

cogito

the theoretical & discussion journal of the YCL



TROTSKY AND WORLD REVOLUTION

A CRITIQUE BY MONTY JOHNSTONE

30p

ERRATA

- Page 2, Column 2, second Lenin quotation, first line: for 'on' read 'in';
third line: after 'revolution' insert a dash (-)
- Page 3, Column 1, line 9: for 'movements' read 'movement'.
- Page 5, Footnote 1, line 5: for 'Radek' read 'Trotsky'.
- Page 7, Footnote 4, last sentence should read "The Politbureau of the Soviet
Party of course had no powers to admit parties to the Comintern"
- Page 11, Column 2, third full paragraph, first sentence should start:
Trotsky called the Spanish Popular Front an "alliance with the
bourgeoisie's shadow"....(quotation ends after "shadow")
- Page 15, Column 1, last line but one of first paragraph in section
The Fourth International and the Lessons of History: for "Manshevik"
read "Menshevik"
- Page 15, Column 2, 13 lines from bottom: for "embassingly" read "embarrassingly".

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EDITORIAL

It is with much pride and some relief that we are able to produce the second part of Monty Johnstone's study of Trotsky. The first part was published as a special issue of *Cogito* some years ago under the title of *Trotsky—His Ideas*. The second part here deals with Trotsky and his ideas on world revolution between 1923 and his death in 1940.

We are considering a reprint of the long out-of-date first part in the event of a large demand stimulated by the long awaited second part. However both parts are independent and are well worth reading in their own right.

This publication comes at a particularly suitable moment when a number of organisations, which are influenced by Trotskyist ideas, after a period of advance and consolidation from the late 1960s, are fragmenting. The number of new publications is confusing to young people new to politics.

Recently both *Workers' Press* and *Keep Left*, referred to in the Preface, have disappeared from the scene. On February 13, *Workers' Press* announced with breathtaking abruptness that due to financial difficulties it was ceasing publication the next day. This was the first information to be given to either the readers or the sellers of the paper, and indeed even to its own staff. Twenty-six London printworkers lost their jobs at less than a day's notice. The regional secretary of the National Graphical Association commented: "My members are flaming mad about this, to say the least. No other paper would do this." On March 13, however, there appeared a successor to *Keep Left—Young Socialist*—printed weekly at a printshop in Run-corn, Cheshire, from which was to issue forth on May 1 a new daily tabloid, *The News Line*. This "supports the policies and perspectives of the Workers' Revolutionary Party", though does not present itself as its official organ as did *Workers' Press*. Unlike its predecessor it incorporates sport and racing—for the featuring of which the WRP had always criticised the *Morning Star*! They had also bitterly attacked the *Star* for having changed its name from the *Daily Worker*—only themselves now to adopt one which has not the slightest hint of a connection with working-class traditions and aspirations.

Along with a new paper, the WRP has also got a new General Secretary. Mike Banda has replaced Gerry Healy, who however remains on their Central Committee and apparently takes charge of education and cadres training. Gerry Healy's new post seems clearly to place on his shoulders the responsibility for replying to the case that is made in these pages. We hope he will not jib at this task!

We believe that this publication will help Young Communists better to understand and deal with the ultra-left ideas with which they come into contact, so many of which can be traced back to Trotsky himself. These ideas have an appeal to young people attracted by their promise of quick revolutionary victories, but often lead to disillusionment and apathy when unrealistic hopes are not fulfilled. In our attempts to build a strong youth movement to play an integral part in the struggle for socialism we feel strongly that we have to argue against these ideas at the same time as we argue for our strategy of socialist revolution.

We hope that YCL members will ensure that this *Cogito* reaches many thousands of young people who belong to or have belonged to Trotskyist organisations and who have been influenced to a greater or lesser extent by their ideas. We share with them a common hatred of capitalism and a common socialist ideal. Our differences are concerned with how to attain it.

Many of them have never heard our case against Trotskyism at first hand. We hope that they will read what we have to say with an open mind, and discuss it with us as well as within their own organisations. We are confident that a deeper study of the issues will convince them of the validity of our arguments and convince them that they can make their most effective contribution to the cause of socialism as members of the Young Communist League.

MAY 1976 IAN FINDLAY
Editor

PREFACE

This is the edited and very considerably expanded transcript of a public lecture arranged by the Communist Party Branch at the London School of Economics. It is presented here as the second part of a study of Trotsky, the first part of which was published by the Young Communist League in *Cogito* in two editions at the end of the sixties, entitled *Trotsky—His Ideas*. It dealt with Trotsky's relationship to the Bolshevik Party, his theory of "permanent revolution", his role in the October Revolution, the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, the trade union controversy and the question of bureaucracy, the building of socialism in the USSR and the Moscow Trials. These questions are therefore not treated again here, nor is any overall appraisal of Trotsky undertaken.

These analyses of Trotsky's political positions arose in response to a challenge in *The Newsletter*, forerunner to the *Workers' Press* as the organ of the Trotskyist Socialist Labour League/Workers' Revolutionary Party, which had written: "If the YCL has got a case against Trotskyism, then why don't they produce it?"¹ When the first part of this case appeared, *International*, the organ of the Trotskyist International Marxist Group, described it as "a thorough and vigorous critique of Trotsky's ideas, based on a POLITICAL analysis of their content and application" which "meticulously refuted the slanders against Trotsky" current to the Stalin period.

Their Trotskyist opponents of the SLL however reacted less soberly. *Keep Left*, the paper of its youth organisation, the Young Socialists, came out in January 1969 with the front page headline: "Monty Johnstone—an apologist for Stalinism. *Keep Left* publishes a reply to the slanders against TROTSKYISM." The "reply" took up 7½ full pages of the 12-page issue, although nowhere could it show what were these alleged "slanders" (defined in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* as "false reports maliciously uttered to person's injury"). In fact, a large part of their article ignored what I had written and was taken up with genuinely slanderous denunciation of "the Stalinist leadership of the YCL" and myself as "a man totally devoid of any political scruples or principles"! It was a classic illustration of what Professor Thouless writes about "Dishonest Tricks in Argument" in his well-known book, *Straight and Crooked Thinking*: "Another common trick in controversy may be called the 'diversion'. This is the defence of a proposition by another proposition which does not prove the first one, but which diverts the discussion to another question", principally to the discussion of the alleged "personal characteristics of the disputants".²

Since then, however, the author of this furious philippic, Robert Black (Robin Blick), has left the SLL/WRP and acquired a demonic status in the eyes of his erstwhile comrades as leader of the "Blick-Jenkins group—the British agents of the OCI Liquidationists".³ Dare one hope that this will mean that the reply from the WRP/YS this time will avoid personal

attacks and stick to the policy issues raised? It will be interesting to see if they will make any attempt to match their claim "not (to) resort to slander or innuendo" but to "operate with the weapon of scientific research and analysis combined with a scrupulous regard for objective truth".⁴

A 106-page reply to the 35-page *Cogito* article came from Alan Woods and Ted Grant of the Militant Group entitled *Lenin and Trotsky: What they really stood for* (London 1969). Its laboured apologetics seem to me dogmatic and extraordinarily blinkered, but it keeps to the issues under discussion and avoids the extraneous abuse of the Black article. I see it has now been printed in Ceylon along with a brief answer to an article by the Ceylonese Maoist leader Shanmugathan. The book carries the singular subtitle: "Reply to Monty Johnstone (Moscow) and N. Shanmugathan (Peking)".⁵ The authors promise to "deal in a detailed manner" with the further questions treated in this second part. Will they, I wonder, be prepared to admit that Trotsky was wrong on any of the issues discussed and, if so, to make a Marxist analysis of the reasons?

On the basis of the first *Cogito* article debates took place with Ted Grant, Alan Woods and Roger Siverman, of the Militant Group, in London, Brighton and Southampton respectively. A debate was also held with Ernest Mandel, theoretician of the Paris-based Fourth International, attended by four hundred people in the Conway Hall, London. This passed off much more calmly than the encounter a year later of Mandel and Tony Cliff of the International Socialism Group—despite a menacing lurch towards the platform by a well-oiled member of the avowedly Stalinist "British and Irish Communist Organisation" (he was not allowed to get close enough to reveal whether his target was Mandel or me!) and notwithstanding Mandel's amazing claim that "the Soviet bureaucrats and Monty Johnstone have to reopen a debate which they thought, which they hoped to have closed with machine-gun bullets 30 or 35 years ago". It appears that even so urbane a Trotskyist as Mandel is unable to escape from the tradition of attributing "bad faith" (a phrase that he frequently uses in controversy) to those Marxists, i.e. the overwhelmingly majority, who do not think like him. This is a bad practice which our movement shared with the Trotskyists in the Stalin period and which diverted attention away from the political questions at issue. We should not let ourselves be goaded into returning to it.

A challenge to debate also appeared in *Keep Left*. On the front page of its January 1969 issue was a Stop Press item: "Sheila Torrance, National Secretary of the Young Socialists, informs *Keep Left* that Monty Johnstone is invited to a public debate on Trotskyism." However, when the YCL leadership accepted to co-sponsor a debate between Gerry Healy, National Secretary of the SLL, and myself on the theme of *Trotskyism* that the YS leadership proposed in a letter to the YCL,⁵ they immediately lost the taste for their own proposals—or were persuaded by the SLL leaders to go back on them. They insisted that they would only debate if the title was made "Trotskyism and Stalinism", which they knew full well was unacceptable, as we were not prepared to appear as defenders of Stalinism in the way that they would be defending Trotskyism. They then announced that "if the title is not changed to include 'Stalinism', we have no alternative but to go ahead to organise a public meeting with our own members, to which your members would be invited and at which they would be given the floor."⁶ So far however that also has not taken place!

However, if the YS National Committee have been tardy in organising their meeting, so have I in completing this second part of my study of Trotsky. (It might perhaps be conceded in mitigation that it takes longer to carry through the serious research required on so vast a theme as this than to organise a public meeting.) In expressing my apologies for having taken so long, I should like to add my gratitude to those kind comrades who did not totally abandon hope that it would eventually see the light of day. Now that it is ready, I look forward to their criticisms and hope that it will contribute at least to promoting further and fuller debate and research on the important problems on which it touches.

MONTY JOHNSTONE
December 1975

TROTSKY AND WORLD REVOLUTION—1923-1940

"Revolution is a profound, difficult and complex science."
Lenin. *The Revolutionary Phrase*,
Moscow, 1965, p.133

"Any attempt to apply the tactics applied internally on one country between October and November (1917)—the triumphant period of the (Russian) revolution to apply them with the aid of our imagination to the progress of events in the world revolution is doomed to failure."

Lenin. *The Revolutionary Phrase*, p.87

"The entire history of Bolshevism, both before and after the October Revolution, is full of instances of changes of tack, conciliatory tactics and compromises with other parties, including bourgeois parties! ... To renounce in advance any change of tack, or any utilisation of a conflict of interests (even if temporary) among one's enemies, or any conciliation or compromise with possible allies (even if they are temporary, unstable, vacillating or conditional allies)—is this not ridiculous in the extreme?"

Lenin. *'Left-Wing' Communism—An Infantile Disorder, Collected Works*,
Moscow/London, 1966, Volume 31,
p.70.

"More than one-third of humanity—one billion people—has entered into the phase of constructing socialism."

L. Vitale, in Ernest Mandel, Editor,
Fifty Years of World Revolution,
1917-1967, New York, 1968, p.35.

No figure in the history of the international labour movement has aroused, and continues to arouse, such bitter controversy as Leon Trotsky. Even today, his stand on all major questions from 1923 to 1940 is defended and extolled by his followers who see him as Lenin's rightful successor to the leadership of world revolution. Rival Trotskyist groups dispute among themselves the mantle of the master for their respective "Fourth Internationals", of which at least three exist today. This cult has inhibited them right up to the present day from making a critical appraisal of Trotsky's role and policies, just as the Stalin cult before 1956 prevented the international Communist movement from making a balanced assessment of Trotsky's principal adversary.

The world's Communist Parties, for their part, for at least two

1. *The Newsletter*, 10 February 1968.

2. Robert H Thouless, *Straight and Crooked Thinking* (London 1958), pp.39-40.

3. The Organisation Communiste Internationaliste (OCI) was the French section of the same "Fourth International" as the SLL till the inevitable split occurred in 1971.

4. *Workers' Press*, 3 December 1969.

5. The letter, dated 7 January 1969 and signed by Sheila Torrance, said: "We should like to challenge you to a public debate on Trotskyism between Monty Johnstone and Gerry Healy of the Socialist Labour League."

6. *Keep Left*, April 1969, p.3.

decades regarded Trotsky not only as an ultra-left and disruptive political opponent, but as a conscious agent of fascism on the basis of the framed-up Moscow Trials of 1936-38. Though such views are still to be found among certain Maoists and in such encrusted outposts of Stalinism as Albania, the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956 changed all this for the bulk of the world's Communists, though admittedly in differing degrees. There is today in many parts of the world Communist movements, especially in many West European Communist Parties, a better chance of objective critical and self-critical appraisal of the history of the international labour movement than among the followers of Trotsky.

I shall attempt to treat this subject in such a critical and self-critical spirit. Unfortunately because of the vastness of the field, I shall not be able to elaborate on many questions that require much fuller treatment—ideally after unheated collective discussion by Marxists of different backgrounds and affiliations, or in some cases unaffiliated. The aim should be genuinely to learn from the past in order to clarify the political tasks of the present rather than to prove to one's own satisfaction the rightness over all the years of one's own party or group.

Balanced judgment needed

I know, of course, that this type of approach is not popular in all quarters. I found myself described in the journal of the International Marxist Group as a "carefree eclectic" for attempting to apply it in a study of Trotsky's ideas. In fact, if attempting on the basis of the experience of history to make a balanced judgment of the various movements and personalities makes you an eclectic, you are in good company. Marx and Engels will have to be dubbed eclectics for instance in their assessment of Lassalle, a mighty figure in the history of the nineteenth century German labour movement, since they rejected any attempt to make a black or white assessment of his "equivocal" role. On the one hand they praised his "immortal service" in founding in 1863 the General German Workers' Union which aroused the German labour movement out of its slumbers, whilst on the other characterising that organisation as a "workers' sect" and criticising the "religious and sectarian character" of his agitation, his striving to be a "workers' dictator" and his scheming with Bismarck. Those who talk about "eclecticism" in this respect are trying to discredit a well-known Marxist method which attempts to make an objective and nuanced appraisal of the past and thereby develop Marxist theory.

Obviously to evaluate Trotsky's positions on the main international questions between 1923 and 1940, positions which he took up in conflict with the positions of the Communist International (the Comintern) and the Communist Parties, involves to some extent evaluating those Communist policies themselves. However, because of the subject that I have been asked to deal with, I shall approach matters essentially from the angle of Trotsky. I hope there will be clear understanding that, if I conclude that Trotsky was wrong, for instance, with regard to the Chinese Revolution of 1925-27, this does not mean that I think that the Chinese policy of Stalin and the Communist International in this period was always right. If I don't attempt here to analyse the latter, it is certainly not because I don't think that it also needs critical analysis.

Revolutionary credentials

Broadly, I think you will already have gathered that I don't see either the Comintern and Stalin, who effectively led it for so long, or Trotsky as having a monopoly of correctness on all the

questions throughout the period with which I am dealing. Nonetheless, I do believe—and if you come to think about it I suppose it's stating the obvious—that the practical contribution of the Communist Parties to the cause of Socialist revolution throughout the world is infinitely greater than the contribution of the movement founded by Trotsky. This is shown by the fact that capitalism has been overthrown since the end of the last war under the leadership of Communist Parties in over a dozen countries.

This fact does not detract from Trotsky's "immortal service" in 1917-20 as the second great leader of the October Revolution and organiser of the Red Army. We should put behind us with disdain the Stalinist falsification attempting to belittle this role. Trotsky is one of the great figures in the history of the international labour movement, though he was to become a tragic and at times a pathetic one, and he should be appraised by his own terms of reference—namely as a Marxist and a revolutionary. This is the tradition to which he belongs. That was the context in which he thought and made his positive contributions as well as the many and serious errors to which I shall be referring.

Trotskyist method

We are going to have to look at the litany of "betrayed revolutions" intoned so inexorably by Trotsky and his followers. People recruited into the various Trotskyist organisations are taught to see the history of the period largely in terms of such "betrayals" in Germany in 1923, in the British General Strike of 1926, in China in 1927, in France and Spain in 1936—as set out in certain selected writings of Trotsky. This produces a caricature of the materialist conception of history, of which Engels remarked caustically that it served for many people an excuse for not studying history.¹

For Lenin "what is most important, that which constitutes the very gist, the living soul of Marxism (is the) concrete analysis of a concrete situation."² Trotsky's followers, in total contrast, impose a ready-made scheme on the history of the international working-class movement as well as on its present. This flows from an approach highlighted in the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International, written by Trotsky in 1938. This basic Trotskyist document proclaims that "the historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership." And it goes on to assert: "The multi-millions masses again and again enter the road to revolution. But each time they are blocked by their own conservative bureaucratic machines." Alongside social democracy, these machines are identified here with the Communist Parties and "the definite passing over of the Comintern to the side of the bourgeois order, its cynically counter-revolutionary role throughout the world."³

It is interesting and important to see the method that lies behind this. If you read the whole of Trotskyist literature you won't see any adequate sociological analysis of the working-class in countries where revolutions are supposed to have betrayed. You'll look in vain there for the "sober and strictly objective appraisal of all the class forces" in the particular states, demanded by Lenin.⁴ Instead you will find the unsubstantiated assumption of an "organic, deep-going, insurmountable urge of the toiling masses to tear themselves free from the bloody capitalist chaos."⁵ If they don't make it, it follows that they must have been held back and blocked by the conspiracy of their bureaucratic leaders notably the so-called "counter-revolutionary Stalinists".⁶

1. Engels to C Schmidt, 5 August 1890, Marx/Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Moscow/London, 1956), p.496.

2. Lenin, "Kommunismus" (June 1920), *Collected Works* (Moscow/London, 1960-70) hereafter *CW*, Vol. 31, p.166.

3. *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*, hereafter *Death Agony* (Socialist Labour League, Longon, 1970), p.13.

4. "Left Wing" Communism, *CW*, Vol. 31, p.63. Emphasis in original.

5. L. Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism* (New York, 1965), p.13.

6. According to *Workers' Press*, 28 February 1973, the Communists are "the most conscious anti-revolutionary tendency in Britain"!

It is difficult to recognise such a working-class whose attitude to revolution is one (to quote Shaw's Alfred Doolittle in another context) of being repeatedly "willing ... wanting ... waiting ...". Marx, Engels and Lenin were more realistic. Lenin spoke of the masses under capitalism as "for the most part apathetic, inert, dormant, convention-ridden."¹ He again and again stressed that not only the broad masses but even the working-class as their leader does not spontaneously develop a socialist consciousness. It was necessary for a revolutionary party to work for very many years in order to inject such a consciousness into the largely economic struggles in which they engaged. This is what Lenin and the Bolsheviks strove to do, for the fourteen years before the revolutions of 1917, in building up their party with its branches and groups throughout Russia.

"Fatalistic optimism"

At that time Trotsky was opposed to the Bolsheviks and poured scorn on the so-called autocratic centralism of Lenin, whom he accused of raking up all the worst filth in the Russian revolutionary movement and in striving for a personal dictatorship. I don't raise this in order to get in some below-the-belt blow at Trotsky who, to his credit, came over and joined the Bolshevik Party in August 1917 just before the October Revolution and played an outstanding role in it. I do so because I am absolutely convinced that anybody trying seriously to understand the basis of Trotsky's policies in our period has to appreciate that he had not by any means shed in practice his "fatalistic optimism", to which he was to refer self-critically at the end of his life in relation to his earlier period outside the Bolshevik Party. Trotsky's "fatalistic optimism" assumed in that period that the masses would find their way to revolution without the hard spade work involved in building up a firmly based, centralised working-class party.

The quotations that I have just given from the Transitional Programme reveal basically the same underlying approach, despite that document's high-flown references to the proletariat's self-appointed "revolutionary vanguard"—the Trotskyists. The "Left Opposition" groups from 1923, and after 1938 the organisations of the Fourth International, from the side-lines virulently attacked every working-class and Communist organisation for allegedly holding back and betraying the masses who were fatalistically assumed to be striving towards revolution. It is no accident that they were totally unable to develop roots among the workers, let alone to win the leadership of any significant sections of them, for their "revolutionary" policies.

In Lenin's lifetime Trotsky was to play a positive role not only in the leadership of the Soviet state but also of the Communist International. It is interesting that at the Third Congress of the Comintern in 1921, when a strong ultra-left trend crystallised around the so-called theory of the offensive, Trotsky alongside Lenin played a very important role in combatting it.

The "theory of the offensive" argued—and some may recognise in this strains that they have noticed in certain leftist groups around at the present time—that the masses needed to be galvanised into action by offensive struggles launched by the active minority of the proletarian vanguard. These would heighten the worker's class consciousness and facilitate the taking of power. The opposition to this thesis, as put forward by Lenin and by Trotsky himself, was based on the understanding that in order to win power you need the majority of the working-class and with it the majority of the population. Since, as they stressed, the Communist Parties did not at that time have such majority

support in any capitalist country, their efforts should be devoted to winning it. However, Trotsky was to abandon this correct position, which he upheld at this time, in favour of ultra-left positions on many occasions in the period from 1923 onwards. This resulted partly, as I have indicated, from Trotsky's reversion to an incorrect understanding of the masses and the character of political work and party organisation required to lead them towards taking power, and partly—as we shall see—in certain cases from considerations of a factional character. No doubt these two factors often merged and reinforced one another.

Germany—1923

Such factional considerations intermingled with Trotsky's over-optimistic expectations of revolution in the West in determining the positions that he took up in relation to the events in Germany in the autumn of 1923. At this time Germany was engulfed in an economic and political crisis and the class struggle was taking ever sharper forms. There were widespread hopes throughout the international Communist movement that the German Communist Party would be able to lead a successful socialist revolution. On Trotsky's insistence the Political Bureau of the Soviet Communist Party at the end of September 1923 decided to set its date for November 7—to coincide with the sixth anniversary of the October Revolution. He even wrote an article stressing the need under specific circumstances to fix in advance a definite timetable for a revolution.²

The plans for an insurrection were called off by the German Communist leadership, after failing at the Chemnitz conference of workers' organisations on October 21 to obtain the necessary support for an immediate general strike. The correctness of this decision is illustrated by the passivity shown by the mass of workers in the Communist stronghold of Hamburg where news of it failed to get through in time. An armed uprising of some 1,300 courageous Communists had to be called off on its third day for lack of support.

The German Communists' failure to carry through a successful revolution was to be used by Trotsky as a criticism of the Comintern leadership headed by Zinoviev. At that time Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin led the Soviet party and Trotsky was leading an opposition to them on internal issues. This Soviet factional line-up and the positions taken up by foreign Communist leaders in relation to it were unfortunately to play a far from negligible role in determining both sides' positions on international issues.

Although Trotsky could not say that what had happened in Germany resulted from Stalin's theory of "socialism in one country", which the latter did not formulate till a year later, he was to assert that it was "a typical illustration of how it is possible to miss a real revolutionary opportunity—and one of world-wide importance."³ This was in his *Lessons of October*, written in September 1924 in an attempt to enlist history for factional ends. His allegation there would appear more convincing had he not in January—only a few months previously and just after the events in question—co-authored theses submitted to the Comintern Executive Committee in the names of Radek, Pyatakov and himself, which stated: "If the (German Communist) Party had declared the revolt in Germany (1923) as the Berlin comrades have proposed, it would have been lying with a broken neck ... The retreat itself corresponded to the objective situation and is approved

1. Lenin, "Left Wing" Communism, CW, Vol. 31, p.93

2. L. Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Comintern* (New York, 1953), Vol. 2, pp.347-353.

3. L. Trotsky, *The Lessons of October 1917* (London 1925), p.14

Referring to Trotsky's totally unsubstantiated references to Germany in *Lessons of October*, the veteran Bolshevik Krupskaya criticised him for ignoring concrete conditions. "When he speaks of Bulgaria and Germany," she wrote, "he occupies himself but little with the correct estimation of the moment. If we regard events through Comrade Trotsky's spectacles, it appears exceedingly simple to guide events. Marxist analysis was never Comrade Trotsky's strong point." After reproaching Trotsky for his "purely 'administrative' and utterly superficial standpoint" with regard to the role of the Party, Lenin's widow went on to note: "When forming his estimate of the German events, Comrade Trotsky underestimates the passivity of the masses."²

The British General Strike—1926

When the General Strike was underway in Britain in May 1926, Trotsky warned of the danger of "letting slip the opportunity of the revolutionary situation as the German party did in 1923", adding that this danger was "extremely real." The strike had made "the substitution of a proletarian state for the bourgeois one" the question of the day.³ As the *International Socialism* reviewer of his writings of this period indicated: "Trotsky was ... over-optimistic about the possibility of revolution in Britain", and "under-estimated the strength of the 'exceptional backwardness of the ideological forms'."⁴

Nonetheless you will nowhere find in Trotsky's writings of that time the version of latter-day Trotskyists who assert that "it was the Stalinists who led the proletariat into the defeats of the twenties and thirties, from the British General Strike of 1926" onwards, acting as "counter-revolutionary agents in the ranks of the workers' movement."⁵ Nor did he so grossly inflate the weight carried by Stalin in the British labour movement as to write as WRP theoretician Cliff Slaughter has done that "Stalin's policy had led directly to the defeat" of the strike!⁶ Indeed in June 1926 he repudiated the "legend" to the effect that he regarded the British Communist Party as "an obstacle in the path of the working-class". Fortunately, he went on, during the strike "the revolutionary activity of the party was, on the whole, at a reasonably high level." He recognised the gigantic "discrepancy between its strength, its resources, its means, and those objective tasks which are becoming increasingly imminent."⁷ Indeed with an initial membership of only 5,000, even though doubled in the course of the strike, and not holding the leading positions in the unions, the extent to which the Party could influence the outcome of the strike was obviously extremely limited. The responsibility for its failure must be placed fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the General Council of the TUC. The Communist Party denounced their calling off the Strike as "the greatest crime" and called for the continuation of the struggle.⁸

Trotskyists often argue that "Stalinism" made a special contribution to this betrayal by promoting the slogan "All power to the General Council". It is true that the Communist Party did argue that the British trade unions needed a strong fighting organ to co-ordinate and lead the struggle against the capitalist class and therefore proposed that the powers of the General Council should be strengthened. This was not something even remotely connected with Stalin. You will find Harry Pollitt arguing it back in 1922—in Lenin's day.⁹ The slogan "All power to the General Council", which was confusing and incorrect, was used less frequently than the call for "more powers" or "wider powers" to the General Council. This was linked with

5 demands for militant Factory Committees and Trades Councils and for a militant policy for the TUC. If you read the documents of the Party during the strike, you will see that its central slogans combined support for the miners' demands with political demands for the nationalisation of the pits and a Labour Government.¹⁰

Nor is it true that the Communists had lined up uncritically behind the Left-Wing leaders on the General Council and created illusions in them. Writing in *Labour Monthly* in October 1925 on the Scarborough Congress of the TUC, Harry Pollitt criticised "the reluctance of the Left-Wing of the General Council to come out openly and fight the Right-Wing on every possible occasion." (p.604). And on the eve of the strike the Executive Committee of the Communist International issued a manifesto warning the British workers that their leaders were irresolute and prepared to betray them and that "the left-wing leaders of the Labour Party and the unions are showing themselves unequal to the situation ... Only the Minority Movement and the CPGB have called on the workers to resist, have tried to organise the struggle have advocated the militant unity of the trade union movement in Great Britain and throughout the world."¹¹

The Anglo-Russian Trade Union Unity Committee

After the betrayal of the General Strike the Soviet trade union leadership denounced the betrayal of the General Council in such sharp terms that British Communist leaders drew up a memorandum criticising it. They were afraid it would lead to the 'break-up' of the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee, which had been formed the previous year to promote contacts and work for international trade union unity against capitalist attacks and the danger of war against the Soviet Union. On August 7, 1926, Stalin defended the action of the Soviet trade unions against the British Communists' criticism. "To keep silent about the General Council's treachery, when it and the Soviet trade unions have joined a bloc in the shape of the Anglo-Russian Committee, would be tacitly to approve its treachery", he insisted.¹²

One would like to know how the Trotskyists fit this into their well-known schema which runs as follows: that from 1924 the policy of the British and of the other Communist Parties was distorted in a right-wing direction under the influence of Stalin and his theory of socialism in one country. The latter, it is asserted, necessarily entailed supplanting revolutionary policies by the wooing of trade union leaders and others who would co-operate in helping to stave off foreign military intervention against the Soviet Union. Proceeding from these assumptions Trotskyists are fond of telling us how "under the direction of Stalin (the British Communist Party) was forced to maintain a friendly attitude to the 'lefts' (in the General Council) in view of their participation in the Anglo-Soviet Committee."¹³

Insofar as the facts show that the pressure from Stalin was in exactly the opposite direction, two alternatives are possible: either ignore or distort the facts, or jettison the simplistic and unfounded premise on which they're based. Unfortunately Trotskyist writers still choose the former course. Thus the WRP Young Socialists' 'Speakers' Notes on the General Strike quote two sentences from a speech by Stalin in 1926 approving the British Communist Party's attitude to the strike, whilst omitting all reference to the speech's attacks on the "downright traitors" on the right of the General Council and the "spineless fellow-travellers of these traitors" on its left and its emphasis on the need for their replacement by "new revolutionary leaders."¹⁴ There are two alternatives possible for these writers here too: either to admit their fault—it could always be down to an excess of polemical zeal—or dispose of the matter by saying that only

1. Quoted by G. Zinoviev in *Errors of Trotskyism* (CPGB, London, 1925), p.179. In 1931, when challenged, Trotsky was to say that "these theses were erroneous" and to plead that he had allowed Radek to put his name to them without having read them. (Trotsky, *Writings—1930-31*, New York, 1973, pp.310-11.) It would in fact have been totally uncharacteristic of Trotsky to sign a political blank cheque for anyone, let alone Radek in whose judgment he had no confidence. Moreover in presenting these theses Radek had specified that they were "drafted by comrades Radek, Pyatak and myself." (*Die Lehren der deutschen Ereignisse*, Hamburg, 1924, p.23.)

2. N. Krupskaya in *Errors of Trotskyism*, pp.366, 368-9.

3. L. Trotsky, *On Britain* (New York, 1973), pp.168-9, 174.

4. *International Socialism*, Mid-October 1973, p.70.

5. Editorial in *Fourth International* (journal of the SLL-dominated International Committee of the Fourth International), November 1967, p.69. My emphasis.

6. *Keep Left*, 26 January 1974.

7. *On Britain*, pp.251-2. At the end of his life however we find Trotsky citing the British General Strike as an example of how since 1923 "the Soviet state has played a more and more counter-revolutionary role on the international arena." (*In Defence of Marxism*, p.25.)

8. See Appeal of CPGB published 13 May 1926, in J. Klugmann, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain* (London, 1969), Vol. 2, pp.210-212.

9. See H. Pollitt, "The Future of the General Council", *Labour Monthly*, September, 1922, esp. p.155.

10. James Klugmann reproduces these documents in his *History*, Vol. 2.

11. J. Degras, Editor, *The Communist International, 1919-1943: Documents* (London 1971) Vol. 2, p.299.

12. J. Stalin, *Works* (Moscow, 1954), Vol. 8, p.208. See also J. T. Murphy (who argued the British Party's view against Stalin), *New Horizons* (London, 1942), pp.226-9.

13. *Keep Left*, March 1968, p.5.

14. Young Socialists Speakers' Notes, No. 1, *The General Strike in Great Britain 1926* (London, n.d.), p.22. Stalin's speech is in his *Works*, Vol. 8, pp.170-5.

an "apologist for Stalinism" would draw attention to such things!

For Trotsky criticism of the General Council was not enough. He was to argue that the continued participation of the Soviet trade unions in the Anglo-Russian Committee was a grievous case of opportunism. In later years he was to go so far as to declare that the Anglo-Russian Committee "in 1925-27 literally broke the neck of the very promising opposition movement in the British trade unions (the Minority Movement)."¹ But his position here was no more consistent than it had been on Germany in 1923. Thus on May 18, 1926, six days after the betrayal of the General Strike by the General Council, he had written: "There does not exist nor has there existed any dispute over the justification for the creation of the Anglo-Russian Committee as an element in the policy of the United Front."² By July, apparently once again for factional reasons, he had put his name to a resolution with a demand "to immediately break off the Anglo-Russian Committee. At the same time, to intensify every effort to strengthen the united front, from below."³

However continued participation was in full accord with the United Front Policy that had been initiated by Lenin and the Comintern in 1921 with Trotsky's active support. This had led to a meeting the next year of representatives of the executives of the Communist and the reformist internationals. A joint statement had recommended "conversations between the representatives of the Amsterdam (reformist) Trade Union International and the Red Trade Union International, to consider the question of how the maintenance and restoration of Trade Union unity of front can be secured nationally and internationally."⁴ This unity should above all be directed against the danger of a new imperialist war.⁵ This was likewise the major objective of the Anglo-Russian Committee, which—as I have shown—did not lead to the toning down of criticism when criticisms needed to be made. Indeed Stalin stressed in August 1926 that "for us the Anglo-Russian Committee is not an end in itself... We cannot renounce freedom of criticism for the sake of respectability and maintaining the bloc at all costs."⁶

It was in fact the hard-hitting nature of such public criticism that led to the TUC winding up the Committee in 1927. True, in the end, no more had come of the whole enterprise than of Lenin's efforts to cement a united front with the reformist internationals. That is however hardly a proof that it should never have been tried.

The Chinese Revolution—1925-27

In the Trotskyist calendar even today the defeat of the national democratic revolution in China in 1927 occupies a place of much greater prominence than the victory of the Socialist revolution in that great country after 1949. The reason is once again factional and the issue has given rise to what Isaac Deutscher in his indispensable 3-volume biography of Trotsky calls "the myths of vulgar Trotskyism". As we shall see, these myths were in fact not the invention of some vulgar Trotskyists of small stature, but go back alas! to Trotsky himself.

In his autobiography Trotsky writes: "The epigones' leadership in China trampled on all the traditions of Bolshevism. The Chinese Communist Party was forced against its will to join the bourgeois Kuomintang Party and submit to its military disciplines... Long before Chiang Kai-Shek crushed the Shanghai workers (in April 1927) and concentrated power in the hands of a military clique, we issued warnings that such a consequence was inevitable. Since 1925, I had demanded the withdrawal of the Communists from the Kuomintang." Elsewhere he goes further and states: "I personally was from the very beginning, that is, from 1923, resolutely opposed to the Communist Party joining the Kuomintang."⁸

In fact, the decision of the Chinese Communist Party, founded in 1921, to join the Kuomintang⁹ was taken in 1922 on the advice of the Communist International's representative Maring (Sneevliet), who later, incidentally, became a supporter of Trotsky. Stalinist "epigones" had nothing to do with it. It flowed from the line put forward by Lenin in his Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions for the Second Comintern Congress in 1920. These stated: "The Communist International must enter into temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and backward countries, but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form."¹⁰

As late as September 27, 1926, Trotsky was describing the participation of the Chinese Communist Party in the Kuomintang as "perfectly correct" for the period before 1925.¹¹ Moreover, as Deutscher notes, "it was only on March 32, 1927, after a year's silence and barely a fortnight before the Shanghai massacre, that Trotsky attacked the Politbureau's Chinese policy."¹² Indeed, his main concern with China early in 1926 had been in presiding over a special commission on the line of Soviet Diplomacy in China. He was to recall years later in a private conversation that the other members of the commission (Chicherin, Voroshilov and Dzerzhinsky) considered his attitude to the prospects of the Chinese revolution to be "pessimistic".¹³ Its report, which he submitted to the Politbureau, "sought not to promote revolution but to secure every possible advantage for the Soviet government. Thus the commission suggested that Soviet diplomatic agencies should seek a *modus vivendi* and a division of spheres between Chiang Kai-Shek's government in the south and (Manchurian warlord) Chang Tso-Lin in the north."¹⁴ (At that time feudal warlords dominated the north of China, which urgently required unity under a democratic central government).

Even Trotsky's attacks on Stalin's Chinese policy in the spring of 1927 did not usually call into question the continuation of the Chinese Communists' work inside the Kuomintang. On the contrary in a speech to the Comintern Executive in May 1927, more than a month after Chiang's coup, he protested against suggestions that he wanted a Communist withdrawal from the Kuomintang "which is not proposed at all."¹⁵

The Chinese Communist Party did not dissolve but preserved its separate identity inside the Kuomintang. That is not the impression given by Trotsky, so without bothering to check the facts

1. Trotsky, *Writings, 1934-35* (New York, 1971) p.273.

2. Quoted by L. J. Macfarlane, *The British Communist Party* (London 1966), p.153.

3. *On Britain*, p.253. Emphasis in original.

4. *The Communist International, Documents*, Vol. 1, p.338.

5. ECCI Directives on United Front, December 1921, *ibid*, p.314-5.

6. *Works*, Vol. 8, p.210.

7. L. Trotsky, *My Life* (New York, 1960), p.529.

8. Trotsky, *Writings, 1930-31* (New York, 1973), p.87.

9. The Kuomintang, China's mass nationalist party, had been formed by the Chinese revolutionary leader Sun Yat-sen to fight for a democratic republic and national independence. At this time it represented an alliance of workers and peasants with the urban middle-class and part of the national bourgeoisie. Trotsky said in 1924: "We approve of Communist support to the Kuomintang Party of China, which we are endeavouring to revolutionise." (*The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology*, New York 1964, p.234).

10. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 31, p.150.

11. Trotsky Archives (T.3008) quoted by E.H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country* (London, 1964), Vol. III, Part 2, p.784.

12. I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed* (London 1959), p.327.

13. Discussion with CLR James (Johnson) in April 1939, in Trotsky, *Writings, 1938-9* (New York, 1969), p.61.

14. Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, p.322. There seems to be an even tighter embargo on the mention of this report in official Trotskyist literature than there was on references to Lenin's Testament by Communist historians before 1956. Perhaps one of the theoreticians of "permanent revolution" will venture an explanation of why we find Trotsky taking up here a position of narrow nationalism and big power diplomacy which they claim, in Stalin's case, to be explicable only as a direct and inevitable result of the theory of "socialism in one country"?

15. Trotsky, *Problems of the Chinese Revolution* (Ann Arbor, 1967), p.94. However, in an unpublished article dated April 3, 1927, he did urge such a withdrawal. (Trotsky, *The Chinese Revolution—Problems and Perspectives*, hereafter *Chinese Revolution*, *Bulletin of Marxist Studies*, No. 1, New York, n.d., p.13) It is difficult to follow Trotsky's zigzags on the question.

for himself the American Trotskyist (SWP) Tony Thomas writes that "the Comintern ordered the Chinese Communist Party to dissolve." Three pages later, apparently oblivious to the incongruity, he tells us how between 1925 and 1926 the membership of the CCP and the Communist Youth had together increased thirty times over and how the next year, in Shanghai, this "dissolved" party had led a victorious uprising of more than 500,000 workers!¹

The Kuomintang, in organisational terms, was in some respects more like the British Labour Party (to which Lenin had favoured the affiliation of the British Communist Party) than the usual type of political party. It provided a vital field for mass work among the workers and peasants, who made up the bulk of its 1927 membership of three to five hundred thousand. Trotsky himself had characterised it in September 1926 as the "peasants' own party"² (a formulation that he was soon however silently to drop in favour of characterising it simply as a "bourgeois party")³ Its work inside the Kuomintang was crucial to its growth from a puny 1,000 in January 1925 to 58,000 in April 1927.

Another myth that stems from Trotsky is that the Kuomintang "was accepted into the Comintern (as a 'sympathising' party)."⁴ In fact, according to Bukharin, who was in the leadership of the Comintern, Zinoviev (about to join Trotsky in constituting the "United Opposition" in the Bolshevik Party) had wanted to propose such an affiliation to the Sixth Plenum of the Executive in February/March 1926.⁵ However, a reading of the hundreds of pages of reports of that Plenum in *International Press Correspondence* at the time, as well as the complete German report of the proceedings, shows that the idea was never even mooted there—let alone adopted. Nor is it possible in the reports of any other Comintern meeting to find mention of it, let alone of Chiang Kai-Shek being made an honorary member of the Comintern Executive.⁶

The Communist International saw the main task in China at this time as the carrying through of an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal revolution. Trotsky played down the importance of feudal survivals and was to reject the Comintern's strategy on the basis of his theory of "permanent revolution", which he had counterposed to the Bolshevik perspectives in Russia before 1917. This theory repudiates the Leninist idea that in under-developed countries there is an intermediate stage to go through before the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat—an intermediate stage which Lenin called the "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry." This represents the power of a wider class alliance and corresponding economic and social tasks. It was the strategic goal of the Bolshevik Party until the bourgeois democratic revolution in Russia in February 1917. As Lenin put it, with the February Revolution "the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry has already been realised, but in a highly original manner", interlaced with the rule of the bourgeoisie. This meant that a new stage had been reached where the next strategic goal—the dictatorship of the proletariat—came on the agenda.⁷ Similarly in China the Comintern worked at this stage to push forward the bourgeois democratic revolution with the

7 working-class playing an increasingly leading role in it.

While the national democratic revolution was underway Trotsky accepted that there would be a stage of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry in China. On April 5, 1927, a week before General Chiang Kai-Shek broke up the Kuomintang Communist alliance and butchered tens of thousands of Shanghai workers, he perceptively pointed to the "profound differentiation within the nationalist camp" and the danger of a coup by a Kuomintang leader.⁸ However, in the same article, he wrote: "It is of utmost importance today not to permit any muddling in the determination of the stage through which the Chinese revolution is passing. It is a question not of the socialist but of a bourgeois democratic revolution." This could bring to power an alliance of workers and peasants, under the leadership of the working-class, establishing a regime "in (whose) economic life, commodity-capitalist relations will inevitably predominate."⁹

Only after the defeat of the revolution did he begin to apply his old conception of "permanent revolution" to it despite the fact that he had just reaffirmed his public repudiation of it.¹⁰ He now saw the next goal as the dictatorship of the proletariat "whose methods from the very outset grow over inevitably into socialist methods", and he denounced the "hollowness of the slogan of the bourgeois democratic revolution."¹¹ By 1928 he had also come to the conclusion that the next Chinese revolution would "not have a 'democratic' period even for six months, as was the case in the October Revolution" but would "be compelled from the very beginning to effect the most decisive shake-up and abolition of bourgeois property in town and country."¹²

Now Trotsky was not only at variance with the Communist International in these views but also with his most prominent supporters—Preobrazhensky, Radek, Rakovsky, Pyatakov and Smilga. Read the controversy that Trotsky and Preobrazhensky had by post in 1928 from the separate parts of Siberia to which Stalin had just had them exiled. Preobrazhensky finds it quite impossible to accept that China's next stage could be the dictatorship of the proletariat when it hadn't yet succeeded in carrying through the equivalent of Russia's bourgeois democratic February Revolution. "Your position is strong", Trotsky's old associate, tells him "only in its external impressiveness, only in its schematic simplicity and clarity, but it is not viable."¹³ A fair summing up, one might say, of so many of Trotsky's political positions!

I have tried to indicate that in terms of the broad strategic goals of the second Chinese revolution¹⁴ the Comintern and the Chinese Communist Party were right against the position that Trotsky came to take up. They also made considerable mistakes, but these did not consist in the general line that Trotsky was to criticise. They did not consist in the fact that the Chinese Communists had entered the Kuomintang and supported and participated in the National Army march to the north against Chang Tso-lin and the warlords started in July 1926.

Nor was the Communist International guilty of ignoring the need for working-class hegemony, for independent and open

1. Tony Thomas, *Marxism versus Maoism* (New York, 1974), pp. 16, 19.
2. Quoted by C. Brandt, *Stalin's Failure in China* (New York, 1966), p. 217.
3. See, e.g., Trotsky, *Chinese Revolution*, p. 11. *The Third International after Lenin* (New York, 1957), p. 218.
4. "Stalin and the Chinese Revolution" (August 1930), in *Problems of the Chinese Revolution*, p. 265. Trotsky here refers to a "vote at the Politbureau, when everybody against the vote of one (Trotsky), sanctioned the admission of the Kuomintang into the Comintern with a consultative vote." No precise date is given, but it is said to have been after Chiang's first coup in Canton on March 20, 1926—i.e. after the Sixth Plenum of the Comintern Executive. The Politbureau of the Soviet Party of course had now powers to admit parties to the Comintern.
5. *Plenum des Exekutivkomitees der Kommunistischen Internationale*, Mai 1927, *Die chinesische Frage* (Hamburg/Berlin, n.d.) p. 138.
6. Tom Kemp, in *Workers Press*, 15 April 1975. Exactly the same statement is made, for example, in Tony Thomas, *Marxism versus Maoism*, p. 17, though it is not to be found in Trotsky's own writings.
7. Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 24, pp. 45-6, 146.
8. *Chinese Revolution*, pp. 12-13.
9. *ibid.*
10. See *The Platform of the Left Opposition* (1927) (London 1963), p. 102: "Trotsky has stated to the International that in all those questions upon which he disputed with Lenin, Lenin was right—and particularly upon the question of permanent revolution and the peasantry."
11. *Chinese Revolution*, p. 18.
12. *Problems of the Chinese Revolution*, p. 127.
13. *Chinese Revolution*, p. 19.
14. The first one had overthrown the Manchu Empire in 1911.

activity by the Communist Party, for the arming of the workers and peasants and for the seizure of the land by the peasantry. These things were stressed repeatedly throughout 1926 and 1927 in Comintern resolutions, in speeches by Stalin and Bukharin and in confidential messages from Moscow to the Chinese Communists.¹ There were however serious opportunist weaknesses on the part of the central leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, headed by Chen Tu-hsiu, and the chief Comintern representative, Borodin, who played down the Party's independent role within the democratic bloc and held back the activity of the workers and peasants for fear of scaring off their bourgeois allies.

Stalin, for his part, must take responsibility for having continued to argue that it was possible to contain and utilise Chiang Kai-shek when the latter's actions and statements had already shown the need to expose him and put the movement on its guard against him. And he was similarly at fault after Chiang's Shanghai coup in April 1927 in encouraging illusions about the revolutionary potential of the Left Kuomintang government of Wuhan, which the Communists entered and supported till July 1927. This is not, however, to say that support for this government and efforts to push it to the left were in themselves wrong. However Trotsky's warning in May 1927 of the forthcoming betrayal by the Left Kuomintang leaders² showed a keener awareness of their role than Stalin's statements of this time.³

Trotsky, having no responsibility, could afterwards exploit these weaknesses and mistakes for all he was worth, but this does not mean that to have worked for an immediate proletarian revolution in China with its tiny working-class would have produced better results. Quite the contrary!

It may well be that Mao Tse-tung was right that even if the Chinese Communist Party had worked more correctly the counter-revolution would still have carried the day in 1927.⁴ No doubt an unfavourable balance of class forces at that time severely limited the possibility of revolutionary success, as Marx recognised in retrospect to have been the case with the Paris Commune in 1871.⁵ But Trotsky was not concerned to make such an objective analysis. His appraisals were overwhelmingly focussed on the one dimension of subjective leadership—and in a factional context, at that.

China after 1927

Mao and the Chinese Communists, after their defeat, proceeded to apply Marxism with great originality to an unprecedented historical situation. Whilst Chiang held the towns in his terroristic grip, they devoted themselves to building up the guerrilla forces and red bases in the countryside from which they would ultimately liberate the towns.

Trotsky's attitude to this was notable for its dogmatic sterility. In 1930—when Soviet power was already spreading over a wide area of South China and the Chinese Red Army was mobilising 40,000 men for battle against Chiang⁶—Trotsky wrote in a Manifesto on China: "At this juncture the Chinese Communists need a long-range policy. They must not scatter their forces among the isolated flames of the peasant revolt. Weak and small in number

8 the party will not be able to take hold of this movement. The Communists must concentrate their forces in the factories and shops and in the workers' districts."⁷

Two years later, the Red Army's unmistakable successes inspired Trotsky to quite remarkable flights of fancy. Leaving behind him the actual civil war in progress, he wrote at some length to his Chinese followers of the dangers of "a civil war between the peasants army led by the Stalinists and the proletarian vanguard led by the Leninists", i.e. Trotskyists, whom he imagined leading a revolution of urban workers, whom "the peasants hoodwinked by the bourgeoisie" would then massacre!⁸ How different was the actual scenario in 1948-9 when the People's Liberation Army entered the cities to an enthusiastic welcome from the workers.

The road to this victory was hard, costly and complicated. It passed through the Chinese Communists' struggle from the early thirties till 1945 around their principal slogan of national revolutionary war against Japanese imperialism, which Trotsky had described in 1932 as a "one-sided and even adventurist way to pose the question,"⁹ although he did urge support for China's "just war" when full-scale hostilities with Japan finally began in July 1937.¹⁰ The Chinese Communists worked in this strategic period for a revolution of a new type, as Mao explained in 1940, "led wholly or partially by the proletariat and aiming at the establishment of a New Democratic society" ruled in its first stage by an alliance of several revolutionary classes, similar in essence to Lenin's revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. After this was accomplished, the revolution would "be developed into the second stage—to establish the socialist society of China."¹¹ The difference stands out clearly between this concept of permanent (uninterrupted) revolution and Trotsky's version, which dubbed this Leninist strategy of two stages as "Menshevik".¹²

Victory of the Chinese Revolution in 1949

The Chinese Communists' epoch-making victory over Chiang in 1949 was a vindication of their creatively evolved strategy of armed struggle, based on the peasant masses, applied from the late twenties in their country in a variety of forms and political conditions, even on occasions against the advice of Stalin. By the same token it marks a crushing refutation of Trotsky who till the end of his life opposed this strategy in all its essentials, misrepresenting its character and denying its potential.

Trotsky's followers persisted in his errors right up to the eye of the victory in October 1949. Thus, in the official organ of the still unified Fourth International of October-November 1949, we find one of the foremost Chinese Trotskyist leaders predicting "with the entry of the Stalinist armies into the towns ... the beginning of the collapse of Stalinism in China." His article ended by stating that the "principal task" of the Chinese Trotskyist "party" was "to fight ... against imperialism, the bourgeoisie and its client, the Stalinist bureaucracy" and "to be ready to enter tomorrow on to the field of battle that history is in the process of preparing for it!"¹³

Writing two years later in an internal bulletin the veteran Chinese Trotskyist leader, Peng Shu-tse, admitted that in 1949

1. Stalin quotes from a number of these, and contrasts them to "a single, solitary telegram" sent to Shanghai on October 1926 stating that, until that city was captured, the agrarian movement should not be forced. He admits that this "was unquestionably a mistake" but insists that they cancelled it a few weeks later (In November) without any prompting (*Stalin on China*, Bombay, 1951, pp.86-94, 100-102).

2. *Problems of the Chinese Revolution*, p.97.

3. See *Stalin on China*. Three out of the five writings of 1926-27 included there are translated from the originals and are therefore not subject to the subsequent textual changes found in Stalin's *Works* published in Moscow after the war.

4. Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China* (London 1942), p.162.

5. Marx to F. Domela-Nieuwenhuis, February 22, 1881, Marx/Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, p.410.

6. See Ho Kan-chih, *A History of the Modern Chinese Revolution* (Peking, 1959), p.223.

7. Trotsky, *Writings*, 1930-31, p.20.

8. Trotsky, *Writings*, 1932, pp.192-201.

9. Trotsky, *Writings*, 1932, p.317.

10. Trotsky, *Writings*, 1937-8, p.101.

11. Mao Tse-tung, *China's New Democracy* (Bombay, 1950), pp.5,9.

12. For Mao's distinction between his understanding of permanent revolution and Trotsky's, see *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed* (Penguin, London 1974), p.94. Attempts to assimilate the two are superficial and mistaken.

13. *Quatrième Internationale* (Paris), October-November 1949, p.32. The original, summarised there, was dated April 15, 1949.

the "extreme contradiction between the 'facts' and the 'traditional' (Trotskyist) conception" first of all evoked confusion and disputes among the Chinese comrades." However he went on to insist that their previous conception was "still entirely valid ... That we could not foresee the current victory of the Chinese Communist Party is the same thing as Trotsky and we Trotskyists being unable to envisage the unusual expansion of Stalinism after the Second World War. Our mistake is not one of principle. It is rather because we insisted too much on principle that we more or less neglected the specific conditions involved."¹ Could there not be something wrong with "principles" that lead to such a neglect of reality, Old Peng?

In contrast to this double-think, Wang Fan-si, leader of the minority Chinese Trotskyist group opposed to Peng, has admitted: "We acted according to our dogma. But we were wrong." He recognises their "misjudgment of the real character of the Communist Party", their mistake in believing that the peasants could only be led from the cities and the fact that "we did not understand the importance of armed struggle."² The dangers of following Trotsky are there for all to see.

Indo-China

With the same sectarian blindness that he had displayed in China, Trotsky joined in 1939 with his Indo-Chinese followers in condemning the Communist leaders—headed by Ho Chi Minh—as "champions of imperialism."³ Even in 1948, when the Vietnamese Communists were leading a bitter armed struggle against French imperialism, they were condemned by the Second World Congress of Trotsky's Fourth International as "trying to dissipate the revolutionary energy of the masses" and able only to "lead the colonial revolutions into the impasse of impotent guerrilla warfare or to rotten compromises with imperialism."⁴

Everybody knows that it was the Communists in Indo-China, as in China, who provided the leadership that brought the most crushing defeats to imperialism. They thereby, of course, refuted Trotsky's slanders about them as well as his boast that "the banner on which is emblazoned the struggle for the liberation of the colonial and semi-colonial peoples, i.e. a good half of mankind, has definitely passed into the hands of the Fourth International."⁵

The Struggle against Fascism in Germany—1929-33

In contrast to the predominantly negative assessment that it has so far been necessary to make of Trotsky's positions, one should recognise that in the period from 1929-33—in particular with regard to Germany—Trotsky's criticisms of the line of the Comintern were essentially correct. Trotsky was right in his refutation of the sectarian, ultra-left theory of "social fascism" that had been developed by Stalin and Zinoviev. Expounding the idea in 1924, Stalin had asserted that social-democracy and fascism were "not opposites but twins."⁶ This idea began to be pushed very hard by the Comintern in its so-called "third period" from 1929 onwards, when the Social Democrats were characterised as "social fascists". This followed the Comintern's Sixth Congress in 1928, which had adopted a programme declaring that "social democracy serves as the mainstay of imperialism in the working-class," and that the left Social Democrats were

its "most dangerous faction".⁷ The main blow was therefore to be directed against social democracy. In general the line was that a united front could only be built from below. You should not normally seek to develop unity with the leaders of these social democratic organisations, not even with their left-wing leaders.

All this meant a rejection by the Comintern of the united front policy that had been initiated by Lenin at its third congress. In practical terms it led to a position where the growing Nazi danger was not combatted with the united front of working-class organisations that was now more needed than ever before. It is true, of course, that if the Communists had proposed and consistently worked for such a united front from both above and below—as opposed to just making occasional appeals for united action as in July 1932 and January 1933—there was no guarantee that they would not have been repulsed by the Social Democratic leaders as they were on those occasions. But what was serious was that they did not make the attempt because of the Comintern's sectarian line.

Trotsky correctly rebutted the concept of "social fascism" by showing that the Social Democratic leaders might be, and indeed were, traitors to the working-class, but that they were not fascists. They had an interest in the maintenance of parliamentary democracy against fascism and that interest needed to be utilised in order to build unity in action against the fascists. Certainly if one could have obtained a united front with the Social Democratic workers without the Social Democratic leaders, that would have been fine. But the point was that these workers still followed the Social Democratic leaders. "The overwhelming majority of the Social Democratic workers will fight against the fascists, but—for the present at least—only together with their organisations," he wrote at the end of 1931. He was absolutely right to argue that "an agreement can be concluded with the devil himself, with his grandmother, and even with Noske and Grzesinski," notorious right-wing reformists, "not with the aim of merely 'exposing' the Social Democracy (before the Communists) but with the aim of actual struggle against fascism."⁸

Some of the ingredients of the Comintern's "third period" line that Trotsky was now attacking are to be found in his own earlier positions. We have seen how in 1926 he was counterposing a demand for a "united front from below" to the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Unity Committee. The next year the Platform of the Left Opposition had declared: "The tactic of the united front should under no conditions be interpreted as a bloc with the traitors of the General Council of the TUC, or as a rapprochement with (the) Amsterdam" reformist trade union international. "Flirting" with Social Democratic leaders of all shades was condemned and "the leaders of so-called 'Left Social Democracy' said to be 'the chief danger.'"⁹

Nonetheless it was a pity that from 1929-33 more heed was not given to his lucid criticisms of policies that were hindering a united struggle to prevent the victory of fascism. Self-criticism on these precise points and using similar arguments were made by the German Communist Party at its Brussels Conference in

1. Reproduced in *Education for Socialists* (SWP, New York), June 1972: *The Chinese Revolution*—Part 1, by Peng-Shu-tse and Peng Pi-lan, pp.23, 27-28.

2. F. Wong, "Memoirs of a Chinese Trotskyist", in *International* (IMG, London), Summer 1974, p.34.

3. Trotsky, *Writings*, 1938-9, p.39.

4. *1948 Manifesto of the Fourth International against Wall Street and the Kremlin* (Toronto, 1948), p.22.

5. *Death Agony*, p.43.

6. J. Stalin, *Works* (Moscow, 1953), Volume 6, p.294.

7. *The Programme of the Communist International* (London, 1932), pp.11-12.

8. Trotsky, *The Struggle against Fascism in Germany* (New York, 1971), pp.138-9. The conception of unity set out here is somewhat different from that proclaimed by Gerry Healy, WRP General Secretary, in a debate with Tony Cliff of International Socialism on February 10, 1969: "When we talk of unity with an opponent organisation, it is to get rid of that organisation." (*The Bulletin of Marxist Studies*, Autumn 1969, p.26)

9. *The Platform of the Left Opposition* (1927), pp. 90-91. (This document, co-authored by Trotsky, is said by its SLL publishers to represent "a landmark in the development of twentieth century Marxism".) Such positions have prompted the suggestion that Trotsky's campaign against sectarian "third period" policies sprang from a concern to take a line contrary to that of the Communist Parties rather than to defend a principled position. (L. Figueres, *Le trotskisme, cet antileonisme*, Paris, 1969, p.190) See, also, Theodore Draper, in *Survey* (London), Summer 1972, pp.106-7: Trotsky "somehow managed to disagree with Stalin and Bukharin no matter what positions they held."

1935.¹ They have been spelt out in detail more recently in the *History of the German Labour Movement* as well as the *Outline History of the Communist International* produced by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Berlin (GDR) and Moscow respectively.² What is omitted is, unfortunately, any recognition of the correct criticisms made at the time not only by Trotsky (he had no monopoly of these, as his followers like to pretend) but also by various non-Trotskyist Marxists, notably the German Socialist Workers' Party (SAP) and the Brandlerites (KPD-O).

Though Trotsky's writings in this period on the struggle against fascism in Germany are among the best that he wrote at any period of his life, they should be read critically. In particular his argument in 1931 that "the attempt of the fascists to seize power in Germany must lead to the mobilisation of the Red Army" as "the arm of the proletarian world revolution"³ is of an adventurist character. Its practical effect would have been to unite Germans around Hitler and the capitalist powers against the Soviet Union. Trotsky's approach here foreshadows the advocacy by the Fourth International in the early fifties of a pre-emptive war by the USSR against world imperialism.⁴

The mistaken Communist policy in Germany does not mean, as Trotskyists have often suggested, that the Russian Comintern leaders were in essence working against a German revolution because they feared that it would undermine the power and privileges of the Soviet "bureaucracy". Trotsky himself did not hold such a crude view. Asked about this in a private talk with C. L. R. James (Johnson), who was a leading Trotskyist at the time, he replied: "I cannot agree that the policy of the International was only a materialisation of the commands of Moscow ... Stalin sincerely wished the triumph of the German Communist Party in Germany in 1930-1933 ... Also you cannot think of the Comintern as being merely an instrument of Stalin's foreign policy."⁵

The Popular Front in France⁶

Already in 1934 under the influence of Dimitroff⁷ and the independent initiative of the French Communists the Communist International started to make an important turn in its policy. Its Seventh World Congress in 1935, discarding the whole concept of "social-fascism", called for a united front of all working class organisations to combat the fascist dangers. It went further and urged, where appropriate, the extension of that unity beyond the working-class, which was to be the hub and core of the struggle against fascism. It called for a Popular Front of all sections of the working people, peasants, urban middle strata and left-wing sections of the bourgeoisie who were prepared to agree on a minimum programme of social advance and opposition to fascism.

Trotsky ferociously denounced this policy, and its application in France and Spain as "class collaboration." This was nonsense. What the Communists sought in their Popular Front strategy was a class alliance under the increasing hegemony of the working-class directed against the most powerful and reactionary sections of the ruling class that violently opposed the People's Front and democracy.

10 By extending the united front of Communists and Socialists in France to include the Radical Socialist Party, it was not a question of concern for the Radical leaders, who were bourgeois politicians. It was concern for the peasants and middle sections in the towns who followed them and needed to be drawn into the struggle against fascism. In this way it was possible to win a victory at the polls in 1936, which was accompanied by an enormous upsurge of working-class militancy and enthusiasm. It is perfectly true that this enthusiasm was in the years ahead dampened down and squandered by the policies and actions of the Socialist Prime Minister Blum and the Radical leaders. But to recognise this does not mean that there was some practical alternative revolutionary strategy which would have succeeded better under the circumstances than the Popular Front, which did in fact turn back the tide of French fascism in that period and mark important social gains and advances in the organisation and outlook of the working-class. From out of the political campaigns and strike struggles of that period the Communist Party became the mass Party that we know today, whilst the Trotskyists remained impotent and irrelevant with their proclamations of the Socialist revolution and their splits and internecine squabbles.

Communists do not try to hide the serious weaknesses and difficulties that showed themselves in France in the framework of the basically correct Popular Front strategy. The French Communist leader, Maurice Thorez, looking back on that period in 1947, observed: "The main defect of the People's Front, in which we took the initiative with some success, and which had very positive sides, was that it became a simple agreement of the leaderships. We did suggest the creation of People's Front Committees democratically elected in the factories and localities. We suggested the holding of a National Congress, composed of delegates elected by popular assemblies at the base. The Congress itself would have elected a National Committee, entrusted with the task of watching over the application of the programme of the People's Front. Some committees of the People's Front were, in fact, elected; but we did not succeed in breaking the opposition of the Socialists and of our other partners to the holding of a sovereign congress. The Socialists and Radicals gradually deprived the People's Front of its content of struggle for bread, liberty and peace ... The People's Front disintegrated little by little and collapsed as the war approached."⁹ This seems to me to be a correct criticism and partly self-criticism, although the objective limits to what the French Communist Party could achieve with its particular size at that time needs also to be taken into consideration. This would equally of course have had to be taken into account in the case of a purely working-class united front, as its position was at that time weaker than that of the Socialist Party.

The Spanish Civil War

The bankruptcy of Trotsky's opposition to the Popular Front shows itself most clearly in Spain. Here there was not just a fascist danger but, from July 1936, an actual fascist uprising led by Franco and his fellow-generals on behalf of the landowning aristocracy and the monopoly capitalists. In February the Popular Front—an alliance of Socialists, Communists and middle-

1. W. Pieck, *Der neue Weg zum gemeinsamen Kampf für den Sturz der Hitler-diktatur* (Berlin, 1960), pp. 22-31.

2. *Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (Berlin, 1966), Vol. 4, pp. 171, 206, 239-40, 289, 302-3, 311-13; *Outline History of the Communist International* (Moscow 1971), pp. 280, 291, 309-13, 325, 328-30, 334, 339.

3. Trotsky, *Struggle against Fascism*, p. 130.

4. See M. Pablo, at that time Secretary of the Fourth International, *La Guerre qui Vient* (Fourth International Publications, Paris, 1952), pp. 75-76: The Soviet leaders "should still declare war now before American rearmament reaches its optimum point ... Where is the wisdom ... if one leaves it in reality to the enemy to choose the moment of his attack, this being anyway inevitable?" (Emphasis in original) This line has since been silently dropped, though echoes of it are still to be heard from the "Fourth International" led by J. Posadas, which in Britain publishes *Red Flag*.

5. Trotsky, *Writings*, 1938-9, p. 62.

6. Since this theme is fairly fully treated and documented in my two-part article, "Trotsky and the Popular Front", in *Marxism Today*, October and November 1975, to which readers are referred, it is only touched on very briefly here.

7. Veteran Bulgarian workers' leader who had gained world acclaim for his heroic defence at the Reichstag Fire Trial in 1933, where he turned the tables on his Nazi accusers who were forced to acquit him. He now came to Moscow and became General Secretary of the Communist International.

8. In June 1936 Trotsky wrote an article entitled "The French Revolution has Begun!" making it clear that he saw the sit-in strikes there as the start of a proletarian revolution. (Whither France? Colombo, 1961, pp. 150-6) In October, after a couple of months in the same organisation, Trotsky's French followers found themselves in two rival "parties" contesting by-elections against each other in which each obtained a few dozen votes.

9. M. Thorez, Report to Central Committee of French Communist Party (October 1947), *World News and Views* (London), November 22, 1947, p. 535. Emphasis in original.

class Republicans—had beaten the Right and Centre parties. They won 269 out of 480 seats in the Cortes (parliament) and a Popular Front government took office. This victory, which the workers' parties were not strong enough to have won on their own, unleashed a great explosion of militancy and initiative among the working people—contradicting Trotsky's assertion that the People's Front was "lulling the workers and peasants with parliamentary illusions" and "paralysing their will to struggle."¹ Workers occupied factories and peasants and agricultural workers took land from the big landowners. The Communists helped to spread grass-roots Popular Front Committees throughout the country, whilst demanding actions against the generals plotting against the Republic. In these five months from February to July the Party's membership had gone up from 30,000 to 107,000 and it had become the strongest left-wing party in the country.²

When the fascists started their insurrection against the Popular Front government in July 1936, on the initiative of the Communist Party and other sections of the Left and in face of hesitation from the government, workers' militias were formed to fight against Franco's forces. "Be prepared for action! Every worker, every anti-fascist must regard himself as a mobilised soldier," declared the famous Communist leader Dolores Ibarruri (La Pasionaria) on Madrid Radio the day after the insurrection began.³ And at a mass meeting in Valencia in August this miners wife and daughter made it clear that the struggle was "not for Spain which is dying together with the enemy, but for the Spain we want to have—a democratic Spain ... which will give the peasants land, which will socialise industry under the control of the workers" and "will completely and comprehensively, and, in a revolutionary spirit, solve the economic problems that lie at the foundation of all revolutions."⁴

Thanks to the direct action of the armed workers, the fascist rising was crushed in most of the main towns in the first fortnight of the war. As capitalists and landlords fled to the fascist zone, workers took over their factories and peasants occupied their land. With the fascist uprising, wrote La Pasionaria, "the whole state apparatus was destroyed and state power lay in the street."⁵

It was now that Franco turned to fascist Germany and Italy, which proceeded to give him the decisive assistance in arms, planes and personnel to continue his offensive against the Spanish Republic. To smash this threat from the ruthless forces of domestic and foreign fascism was the most urgent task of the moment. How could it best be achieved?

Trotsky had correctly criticised the Comintern's view in the "Third Period" that the seizure of power by the proletariat was the immediate task when fascism threatened.⁶ He had shown that fascism was "sharply opposed to other bourgeois parties" and insisted: "The fact that all bourgeois parties from fascism to the Social Democratic Party place the defence of bourgeois democracy above their programmatic differences neither does away with their specific characteristics, nor their struggle against each other, nor our task of taking advantage of this struggle."⁷ On July 30, 1936, however, we find him

writing that the Socialist revolution was on the order of the day as the only means to defeat fascism. "The victory of the people means the end of the Popular Front and the beginning of Soviet Spain."⁸

Trotsky was once again applying the tactics of the Bolsheviks in 1917 to a totally different situation.⁹ Indeed he seemed more concerned with the formal similarity of the historical parallel than with a specific analysis of what policy was good or bad in a specific situation. Thus he was to write: "Apart from the question of whether the policy of the 'People's Front' is good or bad, it happens to be the traditional policy of Menshevism against which Lenin fought all his life."¹⁰

The result of pursuing the course urged by Trotsky in the circumstances of the Spanish Civil War would have been to narrow down the alliance against fascism by breaking the unity of the workers' parties with the peasants and the middle strata who supported the republican parties. Naturally Trotsky wanted such unity—but only "from below", without the parties and party leaders that they still followed. The idea was as futile and unrealistic as the conception of building a united front with the Social Democratic workers without their leaders for which Trotsky had correctly criticised the German Communists in the "Third Period".

Trotsky called the Spanish Popular Front an "alliance with the bourgeoisie's shadow, since the bourgeoisie itself was with Franco, and asserted that the left republicans "represented no one but themselves."¹¹ It would be difficult to imagine a cruder parody of historical materialism. Trotsky here dismisses the Marxist concept of the relative autonomy of ideas and institutions in favour of a dogmatic presumption that either a party directly represents one of the two main classes of society—or it represents no one.¹² The millions of Spanish working people, opposed to fascism but not yet Socialists or Communists, who had returned the 162 republican and other non-Socialist left MPs within the framework of the Popular Front, counted for nothing. Those to whom they gave their votes ... "represented no one"!

To have overthrown the parliament just elected by the people by a Revolution for the establishment of Soviet power would have confirmed the precise allegations against the "Reds" made by the fascists from the summer of 1936.¹³ It is hardly credible that these statements would have been repeatedly trumpeted forth by Franco's propaganda machine for both domestic and foreign consumption if such a seizure of power would have enjoyed the popular support in Spain and the contagious revolutionary propensities abroad attributed to it by Trotsky. On the contrary, the fascists, being much more realistic and in touch with the situation than Trotsky,¹⁴ calculated that, if believed, such "revelations" could win support for themselves—or at least neutralise important sections of anti-fascist opinion into rejecting both sides as anti-democratic. If the workers' organisations had in reality tried to seize power in this way, they might well have enjoyed temporary success in the industrial towns, but at the cost of alienating the wider support at home and abroad. This was crucial if they were to stand a chance of crushing the forces of fascism with their substantial material assistance from

1. L. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution, 1931-39* (New York, 1973), p.229. (July 1936).

2. See J. Sandoval and M. Azcarate, *Spain 1936-1939* (London 1963), p.20. By March 1937 the membership was up to 250,000, of whom 150,000 were industrial and agricultural workers, 76,000 were small and middle peasants, 15,000 were from the middle-classes and 7,000 were intellectuals and from the liberal professions. (Jose Diaz, Report to March 1937 Central Committee Plenum, quoted by F. Claudin, *La crise du mouvement communiste*, Paris, 1972, Vol. 1, pp.270-1) Ted Grant, however, blandly tells us—without disclosing his source—that "two-thirds of the (party's) membership were composed of shopkeepers, foremen, small businessmen, rich peasants, top levels of technicians etc. Only one-third was composed of workers—mostly the most backward section of the working-class." (Ted Grant, "The Spanish Revolution, 1931-37", *Militant International Review*, No. 7, Autumn 1973, p.44.)

3. D. Ibarruri, *Speeches and Articles, 1936-38* (Moscow 1938), p.8.

4. *ibid.*, p.16.

5. *ibid.*, p.214.

6. *Struggle against Fascism*, p.157.

7. L. Trotsky, *Die österreichische Krise* (Vienna 1929), p.11. My emphasis.

8. "The Lesson of Spain", *Spanish Revolution*, pp.234-9, cf. *ibid.*, pp.324-5: "Only the socialist revolution is capable of crushing fascism ...

Victory will go either to the socialist revolution or to fascism." (December 1937).

9. See, e.g. Trotsky's letters of July 1936 comparing the Popular Front to the bloc of Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries with the bourgeois Cadet Party in Russia in 1917. (*Spanish Revolution*, pp.220-1, 233.)

10. *Writings, 1937-8*, p.171 (January 1938)

11. *Spanish Revolution*, pp.309-10 (December 1937)

12. Contrast this with Marx's treatment in his *Eighteenth Brumaire* of the ideological factors involved in the formation of separate parties of the same class and of the character of the French Social Democratic Party of the time as a coalition of two classes (Marx—Engels, *Selected Works*, Moscow/London, 1950, Vol. I, esp. pp.233-4, 247-50.) When criticising Stalin's equally crude party model in relation to the Soviet Union, Trotsky of course sheds his own dogmatism! (See his *Revolution Betrayed*, New York, 1957, pp.266-8.)

13. They cited three forged documents purporting to reveal general instructions for a revolution and the installation of Left Socialists and Communists as a 'Soviet'. (See H. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* London, Pelican edition, 1968, p.150.)

14. "The level of information reaching me stands at zero," he wrote on August 16, 1936, in a private letter to the representative of the Trotskyist movement in Barcelona (*Spanish Revolution*, p.240)—a fortnight after his article, "The Lesson of Spain" (quoted above and below), publicly "explaining" the miraculous effects that would ensure from advancing the programme of Socialist revolution and ending the Popular Front in Spain at that critical moment!

Therefore the Communists devoted themselves to consolidating and extending the anti-fascist unity of the People's Front and achieving the predominance of the working-class within it. Things advanced here much further than in France. The leftward swing in the country was reflected in a new People's Front government in September, under the Left Socialist Caballero, with a majority of workers' representatives and including two Communist ministers and (from November) four Anarchists. Important measures of nationalisation and state control were carried out.¹ Extensive democratic transformations, involving the creation of a new popular state apparatus, were undertaken.

To preserve the Popular Front alliance with the Republican parties under these circumstances did not mean "to subordinate the proletariat to the leadership of the bourgeoisie."² On the contrary, it meant detaching sections of the liberal bourgeoisie from the main force of the class enemy supporting Franco and drawing them and, above all, their millions of peasant and middle-class followers into struggle under the hegemony of the working-class. As Santiago Carrillo, leader of the Spanish Communist Party, has explained, the Left Republican President of the Republic, Azana, "did not possess any real power". This "was in the hands of the people and the working-class forces played the decisive role."³

Of special importance was the decree passed in October 1936 on the initiative of the Communist Minister of Agriculture, which effectively expropriated the big landowners. As Professor Hugh Thomas has written in his well-known history of the Spanish Civil War, this measure "legalising the expropriation of land owned by nationalists revolutionised the life of Spain ... In almost every case the peasants of Republican Spain were by early 1937 either owners of their own land or labouring for a collective farm. The tenant farmers and the landless labourers dependent upon a negligent landlord had vanished."⁴ And Dolores Ibarruri was to emphasise: "The peasants all over Spain—note that, all over Spain, and not only in the part that now happens to be in our hands—will have the land which was turned over to them by the decree of the Ministry of Agriculture of October 7, 1936."⁵ Yet Trotsky alleged—from what special intelligence he does not make clear—that "the Spanish peasants ... say: 'With Franco and with Caballero, it is the same thing'" and added with touching solicitude: "I am with this primitive Spanish peasant."⁶

The granting of national rights to the peoples of Catalonia and the Baque country was another positive step taken by the Popular Front government. This was unfortunately not accompanied by a pledge of independence for Spanish Morocco, from which Franco had launched his insurrection with the support of Moorish soldiers. Pressure from the Spanish Communists, who had campaigned consistently over the years for Moroccan independence, forced Caballero to refer to the problem in the Spanish parliament on December 12, 1936, but what he said was unsatisfactory and too vague to help develop Moroccan opposition to Franco.⁷

Trotsky does not appear to have deemed the issue of Moroccan independence sufficiently important to raise it even in passing in all his writings on Spain between 1931 and 1939. This neglect is matched, at the other extreme, by the exaggerated claims of his supporters like Mandel to the effect that Franco's uprising could have been "crushed in a few months, among other things by promising the independence of Spanish Morocco to Franco's Moorish troops ..."⁸ But why should Trotsky have troubled himself with solutions taking whole months to win the war, when he had a simple formula guaranteed to bring results within a day? "The Spanish revolution", he wrote on July 30, 1936, "can even take the army away from its reactionary officers. To accomplish this, it is only necessary to seriously and courageously advance the programme of the Socialist revolution ... The fascist army could not resist the influence of such a programme for twenty-four hours; the soldiers would tie their officers hand and foot and turn them over to the nearest headquarters of the workers' militia."⁹

The overall policy of the Spanish Communist Party in the Civil War was, I believe, correct, though many mistakes were made and great harm was done by the way in which, at the height of the Stalinist purges in the Soviet Union, NKVD (Soviet State Security) agents were sent into Spain and carried out measures of repression against honest revolutionaries, such as Andres Nin, the leader of the leftist POUM.¹⁰ Far from being linked to the Popular Front conception, such actions worked in precisely the opposite direction. The party's strategy, which must be assessed politically, was to achieve the widest possible unity for the defeat of Franco, whilst at the same time defending and extending the social gains won in the democratic, anti-feudal, anti-monopoly capitalist revolution.¹¹ It was, therefore, a complete distortion for Trotsky repeatedly to allege that "the Comintern declared with regard to Spain that the social reforms will come after the victory."¹²

In practice, as Santiago Carrillo has shown recently, this popular revolution from July 1936 contained within it important elements of a Socialist revolution, though not a Soviet one,¹³ overstepping the bounds of a bourgeois democratic revolution. However, the task of carrying through a complete socialist revolution was to be left until after the Civil War had been won. If the Spanish people were to have any future under any form of democracy, whether it was bourgeois or proletarian or some new transitional form of "people's democracy", the first condition was the defeat of the fascists, who were supported by the bulk of the Spanish army corps as well as by Germany and Italy. This necessitated advancing from the immediate and correct initiative in setting up workers' militias to the organisation of a centralised, well-trained and disciplined People's Army—incorporating the militia—which could fight a modern war effectively and efficiently against the fascists. Trotsky saw this as a betrayal of the Spanish workers so long as Soviet power had not been established and he counterposed the militias to the Republican army. "Enemies of the socialist revolution, that is, exploiting elements and their agents, even if masquerading as 'democrats', 'republicans', 'Socialists', and 'Anarchists', must be mercilessly driven out of the army," he wrote in December 1937.¹⁴

1 In its programme of December 18, 1936, *The Eight Conditions for Victory*, the Spanish Communist Party proposed the nationalisation of the basic industries and the setting up of a Co-ordinating Council for Industry and the Economy.

2 *Spanish Revolution*, p.309 (December 1937).

3 S. Carrillo, *Demain l'Espagne* (Paris, 1974), p.161. An English translation of this extremely interesting book is being published by Lawrence and Wishart in 1976.

4 *The Spanish Civil War*, p.463.

5 *Speeches and Articles*, p.234. cf. *ibid.*, p.101: "Our party is a consistent advocate of collective labour, including labour in agriculture, because collective labour makes it possible to utilise machinery, fertilisers and irrigation on a large scale, thus ensuring an increase in produce and lightening the labour of the peasants. But collectivisation, work in common, must follow from a clear expression of the will of the peasants and must never be imposed on them by force."

6 *The Case of Leon Trotsky* (London 1937), p.294. Ted Grant, in the article quoted above, quotes at length from a Communist article of August 1936 on the inadequacies of the land reform up till then and studiously avoids making even a passing reference to the decree of October. Grant quotes from Hugh Thomas' book in another connection and therefore cannot be unaware that the October decree transformed the previous situation. Yet he bases his argument on the assumption of Socialist and Communist refusal to give the land to more than two-and-a-half per cent of the peasants! (*op.cit.*, pp.27-8, 39, 43, 47-8.) And Felix Morrow in his *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*, recommended by Grant as a "Marxist classic", writes: "The land decree of October 7, 1936, merely sanctioned division of estates belonging to known fascists; other wealthy landlords, peasant exploiters, etc., remained untouched. The aroused hopes of the peasantry were smothered." (New Park, London, edition 1963, p.51) By concentrating on the form of the decree, Morrow seeks to play down its actual effect. It declared that the lands of those "who directly or indirectly had taken part in the rebellion against the republic" were liable to confiscation. In practice this meant almost all landowners' estates (I. Maisky, *Spanish Notebooks*, London 1966, p.117; Sandoval & Azcarate, *op.cit.*, pp.88-9).

7 See Arthur H. Landis, *Spain 1 The Unfinished Revolution* (California 1972), p.192.

8 E. Mandel, *Peaceful Coexistence and World Revolution* (New York 1970), p.12.

9 "The Lesson of Spain", *Spanish Revolution*, p.235. This passage is quoted in full and with approval by Chris Harman in *International*

Socialism, No. 64, Mid-November 1973, p.25. In his new book, p.213, Santiago Carrillo discusses the question of Nin's secret execution and of "certain (Soviet) services in Spain" whilst insisting that there were no Russians in the Republican security apparatus and that he had had no proof of the existence of Soviet secret police jails in Spain. (*Demain l'Espagne*, p.56)

11 cf. Trotsky in April 1936: "The October Revolution has vigorously demonstrated that the socialist revolution cannot be carried out within the framework of democracy. The 'democratic' revolution and the socialist revolution are on opposite sides of the barricades. The Third International theoretically confirmed this experience. The 'democratic' revolution in Spain has already been carried out. The Popular Front is renewing it ..." (*Spanish Revolution*, p.213.)

12 *The Case of Leon Trotsky*, p.294. See also, *Spanish Revolution*, pp.243, 320.

13 *Demain l'Espagne*, pp.53, 161-2.

14 *Spanish Revolution*, pp.320, 1.

Trotsky's statements on the Spanish Civil War often contradicted each other. At times we find him emphasising the need "to draw a distinction between the fighting camps in Spain"¹ and writing (In September 1937): "The Stalin-Negrin government (i.e. the Spanish Republican government of the time) is a quasi democratic obstacle on the road to socialism; but it is also an obstacle ... on the road to fascism. Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow the Spanish proletariat may perhaps be able to break through this obstacle and seize power. But if it sided, even passively, in tearing it down today, it would only serve fascism."² At other times however he was asserting that "without the proletarian revolution the victory of 'democracy' would only mean a round-about path to the very same fascism", and concluding that it was "necessary to openly and boldly mobilise the masses against the Popular Front government."³ Proceeding from this latter view he even went so far as explicitly to champion civil war and an "uprising of the proletariat" in the rear of Republican Spain at a time when it was waging a life-and-death struggle against the forces of Franco, Hitler and Mussolini.⁴

At the beginning of May 1937 an armed uprising did in fact take place in the Republican city of Barcelona. Interviewed shortly afterwards by Associated Press, Trotsky characterised it as "a more or less spontaneous movement" and noted correctly that such "spontaneous uprisings (were) all to the advantage of the fascists."⁵ However this did not prevent him from declaring elsewhere his support for the insurrection, whilst expressing his criticism that it was not carried through to the end. "If the Catalan proletariat had seized power in May 1937," he asserted, as usual without the slightest attempt at substantiation, "they would have found support throughout Spain ... In the territory occupied by Franco not only the workers but also the peasants would have turned toward the Catalan proletariat, would have isolated the fascist army and brought about its irresistible disintegration."⁶ After the Russian workers had seized power twenty years earlier, Trotsky had been similarly "carried away by his optimism".⁷ Opposing the prospect of "explosions" in Germany and Austria to Lenin's warning against relying on the "fairy-tale" of world revolution, Trotsky had taken a stand at the time of the Brest Litovsk treaty negotiations, in 1918, based on a rapid spread of revolution leading to a transformation of the military situation. By the time that harsh reality had forced him to change his view and admit he had been wrong, the young Soviet state had had to pay dearly for an error fraught with dire practical consequences.⁸

Among the German Foreign Office documents of the period is the record of a conversation that enables us to discern the realities of the struggle with fascism obscured by Trotsky's revolutionary rodomontade. It took place on May 7, 1937 between Franco's brother and the German ambassador, Faupel, who reported to Berlin: "In respect of the disturbances in Barcelona Franco informed me that the street fighting had been started by his agents. As Nicolas Franco told me in amplification, they had in all 13 agents at their disposal in Barcelona. Of these one had already a long time before reported that the tension between Anarchists and Communists was so great in Barcelona that he undertook to bring the struggle there to an eruption ... As the Reds had recently attacked at Teruel in order to relieve the

Euzkadi (Basque) government, he had deemed the moment now to be propitious for the outbreak of disorders. In fact the agent succeeded, a few days after he had received the appropriate instructions, in having shooting started in the streets, which then led to the desired results."⁹ By the time the rebels called off their action—and Trotsky was to emphasise that he had been "disquieted by the news of an 'armistice' in Barcelona"¹⁰—it has been estimated that as many as 950 people had been killed and 3,000 wounded.

I am not arguing that Trotsky was consciously working for the fascists. That's ridiculous. I said at the outset that Trotsky should be viewed subjectively as a Marxist revolutionary. But I am absolutely convinced that to seek and support civil war behind the Republican lines when there was already a civil war going on against the fascists, who occupied a considerable part of the country, was objectively to play into their hands. The fascists understood this very clearly. That is why they used their agents to stir into revolt perfectly genuine and sincere Anarchist "Friends of Durutti", members of the leftist POUM and such few direct supporters as Trotsky had in Barcelona. These people acted in what they believed were ways which would serve the proletarian revolution and a consequent disintegration of the fascist army. In fact, they were being manipulated by Franco for the purpose of taking pressure off his army and helping to consolidate his position.

The beginning of 1939 saw the development of grave dissensions in the Republican camp as a result of the advance of the fascist armed forces. "If we were unable to overcome our contradictions this was directly related to our losing positions in the military sphere and the emergence of the prospect of defeat," Carrillo has pointed out. As the Republican forces in February 1939 were being forced to withdraw from Catalonia and the British and French governments were preparing to give Franco diplomatic recognition, Colonel Casado, commanding the central army in Madrid, banned the Communist Party's newspaper and arrested its members.¹² It was hoped to discredit the Party in eyes of the people by alleging that it was preparing a revolutionary "seizure of power". Casado, heading a motley collection not only of officers and bourgeois politicians, but also of Socialist and Anarchist leaders, then carried out a coup designed to prepare the way for a capitulation to Franco, which the Communists bitterly resisted. Certainly these people revealed themselves as unreliable and treacherous allies, ready to sell out the Republic when things became difficult. But this was no argument against having worked with them when they were still prepared to co-operate in the struggle against fascism. As Lenin had written, to "renounce in advance ... any conciliation or compromise with possible allies (even if they are temporary, unstable, vacillating or conditional allies)—is this not ridiculous in the extreme?"¹³ The Communists error lay not in such collaboration but, as Dolores Ibarruri has written self-critically, in their "naivete" in not realising even at a late stage that treachery was being plotted.¹⁴

Serious weaknesses there certainly were on the side of the Popular Front, but Franco's victory was due above all to his decisive superiority in military might as a result of the substantial German and Italian war supplies and armed intervention in the air,

1. *Death Agony*, p.55

2. *Spanish Revolution*, p.296. My emphasis.

3. "Is Victory Possible in Spain?" (April 1937), *Spanish Revolution*, pp.258-9. Emphasis in original.

4. *Spanish Revolution*, p.261 (April 1937), p.324 (December 1937).

5. Trotsky, *Writings, 1937-8*, p.84 (June 1, 1937).

6. *Spanish Revolution*, p.279 (August 1937). This passage is quoted approvingly by Tom Kemp in an extended review of this collection of Trotsky's Spanish writings in *Workers' Press*, 13-17 March 1973. In five long articles this leading WRP historian cannot find a single, even faint, critical observation to make about any point in these writings or even suggest the existence of any of the contradictions in them. This is religious piety, not the scientific method of Marxism.

7. I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed* (London 1954), p.382

8. In Chapter XI of the *Prophet Armed* Deutscher gives an excellent account of this controversy. Trotsky's account (*My Life*, Chapter XXXI) is basically accurate and far more revealing than he realises. See also Lenin's stand against both Trotsky and the Left-Communists on this issue in *The Revolutionary Phrase* (Moscow 1965), especially pp.85-6, quoted above.

9. *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik. 1918-1945. Aus dem Archiv des Deutschen Auswärtigen Amtes* (Baden-Baden 1951), Vol.III, Series D (1937-1945). *Deutschland und der Spanischer Bürgerkrieg. 1936-1939*, p.243 (Document 254)

10. *Spanish Revolution*, p.302 (October 1937).

11. I. Maisky, *Spanish Notebooks* (London 1966), p.136. Felix Morrow, in the standard Trotsky account (*Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*, London 1963) estimates 500 dead and 1,500 wounded and comments: "Certainly the attempt to organise resistance would have resulted in no more victims than were produced by capitulation" to the forces of the Spanish Republican government. (p.112).

12. He took advantage of a state of emergency decreed by Prime Minister Negrin in January 1939. This had mistakenly been approved by the Communists, but it "meant in fact putting power in the hands of the military who wanted to surrender." (D. Ibarruri, *They shall not pass*, London/New York 1966, p.331)

13. *CW*, Vol 31, pp.70-1.

14. *They shall not pass*, p.330.

on the ground and at sea, and the cruel charade of "non-intervention" performed by Britain and France.¹ Trotsky denied the overriding significance of these factors in explaining the Republic's defeat² and spoke of "all the conditions for victory (having been) at hand."³ This was like disputing that the military preponderance of the Versailles forces in May 1871—thanks to the Prussian assistance in releasing their French POWs to them—was the crucial element in the defeat of the Paris Commune, as Marx and Engels had shown.⁴

The crushing of the Spanish People's Front by greater fascist force is no proof of the correctness of Trotsky's criticisms of the Popular Front. It is obvious, as Trotsky himself had written, that "even the most correct strategy cannot give victory under unfavourable objective conditions."⁵ Trotsky's alternative of promoting civil war within the civil war would have led to defeat much more certainly and much more rapidly, whilst bringing discredit to the very conception of socialist revolution. Trotsky was acting like the famous hero of Russian folklore referred to by Lenin who repeated good advice when it was most out of place.⁶ Moreover the good advice was interlaced with denunciations of the most vicious and irresponsible kind. He even went so far as to lump together the People's Front and fascism as "the last political resources of imperialism in the struggle against the proletarian revolution,"⁷ and to describe the Communist movement ("Stalinism") as "the worst agency of the bourgeoisie"⁸—i.e. worse than fascism!

Against Collective Security

Trotsky's refusal to appreciate the new world situation prevailing after the Nazis took power in Germany was also reflected in his attitude to the struggle for peace and collective security in the thirties. He attacked the Soviet Union's entry into the League of Nations in 1934 and the campaign for a peace front of the USSR and the Western bourgeois democracies to help stem the aggression threatened by the fascist states. He even rejected as "anti-Marxist political philosophy" the Communists' distinction between aggressive fascist powers and capitalist countries interested at that time, for their own reasons, in the maintenance of peace.⁹

He condemned Stalin's formula, "We do not want an inch of foreign soil but will not give up an inch of ours", as "a conservative programme for the preservation of the status quo in radical contradiction to the aggressive nature of the proletarian revolution."¹⁰ The defence of the national state of Europe, proclaimed Trotsky, was "in the full sense a reactionary task." The job of the workers was "not the defence of the national state but its complete and final liquidation."¹¹ This all sounded highly revolutionary ... until one realised that the only way that these national states stood to be liquidated in that period was by their annexation by Hitler or Mussolini.

Czechoslovakia was a case in point. In September 1938 the Communist and wide progressive forces were going all out to force the British and French governments to join with the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia to resist Hitler's demands on Czech territory. Not so Trotsky! "What would a military bloc of imperialist democracies against Hitler mean?" he wrote on the eve of the Munich capitulation to Hitler by Britain and France.

"A new edition of the Versailles chains, even more heavy, bloody and intolerable."¹²

Even in Czechoslovakia, where national independence and the democratic rights of the working people were imminently threatened by German fascism, he argued that it was necessary to "advance the slogan that the main enemy is in our own country—the ruling class." It was "absolutely obligatory that our (Czechoslovak) comrades follow a defeatist policy."¹³ He admitted that if the workers took such a defeatist position, "the working-class can serve the military purposes of Hitler. It can add to his advantage at first." He dismissed this however as "a question only of the military map" (?!) and went on: "Imagine in Czechoslovakia we have a revolutionary policy that leads to the conquest of power. It would be 100 times more dangerous to Hitler than patriotic support of Czechoslovakia."¹⁴ Imagination is indeed required here since Trotsky was to advance not the slightest evidence that his "revolutionary" panacea was even a remote possibility in the prevailing circumstances.

Trotsky's whole approach here amounts to this: Imagine the most desirable possible solution. Endow it with the force of imminent reality. And from that lofty premise reject and revile all lesser objectives. The founder of the Fourth International had a lot to say about dialectical materialism, but the philosophical basis of this method is the purest idealism.

The Second World War

These voluntarist and ultra-sectarian positions were carried over into the Second World War in 1939 and maintained by Trotsky till his assassination in August 1940—and by his orthodox followers right up to the end of the war in 1945. He proceeded from the peculiar premise that "a programme of 'defence of democracy' for the advanced countries is a programme of reaction. The only progressive task here is the preparation of international socialist revolution."¹⁵

The Fourth International's *Manifesto on the Imperialist War*, which Trotsky wrote in May 1940, called for the transformation of the imperialist war into civil war in all the warring countries.¹⁶ In keeping with this, he declared after the fall of France to Hitler in June 1940: "From the standpoint of a revolution in one's own country the defeat of one's own imperialist government is undoubtedly a 'lesser evil.' Pseudo-internationalists, however, refuse to apply this principle in relation to the defeated democratic countries."¹⁷

Trotsky was making the basic error, for which Lenin had taken him to task in 1920, of basing himself on "general principle"—an approach which is itself fundamentally wrong.¹⁸ Instead of analysing the specific character of the situation and its practical implications, he was making a mechanical transposition to the very different conditions in the second world war of the Bolshevik slogans of 1914-18—which incidentally he had rejected at that time.¹⁹

In the first world war Lenin had seen no reason for making any fundamental distinction between the two groups of imperialist powers. There was at that time no equivalent of Nazi Germany,

1. The closing of France's frontier with Republican Spain for deliveries of arms also made even more difficult the transportation of Soviet military aid at a time when the fascists were attacking and sinking ships suspected of carrying cargo from Soviet ports to Republican Spain. (See "Solidarity with the Spanish Republic from 1936 to 1939", *Soviet News*, 14 November 1972; I. Maisky, *Spanish Notebooks*, pp.48-9, 116-7.)

2. *Spanish Revolution*, p.341 (March 1939).

3. *ibid.*, p.331. (February 1939)

4. At the same time they had pointed to the Commune's own mistakes, the inadequacies of some of its leaders and the treachery of some of its commanders, which had played a contributory role.

5. Trotsky, *Writings*, 1932, p.289.

6. *CW*, Vol. 9, p.77.

7. *Death Agony*, p.14.

8. *Spanish Revolution*, p.259 (April 1937)

9. Trotsky, *Writings*, 1934-5, p.18 (June 1934)

10. *War and the Fourth International* (June 1934), in Trotsky, *Writings*, 1933-4, p.312. This is described by the American Trotskyist editors of these writings as "one of Trotsky's most important pamphlets ... It is the most complete and systematic presentation of the Leninist attitude toward war in the epoch of imperialism that has ever been written." (p.12) That leaves Lenin's own writings in the shade!

11. *ibid.*, p.304. Emphasis in original.

12. Trotsky, *Writings*, 1938-9, p.11 (19 September 1938).

13. *ibid.*, pp.7-8 (2 June 1938).

14. *ibid.*

15. Trotsky, *Writings*, 1938-9, p.15 (October 1938). My emphasis.

16. Trotsky, *Writings*, 1939-40, p.46.

17. "We do not change course" (30 June 1940), *ibid.*, p.48.

18. Lenin, *CW*, Vol.32, p.22.

19. See Lenin's polemic against Trotsky on this: "The Defeat of One's Own Government in the Imperialist War" (July 1915). *CW*, Vol. 21, pp. 275,280.

whose victory in 1939-45 would have meant subjection to the Iron Heel of fascist barbarism and ethnic genocide, the crushing of working-class and democratic organisations and the blocking—probably for generations—of all possibility of advance to socialism. Before 1933 Trotsky had eloquently stressed the need of the German workers to defend the rights that they enjoyed under bourgeois democracy against the threat of destruction and extermination from the Nazis, whose victory would make “the hellish work of Italian fascism probably appear as a pale and humane experiment.”¹ It is therefore a strange paradox that he now made no essential distinction between the fascist powers and the bourgeois democracies.² “The victory of the imperialists of Great Britain and France”, he proclaimed, “would not be less frightful for the ultimate fate of mankind than that of Hitler and Mussolini. Bourgeois democracy cannot be saved. By helping their bourgeoisie against foreign fascism the workers would only accelerate the victory of fascism in their own country.”³

The Fourth International and the Lessons of History

After Hitler came to power in Germany, Trotsky pronounced the Comintern “dead for the revolution” and called for the formation of a “Fourth International”. In September 1938, after a secret one-day meeting at a private house in a French village, its foundation was proclaimed. The 22 delegates claimed to represent Trotskyist organisations in 11 countries. The private minutes of the conference make pathetic reading and are in glaring contrast to its public declarations. They reveal a position of extraordinary feebleness and almost total disorganisation.⁴ The Polish delegate, Karl, said that “it was true that the Second and Third (Internationals) were dead, but in spite of this they were still mass organisations; the Fourth was in no sense a mass organisation, and it would be folly to proclaim it until it was.” Folly however carried the day: his arguments were attacked as “Manshevik” and he was outvoted by 19 votes to three.⁵

The Transitional Programme of the Fourth International, written by Trotsky and adopted by the conference, announced with staggering pretentiousness that “the crisis of the proletarian leadership, having become the crisis in mankind’s culture, can be resolved only by the Fourth International.” The “overthrow of Mussolini, Hitler and their agents and imitators”, as well as the struggle for colonial liberation, would “occur only under the leadership of the Fourth International.” It alone could “revive the Soviet regime and guarantee its further development toward socialism” by “leading the Soviet masses to insurrection.”⁶ And in a message to American supporters Trotsky predicted: “During the next ten years the programme of the Fourth International will become the guide of millions and these revolutionary millions will know how to storm earth and heaven.”⁷

Each new day of the coming war would work in their favour, he wrote in October 1938. “In the very first months of the war, a stormy reaction will set in among the working masses. The first victims of this reaction, along with fascism, will be the parties of the Second and Third Internationals. Their collapse will be the indispensable condition for an avowed revolutionary movement, which will find for its crystallisation no axis other

than the Fourth International. Its tempered cadres will lead the toilers to the great offensive.”⁸ A failure to succeed in this could not be blamed on the smallness of their forces. “The Fourth International”, he claimed in May 1940, “in numbers and especially in preparation possesses infinite advantages over its predecessors at the beginning of the last war. The Fourth International is the direct heir of Bolshevism in its flower.”⁹

However Trotsky’s euphoria at the prospects that he saw opened up by the war was accompanied by pessimistic and revisionistic forebodings. Both reflected his own impatience.¹⁰ Thus he wrote in September 1939 that if “the present war” did not promote revolution in any of the advanced countries, “nothing else would remain except only to recognise that the socialistic programme, based on the internal contradictions of capitalist society, ended as a Utopia.” In such a case “we should doubtless have to pose the question of revising our conception of the present epoch and its driving forces.” It was “absolutely self-evident that if the international proletariat, as a result of the experience of our entire epoch and the current new war, proves incapable of becoming the master of society, this would signify the foundering of all hope for a socialist revolution, for it is impossible to expect any more favourable conditions for it.”¹¹

Faced with the fact that Trotsky’s predictions have proved so disastrously mistaken, his defenders argue that it was only that he got his timing wrong, as Marx, Engels and Lenin had often done before him. This evades the essence of the problem. It is not just that, far from leading millions to victory, the Fourth International since Trotsky’s death has split and split again and nowhere in the world succeeded in establishing a single mass party.¹² It is above all the fact that the world revolution has made enormous advances in this period—but under the leadership of the Communist Parties described when the Fourth International was formed as “no longer parties, properly speaking, but mechanisms operated by the Soviet Foreign Office (whose doom was long ago pronounced).”¹³

Since 1938 when Trotsky wrote of the “definite passing over of the Comintern to the side of the bourgeois order, its cynically counter-revolutionary role throughout the world”, these “doomed” parties have led the overthrow of the bourgeois order in a dozen countries, though not yet in the advanced capitalist nations. The apologia of Trotskyist orthodoxy is embarrassingly feeble: “We view these revolutions as anomalies, as mileposts on a historically temporary detour away from the main pattern of proletarian revolution.”¹⁴

As Trotsky had alleged that “the chief cause for the defeats of the world proletariat is the criminal policies of the Comintern,”¹⁵ it would be only logical for his followers to concede that the policies of the Communist Parties should be given some credit for its victories. But no! The dogmatists resist so dangerous an admission. “It is a fact,” writes Cliff Conner of the American Trotskyist Socialist Workers’ Party in the best Orwellian New-speak, “that Stalinist parties have been at the head of the revolutionary struggles that have ended in victory, but that it is not the same as saying that the parties themselves helped advance

1. Trotsky, *Struggle against Fascism*, p.125. See also *ibid.*, pp.126, 155-6, 161, 367-8.

2. A similar mistake was made by the Communist International and its parties at the beginning of the war, although at no time did the British and French Communist Parties proclaim or practise a policy of revolutionary defeatism, or demand “that the workers turn the imperialist war into a civil war”, as the British Trotskyists pride themselves on having done. (*Newsletter*, 26 September 1964.) In refusing to reconsider this line even after Britain and the Soviet Union had become allies in 1941 the latter were following Trotsky, who had written in 1939: “To renounce defeatism in relation to that imperialist camp to which the USSR adheres ... is to push the workers of the enemy camp to the side of their government; it means to renounce defeatism in general.” (Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism*, pp.16-17.)

3. *Manifesto of the Fourth International on the Imperialist War and the Proletarian World Revolution* (May 1940), *Writings 1939-40*, p.46.

4. *Documents of the Fourth International* (New York, 1973), esp. pp.285-9.

5. *ibid.*, pp.297-8.

the revolutionary process. In China, the policies of the Chinese CP were consciously designed to hold back the revolution"!!¹

How then did such revolutions succeed? "In China and Yugoslavia," explains a Conference resolution of the Socialist Labour League, "the bulwarks erected against the spread of revolution by international Stalinism were broken down by the elemental force of the popular revolutionary movement, the absence of any viable bourgeois alternative and the corruption and breakdown of the old regimes."² As Trotsky noted of his pre-1917 "fatalistic optimism", this implied in practice "repudiation ... of the very idea of a party, because, if 'the course of events' is capable of directly dictating to the masses the correct policy, what is the use of any special unification of the proletarian vanguard, the working out of a programme, the choice of leaders, the training in a spirit of discipline?"³ However the SLL wants to have it both ways, since in the very next page of its resolution it declares: "The need to build independent Marxist parties in order to provide alternative leadership is the most urgent task of today."⁴

It is surely a proof of ideological bankruptcy and incapacity to face up to the experience of history that the main post-war Trotskyist work on world revolution, edited by Ernest Mandel, should in all its 366 pages avoid any Marxist analysis of the implications of the socialist revolutions since the end of the war for traditional Trotskyist theory. Its first essay states at the outset: "More than one-third of humanity—one billion people—has entered into the phase of constructing socialism."⁵ Yet it offers not a word of explanation as to why these revolutions

¹⁶ have taken place under the leadership of "counter-revolutionary" Communist Parties, whereas the allegedly revolutionary Trotskyist organisations have NOWHERE succeeded in directing the masses' revolutionary "urges" and leading them to revolution!

The recent revolutionary victory in South Vietnam and the role of the Communists in achieving it emphasises once again the invalidity of Trotsky's fundamental prognoses and can only accentuate the "revisionist" heartsearchings already going on among less hide-bound Trotskyists about their traditional model.⁶ What is however at stake is not a patching up of that model to allow for such "special cases" as the Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions, but a recognition that history has demolished the very basis on which Trotsky wrote off the Communist Parties and proclaimed his Fourth International.

If you looked at the record of a horse that had failed, despite persistent attempts, even to win a place in a single important race, wouldn't you ask yourself whether he hadn't got certain congenital defects as a racehorse? And would you not be better advised to back one that had won a dozen races in the same period, even though he'd crashed some of his fences and had not yet carried off the Derby or the Grand National?

Such, it seems to me, is the kind of choice to be made today between the various Trotskyist organisations and the Communist Party and the Young Communist League by all who wish effectively to work for further victories of the socialist revolution all over the world.

1. **Towards a History of the Fourth International, Education for Socialists** (SWP, New York), June 1973, p.8. Emphasis in original.
2. **Labour Review** (SLL), Winter 1961, p.88.
3. Trotsky, **Stalin**, p.112.
4. *op.cit.*, p.89.
5. L. Vitale, in Editor, E. Mandel, **Fifty Years of World Revolution** (New York, 1968), p.35.
6. See the controversy in the **International Socialist Review** (July/August 1973, April 1974, February 1975) around Pierre Rousset's book, **Le parti communiste vietnamien** (Paris 1973). Rousset, a leader of the French Trotskyist Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire, recognises that the Vietnamese Communist Party "has provided, more than enough, the proof of its exceptional ability to lead the revolutionary struggle for the conquest of power." (p.125) but sees it as "a very special case in the international Communist movement." (p.55). The SLL/WRP, for its part, has somehow contrived to combine an insistence on the need for independent Trotskyist parties throughout the world with a recognition (when this suited other polemical purposes) that the struggle of "the Vietnamese people led by Ho Chi Minh" had demonstrated "the transcendental power and resistance of a protracted people's war" —i.e. the Vietnamese Communist Party! (Editorial in **Fourth International**, London, February 1968, pp.1-2. Emphasis in original.)

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6. **Death Agony**, pp.14, 47, 43, 52.
7. Trotsky, **Writings 1938-9**, p.59 (October 1938).
8. Trotsky, **Writings, 1938-9**, p.20.
9. **Manifesto on War, Writings, 1939-40**, p.45.
10. Ralph Fox aptly described this characteristic in Trotsky as the mark of "the petty-bourgeois in a hurry." (R. Fox, **Lenin**, London 1933), p.284.
11. Trotsky, **In Defence of Marxism**, pp.9, 14-15.
12. The exception was Ceylon, but its main Trotskyist organisation—the Lanka Sama Samaja Party—was blackballed from world Trotskyism in 1964 for the heinous crime of "Popular Frontism". It was superseded as the largest organisation in the Fourth International by the "guerillaist" PRT (Combatiente) in Argentina, which later officially broke with Trotskyism. Its place has now been taken at the top of the league by another Argentinian organisation, the PST, which is involved in violent factional struggle with the majority in the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. It seems that despite the "incomparable tempering of cadres" (**Death Agony**, p.58) by Trotskyist ideology, the acquiring of any sort of mass basis by any Trotskyist group always leads to heresy and "degeneration". Perhaps some Trotskyist theoretician will analyse the reasons for this phenomenon?
13. **Documents of the Fourth International**, p.61.
14. George Johnson and Fred Feldman, "Vietnam, Stalinism and the Post-War Socialist Revolutions", **International Socialist Review** (SWP, New York), April 1974, p.27.
15. Trotsky, **Writings, 1934-5**, p.183.

AIMS AND OBJECTS

OF THE YOUNG COMMUNIST LEAGUE

To learn, teach and win young people for the ideas of Socialism and Communism.

To help unite young people to achieve a Socialist Britain in which there will be social ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange and where young people will get boundless opportunities for their mental and physical development.

To assist in winning higher wages, equal pay for equal work, homes and increased opportunities for children, vocational training, sport and leisure. To extend the democratic rights of young people, and oppose all forms of discrimination based on race, colour, sex or religion.

To help maintain peace, and to work together with other youth organisations and all young people to this end; to develop friendship between the youth of all lands, and to support the young people in the colonies who wish to be free and independent.

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