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Stalinist tanks liberate Da Nang from imperialism March 1975



Stalinist tanks enforce Kremlin bureaucratic control of Czechoslovakia, 1968

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL - PROBLEMS AND TASKS

PART ONE

This document, adopted at the Founding Conference of the WSL on the 19th October, is intended to form the basis of a discussion within the world Trotskyist movement on the theoretical problems and tasks which need to be confronted in rebuilding the Fourth International. By beginning an analysis of the history of the post-war Trotskyist movement, and centrally, of the problems posed by the development of post-war Stalinism, the document attempts to focus discussion on some of the fundamental questions of method and principle which in the view of the WSL have to be clarified before a firm basis can be established for a reconstructed International.

INTRODUCTION

Unlike all previous revolutionary classes the working class is necessarily a self-conscious class. This is why the opening sentence of the Transitional Programme - 'The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat' - is as objective and essential now as it was at the founding conference of the FI in 1938. As the unfolding of the Portuguese revolution - prelude and catalyst to revolutionary struggles in the whole of Europe - shows, the essential obstacle to the proletarian revolution is not any 'weakness' of the working class as a material force within history, but the grip of treacherous and cowardly political leadership upon it.

The revolution of the working class is different from all previous social revolutions in this: that its purpose is not to establish a new form of class society and new forms for the exploitation of one class by another, but to end class society once and for all, setting mankind free to consciously and collectively control its activity.

The working class revolution, therefore, has no need to disguise its aims in political and ideological fictions, religious or 'democratic' formulae, such as those of the great bourgeois revolutions, which pretend to stand above classes and unite society. On the contrary such ideas, and the politics which they express, form the greatest brake upon the political development of the international working class and upon the independence and resolution of its leadership, the revolutionary party.

NECESSITIES

Unity, independence and scientific self-consciousness, these are the necessities of the international revolutionary movement of the working class. Hand-in-hand with them

must go the bitterest hostility to all forms of class-compromise, of 'socialism in one country', of Popular Frontism, of 'peaceful co-existence' between class and class.

This standpoint requires the severest struggle within the working class movement itself for the material organ of revolutionary consciousness, the revolutionary party. This standpoint lies at the basis of the Transitional Programme of the FI, drafted to express the highest point in the historical experience of the world working class, and to expound clearly to the advanced sections of workers the historical need for a new revolutionary international, and for a break with the counter-revolutionary policies of Stalinism.

It is not by chance that the nature and method of the Transitional Programme has now been thrown into question within the International Committee. The forces driving on the discussion and factional struggle are material ones. They are those of the international working class and other oppressed classes on the offensive in Europe, in the Middle East, in Indochina, in the United States itself - in fact in every continent of the globe.

CRISIS

The offensive of the working class is itself a response to the economic crisis of the imperialist system, in which the productive forces stagnate, the accumulation of capital is held back and disrupted. Deeper and deeper splits are forced open in the complex of arrangements - monetary and trade agreements, diplomatic and military alliances, coalitions and other working agreements with 'socialist' leaderships - which were built up during the post-war boom.

The economic crisis propels imperialism into worldwide attacks upon the working class, attempting to weaken and crush the workers and so create the political conditions and regimes necessary to restore profitability to the great monopolies and banks, and to the national capitals themselves.

The global framework for this is the sharpening competition between national capitals now polarised in the three main capitalist blocs of Western Europe, Japan and the USA. From the necessity to increase productivity and to secure markets and raw material sources in a situation of intensifying international competition the bourgeoisie is driven to increase its attack on the working class internationally and increase the threat of imperialist war.

But the present period differs from the thirties in that the working class enters the struggle internationally from a position of strength. The savage defeats inflicted on the Chilean workers must be seen in the context of a movement of the working class which, on a world scale, presses forward undefeated.

The determination of the USA to protect, in the Chilean coup, its domination of the Latin American continent, to secure its markets and raw materials, in a situation of gathering economic crisis only succeeded in imposing the military junta on the Chilean workers - as a

result of the popular front demagoguery of the Stalinists, who, at every step, disarmed the working class and refused to consolidate workers' power in the face of American imperialism and its agents in the Chilean state machine.

Chile, however, has to be seen in the context of the victories in Indochina, the overthrow of the fascist regime in Portugal, the massive movements of the French and Italian workers in 1968-69. The French general strike in 1968 showed the undiminished revolutionary strength of the European working class. What began as a defensive action against inflation rapidly posed the question of state power. The continuation of bourgeois rule was only secured through the deliberate betrayals of the CP - indicating clearly the unaltered character of Stalinism.

PORTUGAL

In Portugal - enfeebled and buffeted by brutal colonial wars on three fronts - fascism proved unable to hold back the working class and continue to impose a stable state structure. Portugal acts as the ante-chamber to the Spanish and European revolutions, demonstrating the impossibility of any 'smooth return' to bourgeois parliamentary democracy (a political regime which in any case never had better than a shaky presence in Portugal).

Portugal underlines the permanent nature of the international revolution, the inseparability of the struggle for democratic rights from that for working class power over the state and the economy. And in doing so - in a situation where the profitability of Portuguese native capital can only be restored through a massive defeat of the working class by the right - it places on the agenda all the questions of political leadership facing the European working class.

In the workers' states the distinct tasks of the political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy are posed. But the struggles are, fundamentally, one. The acute crisis of the Stalinist bureaucracies in the capitalist states both reflects and aggravates the antagonism between the class and national aspirations of the workers in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Germany and the Soviet Union itself.

At the same time the first forms taken by the political revolution - as in Czechoslovakia in 1968 - draw strength and momentum from the offensive of the proletariat under capitalism. The invasion of Prague was, in this sense, the necessary sequel to Stalinism's betrayal of the French working class in 1968.

EXCEPTION

Yet, on a world scale, defeats such as that in Chile are the exception, not the rule. Against Chile must be set the debacle of Kissinger and Zionist diplomacy, unable to contain the revolutionary movements in the Middle East, misled though they are by bourgeois nationalists.

And above all against Chile must be set the victories in Indochina against the US puppet regimes, producing within a matter of weeks - radically changed political alignments throughout the states of South East Asia. In Vietnam and Cambodia the inability of the US ruling class to continue support for Thieu and Lon Nol reflected the economic, political and military paralysis of the most powerful capitalist class in the world. Their inability to retrieve the situation in South East Asia reflected also the gathering social crisis within the USA itself.

In February, 300,000 workers, led by UAW delegations from Detroit, (a fact buried by the majority of the world press), marched in Washington against unemployment. The fact that Democratic politicians placed themselves at the head of the demonstration indicates not their strength but their weakness. Watergate was only the opener in a series



Lenin addresses the 3rd Congress of the Communist International formed in 1919 to provide revolutionary leadership for the international working class

of scandals and revelations, almost unthinkable five years ago, which have gone right into the entrails of the most powerful capitalist state machine on earth, and its world-wide operations through the CIA and sister organisations.

While virtually every class struggle in the world comes home to roost in Washington, the US capitalist politicians are more deeply divided among themselves and mutually suspicious than ever before in the post-war period; and above all afraid of the independent movement of the American working class, both the organised workers and the youth and the blacks, on whom unemployment falls most savagely. The inability of US imperialism to hold even its own working class within capitalist political limits provides the conditions for building a party in the US with unprecedented strength within the working class itself.

OFFENSIVE

It is this world-wide offensive of the workers which forms the material basis of the discussion and splits on the meaning and method of the Transitional Programme and the struggle to build the Fourth International which have recently erupted within the International Committee. Within this basis defeats such as Chile are the exception not the rule. This offensive explains why, almost from the word go, Pinochet and the Chilean junta have been under pressure from the US and the other imperialist powers to present as 'respectable' a face as possible to the world.



Chile: right wing demonstrate against Allende's Popular Unity government.

Faced with a working class which is, on a world scale, undefeated, Kissinger, Franco and the Kremlin are at one in their desire to disguise the essential lessons of Chile - the bankrupt and lethal nature of Popular Front politics and the treacherous role of Stalinism.

The offensive of the working class is the essential and specific element for understanding the split in the WRP. At the point where one of the strongest sections of the WRP, and the only one with solid roots and work within the trade unions, faced the need to carry a fight for revolutionary programme into a major section of the working class, they came up against the accumulated limits, weaknesses and conservatism within the IC and the WRP. These limits and this conservatism, which within a space of months openly revealed themselves in the most blatant bureaucratism and as an obstacle to the building of a British section actually rooted in the working class, were themselves the product of a complex series of struggles, splits, theoretical and practical battles within the world Trotskyist movement since the Second World War.

For the most part the post-war development of the world movement took place in isolation from the masses, and from experience of the cadre in revolutionary struggles. Thus the IC founded in 1953 in opposition to Pablo's attempt to liquidate the cadres of the FI into the Stalinist parties, was until recently isolated from the mass movement, obliged to use the Transitional Programme mainly as a propaganda instrument, cut off from any decisive leadership or influence within the mass movement.

The series of struggles, by and within the IC, to defend the Transitional Programme, to establish and develop the independence of the party, and to develop the world-view of Marxism, with its insistence on the antagonistic and crisis-ridden nature of imperialism, therefore had in general an abstract and apparently 'theoretical' character. They involved relatively few comrades, only a handful of whom had any lengthy experience as members of a Trotskyist organisation. They were unable, with rare exceptions, to bring the 'abstract' issues over which they struggled and split, into living practice within the body of the working class. This isolation of the movement, the outcome of conditions beyond its control, made it a material impossibility to build an International which was truly democratic and centralist, with national sections effectively struggling for the leadership of the working class, and politically directed by a tested, experienced and stable international centre which they themselves had produced and elected. These conditions at the same time made almost impossible an objective study of the post-war history of the world movement, and of the main developments which had taken place in class relations on a world scale.

INFLUENCE

Worse, these conditions strengthened all those tendencies within the world movement which reflected the indirect influence of the enemy class and the bureaucracy: the resort to 'timeless' generalities on the nature of imperialism which submerged the concrete situation and tasks of the sections, initiatives towards the bureaucracy which sometimes veered towards opportunism, the tendency towards clique politics, individual alliances and bureaucratism, theoretical instability and one-sidedness, coupled with a propaganda orientation to most political activities, and the effective operation of the IC (the worse, because only tacitly agreed) as a 'federation', acting on the international stage only by agreement between the leaderships of the national sections, and without bringing the membership of the sections into the discussion on international differences.

CHANGED

But these conditions have now changed. The objective situation is now ripe for building sections of the FI in many countries, for renewing the theoretical equipment of Trotskyism, and for taking up the study of the movement in the post-war period, to draw from it and weld together all its strengths, and to break from its ossification and weaknesses. This task is a material one. It cannot be achieved in an orderly or 'rational' way.

In particular the development of national cadres, struggling for existence and leadership within their own sections of the international working class, cannot await the clarification of all theoretical questions, or the existence of even a rudimentary international centre based on the struggle for the continuity of Trotskyism. This is no accidental matter. It expresses the fact that an effective, stable and democratic International can only be built on the basis of a theoretical rearming of the Trotskyist move-

ment, and with human, material and financial resources which can only be provided by the development of national sections.

This theoretical rearming can itself only take place through carrying the existing theoretical and programmatic strengths of Trotskyism into the body of the working class, in the building of the national sections, and testing the 'theoretical' positions developed, in the practice of the class struggle itself.

In confronting this task the WSL occupies a crucially important position. It has been born from a brief, but extremely rich, struggle against the liquidationism, sectarianism and bureaucratic methods of the WRP leadership. This struggle was only possible because the WRP opposition was based on experienced roots, narrow but nonetheless real and tempered, within the organised working class. And the WSL, in breaking from the WRP, expresses the practical and theoretical offensive of the international working class.

NEGLECTED

That is why we are able and determined to confront and answer the essential questions of post-war developments and the history of the Trotskyist movement which for decades were neglected or buried within the IC. We shall not, initially, be able to resolve or even recognise all the essential problems. But we possess the material and theoretical basis to look the world in the eye.

This document, adopted by the Founding Conference of the WSL, on October 18th - 19th, 1975, is intended to form the basis for discussions on an international level both with political groupings and with individuals, as an initial step towards agreement on perspectives for the rebuilding of the Fourth International as the World Party of the Proletarian Revolution.

It has therefore, a wholly *practical* purpose, and it takes up theoretical questions only insofar as they appear necessary to this. For this reason it is necessary for the introduction to spell out in slightly more detail the objectives and methods of the document, and the discussion which it is intended to open.

The political task facing us in this discussion is not to *describe* but actively to *reconstruct* the continuity of Trotskyism. This means starting from the concrete problems of building and developing the WSL, of completing the break with the methods of the WRP leadership, and of carrying the methods of the Transitional Programme into the most advanced layers of the British working class. But this itself requires a study of the main developments and turning-points in the history of the FI since the war.

This study is no contemplation: it is the study of our own strengths and weaknesses. It will appear, in large part, as the story of small, isolated cadres arguing and splitting over events on which they had little or no direct influence, seeking a road to the working class from which historical development itself isolated them, and engaged sometimes in Byzantine manoeuvres against one another.

CONTINUITY

But what gives unity and continuity to this struggle is the theoretical basis of Trotskyism: the only political tendency in the world which fights for the leadership of the working class as a revolutionary force, and which bases itself upon a materialist, class analysis of the main counter-revolutionary force within the world workers' movement - Stalinism. This is what makes Trotskyism - and no other political tendency - the continuity of Marxism in our epoch. This is why the betrayal of the German working class to Hitler by the Stalinists represented a turning point for Trotsky, and why from it he began the struggle to establish a new, revolutionary international - the Fourth International.

The German defeat provided living proof, visible to the most advanced sections of workers internationally, that Stalinism and the degenerated Third International had gone over definitively to class-collaboration and counter-revolution. Our task is to consciously base ourselves on, and develop, the theoretical basis from which the struggle for the FI began.

At the same time this discussion must recognise that the majority of comrades within the WSL (and internationally) are not familiar with even the main outlines of the post-war history of the FI. (The recent publication of past documents and correspondence by the SWP and WRP ease the problem slightly, but neither is intended to open a living discussion on the matter, and both are - to say the least - extremely partial.)

The main part of this document, *The Fourth International 1944-75*, therefore has the task of outlining this history in an intelligible way, and it therefore takes the form of a more or less chronological narrative. At each of the critical points of development, the document draws a 'balance sheet' of the essential gains and retreats, not from the standpoint of 'passing judgment' in retrospect, but in order to extract every possible strength from the history of the movement.

The need for intelligibility also dictates the basic form of the account. In general, the positions and activities of



France May-June 1968 - showed undiminished strength of European working class

the sections and tendencies involved are summarised, rather than quoted as extracts from the original documents. Most essential quotations are referred in footnotes, together with references to the documents in their most accessible form of publication. The document ends with *Conclusions*.

This section has the main purpose of setting out the elements of our political basis for international discussion towards the building of the Fourth International. It also sets out the political and organisational initiatives which the WSL will take to promote discussion on this political basis in the world movement. The document, therefore, necessarily takes an outline position on the present state of world politics and the main tasks of Trotskyism within this. It is important that the discussion focus on this overall assessment and the international perspectives flowing from it, rather than on the details of organisational proposals internationally. Once there is agreement on the essential content of our political perspectives, a good deal of flexibility will be both necessary and possible in carrying the discussion into the world movement.

The most important political element is Stalinism - the main vehicle for bourgeois ideology and the strangulation of revolutionary movements on a world scale. As the account shows, the main crises of the FI since the Second World War have turned, often in an explicit way, on this question. This reflects the fact that the struggle of Trotskyism for leadership within the international labour movement is, first and foremost, a struggle against Stalinism and its influence.

PARASITIC

Stalinism is a new form of bureaucracy within the labour movement, parasitic upon the conquest of state power by the working class. On a world scale it reflects and reinforces the limitation and betrayal of the struggle to take and hold on to state power. The Stalinist bureaucracy, which usurped the Soviet working class in the name of 'socialism in one country', is the material, social crystallisation of class-compromise on a world scale. This was, and remains, the central plank in the theoretical equipment of Trotskyism.

But world Stalinism has undergone enormous changes since the foundation of the FI. Under Stalinist regimes capitalist social relations have been overthrown in Eastern Europe, mainland China and other countries of South East Asia. This was a development not anticipated by Trotsky before his assassination in 1940. Trotsky foresaw that the war would result either in the destruction of the workers' state in the Soviet Union (and, with that, of the bureaucratic caste in the form in which it had grown up),

power under extremely favourable conditions. Stalinism was the key force in decapitating these struggles. In France and Italy Stalin's political servants formed the essential props of coalitions with the 'anti-fascist' bourgeois politicians and the reformists, and in Greece Stalin abandoned the Communist-led resistance fighters to the mercies of the monarchists, backed by the US and British Armies.

PRECONDITION

The precondition of the social overturns in Eastern Europe therefore, was the destruction of the revolution in Western and Southern Europe, and the wholly deliberate collaboration of Stalin with Roosevelt, Churchill and Truman in restoring bourgeois rule where it was in a state of collapse. And the later social overturns in Eastern Europe, when they were carried out, were not at all part of a coherent Stalinist strategy, but an empirical response to the Cold War, coupled with the impossibility of maintaining stable military and political control in Eastern Europe without abolishing capitalist property relations and the coalitions which defended them.

In fact, in an uneven and ad hoc way, Stalin turned directly from the reconstruction of bourgeois states in Eastern Europe - as he had promised the imperialist powers at Yalta and Potsdam - to the eradication of bourgeois property and parties.

These complex developments between the end of the war and the early 1950's demanded - and still demand - of the Trotskyist movement a major theoretical development. What was essentially new in the contours of world Stalinism, and how could the movement fight for independent parties which could wrest the political leadership from Stalinism and reformism? Under conditions of isolation from the masses, and deprived by Stalin's assassin of Trotsky's theoretical leadership, this challenge was not easy to meet or even, sometimes, to recognise.

The weaknesses of the movement in face of the new conditions express themselves in two main forms. On the one hand there was a tendency to succumb to impressions of the events in Eastern Europe and, later, in China and Asia, and to liquidate the basis of Trotskyism by attributing to Stalinism a new revolutionary role.

This tendency erupted, in 1952-53, in Michel Pablo's attempt to liquidate the Trotskyist sections themselves into the Stalinist parties, and it continues into our own time in the tail-ending and opportunism of the Pabloite organisations in relation to Stalinism. If Pablo's attempt had succeeded, there would be no Trotskyist movement today.

The weakness of the movement expressed itself also



Stalin toasts Churchill in Moscow 1944, one of the meetings to divide Europe into peaceful 'spheres of influence'.

and most ramshackle empiricism. A recent example from the British state capitalists demonstrates the point. In part one of the *History of the International Socialists*, leading IS member Ian Birchall poses the question as follows:

Up to his death Trotsky had always argued that Russia, despite Stalin's crimes, remained a workers' state, though a degenerate one; he rejected the view that Russia had reverted to capitalism, or that a new form of class society had grown up there. By the late forties, however, a new element entered the debate. Following the great carve-up of the world at the end of the Second World War, Russia had taken over a number of countries in Eastern Europe and established regimes there which were becoming more or less identical to the set-up in Russia. The question that arose was - were these two workers' states? If not, how come they seemed to function in exactly the same way as Russia? If they were, then didn't that mean you could have a workers' state without a workers' revolution and without an independent revolutionary party?

It was in this situation that a grouping within the British Trotskyist movement developed the theory that Russia, and the East European states were 'state capitalist'. The main theoretical elaboration was the work of Tony Cliff. (*International Socialism* March 1975, pp. 16-17)

The logic of this position, as we well know, is that the working class is not the fundamental revolutionary class of modern society, and that the struggle for a revolutionary party of the working class is premature by an entire historical epoch. The conclusion of this logic - a rejection of the basis of everything Marx, Lenin and Trotsky fought for - is every day practically expressed in the existence and activity of IS.

Ironically, it is only the openly counter-revolutionary role of Stalinism that prevents the IS leadership giving explicit theoretical expression to this logic and converting themselves into a 'jacobin' faction at the flank of the new Stalinist 'ruling class'.

EMPIRICISM

But what is most striking about Birchall's passage is his crass empiricism, its 'worship of the accomplished fact' and its unswerving adhesion to formal logic. In fairness to the Pabloites it should be said that they have seldom - if ever - stooped to such a theoretical level. This reflects, naturally, not any inherent theoretical strength of the Pabloites - they have always been over-ready to curtsy in the direction of the 'facts' - but on the contrary, the fact that they have remained formally and verbally tied to the fundamental Trotskyist analysis of Stalinism as a bureaucratic caste, not a new class within world history.

Let us look again at Birchall's logic. It goes as follows: 'The Stalinists have abolished capitalist social relations in Eastern Europe. Only a new ruling class can overthrow a given set of property relations. Therefore, the Stalinists are a new ruling class'. One fact, one assumption, and the syllogism is complete. By taking one element of developments after the Second World War, wrenching it out of its material context, forcing it into the straitjacket of formal logic, and then generalising from his conclusion, Birchall arrives at a wholly false and reactionary position, which only the congenital divorce between theory and practice in centrist groupings such as IS prevents him carrying to its 'logical' conclusion.

Applying the same 'logic' to the events which followed the failed coup of March 11th. in Portugal, Birchall could have argued with equal plausibility as follows: 'The Socialist Party supports the expropriation of the banks, which is a revolutionary step. Counter-revolutionary politicians are opposed to the revolutionary moves of the working class. Therefore, the Portuguese Socialist Party is not a counter-revolutionary leadership.'

Very possibly the IS group will, in the future, explicitly revise the Bolshevik position on the Second International. But that is not our main concern here. The point of introducing Birchall's 'theory' is to highlight the crucial importance of method, of the struggle for theoretical development on the basis of the world-view of dialectical materialism, in the post-war history of the Fourth International. The continuity of this struggle runs through the Trotskyist movement, and nowhere else. And



Athens, December 1944 - members of the workers militia fight using captured weapons and helmets.

or in the political revolution in the Soviet Union, with the working class cleansing its own state of the bureaucracy which had politically expropriated it.

In the event, neither of these things happened. Stalinism retained its hold on the Soviet Union and, from 1948 on, overthrew the coalitions with bourgeois parties and reformists in Eastern Europe (apart from Yugoslavia), expropriated the main means of production and brought the land under state control.

CHINA

Simultaneously the Chinese Communist Party, leading the People's Army and the mass movements of the peasantry, and going in practice beyond Stalin's wishes and instructions, advanced southwards during 1947-49, driving Chiang Kai-shek's forces before them. By the summer of 1949 they held effective military and political power in the whole of mainland China. Only somewhat later, in the early 1950's did they undertake an uneven process of expropriation of the native capitalists, completing the abolition of capitalist and pre-capitalist relations of production.

These social overturns were one side of international developments in the immediate post-war period. But they took place largely within the framework of an international settlement between Stalinism and imperialism, the kernel of which was Stalin's agreement to use the Communist Parties to strangle the proletarian revolution in Western Europe, to partition Europe as a whole and to dismember Germany and its working class.

In France, Italy and Greece the working class stood in a position, from 1945 onwards, to launch struggles for state

in an apparently opposite way - falling back upon 'Trotskyist orthodoxy', and an inability to qualitatively develop the perspectives of the movement to grasp the new conditions. This was, from its inception, the weakness of the International Committee.

Its principled resistance to Pablo's liquidationism was based upon the - correct - insistence that Pablo's conclusions in effect (and in practice) denied that the Fourth International had an objective, historical reason for existing, and were in contradiction with the founding positions of the movement.

But the defence of 'orthodoxy' also expressed the inability to make the necessary theoretical and political developments - to break with 'orthodoxy' through its objective development. This weakness lay at the basis of the SWP's unprincipled 'reunification' with the Pabloites in 1962, and the subsequent degeneration of the WRP and OCI.

TROTSKYIST

But for all these weaknesses, it is essential to realise that it was only within the Trotskyist movement that a dialectical materialist analysis of the developments of world Stalinism could be, and was, fought for. The 'Russian question', over which Trotsky and Cannon fought Burnham and Schachtman in 1939-40, had now become the Polish question, the Yugoslav question, the Chinese question.

Those who departed from Lenin's analysis of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism, and who credited the Stalinist bureaucracy with being a new class, ruling a new form of class society, have been forced to the crudest

within this theoretical struggle the biggest problem has been that of the development of world Stalinism - the major counter-revolutionary force within the world labour movement.

OUTLINE

At this point, to end the *Introduction*, we should set out in outline the standpoint from which, in our view, the post-war developments in Stalinism should be judged. Stalinism is a new form of labour bureaucracy in two essential respects: it rests upon the *international* movement of the working class, and upon the conquest of power by the class in Russia in 1917, and the smashing there of the capitalist state, replacing it by the dictatorship of the proletariat which only later fell victim to bureaucratic degeneration. In both these ways it differs from the bureaucracy of the Second International.

It is not a new social class, and cannot act independently of the movement of the international social classes. It is, on the contrary, the main vehicle of mediation, conciliation and compromise between the social classes internationally. It is an *international* political formation to a much higher degree than the parties of the old Second International have ever been.

Even in its worst degeneration Stalinism retains this inverted 'internationalism', reflecting the fact that the October Revolution was first and foremost a huge qualitative gain for the international working class, and that Stalinism is historically tied to the social relations first set up by October, and later extended to other nation states.

But this very 'internationalism' of Stalinism, together with the fact that it rests on the gains of a successful revolution - the conquest of state power - can give Stalinism a measure of independence of the social classes within a particular nation state. Unlike the social democracy, Stalinism settles its relations with imperialism on a *world* scale, not within the confines of the national society.

These relations with imperialism are dialectical to the core - relations *both* of compromise and betrayal, *and* of the harshest antagonism, in that Stalinism is tied to the existence - and the limitation - of socialised relations of production, and to permit their destruction would be to destroy Stalinism itself. Only insofar as this *dialectical* and *international* social basis of Stalinism is consciously grasped - and it is fundamental to Trotsky's own analysis of Soviet development in *The Revolution Betrayed* - is it possible to analyse post war history objectively and concretely.

CONSISTENT

From this standpoint the fact that in some countries - where the capitalist state machine was greatly weakened or collapsing - the Stalinists have overturned capitalist social relations, is no more inconsistent with their general character as a counter-revolutionary political formation than is the fact that social democratic leaders will on occasion fight for reforms or wage claims within a particular state or industry, or against the destruction of the basic rights of the working class.

Thus the social overturns in Eastern Europe - whether carried out with active support from the working class (as in Yugoslavia) or solely by the Stalinist apparatus backed by the Red Army (as in Hungary) - formed part of a Europe-wide settlement between Stalinism and imperialism which was counter-revolutionary to the core. At its heart lay the decapitation of the revolution in Western Europe on Stalin's orders. And far from helping, the European settlement and Stalinist policy as a whole, formed a hindrance to the Chinese revolution.

The theoretical standpoint set out above is only a sketch. As we shall see, it is not one plucked out of the air, but one which attempts to distil, build on and develop the theoretical gains of the Trotskyist movement's history. We shall return to it; it is set out here so that comrades may bear it in mind in reading the document as a whole.

● The alternative "theory" of state capitalism mentioned by Birchall - that of the restoration of the capitalist class rather than the emergence of a new 'state-capitalist' class - is not dealt with here. Birchall's argument is quoted here to illustrate a methodological point rather than as a prelude to a detailed refutation of all the variants of state capitalism.

THE INTERNATIONAL SINCE WORLD WAR II

Within a year of the founding conference (Paris, September 1938) at which it adopted the Transitional Programme, the Fourth International faced the severest tests of both its policies and its organisational and human resources - the Second World War. And, less than a year after the outbreak of war (September 1939), the International had its main theoretical and political leader, Leon Trotsky, murdered by Stalin's agent (August 1940). But though its cadre was not large, and was almost everywhere subject to harassment by the police or the GPU, the International entered the war with great political strengths.

In the last months of his life Trotsky had led the majority of the largest section - the American SWP - in a deep-going struggle with the revisionist tendency led by James Burnham and Max Schachtman. What was at issue was the class character of the Soviet Union, the political nature of Stalinism and, beneath these, the method and world-view of Marxism.

The factional struggle in the SWP, which lasted from September 1939 to April 1940, was precipitated by the Hitler-Stalin pact of August 1939, speedily followed by the partition of Poland and Stalin's invasion of Finland (December 1939). These events unleashed a tidal wave of "patriotic" and anti-Soviet hysteria throughout the bourgeois "democracies" and, of course, a massive disorientation of the membership of their Stalinist parties.

Politically, what the SWP minority reflected was capitulation to bourgeois public opinion, and a refusal to



Trotsky

opposition abandoned any struggle for a dialectical understanding of class antagonisms on an international scale, reflected both in the enduring gains of the October Revolution and the treacherous zig zags of Soviet foreign policy.

EQUIPPED

Trotsky took the lead in fighting them patiently 'to the roots' (1), taking up and answering fully each of the theoretical and political points raised, and independently analysing at the same time the complex and readily-developing world situation. The lessons of the SWP were taken into the international leadership and the other sections, and as a result the International was equipped politically to fight for the unconditional defence of the Soviet Union, and - what became especially important after Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, with the consequent turn of all the Stalinist parties of the 'Allied' states to the most open class-collaboration with their 'own' bourgeoisie - for independent, revolutionary policies of the working class within the labour movement.

The struggle was no easy one. It is important for the Trotskyists of the 1970's to grasp under what harsh conditions the founding cadres of our movement were obliged to fight for internationalism and how well, in general, they stood up to the test.

In occupied Europe the French Trotskyists published a total of 73 issues of their clandestine paper *La Verite* (Truth), as well as several issues of their theoretical journal. This took place under the noses of the Gestapo,



Communist partisans were welcomed into Italian towns with the defeat of fascism - but Stalinist policy opposed revolution.

with the constant threat of treachery from the Stalinist leaderships of the main resistance organisations. Many lives were lost in the struggle for Trotskyist internationalism during the war. Nine leaders were executed in Holland in April 1942, others in Austria and Germany itself. In Belgium a group including Abraham Leon, the young author of the only comprehensive Marxist work on the Jewish question, was arrested in 1941, and died in the concentration camps.

ARRESTS

In Greece, dozens of comrades were arrested by the fascists and many of them executed in 1943. The veteran Trotskyist Pantelis Pouliopoulos, dying of tuberculosis, appealed to the Italian soldiers of the firing squad, so that they mutinied and refused to fire, forcing the officers to carry out the executions themselves. (2) In France, also, dozens of Trotskyists were arrested and many of them died. They included the leader of the French section Marcel Hic, who died in Buchenwald. (3)

Despite the persecutions, the French section played a central role in drawing together a European Secretariat in 1943, and in organising in February 1944 a conference of the European sections in occupied France itself, with representatives from France, Belgium, Germany, Greece and Spain. (4)

They also published in collaboration with German Trotskyists in France propaganda papers in German including *Arbeiter und Soldat* (Worker and Soldier), aimed at fraternisation with the German occupation forces. At least thirty German servicemen and an unknown number of French comrades were shot in Brest for dis-

the capitalists and Stalinists alike for supporting the strike movement in the latter part of the war, and for their opposition to the bureaucrats' policy of 'national unity'; several were jailed.

In the USA, eighteen leaders of the SWP were jailed in 1941 for their opposition to the war policy. In India and Ceylon groups sympathetic to Trotskyism opposed the Stalinist policies of collaboration with British imperialism, and several of their leaders were imprisoned.

VIETNAM

In the South of Vietnam, the Trotskyists commanded a considerable following. In August 1945, following the collapse of Japan over a hundred workers' and farmers' committees held power in and around Saigon. But in September, the Vietnamese section was almost destroyed and dozens of its leading members killed, on the instructions of the Stalinists. (6) In China, during and after the war, the Trotskyists were persecuted both by the Kuomintang and the Stalinist forces.

In the labour camps of the Soviet Union itself, supporters of the Left Opposition who had survived the terror continued their opposition to Stalin's policies and methods. In occupied Palestine Trotskyists maintained their opposition to the creation of a Zionist state, and for a united Arab revolutionary socialist movement.

It might be thought that under these severe conditions 'theoretical' questions would get pushed into the background. But the opposite was the case. In occupied Europe the main questions that arose was "How to clearly pose the need for a working class struggle for socialism; while supporting the resistance movements against German imperialism, which had generally a nationalist and 'democratic' political line?"

Unity of the French movement was only achieved at the European conference in February 1944. At it was thrashed out agreement between the two main groupings: the POI (International Workers' Party), which had begun to adapt politically to French nationalism and de Gaulle, and the CCI (International Communist Committee) which had adopted a sectarian position in relation to the nationalism-dominated resistance movements. Out of their unity was formed the PCI, forerunner of the OCI.

The "Theses" adopted explicitly pointed out that "The POI leadership deemed progressive the struggle of its own bourgeoisie; did not, right from the start, separate itself from Gaullism; and was satisfied to clothe the latter in more 'revolutionary' phraseology", whereas "under guise of safeguarding the heritage of Marxism-Leninism, the CCI obstinately refused to make any distinction between the nationalism of the bourgeoisie and the mass resistance movement."

It was on this basis that the European Secretariat was able to launch an 'Appeal' to the European working class in July 1944 (immediately after the Normandy landings) which pointed prophetically to the dangers arising from

the collaboration between Stalinism and the great imperialist powers:

"... today, at the decisive moment when the power of the bourgeoisie in Europe, undermined by five years of war, is crumbling, the Communist Parties enter the bourgeois governments of the Gaulles and Bonomis, putting their authority at the service of the exploiters".

The 'allied' imperialists, the Appeal warned, "propose to Balkanise Europe in a new Versailles Treaty, dismembering Germany, drawing more artificial frontiers, opposing all friendship between peoples, whipping up antagonisms and national hatreds". (7)

CONTINUED IN NEXT EDITION

1. See *In Defence of Marxism*, and J.P. Cannon *Struggle for the Proletarian Party*.
2. See *Quatrième Internationale*, June-July 1946, and *memoire in QI*, May-July, 1950, pp.12-13.
3. See *memoire in QI*, August-October 1950.
4. See *Fourth International*, March and May 1945 for accounts in the *Theses of the Conference: Theses on Liquidation of World War II and the Revolutionary Upsurge*.
5. For details of the work of the Trotskyists in occupied Europe see *FI*, September-October 1945, and *Lutte des Trotskyistes sous la Terreur Nazi*, PCI, 1945, *Report on the FI since the Outbreak*.
6. See Lucien, *Quelques etapes de la revolution au Nam-Bo du Vietnam* (QI, September-October 1947, pp.41 et seq.), *Nouvelle etape de la contre-revolution et de l'offensive imperialiste en Indochine*, (Resolution du Comité central du groupe communiste internationaliste vietnamien en France) in QI, Nov-Dec 1947. For brief news on the fate of the Trotskyists in Tonkin, see QI, Jan-Feb. 1948.