for the RCG the task is to discover anew a very starting point. Rather than stand on the shoulders of Lenin and Trotsky and raise themselves above their own pygmy proportions, the RCG, in their vain search for the roots of Marxist theory, dig themselves a hole in the ground.

Julia Kellett  
Steve Piercy

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Engels, *Marx Engels Selected Works in one volume*, p. 692.
2. Marx, Engels, *German Ideology*, p. 30.
3. *Revolutionary Communist* No. 5, p. 48.
4. Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*.
5. Marx, *The Holy Family*.
6. Lenin, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, p. 98.
7. Trotsky, *The Transitional Programme*, (Folrose Press Edn.) p. 41.

8. *ibid.* p. 11.
9. Engels, "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" in *MESW*, p. 501.
10. *Revolutionary Communist* No. 5, p. 15.
11. *ibid.* p. 16.
12. Engels, *op cit.* p. 501.
13. *ibid.* p. 501.
14. Trotsky, *Problems of Everyday Life*, (Pathfinder) p. 38.
15. *Revolutionary Communist* No. 5, p. 41.
16. *ibid.* p. 41.
17. Trotsky, *Revolution Betrayed*.
18. Trotsky, *Problems of Everyday Life*, p. 37.
19. Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme", *MESW*, p. 324.
20. *Revolutionary Communist* No. 5, p. 34.
21. *ibid.* p. 43.
22. *ibid.* p. 43.
23. *ibid.* p. 44.
24. *Revolutionary Communist* No. 5, p. 47.
25. Lenin, *On the Emancipation of Women*, p. 69.
26. *Revolutionary Communist* No. 5, p. 47.
27. Krupskaya, *Rabotnitsa* No. 1, 1914.
28. *Revolutionary Communist* No. 5, p. 47.
29. *ibid.* p. 42.
30. *ibid.* p. 42.
31. *ibid.* p. 42.
32. Lenin, cited in *Not by Politics Alone*, Ed. T. Deutcher, p. 112.
33. *Revolutionary Communist* No. 1, p. 2.
34. *Revolutionary Communist* No. 1, p. 6.

# LEFT IN THE LIMELIGHT

In this regular feature in 'Trotskyism Today' we will bring together material from a wide range of sources on the left internationally, to make available to our readers information and views they may well otherwise miss, or which we feel ought to be savoured anew. We invite readers to submit suggested material for this feature - with or without their own comments attached.

## Challenge accepted?

The dissolving by the International Marxist Group of their paper *Red Weekly* and the appearance in its place of *Socialist Challenge* has provoked a wide range of response - from adulation amongst certain amorphous sections of the left, to a sharp rebuke by *Workers Action* paper of the International Communist League, roundly denouncing *Socialist Challenge* and the IMG's call for 'left unity' as a "rotten bloc", with "more to do with bourgeois diplomacy than Marxism".

But perhaps the most penetrating comments have come on the letters page of *Socialist Challenge* itself, where all manner of 'left' wing forces have praised what they see as the merits of the paper. Many of these letters sound suspiciously satirical in tone, but are published straight-faced without comment by the *Socialist Challenge* editorial board, who apparently feel that the subordination of programme to "unity" is what the paper is all about.

*Socialist Challenge* No. 4 (30 June) carried the following example, headlined 'Non-aligned greetings':

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"We would like to welcome *Socialist Challenge* as an attempt to break out of the sectarian tradition of the British left.

Both of us were in revolutionary



*Socialist Challenge* editor, Tariq Ali

organisations in the late 60s and early 70s. We well remember how at that time the left endlessly discussed whether the USSR was state capitalist or a workers' state. We are glad to see that *Socialist Challenge* has broken out of this petty sectarian attitude and concentrates on one important fact: the USSR isn't what we want.(!)

We are also glad to see that in 'Our Policies' *Socialist Challenge* has recognised that such things as the 'sliding scale of wages', 'open the books', and so on, while on occasion being useful demands should not become static and a bar to unity on

the left.(!)

It is also pleasing to see that the International Marxist Group has broken from the stance of assuming that its complete programme is the only correct one - an attitude which excludes many socialists who have abandoned the right thinking of 1938. In this respect we feel that groups such as Big Flame and the Socialist Workers Party have much to offer *Socialist Challenge*. Even though both these groups reject Trotskyism in words (!) they have in practice shown themselves to be on the side of the class struggle and thus revolutionary Marxists.

We have not been very active in the last few years on the 'organised' left, being involved in a small way in the women's movement and gay liberation. With the emergence of *Socialist Challenge* we feel there is more incentive for non-aligned socialists like ourselves to become more involved and committed to spreading socialist views. HELEN REID and MIKE BAINES (Birmingham)"

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An unmannerly opposite view however appeared in No. 3 in which leading IMG member Valerie Coultas complained:

"Perhaps I'm being pedantic, but I was surprised to see that your four points in 'Our Policies' did not include the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and the setting up of a planned economy.

Won't readers of *Socialist Challenge* remain a little confused if this point is not made absolutely explicit?"

## Making the lefts fight

When WSL founder members were bureaucratically expelled from the Workers Revolutionary Party in December 1974 one of the 'crimes' with which they were indicted was that they were "soft on reformism".

The pretext for this charge by the WRP leadership was that in the opposition document written by Alan Thornett within the WRP was a call for the Party to place demands on 'left' Labour MPs in order to expose their refusal to fight the Wilson government. Thornett pointed to the successful "Make the Lefts Fight" campaign waged by the WRP's forerunner the SLL in the 1960s, and stressed the crude and sectarian manner in which the WRP

had descended to simply denouncing all social democrats and union leaders, falsely, as 'corporatists'.

This meant the WRP was unable to fight the illusions many workers retain as to the role of the 'lefts'. These criticisms were ruthlessly suppressed by the Healy leadership, and WRP policy lurched even further towards sectarianism with the abstract demand to "Bring down the Labour Government" even before the Lib-Lab coalition deal was hatched this year.

But last month's Parliamentary vote by two 'left' Labour MPs (Wise and Rooker) against the government obviously stirred some distant memories on the editorial board of the WRP's daily paper *News Line*. They broke for a moment from this ritual formula for each and every social democrat, to write a surprisingly apt *What We Think* (17 June 1977):

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"Chancellor Denis Healey yesterday delivered a bullying speech attacking two Labour MPs, Mrs Audrey Wise and Jeff Rooker, both from the Midlands. He said that he did not think 'the movement' would ever forgive them for voting against the Finance Bill on Tuesday night.

What 'movement' is he referring to? The Movement of Bankers, Fiddlers and Tax Evaders (BFTE)? Or the Movement of Social Democratic Politicians in the Service of the International Monetary Fund (SDPSIMF)?

If he means the labour movement, then it is an affront to every Labour supporter and trade unionist. For, on the contrary, Wise and Rooker deserve full support for their vote against the Budget strategy of the Lib-Lab coalition. If we have any recriminations with them (and we have many), it is that they didn't adopt this policy a long time ago.

They should keep it up. And the Benn-ites and all the 'Tribune'-ites should join them at the earliest call of the division bell.

The next big opportunity comes next week when Premier Callaghan presents the Bill for Direct Elections to the European Parliament. This is neither 'European' nor a 'parliament'. It is a caucus for the multinational corporations, the banks and NATO.

The Lib-Lab Bill further ties Britain to the capitalist Common Market, i.e. roaring prices, currency anarchy, higher unemployment.

Labour MPs are duty-bound to vote against this reactionary, anti-working class Bill and smash the pact with the Liberals.

This monstrous thing called a

government is no longer any use to man or beast. Yesterday it lost an important clause in the Water Bill! Its future cannot be left in the hands of parliamentarians. The Liberals would like to pull out when they like to force an election on terms favourable to the capitalist enemy.

This is what happened in Australia in November 1975 in the Canberra coup, and the Tories stormed to their biggest ever victory over the Labour Party headed by Gough Whitlam.

The initiative to force this government out of office rests with the working class. The mass arrests at Grunwicks in north London shows what kind of a 'Labour' government this is.

The time to mobilise is now. The issues are clear: against Phase Three, against the cuts, against rising prices, against unemployment, and in defence of basic trade union rights."

## Just critique of Mandel

One magazine many readers will not easily encounter is a new publication entitled *International Correspondence*, which appeared in our letter box a few weeks ago.

Inside the cover the magazine proclaims that it is: "Published in English for the Organising Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International by its British Sections." (sic!)

While we know very little of the whereabouts or activity of the OCRFI's "British Sections" we do know that its principal force internationally is the French OCI, led by Pierre Lambert.

The OCI was, until 1971, united in the International Committee of the Fourth International with the British Socialist Labour League (now Workers Revolutionary Party) led by Gerry Healy.

The "Special" May edition of *International Correspondence* carries material related to the discussion leading up to the forthcoming World Congress of the "United" Secretariat of the Fourth International. This takes the form of reprinting Ernest Mandel's 25 *Theses on World Revolution*, together with a lengthy critique of these *Theses* by the OCI's Stephane Just.

Just makes a large number of points against Mandel — several of which are wrongly conceived or inadequate. But the OCI's early history in defending "orthodox Trotskyism" against revisionist conceptions (which turned away from the responsibility of Trotskyists to give independent leadership



WRP leader Healy

to the working class) enables Just to begin his polemic by attacking the central weakness of Mandel's *Theses*:

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"Comrade E. Mandel writes:

'The fact that the objective conditions for world socialism have existed at least since 1914, if not since 1905, does not lead to an automatic or inevitable victory for world socialism, essentially because of the central role played by the subjective factor in the achievement of socialist revolution.'

If we bear in mind the first sentence of Comrade Mandel's First



Lambert

Thesis quoted above we can see that the methods used at the beginning of the Transitional Programme and those used at the beginning of the

"Theses on the world Revolution" are comparable. Has Comrade Mandel deliberately proceeded in this way in order that the plan of the theses could be directly related to the foundation programme of the Fourth International? One would like to think so, as it is an excellent way to help the discussion.

This permits several differences to be noted. Mandel writes that the socialist revolution and the construction of socialism "require a conscious effort by the toiling masses" (end of 2nd sentence, Thesis 1). Thesis 2 continues: "The crisis of humanity is the crisis of revolutionary leadership (and of class consciousness) of the proletariat" (3rd sentence, Thesis 2).

We have just seen that the Transitional Programme only says:

'The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership of the proletariat.'

The four additional words of Mandel must have for him a considerable importance, as he feels obliged to integrate them into the principal proposition of the founding programme of the Fourth International. More especially as this "concept" runs like a red thread through the 25 Theses. Thus:

'In the final analysis, the temporary restabilisation of capital after 1923, the victory of Stalinism in Russia, the emergence of fascism in Europe (and semi-fascism in Japan at the end of the 1930s), the long decline in the level of working class consciousness, and the outcome of the Second World War, with all its horrors (from Auschwitz to Hiroshima) are the result of the long series of defeats for the international revolution that occurred between 1923 and 1943 (although this series of defeats was of course interrupted by partial, geographically limited upsurges).' (Last sentence of Thesis 4.)

Granted, what is written here is that "the long decline of the level of consciousness of the proletariat" is the result of the defeats incurred by the international revolution between 1923 and 1943. But the same thing can be said of the revolutionary leaderships; the crisis in the revolutionary leaderships has, to a large extent resulted from the defeats suffered by the proletariat. It is none the less a determining factor. It is a prime cause of the crisis of humanity, that is to say of new defeats of the proletariat, of the delay in the victory of the world proletarian revolution. Furthermore, Comrade Mandel, by integrating his concept into Trotsky's fundamental proposition clearly shows that he attributes the same importance and the same role to it as he does to Trotsky's

proposition. Comrade E. Mandel shows on several occasions that it should be understood in this way. Thesis II begins with this sentence:

'The basic subjective difficulty in achieving a victorious socialist revolution in West Europe, a difficulty resulting from the whole past history of the labour movement, lies in the deep reformist and semi-reformist illusions of broad toiling masses, in other words the widespread identification of their own democratic freedoms with the institutions of the bourgeois democratic state.'

The illusions of the masses cannot be denied. But what does he mean by the phrase, "the low level of consciousness of the masses"? Can one place this "low level" on the same plane as the crisis of the "revolutionary leadership"? These questions are worth asking. If this were true it would be necessary to draw the conclusion that the masses are "uncon-



Mandel

sciously" responsible, obviously somehow objective, for the defeats of the proletarian revolution in the world.

Illusions of the masses are no new thing. They are more or less important, deep and durable. They depend on various factors which vary according to the country, the moments in time, the historical experience, the strength and implantation of the traditional organisations, the traditional working class parties. But they exist at all epochs and in all countries. They must be taken into account. They cannot be put on the same level as "the crisis of the revolutionary leadership to which the crisis of humanity is reduced".

Let us examine the matter in a concrete fashion. Were not the hundreds of thousands of workers who followed the priest Gapon in procession, that bloody Sunday in 1905, bearing a petition to the Czar, proof of the illusions in both the Czar and the priest Gapon, his methods and policies? Is it not as

Comrade Mandel writes, the obvious expression of a "(very) low level of the consciousness of the masses"? Looked at from a certain point of view, it is a fact. Yet, they were writing the first page of the Russian revolution, to which 1905 was the prologue. These same men, the selfsame proletariat built the first soviets on the initiative of the social democrat militants (mensheviks and bolsheviks) and other revolutionary organisations. They built the first Petrograd soviet. Their class movement led them, despite and through their illusions to establish the organs of their class unity, the "parliament", their revolutionary committees, the organs of their future power, of the dictatorship of the proletariat....."

"The defeat of the German revolution in 1918 as in 1923 has nothing whatever to do with the illusions of the masses, and the "low level of class consciousness" of the German proletariat. The cause was the absence of a revolutionary leadership, which the German CP had been unable to assume. As Trotsky explains, a correct policy for the party which stands on the terrain of the proletarian revolution does not guarantee victory in every case, but the existence of the Marxist party applying a correct policy, 'forming a revolutionary leadership and freeing the masses from their illusions in the course of the class struggle and the revolution, is an indispensable condition for the victory of the revolution.

The same lesson emerges from the Hungarian revolution of 1919, from the revolutionary crisis in Austria, Italy and elsewhere prior to 1923. It was not the "Parliamentary, reformist or semi-reformist illusions" that brought the revolution or revolutionary crises to defeat, but the political action of social democracy and the political immaturity of the CP's, which were not up to the tasks of building a revolutionary leadership, or the realisation of those tasks which are incumbent on a revolutionary leadership.

Comrade E. Mandel goes on to specify: for him "the long decline in the level of consciousness of the working class" begins in 1923 and accentuates progressively as the proletariat suffers cumulative defeats. This assertion gives us food for thought.

In what way was the "level of consciousness" of the German proletariat lower in 1933 than in 1918 or 1923? To tell the truth, it is the high level of consciousness of the German proletariat in the years preceding 1933 and in the months following the coming to power of the

Nazis in January 1933 that is surprising.

Despite the immense machine of repression of the Nazis, the working class stood behind its parties, social democracy and the German CP, waiting for the leaders of their parties to lead them, and to organise the fight against Nazism. Even after the coming to power of Hitler, while terrible repressions and provocations were unleashed, at the elections of March 1933, in spite of the extraordinary falsifications, the proletariat voted massively in favour of the SPD and CPD.

And after 1933, is it necessary to recall the heroism of the Viennese proletariat in February 1934, fighting, guns in hand against Dollfuss's troops and defending foot by foot their neighbourhoods? Only a deep class consciousness could sustain such heroism. And finally did the French and the Spanish proletariats show signs of a "low level of class consciousness" between 1934 and 1938 — or on the contrary — of a very high level of consciousness? Without going into detail we can say: the French working class imposed the Workers United Front on the SP and CP of France in February 1934, as well as on the CGT and CGTU; from the Asturian insurrection to the Spanish revolution in 1936/38 the Spanish proletariat showed proof of a fantastic class consciousness, and how fragile and easily overcome its "reformist or semi-reformist illusions". Even in the 1936 elections, the French working class did not vote "Popular Front" but for its parties. The Radical Party suffered a resounding defeat at the first round, and it was saved from disaster only by the withdrawal in the 2nd round, of SP and CP candidates in a number of constituencies; the SP and especially the CP of France on the other hand massively increased their vote and the number of delegates elected....."

"The "low level of consciousness", or the "decay of the level of working class consciousness", or yet the reformist or semi-reformist illusions of the masses", are not responsible for the defeats of the proletariat before World War II. On the contrary, the proletariat showed a tenacity, a capacity, a revolutionary will, which are incredible. The reformist leaderships at first, and then these leaderships and the Stalinist leaderships together, have misled the struggles of the proletariat, blunting their revolutionary edge. These are the leaderships which have opposed to the revolutionary tendencies of the proletariat, the reformist illusions and semi-reformist

illusions, which have spread and propagated them. To draw this balance is not now necessary — from the parliamentary cretinism of the Social democracy, the ultra-leftism of the CP's ending in Popular Frontism — it is well known; the "non-maturity" of the masses of which Trotsky spoke in 1938 resulted from these policies and from nowhere else.

The failure to assign the causes and responsibilities of the defeats, to put on the same plane the crisis of the revolutionary leadership and "the consciousness of the masses" which, seen in this light, is no more than a lifeless abstraction, opening the door to dangerous conclusions —

the masses are spontaneously

reformist, even Stalinist!  
the masses have the leadership which they deserve!  
the masses carry therefore the responsibility for their defeat!  
it is necessary to "revolutionise" them ideologically, or by exemplary acts, or both together!

These conclusions derive from each other. If the masses have reformist illusions, it would mean that the reformist parties and the Stalinist parties (which some call reformist) are the parties which suit them. They have the leadership which they deserve, and in consequence carry the responsibility for their defeats of which the main cause lies in their illusions."

## Boycottist case

During and immediately after the June elections in Spain the International Marxist Group carried extensive material on the campaign waged by an electoral front including the Liga Comunista Revolucionaria (LCR), one of the Spanish groups adhering to the 'United' Secretariat of the Fourth International.

They were rather more reticent about the very different campaign waged by another group also related to the USFI — the Communist League (LC). The LC fought consistently for a boycott of the June elections, and in doing so, along with a number of other groups, ran the gauntlet of police repression reserved specifically for boycottists.

The Workers Socialist League's analysis of the Elections has been carried in detail in two whole page articles in *Socialist Press*. We will not repeat here our argument for a boycott position.

Instead we thought readers would be interested in one of the campaign leaflets distributed by the boycottists during the election.

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Communist League (LC), Organisation of the Fourth International (OCI), CNT (the anarchist trade union), EMAS and LAIA (two organisations of the Basque left) in Alava, one of the four provinces of Euskadi.

### ALERT AGAINST THE ELECTORAL FRAUD

To the people of Alava:

Our people have the right to exercise their freedoms because that right has been won with enormous and heroic sacrifices. For this reason the people must give no support to political operations which attempt to avoid their demands, which try to manipulate their wish to be free,

which are a trick designed to oppose their aspirations.

The Suarez government has called a general election. It is an election whose framework has been agreed with the most purely reactionary section of Francoism (the Popular Alliance); an election before which the so-called "democratic opposition" has shamefully backed down; an election which places extreme limits on freedom of expression and which scandalously sabotages the demand for amnesty and the action of the parties and organisations of the working class etc...; an election in short which guarantees a parliament in whose corridors the urgent demands of the workers are smashed and converted into anti-working class laws, and to which the youth, the poor peasantry and those fighting for women's rights will have no access.

It is a parliament which sets up in advance an impassable and oppressive barrier against the national rights of the Basque people and all the other nationalities. It is a parliament which is trying in the name of "democracy" to protect, through all the repressive institutions the rule of the repressive Francoist oligarchy.

In the name of freedom, amnesty and all our social and political rights

**DON'T VOTE  
BOYCOTT THE FRAUDULENT  
ELECTIONS**

### LETTERS

We welcome letters from readers, particularly on points arising from this magazine. Letters should be as brief as possible. Write to:

TROTSKYISM TODAY,  
31, Dartmouth Park Hill,  
London NW5 1HR.



