SPARTACIST

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For a Leninist-Trotskyist Party!

China on the Brink: Workers Political Revolution or Capitalist Enslavement?

A decisive turning point in the history of the Chinese Revolution is approaching. Whether the increasingly assertive forces for capitalist restoration succeed in destroying the gains of the 1949 Revolution, or whether workers political revolution sweeps away the corrupt Beijing Stalinist bureaucracy, will not only determine the fate of the Chinese people, but will leave a huge imprint on the countries of East Asia and beyond.

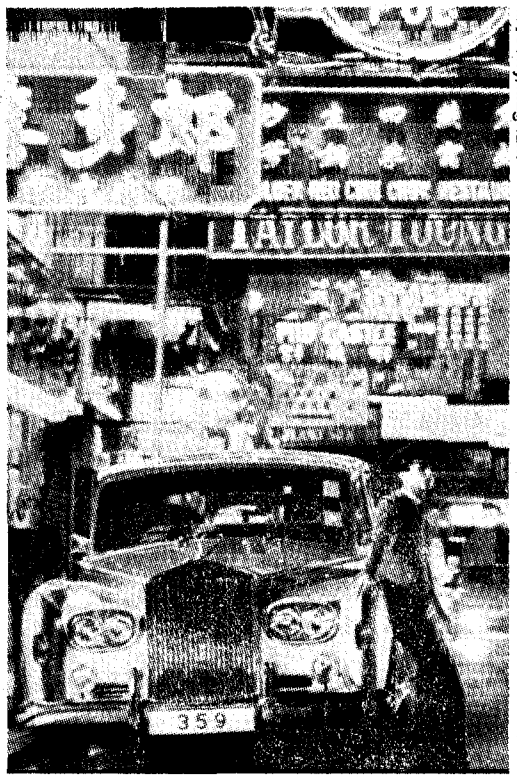
The death this February of China's "paramount leader," Deng Xiaoping (Teng Hsiao-ping), occasioned countless commentaries from capitalist spokesmen around the world lauding his market "reforms" which led to the privatization of small and medium-scale industries and opened whole areas of the country to foreign capitalist investment. Yet the more farsighted of the bourgeois media also noted that the "reforms" have created conditions for social turmoil. Over 100 million poor and middle peasants, displaced by the liquidation of the rural communes and the return to privately operated agriculture, have poured into the cities and towns searching for work. Meanwhile, there is a growing cleavage in economic development and living standards between the southeast coastal and Yangtze River delta areas—the primary recipients of foreign investment—and the rest of the country, from the rural hinterland to centers of state-owned heavy industry in northeast and central China.

Even as the *New York Times* praised Deng for the "dynamism of his reforms," this newspaper of record for U.S. imperialism worried about "how incomplete and therefore tenuous those reforms remain." No sooner had the official memorial services for Deng concluded than the U.S. and other imperialist powers moved to demand that China slash investment in state-owned industries as a condition for joining the World Trade Organization and "to speed the opening of the country's economy" (*New York Times*, 2 March).

Reuters

Tiananmen Square, Beijing, May 1989—Chinese workers defended student protesters, opposed Deng's pro-capitalist "reforms." When working people entered the protests en masse, the Stalinist regime trembled.

In this regard, the reversion of Hong Kong to Chinese control on July 1 after 150 years as a British colony is a signal event. The Beijing Stalinists long ago declared that the takeover would in no way threaten Hong Kong's capitalist economy, putting forward their "One China, two systems" policy of reintegration of Hong Kong and Taiwan with the mainland on a capitalist basis. This fall, the national congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) may feature an open battle for succession between the sclerotic "Old Guard" of longtime party veterans and a "third generation" of younger officials who mostly seek to enrich themselves



McCurry/Magnum

Hu/Philadelphia Inquirer

Chinese Stalinists have pledged to maintain capitalism in Hong Kong after July 1 takeover. The "magic of the marketplace" means bright lights and limousines for the wealthy few, while tens of thousands of laborers in Hong Kong live in wire-mesh cages.

in a "free market"—i.e., capitalist—China. This could be the context for a bid for political power by openly capitalist-restorationist elements.

The political heirs of Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung) have brought the Chinese Revolution to the abyss. The 1949 seizure of power by Mao's peasant-guerrilla army over the Guomindang (Kuomintang) Nationalist regime of Chiang Kai-shek shattered capitalist rule and liberated the country from subservience to Japanese and Western imperialism. The Chinese Revolution created the conditions for enormous gains for workers, peasants and women. The huge defeat the Chinese Revolution represented for the U.S. and other imperialist powers was brought home by the intervention of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the Korean War of 1950-53, which saved North Korea from being overrun by the American imperialists and their South Korean puppet regime.

But what issued out of the 1949 Revolution was a ***bureaucratically deformed*** workers state, ruled by a privileged caste headed by the CCP and PLA leadership. A key factor conditioning this outcome was the atomized state of the Chinese proletariat, which had suffered two decades of deadly repression under both the Guomindang and the bloody Japanese occupation which began with the seizure of Manchuria in 1931 and spread to the major cities in 1937. As well, the Chinese working class had been repeatedly and grievously betrayed by Stalinism, most notably in the defeat of the 1925-27 Revolution. Furthermore, China had undergone a severe economic decline related to the world depression of the 1930s, cutting into the prospects for a revival of even elemental trade-union struggle.

There was a qualitative difference between the 1949 Chinese Revolution and the 1917 October Revolution in Russia led by Lenin and Trotsky's Bolshevik Party. The Russian Revolution created a state regime of proletarian democracy instituted through the rule of workers, peasants and soldiers soviets (councils). The October Revolution was carried out by a class-conscious proletariat which had undergone long years of political struggle and which saw the seizure of power as the first step in world socialist revolution.

In contrast, the CCP came to power through a military-bureaucratic social overturn. Modeling itself on the USSR under Stalin's bureaucratic regime, Maoist rule followed the Stalinist dogma of building "socialism" in a single country. Denying the fundamental Marxist understanding that socialism can only be built at the highest level of technology and economy, requiring the extension of socialist revolution to advanced industrial countries, this nationalist schema expressed the material interests of the bureaucratic caste which usurped power in the Soviet Union in 1923-24. Likewise, Mao's Stalinist regime defended the interests of the

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Burke/Life

Victorious People's Liberation Army enters Beijing, 1949. The Chinese proletarian masses were bystanders as the Maoist-led revolution finally threw out Chiang Kai-shek and the Guomindang capitalist regime.

CCP/PLA bureaucracy which ruled from the inception of the People's Republic of China.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991-92, after decades of military and especially economic pressure from world imperialism, proved the bankruptcy of the Stalinist schema of "socialism in one country" once and for all. But if this dogma was utopian and reactionary under Soviet conditions, it was all the more absurd to claim that China on its own could achieve the advanced state of development necessary for creating a socialist society as the country groaned under the weight of an impoverished peasantry making up three-fourths of its population. Now in the "post-Soviet" world, imperialist pressures on China and remaining countries where capitalist rule and imperialist overlordship have been overthrown—North Korea, Cuba, Vietnam—have increased qualitatively, while the imperialist powers, centrally the U.S. and Japan, are positioning themselves for a fight over the spoils of capitalist counterrevolution.

In response to these pressures, the Beijing Stalinists have tied China even more closely to the world capitalist market, expanding Deng's "reforms" while maintaining rigid control over the restive population. Thus the "opening" of the economy to capitalist exploiters is accompanied by a further clampdown on political protest. Opponents of the Stalinist regime face not only imprisonment but the state terror of the death penalty—a barbarity also applied with racist vindictiveness by the "free world's" top cop, U.S. imperialism.

In 1992, Deng staged a well-publicized tour of southern China's capitalist "Special Economic Zones" (SEZs) and called for extending "free market" enterprise throughout the country. Wary of sinking money into crumbling "post-Communist" societies like Russia, foreign investors responded by signing contracts doubling their investment in China from the year before. The Beijing regime began to talk about the "socialist market economy" as a transition to a full-fledged market economy. In its pursuit of capital investment, the Beijing regime has even rolled out the red carpet to the same bourgeois forces which were overthrown by the 1949 Revolution and who have since that time accumulated enormous wealth in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and elsewhere in the Pacific Rim.

But the dreams of the bureaucrats and bankers of a peaceful, bountiful restoration of capitalism are illusory. The state the Stalinists administer is based on the revolution which expelled the Chinese bourgeoisie and created a nationalized economy. It is on the basis of China's collectivized economy—a prerequisite for socialist development—that we Trotskyists have always called for the military defense of the Chinese deformed workers state against capitalist forces—including defending its right to a nuclear arsenal. At the same time, we fight for a proletarian political revolution led by a Trotskyist party to remove the parasitic, nationalist ruling caste which stands as an obstacle to the development of a socialist society and which today offers itself as brokers to the imperialists.

The aims of China's would-be exploiters—centrally to secure the right to buy and sell property and hand it down to their offspring—can only be achieved through smashing the existing state apparatus by one means or another and replacing it with a new one based on the principle of private ownership of the means of production. The one force which can stop the drive toward capitalist restoration is the Chinese proletariat. In 1989, the working people of Beijing, later joined by their class brothers and sisters throughout the country, threw themselves into battle against the discredited, venal bureaucracy in the tumultuous events centered in Tiananmen Square. For two weeks in May-June 1989, the government could not enforce its own declaration of martial law in the face of mass resistance by the "laobaixing" (common people) in the streets leading to Tiananmen. A political revolution was emerging. Eventually, the regime was able to find loyal army detachments which drowned the uprising in blood. This was followed by a vicious wave of repression throughout China, overwhelmingly directed against the working class.

While the proletariat was bloodied by the repression, it was not crushed. And today all of the factors that led to the Tiananmen upheaval eight years ago are present in magnified form: flagrant official corruption, inflation, massive

peasant discontent. As the regime aims to "smash the iron rice bowl" of guaranteed lifetime employment and social benefits—deeply cherished gains of the 1949 Revolution—there is growing economic insecurity. Every year since 1991, the number of strikes and protests by workers in both state-owned and private capitalist industries has increased. Unlike the workers of Poland, East Germany and the Soviet Union, who after decades of Stalinist lies were largely lulled into believing Western propaganda that "free market" capitalism would give them a life of plenty, Chinese workers have already experienced the "magic of the marketplace" and know that they will not be among its winners.

The increase in labor struggles inside China indicates that the working class is not about to see its rights taken away without a fight. A most dramatic example took place in Harbin City, Heilongjiang province on New Year's Day (*Hong Kong Economic Journal*, 21 January). Entire families formerly employed by state-owned sugar beet and flax industries had gone months without pay under the new capitalist economic "reforms." Even a meager "livelihood" subsidy was cut off from the Mid-Autumn Festival to the Dragon Boat Festival. Workers "took action to find food and clothing for themselves," seized control of workshops, opened warehouses and seized stockpiled sugar. These organized acts of working-class self-defense were accompanied by singing of the "*Internationale*," whose lyrics in Chinese state, "There are neither heroes nor immortals nor emperors in the world. All things belong to the workers. We should rise to save ourselves." But by New Year's Day, some four months had passed without the workers receiving a cent. In an act of desperation, older workers mobilized before dawn to lie down on the railroad tracks, hoping to kill themselves to lighten the economic burdens on their children and grandchildren. As distraught family members discovered what was happening, they also massed on the railway tracks. Soon more than 3,000 Acheng Textile Mill workers staged a sit-in on the tracks, with another 1,000 townsfolk looking on. The sit-in paralyzed rail service on Binsui Railroad, which links Shanghai and Beijing to the south and the Sino-Russian border to the north, for the entire day. Local and national CCP leaders quickly dispatched "negotiators" who achieved a "compromise" with the workers to end the sit-in.

But even such dramatic acts of militancy on the economic plane are not enough to stop the counterrevolutionary tide. It is necessary for the working class to enter the political plane. As Russian revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky wrote in his analysis of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution under Stalinism, *The Revolution Betrayed* (1937), the question is: "Will the bureaucrat devour the workers' state, or will the working class clean up the bureaucrat?" We Trotskyists fought for a program of ***proletarian political revolution*** led by a Bolshevik party to bring revolutionary socialist consciousness to the working class in order to sweep out the bureaucracy, establish the rule of workers soviets and return the Soviet Union to its role as the headquarters of world socialist revolution.

The program of political revolution is needed in China today if the workers and impoverished peasant masses are to emerge victorious in the class battles that lie ahead. As part of our fight to reforge Trotsky's Fourth International, the International Communist League seeks to build an egalitarian-communist party based on the program of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolsheviks and the early Chinese Communist Party. Such a party would link the struggle against the corrupt Stalinist bureaucracy in China with the class struggles of the militant Indonesian and South Korean workers against their capitalist rulers, and with those in the imperialist centers such as Japan. Only through extending socialist revolution to these countries will the threat of capitalist re-enslavement be eliminated once and for all and the basis laid for the development of China in a socialist Asia.

From Maoist Autarky to the "Socialist Market Economy"

The social revolutions which took place following World War II in East Europe, Yugoslavia, China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba posed new theoretical problems for the Trotskyist Fourth International, whose ranks and leadership had been decimated during the war years. Faced with the unforeseen victory of Stalinist-led guerrilla forces in Yugoslavia and China and the creation of other deformed workers states throughout East Europe, a revisionist leadership under Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel posited that the Stalinists could pursue a "roughly" revolutionary course, and that Trotskyist parties were therefore no longer necessary.

This liquidationist line led in 1951-53 to the destruction of the Fourth International as a world party of socialist revolution. The deadly effect of the Pabloite line was borne out in Pablo/Mandel's tailing of Mao's CCP. After the Chinese Trotskyists had been systematically rounded up and locked away in Mao's prisons in 1952, Pablo slandered them as "fugitives from the revolution" and suppressed an appeal on their behalf written by Peng Shuzhi (Peng Shu-tse), a leader of the Chinese Trotskyists who was able to flee the country before the repression hit.

But even among the Trotskyists who fought Pabloite revisionism, there was widespread confusion over the nature of the Chinese Revolution. Thus the U.S. Socialist Workers Party, led by pioneer American Trotskyist James P. Cannon, along with Peng and others failed to recognize the fundamental social overturn that occurred in 1949, later concluding that only after the expropriation of the remnants of the Chinese bourgeoisie in 1953-55 did China become a deformed workers state. This confusion stemmed from a sterile "orthodoxy" which attempted to counter the Pabloite

Scott/BBC

In 1989 protests, workers looked back to Mao regime's claims of "egalitarianism" as they protested corruption and other effects of moves toward the "market economy." Sign on right reads, "Older Big Brother Is Angry"—a reference to the working class.

line that the Fourth International was no longer necessary by denying that social overturns occurred with the victory of the Stalinist forces. Absent from this formula was the critical distinction between a workers state such as that issuing out of the Russian October and deformed workers states such as Mao's China or Tito's Yugoslavia, which require political revolution against the bureaucratic regimes to defend and extend the gains of those revolutions. (The definitive degeneration of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party was manifested in their uncritical hailing of Fidel Castro as an "unconscious Trotskyist" and rejection of the Trotskyist program for workers political revolution in Cuba. The International Communist League traces its origins to the "Revolutionary Tendency" in the SWP, a faction which fought this Pabloite degeneration, was bureaucratically expelled and went on to found the Spartacist League. This history is documented in our *Marxist Bulletin* series.)

Summing up the experience of the post-war revolutions, the Spartacist League wrote in our 1966 "Declaration of Principles" that petty-bourgeois guerrilla forces "can under certain conditions, i.e., the extreme disorganization of the capitalist class in the colonial country and the absence of the working class contending in its own right for social power, smash capitalist property relations; however, they cannot bring the working class to *political* power. Rather, they create bureaucratic anti-working class regimes which suppress any further development of these revolutions toward socialism." A crucial factor for the creation of the deformed workers states was the Soviet Union, which acted as a counterweight to the imperialist powers. Thus the U.S. Cold Warriors were constrained from carrying out nuclear strikes against China and Vietnam by their fear of retaliation by Soviet nuclear forces.

In the "post-Soviet" world, the Chinese Stalinists seek to further capitalist "reforms" with the intention of placing themselves (and their offspring) among China's new exploiters. As Trotsky wrote in *The Revolution Betrayed*:

> "One may argue that the big bureaucrat cares little what are the prevailing forms of property, provided only they guarantee him the necessary income. This argument ignores not only the instability of the bureaucrat's own rights, but also the question of his descendants. The new cult of the family has not fallen out of the clouds. Privileges have only half their worth, if they cannot be transmitted to one's children. But the right of testament is inseparable from the right of property. It is not enough to be the director of a trust; it is necessary to be a stockholder. The victory of the bureaucracy in this decisive sphere would mean its conversion into a new possessing class. On the other hand, the victory of the proletariat over the bureaucracy would insure a revival of the socialist revolution."

Thus the party that once conducted spartan guerrilla war against Chiang Kai-shek and the Japanese occupiers now turns out government functionaries riding in Rolls-Royces to meet Hong Kong bankers over meals that cost many times a peasant's annual income. Revulsion at the official corruption rampant in today's China has helped spur a certain wistfulness for the time of Mao Zedong. As James Miles, a perceptive observer who spent eight years as the BBC's China correspondent, observed about the China of the early 1990s:

> "Old Maoist songs, usually with a disco beat added to suit modern tastes, suddenly could be heard everywhere too—in trains, in taxis, and in bars and restaurants. By the end of 1991, more than a dozen cassette tapes of such songs were on the market, of which more than 10 million copies had been sold.... According to one Chinese account, probably somewhat exaggerated but nonetheless indicative of the mood, Mao books became more sought after than novels about love or kung fu."
>
> —*The Legacy of Tiananmen—China in Disarray* (University of Michigan Press, 1996)

For China's citizens, as Miles noted, "it was a chance to indulge in nostalgia for what they saw as the relatively corruption-free days of Maoist rule." Such nostalgia serves to misidentify Mao with communism and egalitarianism, portraying his rule as fundamentally different from Deng's. But while Mao called on the CCP to "serve the people" and Deng pronounced, "To get rich is glorious," the two represent no more than different poles of the same anti-proletarian bureaucracy.

From the time he seized the CCP leadership in the early 1930s, Mao gave Chinese Stalinism a particular peasant-nationalist cast which barely paid lip service to even formal Marxist concepts. Encapsulating Mao's anti-materialist revision of Marxism was his 1960 statement: "Lenin said: 'The more backward the country, the more difficult its transition to socialism.' Now it seems that this way of speaking is incorrect. As a matter of fact, the more backward the economy, the easier, not the more difficult, the transition from capitalism to socialism." What Lenin understood is that to achieve socialism—the lowest stage of classless communist society—scarcity must be eliminated, and this can only be done on the basis of the highest possible level of technology. In turn, this requires the combined efforts of many advanced, industrialized countries on the basis of socialist planning. For Mao the messianic nationalist, this was anathema.

Maoist rule was marked by extreme voluntarism and adventurism. Following the collectivization of agriculture, in 1958 Mao unleashed the "Great Leap Forward"—a utopian effort to catapult China to the status of an industrialized country through mobilizing mass peasant labor. The folly of this scheme was epitomized by the "backyard steel furnaces" built throughout the countryside, which to fulfill their steel-making quotas ended up by melting peasants' pots and pans. The campaign led to extreme economic dislocations and one of the worst famines in history.


Der Spiegel

Building a canal during "Great Leap Forward" of late 1950s. Maoists' attempt at rapid industrialization by manpower-intensive mobilizations led to complete economic breakdown.

In the aftermath of this "Great Leap" backward, Mao lost leadership of the central bureaucracy to a more pragmatic faction led by Liu Shaoqi (Liu Shao-chi) and Deng Xiaoping. In 1966, Mao fought back by launching the "Cultural Revolution." In the course of "the lost ten years," as this period came to be known, universities and factories were shut down and scientists were sent to the countryside to "learn from the peasants." Student "Red Guards" mobilized to weed out Mao's enemies, who were branded as "capitalist roaders," wreaked havoc on workplaces and schools until the PLA under Lin Biao (Piao) was called out to corral the students.

Many radical leftists outside China were taken in by Mao's claim to be waging a mass struggle against "bureaucracy." These included the ostensibly "orthodox Trotskyist" International Committee headed by Gerry Healy, whose counterfeit brand of Trotskyism is now carried on by David North's "Socialist Equality Party." Healy's British journal *Newsline* (21 January 1967) trumpeted that "the best elements led by Mao and Lin Piao have been forced to go outside the framework of the Party and call on the youth and the working class to intervene" in this "anti-bureaucratic" fight. The Cultural Revolution was in fact nothing more that a giant faction fight between the Mao/Lin and Liu/Deng wings of the bureaucracy, neither of which merited the least political support from Trotskyists.


AP

"Cultural Revolution": Red Guards holding up Mao's "Little Red Book." Mao faction unleashed the army along with the Red Guards to destroy intrabureaucratic opponents.

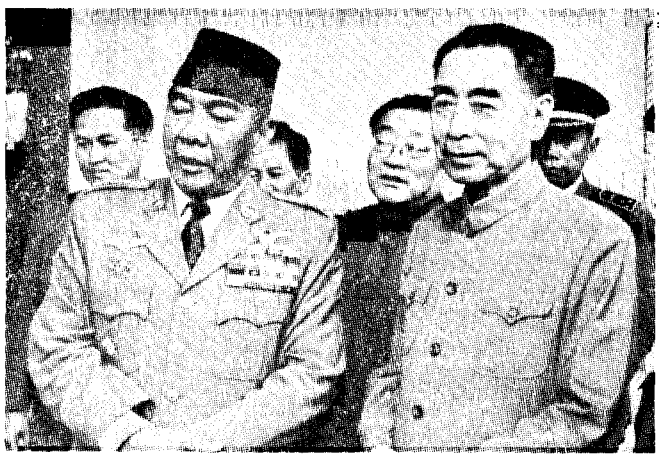
The purged Liu Shaoqi died in prison. But Deng Xiaoping survived to be brought back into the leadership fold in 1973 by Mao and his lieutenant, Premier Zhou Enlai (Chou En-lai). In 1978, two years after Mao's death and the purge of the rabidly pro-Mao "Gang of Four," Deng took over the party leadership. His initial program was to introduce "market adjustment" to the centralized economy. Over the next several years, a cascade of measures was enacted, breaking up collectivized agriculture and establishing brutally exploitative "special economic zones" for foreign capitalist investment.

Despite the claims of some leftist academics and organizations which revile Deng and uphold Mao as a revolutionary alternative, Deng was in many ways Mao's logical successor. The aim of Deng's market "reforms," which he dubbed "socialism with Chinese characteristics," was the same as Mao's: to turn China not only into a modern nation-state but into a world power. Deng and his followers argued that the "reforms" were necessary to carry out the "four modernizations"—industry, agriculture, science and technology, and military defense. Modernizing China remains a key revolutionary task. But the Stalinists have always been die-hard enemies of the only perspective capable of realizing this task: the extension of socialist revolution to advanced capitalist countries such as Japan, which in the framework of international planning can provide the technical resources necessary to modernize China.

The introduction of market "reforms" under Deng follows a pattern inherent in Stalinist bureaucratic rule. To function


Der Spiegel

Maoist regime lionized Sukarno as the leader of the "progressive bourgeoisie." Zhou Enlai with Indonesian strongman Sukarno in Jakarta, 1965 (below). Roundup of Communists in Jakarta, 1965 (right). Over half a million Communists, workers, peasants and ethnic Chinese were slaughtered.


AP

effectively, the centrally planned economy which is a prerequisite for socialist development must be administered by a government of democratically elected workers councils. But the Stalinist misrulers are hostile to any expression of workers democracy, substituting arbitrary administrative fiat in its place. Faced with the inevitable imbalances of a bureaucratically administered planned economy, Stalinist regimes are impelled to introduce capitalist market measures: loosening economic planning, forcing plants to produce for the market, encouraging private businesses and foreign capitalist investment. Similar attempts at "market socialism" in Yugoslavia and Hungary in the 1970s and '80s, as well as former Soviet leader Gorbachev's *perestroika* reforms, helped spawn domestic bourgeois forces which, with the full support of the imperialist powers, eventually vanquished the workers states. China's "socialist market economy" has similarly given rise to a nascent internal bourgeoisie, many of whom act as local agents for foreign capital.

China's Criminal Alliance with U.S. Imperialism

Linking the regimes of Mao, Deng and current Chinese leader Jiang Zemin is the nationalism inherent in Stalinism. Today the bureaucracy proclaims the advent of China's "superpower" status and extols "traditional" Chinese values. But Mao's rule was marked by a similar national messianism. An example of the backward nationalism that defined "Mao thought" was his opposition to birth control. Clearly irrational in a poor country with overwhelming population pressures, this position had everything to do with Mao's base among the peasantry, for whom the family has traditionally been the basic unit of production.

It was over international questions that the Maoist regime most clearly showed its anti-revolutionary nature. In its early years, the CCP regime was allied with the Soviet Union, undertaking a Soviet-style five-year plan in 1953. But later that decade, Chinese complaints over inadequate Soviet aid in the aftermath of the economic dislocation and irrationality of the "Great Leap Forward" led to a split between the Beijing and Moscow Stalinists. Within a few years, Mao was proclaiming that "Soviet social-imperialism" was an even greater danger than the United States, a position neatly dovetailing the U.S. rulers' strategic goal of destroying the Soviet degenerated workers state. The Soviet-Chinese border soon became one of the most heavily militarized in the world.

The USSR under Stalin and his successors was certainly no paragon of revolutionary internationalism. Under Khrushchev, the Soviet Union even refused to back China in its border war with capitalist India in 1959. But for all Mao's ringing denunciations of Soviet "revisionism," Maoist foreign policy was substantively identical to the policies of the Kremlin. Both flowed from the nationalist precept of "socialism in one country," which led the Stalinists to seek a *modus vivendi* with imperialism and to embrace any number of anti-Communist bourgeois-nationalist regimes in the "Third World" in the pursuit of trade and diplomatic deals. This was symbolized by the 1956 Bandung Conference in Indonesia, where the Chinese government signed on to a declaration of "peaceful coexistence" pledging "non-interference" in the affairs of the neocolonial bourgeois states.

The most disastrous fruits of China's non-aggression pact with the bourgeois nationalists were seen in Indonesia in 1965. The Mao regime instructed the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI)—the largest Communist party in the capitalist world, with three million members and many times that number of supporters—to maintain at all costs a political bloc with the "anti-imperialist" regime of Sukarno, an ally of Beijing. Basing itself on the Stalinist schema of revolution in "stages"—first a revolution limited to (bourgeois) democracy, to be followed only later by a fight for socialism—the PKI adopted a policy of "*gotong royong*" ("national unity") with the Indonesian bourgeoisie and its military, even to the

point of forcing workers to return factories they had seized to the capitalists.

With the workers politically lulled by the misleadership of Beijing and the PKI, the Indonesian military general staff staged a coup led by General Suharto which ushered in a horrific bloodbath. Accompanied by a communalist slaughter carried out by Islamic fundamentalist mobs against ethnic Chinese, the regime slaughtered at least half a million Communists and their sympathizers. Beijing's response to this catastrophe was to protest the persecution of Chinese nationals and to "deplore" the breaking of friendly relations between the two governments! Not until 1967 was the anti-Communist massacre even mentioned in any Chinese publication.

With the elimination of the "Communist menace" in this strategic Pacific Rim country, the U.S. imperialists felt emboldened to massively escalate the ground invasion of South Vietnam in their efforts to crush the liberation struggle of North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front (NLF) in the South. At the same time, the consolidation of Indonesia as a bastion of "free world" anti-Communism created the conditions for the later development of a wing of the American ruling class which became "defeatist" as the heroic Vietnamese fighters drove them out of Indochina. Even the "hawk" Richard Nixon titled his memoirs *No More Vietnams*, a reflection of a viewpoint in the U.S. ruling class that the U.S. could safely withdraw from its ***losing*** war without jeopardizing its strategic interests in Southeast Asia.

Another example of the criminal results of Stalinist nationalism was seen in the Vietnam War, when Mao's China blocked passage to Vietnam for Soviet military aid—itself often inferior to the military hardware the Kremlin doled out to bourgeois "allies" such as Nasser's Egypt. At the height of the Cultural Revolution, when radical leftists around the world were hailing Mao's China as a revolutionary alternative to the stodgy Kremlin bureaucrats, the Spartacist League insisted that given the Mao regime's hostility to the Soviet Union, "the danger of an imperialist alliance with China against the Russians cannot be dismissed" ("Chinese Menshevism," *Spartacist* No. 15-16, April-May 1970).

This prediction was borne out with the official rapprochement between the U.S. and China signaled by war criminal Nixon's visit to China in 1972 while American bombs were raining on Indochina. In counterposition, the Spartacist League advanced the call for "Communist unity against imperialism," which required political revolution against the governments in Moscow and Beijing. During this period, the Spartacist League was able to win to Trotskyism groupings and individuals who broke with Maoism over China's betrayals of revolutionary struggles around the world.

China's backstabbing of the Vietnamese was deepened under Deng. Four years after the North Vietnamese Army and NLF sent the U.S. and its puppet regime packing, China decided to "teach Vietnam a bloody lesson" by invading the country. This heinous action was taken in response to the ouster of the genocidal Chinese ally Pol Pot in Cambodia at the hands of Vietnamese troops. Denouncing Beijing's treachery, we declared: "China: Don't Be a Cat's Paw of U.S. Imperialism!" In the upshot, it was the battle-hardened Vietnamese army which taught Beijing a lesson instead. Shortly after its stinging defeat by Vietnam, China threw its support to the reactionary, woman-hating, U.S.-backed Islamic *mujahedin* in Afghanistan who fought against the Soviet Red Army following its 1979 intervention.

China's alliance with the U.S., initiated by Mao and Zhou Enlai, helped set the stage for Deng's "open door" to imperialist exploitation in the next period. Today, Mao's heirs don't even give lip service to the goals of socialism, instead openly offering themselves as compradors (agents) of imperialism. But as much as they trumpet the "success" of their economic "reforms," these measures have created enormous fissures in the society which threaten to blow up into massive turmoil at any moment. Such an upheaval took place in Tiananmen in 1989, and it nearly spelled the end of the rule of the brittle Stalinist bureaucratic caste.

The Spectre of Tiananmen

By the late 1980s, the effects of China's economic "open door" were being felt throughout the society. Popular anger

Wide World

Magnum

Nixon toasts Mao in 1972, as U.S. imperialists rain down death and destruction on Vietnam.

Workers Vanguard

Trotskyists protest China's 1979 invasion of Vietnam: "China: Don't Be Cat's Paw of U.S. Imperialism!"

at corruption was seething, as ever more party officials entering the business world took to plundering state resources and conspicuously flaunting their new wealth. While construction boomed in the "Special Economic Zones" in the southeastern coastal region, the urban population all over China was reeling under high inflation—a shocking new phenomenon in the People's Republic. The official inflation rate in 1988 was 19 percent, which while understated for city residents was still triple the rate of the year before. At the same time, wages in state industries rose only about 1 percent that year. With workers' incomes and job security declining, labor actions rose sharply in the years leading up to 1989. In the countryside, grain production was falling, causing food shortages in the cities, while peasant incomes were also stagnating. This helped spur the flight of tens of millions of peasant laborers into the cities.

The social tensions generated by market "reforms" erupted in the spring of 1989 when Beijing's working people threw their weight behind student protesters in Tiananmen Square, provoking a near-fatal crisis for the Stalinist rulers. The largest public square in the world, Tiananmen is the political center of China. Mao's mausoleum is on its southern side; the Great Hall of the People, a mammoth government meeting place, is on the western end; in the middle is a monument to the heroes of the Chinese Revolution. A few hundred yards away lies the Zhongnanhai compound, the headquarters of the CCP.

It was in Tiananmen that Mao proclaimed the People's Republic in 1949. Ever since then, it has been the favored site of official celebrations, rallies and military parades. But it has also on occasion seen massive protest demonstrations. And from mid-April until 4 June 1989, the square was occupied by tens of thousands of students and working people in defiance of the hated Deng regime.

A recent documentary by Carmela Hinton, titled "The Gate of Heavenly Peace," provides a useful picture of the Tiananmen events. The film includes a brief history of previous demonstrations there, the most significant of which was the 5 April 1976 outpouring of Beijing residents to place wreaths honoring deceased premier Zhou Enlai. Coming at the tail end of the Cultural Revolution, what began as a memorial to Zhou developed into a mass protest against the Gang of Four until it was violently dispersed. In all likelihood, the protests were the work of Deng and his faction, as they fought out a crisis of succession to the ailing Mao. At the same time, the masses who flocked to the square were expressing their desire for an end to the destructive chaos of the grossly misnamed Cultural Revolution.

The 1989 events developed in a qualitatively different direction, even though the occupation of Tiananmen also began with a memorial gathering, this time for former CCP secretary-general Hu Yaobang, who had died on April 15. Hu had been widely respected for the simple fact that he was one of the few leading officials not personally tainted with corruption. Although a protégé of Deng, Hu was forced into resigning his post following student protests in 1986-87 which began to involve workers in Shanghai, China's largest city and commercial center.

The 1989 Tiananmen events began when students from the Department of Party History at People's University rode their bicycles in the middle of the night to lay wreaths for Hu at the Monument to the Heroes of the Revolution, the exact spot where Beijing residents had honored Zhou Enlai 13 years earlier. The next day, students from campuses throughout the city joined a march to the square, singing the revolutionary workers' anthem, the "*Internationale*." What followed was a sit-in outside the Great Hall of the People, as students attempted to pressure the National People's Congress, China's putative national assembly, to accept a petition. As the offspring of relatively privileged families, including those of top bureaucrats, the students felt they had a certain birthright to raise their demands against corruption and for more student rights. They also called for an official explanation for Hu's dismissal as party chief two years earlier.

Soon, up to 10,000 people flocked to Tiananmen, including workers and unemployed. By the time of Hu's funeral on April 22, protests had broken out in provincial centers such as Xi'an in Shaanxi province and Changsha, the capital of Hunan province. Two days after the funeral, students from 21 universities in Beijing called an official strike. Teams of youth took their demands to working-class neighborhoods, repeatedly stressing that they did "not oppose the government or the party." The regime responded with a threatening editorial in the 26 April *People's Daily* denouncing the actions as a "conspiracy" to destroy the socialist system. Still the demonstrations continued to swell and to spread throughout China.

On May 4, 300,000 people flocked to Tiananmen on the 70th anniversary of the "May 4th Movement"—the

movement, originating in anti-imperialist student demonstrations, out of which the Chinese Communist Party was born. Following the massive 4 May 1989 protest, student leaders decided to launch a hunger strike to force concessions from the government. Sympathy with the hunger-strikers led to another huge demonstration on May 17, marked by the massive participation of factory workers from around Beijing.

At this point, the regime's hand was forced, and on May 20 martial law was proclaimed. This marked a decisive turning point. For one month, the Stalinist rulers had allowed a massive display of defiance to unfold before their own eyes. But with working people entering the protests en masse, Deng and his cohorts realized that unless they put down the rebellion, their days were numbered. As we wrote at the time, "It was the beginnings of a working-class revolt against Deng's program of 'building socialism with capitalist methods' which gave the protests their mass and potentially revolutionary nature" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 480, 23 June 1989).

Subsequent accounts have fully borne out this assessment. When the protests first took place, only small numbers of curious workers dared to venture into the giant plaza. Every account of the workers' role in the early protests reports that the petty-bourgeois students looked down on them as "uncultured" potential troublemakers. Workers were kept to the western edge of the square, rebuffed by student marshals if they tried to get too close to the center of the action. But as the protests continued and their numbers began to swell, the workers began to effectively organize, raising their own demands and providing the demonstrations with some social power.

Workers' concerns centered on the galloping inflation rate and the rampant corruption of the "Communist" officialdom. A special target of hatred were the children of Zhao Ziyang (Hu's replacement as party chief), Deng and other leaders, who were growing fabulously rich from their family connections. James Miles recalls: "One song particularly relished by the demonstrators was one that began with the words '*Dadao guandao* [down with profiteering officials], *dadao guandao, fan fubai* [oppose corruption], *fan fubai*,' sung to the tune of the nursery rhyme *Frère Jacques*."

Leaflets issued on April 20 by a group which came to be known as the Beijing Workers Autonomous Federation (BWAF) demanded a wage increase and price stabilization and called to "make public the personal incomes and possessions of top party officials." A flyer titled "Ten Polite Questions for the CCP" asked: "Mr. and Mrs. Zhao Ziyang play golf every week. Who pays the green fees, and other expenses?... How many residences and retreats do top party officials have spread around the country?" It pointedly concluded: "Would the party be so kind as to explain the meaning and implication of the following terms: i) Party, ii) Revolution, and iii) Reactionary" (quoted in Mok Chiu Yu and J. Frank Harrison, *Voices from Tiananmen Square—Beijing Spring and the Democracy Movement* [Black Rose Books, 1990]).

The BWAF's leaders were workers from medium or large-scale state enterprises. Seeing itself as an independent labor organization, the BWAF actually functioned in a broader way. Subdivided into departments for logistics, propaganda and organization, it kept a printing press at a secret location and set up a broadcasting station at the western edge of Tiananmen. This became an ongoing "democratic forum": every night statements from listeners were aired along with pilfered *neibu* (internal) government documents—a big hit among the station's audience. Similar groups soon sprang up elsewhere in Beijing and around the country.

A "workers picket corps" was set up to protect the student demonstrators. "Dare to die" teams—one of them named the "Black Panthers"—were organized to intervene against police arrest of protesters; occasionally the workers won the release of those arrested. One example of the dozens of workers groups which began to spring up was the "Flying Tiger Corps," composed of hundreds of motorcycle owners. The morning after martial law was proclaimed, the "Flying

Riboud/Magnum

Chinese peasants cultivate rice. Proletarian revolutions in the advanced capitalist countries leading to an international division of labor will lay the material basis for the modernization of agriculture and industry in China.

Tigers" roared through the gates of the huge Capital Iron and Steel Works, distributing leaflets and calling for the workers to strike. As described by Andrew Walder in "Popular Protest in the 1989 Democracy Movement—The Pattern of Grass-Roots Organization" (1992):

> "After the declaration of martial law in Beijing, these groups became more numerous...and mobile, shuttling around the city to confront advancing troops or reinforce barricades at intersections. In Beijing, in addition, the resistance to martial law troops was enforced throughout the city by unnamed neighborhood-level organizations.... If soldiers or military vehicles were spotted, the watches would sound the alarm (usually by banging pots and pans from the rooftops) and residents would pour out of their homes to their stations at the barricades."

For two full weeks, the Stalinist regime was unable to enforce martial law. The first major PLA unit called in to the city, the 38th Army, refused to move against the protesters. In his book, *The Deng Xiaoping Era—An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978-1994* (Hill and Wang, 1996) Maurice Meisner describes the resistance within the military brass to the regime's call to suppress the demonstrations:

> "On May 21 seven prestigious retired PLA leaders, including former Minister of Defense Zhang Aiping and Navy commander Ye Fei, wrote an open letter to Deng Xiaoping, addressing Deng in his capacity as Chairman of the Party's Central Military Commission. 'The People's Army belongs to the people,' they reminded China's paramount leader. 'It cannot stand in opposition to the people, much less oppress the people, and it absolutely cannot open fire on the people and create a blood-shedding incident'.... When it was read over the loudspeakers in Tiananmen Square on May 22, it brought forth tearful cheers from the youthful demonstrators."

Activists spoke with PLA units in the streets about the responsibilities of being in a "people's army" and invited them to join in revolutionary songs. On May 24, most troops were ordered to withdraw from the city.

By this time, the central government was ceasing to exist. Ministries stopped working and no official pronouncements were made. Even police were reportedly joining the protests. The events in Beijing bore resemblances to the Hungarian workers revolt in November 1956, where demonstrators successfully stopped the first wave of Soviet troops sent to crush them. Workers assemblies proliferated, not only in Beijing but around the country, embryonic formations that could have developed into workers councils such as appeared in Hungary in 1956, as well as in Russia in 1917, where they formed the basis for the proletarian state after the Bolshevik seizure of power.

But the Chinese workers were not able to elevate this exceptional situation to a political struggle to oust the bureaucratic tyrants and seize power in their own name. While workers and youth showed great resourcefulness and heroism, their demands remained partial and inchoate. This points to the need for the intervention of a revolutionary party that would unite all sectors of the working population, youth and women under the leadership of the proletariat mobilized as a conscious revolutionary force and contender for power. ***In both Hungary in 1956 and China in 1989, the key factor was the absence of a revolutionary leadership such as that provided by Lenin and Trotsky's Bolshevik Party in Russia in 1917.***

Uprisings Follow Beijing Bloodbath

By early June, the regime was able to regroup. It called in new military forces, in particular the 27th Army. At dusk on June 3, some 40,000 troops, complete with armored vehicles, moved into the city and unleashed a bloodbath against people massed in the streets against them. It is reported that when the troops reached Tiananmen in the early morning of June 4, their first target was the workers' station at the western end. One student leader saw tanks flatten the tents of the BWAF, killing 20 people. In contrast to the war waged against the working people of the city, the students remaining in Tiananmen were allowed to leave largely without punitive actions being taken. Their numbers had dwindled by then to some 5,000. Most Beijing university students had left the square as the hunger strike wore down, replaced by youth from the provinces.

The exact toll of the June 3-4 massacre is impossible to determine, but it is likely that several thousand were killed or wounded. Yet the army's terror failed to quell the rebellion. In fact, it served to generalize proletarian resistance, as "dare to die" corps erupted everywhere in China. One example was Shanghai's "Wild Geese Dare-to-Die Corps," described by Andrew Walder as "an organization comprised of workers who, after hearing news of the events in Beijing, came together to erect barricades, stop traffic, man checkpoints at intersections, and shout slogans in protest of the massacre." Citizens' groups controlled the streets of Shanghai and Xi'an for as much as a week after June 4. "People's Brigades" in Tianjin marched through the streets calling for a general strike, chanting, "Repay the blood

debt," and "Overthrow, overthrow, overthrow all, 'til not a one is left, the more chaos the better."

Some weeks afterward, authorities staged an exhibition on the protests at the Military History Museum in Beijing. In the courtyard was a collection of burned-out military vehicles. Inside was a map showing the cities where protests had taken place: over 80 were marked, and that was only the official count. The plebeian outpouring drew in unemployed and temporary workers from the countryside, adding a raucous flavor to the protests. One particularly unruly dare-to-die corps, in the northeast city of Harbin, chanted, "Overthrow the government," "General strike" and "We want to drink beer"! On some occasions, the lack of clear leadership allowed overtly reactionary elements to make their voices heard, including some who raised slogans in favor of the Guomindang.

Even a tiny Chinese Bolshevik organization could have grown to play a decisive role in 1989. The nascent situation of dual power—where working people were beginning to take control of the cities in their own hands—needed to be developed into a fight for political power. This would have meant, among other things, struggling to transform the informal workers assemblies into workers councils open to all except openly counterrevolutionary tendencies, and spreading this type of organization into rural communities and especially the armed forces—forging real links with the soldiers and officers who did not want to fire on their own people. Coordinated nationally, these organizations could have been the basis for a revolutionary regime of workers democracy counterposed to the Stalinists and pledged to fight to the death against capitalist restoration.

The regime's justification for smashing the protests is that they were an expression of "counterrevolutionary" turmoil. But the protests were anything but that. To be sure, there was a wide range of political and social appetites expressed by the student demonstrators. Socialist aspirations were often mixed with great illusions in the U.S. and bourgeois democracy in general. Occasionally, speakers in Tiananmen would compare the movement to Polish Solidarność, which after its origins as an "independent" trade union rapidly evolved into a counterrevolutionary formation, playing a leading role in the restoration of capitalist rule there in 1988. But from the beginning, the protesters' demands, centrally for more democratic rights and an end to corruption, were egalitarian in nature. Workers marched into Tiananmen Square carrying pictures of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, not Chiang Kai-shek.

This held true even when popular hatred for the government reached its peak following the Beijing massacre. For example, the "Red Clan," a group which sprang up in Xinjiang Auto Assembly Plant No. 3 in China's far west when news of the killings came out, proclaimed in its flyers that "the ten years of reform have been ten years of corruption, ten years of hardship for the people." These hardships were particularly acutely felt in China's interior, far removed from the booming coastal areas. Clearly, the Xinjiang auto workers were not applauding the opening of China to capitalist exploitation.

It is the continued rule of the parasitic, money-grubbing Stalinist butchers which ensures that the forces wishing to foment truly counterrevolutionary turmoil will continue to gather strength. As China now approaches what could be the terminal crisis for this degenerated workers state, the necessary condition for victory for the workers and peasants is the forging of a revolutionary, egalitarian-communist party with a program to defend and extend the gains of the 1949 Revolution by sweeping away the bureaucratic excrescence which has provided an "open door" to a future of misery for China's toilers.

China and the Terminal Crisis of Stalinism

As soon as the Deng/Li Peng government regained the upper hand, it unleashed a vicious witchhunt centrally directed against the working class. While student demonstrators felt little of the repression, dozens of workers around the country were executed for "hooliganism" and other concocted "crimes." While the regime aimed through its terror to send a signal to the rest of the working class, the repression brought only a shallow "stability." One indication of this came when workers in state industries in the Beijing

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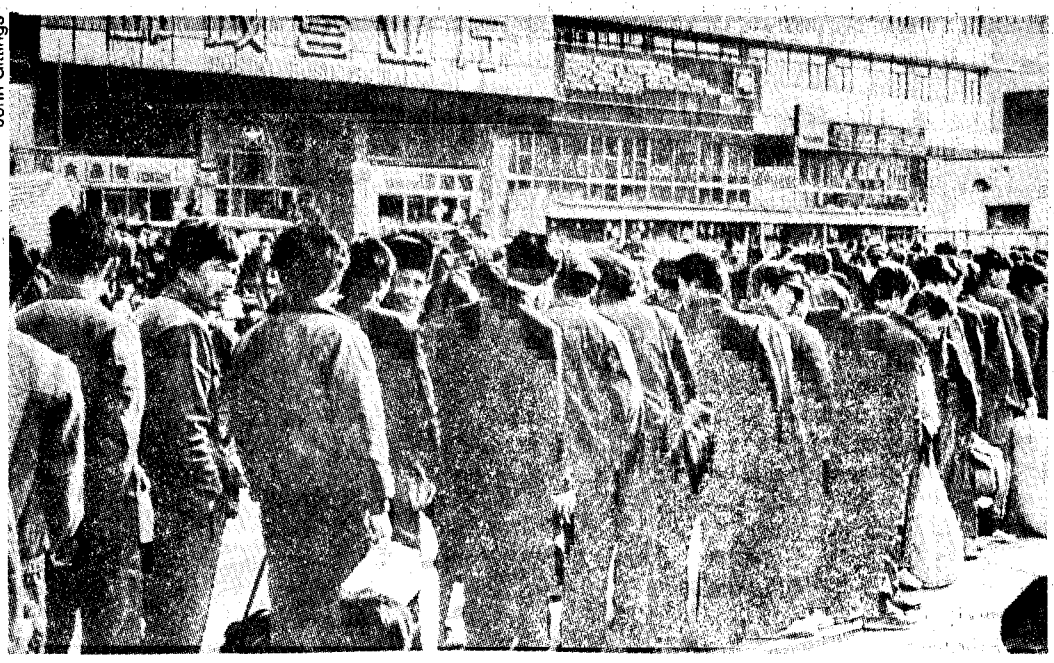

Jobless agricultural workers in Henan province line up for railway tickets to Beijing. Rural poverty and increasing class differentiation in the countryside swell emigration of rural Chinese to the cities.

area were told to fill out forms indicating their role in the protests. Fifty thousand workers actually ***admitted*** to participating. One can only imagine the real number.

Within a few months, events in East Europe broke out which would again shake the Chinese Stalinists. Protests in the East German (DDR) deformed workers state led to the tumbling of the Berlin Wall in November, touching off an incipient political revolution. The East German proletariat took to the streets with demands for genuine socialist democracy, not the hypocrisy and repression of the Honecker regime. The ICL undertook the largest mobilization in our history in a political struggle with the abdicating Stalinist regime over the future of the DDR. Our growing political impact in fighting for a proletarian political revolution in East Germany, the revolutionary unification of a "red Germany of workers councils in a socialist United States of Europe," was seen in the mass mobilization of a quarter of a million workers in Berlin in a pro-Soviet anti-fascist demonstration initiated by the ICL at the Treptow monument on 3 January 1990. Immediately following this mobilization, the West German capitalists, with the German Social Democrats as their "Trojan horse of counterrevolution," and the East German Stalinists as willing salesmen of the workers state, accelerated a counterrevolutionary stampede—*Anschluss*. (For a full analysis, see English-language *Spartacist* No. 45-46, Winter 1990-91.) The ensuing capitalist reunification of Germany marked the period of the terminal crisis of Stalinist rule in East Europe, culminating in the victory of capitalist-restorationist forces in the Soviet Union in 1991-92.

This was a devastating defeat for the workers and oppressed of the entire world, bringing the horrors of mass poverty, nationalist bloodletting and untold other miseries to the peoples of East Europe and the former USSR, as well as sharpened interimperialist rivalries over who would come out on top in the post-Soviet world. For all of the CCP's anti-Soviet nationalism, the Beijing rulers realized that they would now face enormously increased pressure from the U.S., Japan and other capitalist powers. Over the next few months, factional fissures appeared in the party leadership, with those around propaganda chief Deng Liqun (known as "Little Deng") sounding the alarm against "bourgeois liberalization" and the threat of "peaceful evolution," by which they meant the restoration of capitalism through continuing economic reforms. But "Big Deng" (Xiaoping) won out by pushing the idea that China could avoid the fate of the Soviet Stalinists by plunging even deeper into the free-market sea. He argued that only in this way could they alleviate the poverty of the Chinese people, which he put forward as the real threat to "stability."

The 14th party congress in October 1992 formally enshrined the "socialist market economy." A new constitution adopted by the congress did away with the old pro forma rhetoric of "proletarian internationalism" and even dropped the sentence stating that "the socialist system is incomparably superior to the capitalist system." In the aftermath, pro-capitalist "reforms" were greatly accelerated. The SEZ "free trade" zones have since expanded throughout China, including the Yangtze River delta, China's richest area.

While foreign investment in China continues to mount, the fastest-growing sector of the economy is the "township/village enterprises." While these "collectives" are ostensibly public property, their lines of ownership are in fact cloudy. Producing for the market, these businesses, which range from mines to light-production factories, are extremely exploitative. The death rates in China's coal mines—some ***10,000 per year***—can be laid at the door of the "collective" mines, which are virtually unsupervised by any state authority. These enterprises are spawning a growing domestic bourgeois class, often linked with foreign investors and military officers.

State officials have leaped en masse into China's free-wheeling business world as private businessmen, "collective" entrepreneurs and agents for foreign investors. By early 1993, about one-third of all government functionaries had second jobs, often as consultants or in public relations, where their connections in the bureaucracy gave them access to profitable inside information. No one joins the CCP anymore unless it is to advance a career in business. And nowhere is this more evident than in Shanghai, the home base of Jiang Zemin. As a leader of the Shanghai CCP organization department in charge of recruitment recently put it, "Our primary concern is money-making ability." The current regime dreams of making Shanghai a new Hong Kong, slating the massive Pudong district across the Huangpu River from central Shanghai for capitalist development.

Corruption is rampant among the police, from pocketing "toll" collections on roads to putting police uniforms on sale in streetside markets. ***Anything*** goes to make money in this sordid atmosphere. A few years ago, the All-China Women's Federation, an arm of the bureaucracy which supposedly fights sexual discrimination, was found to have imported Russian prostitutes to work a hotel in Guangzhou (Canton) it jointly owned with a group of Hong Kong financiers!

A key factor behind the counterrevolutionary destruction of the USSR was the development of a generation of privileged, educated offspring of the bureaucracy who increasingly identified with the capitalist West, hoping to secure a life of riches for themselves. These were a good part of the Soviet "yuppies" who flocked behind Boris Yeltsin. A similar phenomenon has taken place in China with the rise of the *taizidang* ("princes' party"): officials and relatives of top bureaucrats who have no attachment to even the distorted egalitarianism of the earlier People's Republic.

As Leon Trotsky noted about Stalin's USSR: "That which was a 'bureaucratic deformation' is at the present moment preparing to devour the workers' state, without leaving any remains, and on the ruins of nationalized property to spawn a new propertied class" ("Not a Workers' and Not a Bourgeois State?", November 1937). In China today, one of the biggest business operators is the PLA, the very core of the state. At first, the military was encouraged to start up businesses to supplement its budget. Now the PLA owns over 20,000 enterprises, ranging from the Palace Hotel in Beijing, one of the country's most luxurious, to bicycle and refrigerator factories. Its biggest venture is the Poly Group conglomerate, whose main business is arms exports, including airplanes, Silkworm missiles and more conventional weapons taken from army stockpiles.

Among the military brass who staff the PLA Armaments Department, which runs Poly Group, are the sons-in-law of Deng Xiaoping, Zhao Ziyang and former president Yang Shangkun. In 1993, China's two highest-ranking military officials warned that efforts to strengthen the army were threatened by "decadent capitalist ideology and lifestyles." Also tearing at the bureaucratic apparatus is the emergence

of economic "warlords" who have developed strong regional power bases and are increasingly independent of the central state authority. Often tied financially to foreign investors, they work in league with local military and police officials whom they handsomely pay off.

Aggravating this threat to the national unification of China—an achievement that was finally secured by the 1949 Revolution—is the structure of the PLA, whose component armies are regionally based. A power struggle in Beijing could easily escalate into a civil war among PLA units fought on a regional basis. Capitalist counterrevolution would bring not only economic collapse and immiseration but the danger of a return to warlordism and bloody political chaos.

China, a relatively ethnically homogeneous state with a minority population of only 8 percent, does not face the same kind of threat of nationalist separatist movements which helped destroy the multinational Soviet and Yugoslav workers states. At the same time, the territories inhabited by the Tibetans, Mongolians and Muslim peoples of Xinjiang province are huge and have military significance. While China's minorities have made great strides in literacy, health and other areas since 1949, they have suffered discrimination at the hands of the Han-chauvinist bureaucracy.

Stalinist national chauvinism has helped open a door for reactionary separatist forces backed by the U.S. and other imperialist powers. For decades, the imperialists have used the demand for independence for Tibet as a battering ram against the Chinese deformed workers state. More recently, in the protests which occurred shortly before Deng's death among the aggrieved Turkic-speaking Muslims in Xinjiang province, there were indications of involvement by reactionary Muslim separatists based in neighboring Kazakhstan, formerly a Soviet Central Asian republic. A Trotskyist party in China would seek to mobilize the proletariat to defend the rights of national minorities against Han chauvinism. While opposing imperialist-sponsored "independence" movements, we defend the right of independence for a Tibetan *soviet* republic.

Hong Kong: British Colonialists Out, Capitalism Remains

As much as the *taizidang* may dream of transforming themselves from social parasites into a capitalist ruling class, the ones who stand to come out on top if counterrevolution succeeds are the overseas Chinese businessmen who have been pumping billions in investment into China. Unlike the 1917 October Revolution, which destroyed the Russian bourgeoisie as a class, the Chinese Revolution essentially chased the Guomindang out of the country to Taiwan, Hong Kong and elsewhere, allowing this bourgeois class to retain cohesion. Today, it is making its comeback through investments. China's first SEZ "free trade" zone was located in Shenzhen, a farming village next door to Hong Kong which grew into a city of 2 million in just ten years. The vast bulk of investment came from Hong Kong capitalists who built shoe, textile and toy factories exploiting workers at wages far lower than across the border. In recent years, as the SEZs have spread, investment has poured in from Taiwan, Singapore and elsewhere.

For centuries, Chinese merchants played a major role in Southeast Asian commerce, earning the name "the Jews of Asia." With the last few decades of economic growth in the region, Chinese capital has displaced Japanese as the main source of investment in Asia. The extended families at the center of this phenomenon include some of the richest in the world. With their wealth, kinship links inside China and solid ties with the world's bankers and top political figures, they form a capitalist ruling class in reserve. One example of these families is the Riady clan of Indonesia, whose financial support to American president Clinton has provoked a nasty bout of "Yellow Peril" racism in the U.S.

The strong pull that this class already exerts on the mainland can be seen in Hong Kong, where 60 percent of foreign investment in China originates. Already, Hong Kong is virtually completely integrated with the neighboring mainland province of Guangdong, with which it shares a common cultural heritage and language (Cantonese). Much of the Pearl River delta has become a huge "free trade" factory belt, with more farmland being handed over to capitalist developers every year. Guangdong officials increasingly answer to the Hong Kong moneymen, not to Beijing. As an old Cantonese saying goes: "The mountains are high, and the emperor is far away." Hong Kong has also served as the avenue for the enrichment of many mainland government and military officials through their positions in trading companies and dummy corporations which they set up to route money back into China for investment in joint ventures and other capitalist enterprises.

The imminent reversion of Hong Kong to Chinese rule has led to an immensely cynical outpouring of "human rights" verbiage by the former British colonial rulers and the Western media. Ever since seizing the island in 1841 during the first Opium War against China's decrepit Qing Dynasty, the British ran the colony as a virtual police state, brutally oppressing their Chinese subjects. Hong Kong became a haven for both British and Chinese drug smugglers, Chinese warlords and, later, Guomindang crooks fleeing the mainland in 1947-49. But when Mao Zedong's guerrilla army approached Hong Kong at the close of the civil war, Mao called off the advance as he searched, in the face of U.S. hostility, for allies among other imperialist powers. Today, the glitz of Hong Kong's economic "miracle" hides one of the world's greatest gaps between the rich and poor. Some 10,000 hideously exploited workers and elderly people live in steel cages stacked in twos or threes. In February 1996, 24 homeless people died on one night during a rare cold snap.

The wispy veneer of democratic liberties in Hong Kong, which the imperialists scream are about to be trampled on by China, were only granted after the 1984 agreement on the return of the colony to China. In response to the imperialist outcry over "human rights," Beijing pointed out that its projected laws for Hong Kong are actually based on Britain's own colonial-era legislation! This fact alone speaks volumes about the aims of the Chinese Stalinist regime. Beijing has pledged in advance not to lay a finger on Hong Kong's capitalist magnates, a policy symbolized by the appointment of shipping tycoon Tung Chee-hwa to run Hong Kong for the central government. In return, following the July 1 takeover the nationalist bureaucracy will gain control of the largest container port in the world as well as the world's largest foreign reserve holdings.

The overwhelming concern of the brittle Stalinist bureaucratic caste is to maintain stability, and to do this it is implementing its own battery of police-state laws enforced by local police and some 10,000 PLA troops to be stationed in Hong Kong. The point of Beijing's "One China, two systems"

policy is not so much Hong Kong as it is Taiwan. By defending capitalist property in Hong Kong, the Stalinists hope to show the Guomindang bourgeoisie—whose forces massacred thousands of Taiwanese in 1947 to solidify its brutal rule over the island—that their property rights will be reliably protected in the event of reunification with the mainland.

Trotskyists can only cheer as the rotted British Empire loses its last major colonial holding with the lowering of the bloody Union Jack and the raising of the five-starred red flag of the People's Republic on July 1. But as the Spartacist League/Britain wrote in "Britain Out of Hong Kong!" (*Workers Hammer* No. 109, September 1989), we are for "One country, one system—under workers rule!" We look to the early period of Chinese Communism, before the liquidationist line of Stalin's Comintern led to the beheading of the 1925-27 Revolution. In 1922, the CCP led a strike of 10,000 Hong Kong seamen. Three years later, the Communist-led Canton-Hong Kong Strike Committee carried out a 16-month strike following the murder by British troops of anti-imperialist protesters in Shanghai. Those communists fought to liberate Hong Kong and the rest of China through mobilizing the working class at the head of the battle for national liberation. Today's Stalinist "Communist" regime eagerly prostitutes itself to Hong Kong's capitalist masters, seeking only to reserve a privileged position for CCP bureaucrats as the Chinese bourgeoisie moves to recoup in China what it lost in 1949.

Market Chaos

In reviewing Deng's "reforms," James Miles observed:

> "Compared with the seemingly disastrous rush toward free market capitalism under way in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, China appeared to have found the right formula.... But China's economic revolution had its price. Although few observers paid much attention in 1992, it was apparent that China's explosive economic growth was also expanding the ranks of the disappointed and disillusioned, particularly among peasants and workers in state enterprises whose voices are rarely heard."

China's rulers are well aware of the seething discontent at the base of the society. The chief targets of China's free-marketeers are the network of state industries—still the core of the economy—and the social benefits the workers in these plants have enjoyed. Overseas capitalist interests and "liberals" inside China have been clamoring for the government to cut its subsidies to these industries. Despite some fits and starts in this direction, Beijing still shells out fully 70 percent of its bank loans to keep state enterprises afloat. Why? The answer lies in the dynamic described by Trotsky concerning Stalin's ruling caste in the Soviet Union: "It continues to preserve state property only to the extent that it fears the proletariat." Thus, in 1992, a wave of militant labor actions forced the government to abandon its plan to "smash the three irons" of lifelong guaranteed jobs, wages and benefits.

At the same time, central planning—the fundamental economic underpinning of a workers state—has been greatly attenuated. Many state plants have been forced to sell their products directly on the market, while the share of the state sector in the country's industrial output has fallen to 42 percent last year from 78 percent in 1978. At the same time, while there have been some layoffs in state-owned plants, mass dismissals have been discouraged because the government is legally obliged to find new jobs for those laid off. On the other hand, with credit more tightly restricted, failing state firms are sharply cutting back on benefits like education and health care for workers' families. And there is not yet any kind of social "safety net" in place for those thrown out of work.

For the first time in "People's China," a significant number of city residents, estimated at 15 million, are falling below the official poverty line. The regime's answer has been to encourage workers to take second jobs or to go into business for themselves, no doubt hoping that this would leave them little spare time to think about politics. But the attacks on workers' living standards helped spark a rise in strikes and protests over the last six years.

The sources for potential turmoil in China are many and far-flung. The workforce for "collective" enterprises is typically drawn from the huge mass of laborers from the countryside who cannot make a living on the farms. Spawned from the breakup of the rural communes in the early-mid 1980s, this giant "reserve army of labor" was drawn on at first to provide workers for the SEZs. Now it is widely employed throughout China. In the cities they do dangerous construction work and other jobs city residents refuse to perform, while lacking the most basic protections and social benefits. Desperate for housing, the migrant laborers—now known as "Deng's army"—often live outside city centers in segregated enclaves with others from the same region speaking the same dialect.

By 1994, transients made up as much as 20 percent of Shanghai's population, while the migrant population in Beijing numbered 3.2 million. The desperate plight of the transients, a major factor behind China's soaring crime rates, creates social tinder waiting to explode. As a Shanghai newspaper commented in 1993, "If even 1 percent of this enormous mass of people has nothing to live on, there will be social chaos.... If they join forces with the millions of unemployed in the cities, then the consequences will be more unthinkable yet."

The effects of the dismantling of China's rural communes have been disastrous for the mass of the peasantry. Home to one-quarter of the world's population, China contains only

Joseph Abeles Collection

Scheler/Black Star

Third Chinese Revolution of 1949 liberated women from centuries-old bondage, symbolized by crippling footbinding (left). Study group near Guangzhou after the revolution (right). Acquisition of literacy was vital to integration of women into economic life.

about 9 percent of the planet's arable land. The problems of Chinese agriculture are truly intractable short of the integration of China into an international planned economy, which would provide the machinery, electric power and other ingredients necessary for modern, large-scale farm production. On its own, China could not possibly achieve such a level of technique. But the collectivization of agriculture under Mao at least provided an administrative means to provide the peasantry a livelihood and a basic level of health care and education.

Under Deng, however, the communes were seen as a hindrance to freeing up labor power and encouraging the growth of rural businesses. Farms have now reverted to individually operated plots under the "family responsibility system." The more successful peasants—or those with the right *guanxi* (connections)—are encouraged to hire workers and to engage in small private or "collective" businesses. In this way, a rural bourgeoisie is being created, and below it a huge class of poor peasants. Health care and education are now priced beyond the means of most peasants.

Official corruption greatly exacerbates the plight of the peasantry. Local officials are handing over ever-greater chunks of real estate to developers while routinely demanding that peasant households pay bogus taxes or "contributions" for projects that never materialize. A journal reporting on a village in southern China where peasants who couldn't pay their taxes had their property seized, wrote that residents looked at local officials as "worse than the KMT [Guomindang]." A few years ago, *Beijing Daily* quoted an older peasant woman in the northeast who denounced the thieving of local bureaucrats, saying, "The peasants really cannot bear it. If officials carry on behaving like this, we will definitely be forced to rebel." By 1993, the Chinese Academy for Social Sciences reported that "parades, demonstrations, and attacks on local government offices" reached a level unprecedented since the CCP took power.

Among the first to suffer from the Stalinists' reactionary measures have been the women of China, for whom the 1949 Revolution opened up the possibility of entering social and economic life for the first time. But while the Chinese Revolution made huge inroads in improving the previous slave-like status of women, their social liberation has been circumscribed by China's poverty and the Stalinist regime's glorification of the family, in which is rooted the oppression of women.

Today, however, with the reversion to family farming and the spread of corrupt practices everywhere, such prerevolutionary evils as female infanticide and kidnapping of women to be sold as "wives" have re-emerged. In the cities, women workers are often the first to be laid off by cost-cutting managers in state firms who no longer want to pay for maternity benefits. Young women workers predominate in the SEZ plants, where they often slave up to 14 hours a day, with barely a day off per month, for as long as the owners find it profitable. When they lose their jobs, they are thrown out to face a bleak future back on the farms, to toil in the fields without machinery and to slave away in the home, where backward Confucian "family virtues" have made a strong comeback.

At the same time that the regime's pro-capitalist "reforms" are threatening to wipe out some of the key gains of the 1949 Revolution, they also serve to undercut some of the administrative mechanisms of Stalinist rule. The rural communes, for example, provided not only key services for the peasants, but a framework for party cadres to rein in their charges. One effect of the influx of rural laborers into the cities has been to effectively destroy the system of residency registration which formerly restricted Chinese citizens' ability to move around the country. And by relieving state industries' responsibilities in providing basic services to the workers, the regime has also undercut the *danwei* (work units), a key instrument of bureaucratic control over the workers.

Nationalism and Counterrevolution

One year after the Tiananmen upheaval, Deng Xiaoping, speaking with former Canadian prime minister Pierre

Trudeau, gave vent to the fears plaguing China's leaders. Deng railed:

> "If turmoil erupts again, to the extent that the party is no longer effective and state power is no longer effective, and one faction grabs one part of the army and another faction grabs another part of the army—that would be civil war.... As soon as civil war breaks out, local warlords will spring up everywhere, production will plummet, communications will be severed, and it won't be a matter of a few million or even tens of millions of refugees—there'd be well over a hundred million people fleeing the country. First to be affected would be Asia—now the most promising part of the world. It would be a global disaster."

This statement helps explain why the Chinese regime banishes even the mildest dissidents to prison or to the dreaded *laogai* "labor" camps. Illustrating the bureaucracy's extreme fear of any type of political expression was its handling of the dispute with Japan over the barren rock outcrop known to the Chinese as the Diaoyu Islands and to the Japanese as the Senkakus. After a group of Japanese rightists laid claim to the islands for Japan, the Chinese government joined with nationalists in Hong Kong and Taiwan in stoking the fires of chauvinist demagogy. But when students in Beijing began to protest the seizure, the Chinese leaders clammed up, posted 100 additional policemen outside the Japanese embassy and forbade any protest demonstrations. As an intellectual told the *New York Times* (19 September 1996), "The Government is afraid that if they let the students demonstrate against the Japanese, there might be two unemployed workers among the 10,000 demonstrators who would shout 'Food!' and 'We have to live!' and then the demonstration could be totally transformed."

The regime in Beijing is so fragile that it can't allow demonstrations even when they are in agreement with state policy! In its attempts to ward off social unrest, the Jiang Zemin government has in recent years consciously fostered the most rabid nationalist sentiments, preaching that the market economy will propel China to superpower status. A communiqué issuing from a CCP plenum in October announced a "spiritual civilization" campaign aiming to promote patriotism "in a penetrating and sustained manner" and encourage "family virtues" and other aspects of "traditional" Chinese culture.

The dispute over the Diaoyu Islands is indicative of the counterrevolutionary role played by nationalism in the deformed workers states. The stunt pulled by the Japanese revanchists on the rocks, which are unpopulated and have no military significance, in no way posed a threat to China. From a Marxist standpoint, it certainly did not pose the question of military defense of the Chinese deformed workers state. After Beijing put the boot on open protests, the issue was seized upon by rightists in Hong Kong and Taiwan, who dispatched boats flying the flags of both Taiwan and the People's Republic. Mass demonstrations took place in Taipei and Hong Kong, some of them exhibiting virulent anti-Japanese racism. The right-wing nationalists thus became the champions of anti-Japanese sentiment which was running very high on the mainland on the 65th anniversary of the brutal Japanese occupation of Manchuria.

Having tossed away even the fig leaf of "socialist" demagogy, the Stalinist bureaucracy sees in reactionary Confucian "traditions" and national chauvinism the means to create some ideological glue to help keep the populace in line. As an ideology emanating from capitalism's emergence from feudal society, nationalism is a ***false consciousness*** for the Chinese proletariat. It is, however, the proper ideology of the Hong Kong capitalists and nascent mainland Chinese bourgeoisie. Nationalism was a major political force in the counterrevolutionary wave that swept over the former USSR and East Europe—both the nationalism of the minority peoples, fostered for decades by the U.S. State Department and CIA, and the chauvinism of the ruling caste, which helped spin off elements who looked to capitalist rule as the road to great-power status. Those among the Communist Party of the Soviet Union who claimed to stand for maintaining "socialism" soon found themselves in a "red-brown" bloc with outright fascists. Nationalism is already playing a similar role in China. Thus, in the name of forging a "greater China," the bureaucracy is inviting the Chinese bourgeoisie back into the country they were tossed out of in 1949.

Both the nationalist bureaucracy in Beijing and many imperialist spokesmen predict that China will become the world's next superpower by continuing to develop a market economy and keeping an iron heel over the working people. But this is a pipedream. China is certainly no longer the weak, divided country it was before the revolution, when U.S., French, Japanese and other imperialist powers carved out their own "concessions" on its territory. Yet China is still faced with the legacy of centuries of backwardness, particularly in regard to the agrarian question. Today, despite the huge growth of its urban areas, China remains bogged down by a very backward, impoverished hinterland, where according to World Bank estimates about 350 million people—one-fourth of the country's population—subsist on less than US$1 per day.

A capitalist China would be an arena for intense imperialist rivalry. It was over the "right" to exploit China that the Pacific War between the U.S. and Japan was fought from 1941-45. Today, the two Pacific powers again have their sights set on the untrammeled exploitation of China's huge proletariat as well as on resource-rich Siberia, reopened to imperialist plunder as a result of the destruction of the Soviet Union. The U.S. remains the dominant military power, with 100,000 troops stationed in Asia, about one-third of them in South Korea. But Japan has become steadily more assertive. At a New Year's news conference in Tokyo this January, Japanese prime minister Ryutaro Hashimoto warned that the days when Japan could "act, taking peace and prosperity for granted in the international community under the United States wing, have already passed" (*International Herald Tribune*, 8 January).

A proletarian political revolution in China would immediately face virulently hostile imperialist reaction. It would also send shock waves around the world and decisively encourage the international proletariat which has been politically and economically ***thrown back*** by the bourgeois onslaught and triumphalism over the so-called "death of communism" since the 1991 capitalist counterrevolution in the former Soviet Union. A proletarian political revolution in China would also find a crucial source of support in the class struggles of the proletariat of East and Southeast Asia. The demonstrations and strikes which broke out in Indonesia last year against the despised, corrupt Suharto dictatorship pitted militant workers against some of the same capitalist interests who are sinking money into China looking to exploit the workers there. Throughout much of Southeast Asia, capital investment has created a young proletariat with the potential, under a revolutionary leadership, to topple the

brutally exploitative capitalist regimes in the region.

What happens in China in the near future will have a huge impact on the Korean Peninsula. The nationwide strikes by militant independent unions which rocked South Korea earlier this year showed the enormous potential of the South Korean proletariat to struggle against its capitalist exploiters. Meanwhile, the dissipated, very deformed workers state of North Korea is on its last legs as the population reels under a severe famine. Yet the criminally venal bureaucracy in Beijing refuses to give desperately necessary food aid to its erstwhile North Korean ally, out of deference to its South Korean business partners. A revolutionary workers and peasants government in China would fight, as we do, for the revolutionary reunification of Korea and mobilize whatever resources it could to relieve the famine across its northeast border, while giving political and material aid to the South Korean workers in their struggle to overthrow the vicious exploiters who seek the unconditional surrender of the North in a reunified capitalist Korea.

For a Leninist-Trotskyist Party!

China is fast approaching a crossroads. Those militants who want to fight the threat of capitalist re-enslavement will have to learn that what they know of communism is at best grotesquely distorted. Since the defeat of the 1925-27 Revolution, communism has either been identified with Mao's utopian peasant-nationalism or seen as only a cynical appellation for those seeking to use their bureaucratic connections to become exploiters of the working people. The counterrevolutionary destruction of the USSR and the deformed workers states of East Europe completely verified the prognosis laid out by Leon Trotsky in analyzing the degeneration of the Russian Revolution under Stalinism: either the workers would sweep out the parasitic bureaucracy, or the bureaucracy would prepare the ground for the restoration of capitalism. The decisive question is one of revolutionary leadership. A genuine Leninist party must also serve as the collective memory of the working class. Thus the ICL struggles to bring the authentic program of Leninism to the Chinese proletariat, including the suppressed history of the Chinese Trotskyists (see article page 21 this issue).

When a situation of political revolution began to develop in East Germany in November 1989, the ICL threw all the resources it could muster into intervening with a program calling to "stop capitalist reunification" and for "a red Germany of workers councils in a socialist United States of Europe." In Russia, following Yeltsin's countercoup against the "Gang of Eight" Stalinist has-beens, the ICL immediately issued a leaflet widely distributed in Moscow calling for workers action to "stop Yeltsin's counterrevolution!" But although the time had come for the Soviet proletariat to act, the workers, cynical, dejected and atomized after decades of Stalinist lies, did not move. The consciousness of the proletariat which had made the October Revolution had long since been deformed by Stalin's retrograde nationalism (often masked as Soviet "patriotism," particularly in World War II, when Stalin used "defense of the fatherland" as the ideology for mobilizing the population to smash Hitler's Third Reich). The lie and pretext of building "socialism in one country" to justify a counterrevolutionary foreign policy of selling out revolutions internationally to appease imperialism was the antithesis of the revolutionary internationalist program of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolshevik Party.

From Germany to Russia, the Stalinists became the brokers for the sellout of those countries to imperialism. The collapse of the Stalinist-ruled workers states marked an enormous defeat for the world's working people and oppressed, ushering in a period of bourgeois triumphalism over the supposed "death of communism." But while the consciousness of the working people has been set back by this defeat, we Trotskyists say that it is Stalinism that has proven its complete bankruptcy. Communism continues to live in the class struggles of the working people, and in the political program of the ICL as the party of revolutionary Marxists who fight for new October Revolutions.

The counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union has greatly encouraged those who would return China to the days of capitalist slavery and imperialist subjugation. But there is also evidence pointing to tumultuous social struggle in the near future against immiseration and free-market exploitation. What direction will these struggles take? For the working class to seize political power—to build a China of workers, soldiers and peasants councils—requires the leadership of a Leninist-Trotskyist party which acts as the champion of all those under attack by the rush to a free-market economy. Such a party would undertake special measures to organize the superexploited migrant workers, who form a potentially powerful link between the urban

working class and China's vast peasant interior. It would advance the cause of the rights of women, from defending their jobs to ruthlessly fighting the re-enslavement of women to bride-procurers and household tyrants.

To forge an internationalist, egalitarian-communist party requires a political struggle against not only the Stalinist misrulers but also those who would lead the workers into the camp of "democratic" counterrevolution. Some Tiananmen-era dissidents have been engaged in efforts to organize trade unions opposed to the regime's corporatist All-China Federation of Trade Unions, particularly in the capitalist SEZs. Such activists can be quite heroic, battling for workers' rights against both the bosses and Chinese police forces. However, as Marxists, we warn against those, like Han Dongfang, who are tied to the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy in Hong Kong and to the American AFL-CIO, whose leaders have for decades acted as labor agents for U.S. imperialism.

During the anti-Soviet Cold War, imperialism's labor front men specialized in the call for "free trade unions," by which they meant anti-Communist fronts for counterrevolution. Today, the Hong Kong-based journal, *China Labour Bulletin* (January 1997), which claims to fight for "independent" trade unions in China, baldly admits that the *Bulletin*'s chief editor had been featured on radio broadcasts of the *Voice of America* and *Radio Free Asia*—both of them official anti-communist mouthpieces for U.S. imperialism.

In drawing a hard class line in defense of the Chinese deformed workers state against the threat of counterrevolution, we Trotskyists also struggle against those who veil their appeals to capitalist forces with the rhetoric of bourgeois "democracy." Many who claim to stand in the tradition of Leon Trotsky's fight against the Stalinist gravediggers of revolution have openly and repeatedly sided with "democratic" counterrevolutionary movements, particularly those arrayed against the former Soviet Union. For example, the United Secretariat (USec), formerly led by the late Ernest Mandel, proclaimed "Solidarity with Solidarność" in Poland even as this fake "union" came out foursquare for capitalist counterrevolution. Today, the USec's Hong Kong supporters who publish *October Review* hail all manner of Chinese "dissidents," including openly pro-capitalist elements.

The International Socialist tendency, led by Tony Cliff's British Socialist Workers Party and including the U.S. International Socialist Organization, has sided with the capitalist "democracies" ever since the birth of the People's Republic of China, putting forward the anti-Marxist position that China since 1949 has been a "state capitalist" society. Cliff was expelled from the Fourth International at the onset of the Korean War in 1950 when he openly refused to defend China and North Korea against U.S. imperialism. Since then, the Cliffites have hailed every "anti-Stalinist" reactionary, from Solidarność to the Afghan *mujahedin* to anti-Communist rioters in Cuba in 1994 who sought to foment counterrevolutionary turmoil at a time of increasing danger to the Cuban deformed workers state in the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR.

Today, the argument that capitalist counterrevolution has already occurred in China has led some "leftists" to link arms with the vilest reactionaries. Thus, the Hong Kong-based "Pioneer" group (formerly "New Sprouts"), an offshoot of the USec's Revolutionary Communist League, has repeatedly demonstrated ***with the Guomindang*** against the Chinese takeover of Hong Kong. In an interview with the Japanese USec newspaper *Kakehashi* (28 October 1996), a Pioneer spokesman baldly pronounced that the Stalinist rulers of Hong Kong will be "worse than the British colonialists, because a couple of years ago the British implemented democratic reform, civil election law and the law on human rights"!

Similarly, the "Socialist Equality Party" of David North has claimed that "the Chinese state is not, even in the most distorted sense, an instrument for the defense of the working class" (*Fourth International*, Winter-Spring 1994). More recently, they wrote that "under Deng the bureaucracy has largely completed its transformation into a property-owning bourgeois ruling class" (*International Workers Bulletin*, 17 March). Yet this supposed "bourgeois ruling class" does not even have the legal right to buy and sell property or to will their "capital" to their descendants. Despite the significant inroads made by both foreign and domestic capital in China, the People's Republic remains a bureaucratically deformed workers state which must be unconditionally defended against internal and external counterrevolution.

The Northites and their predecessors in Gerry Healy's International Committee have always been enemies of the Trotskyist program of unconditional defense of the deformed and degenerated workers states. Thus they joined with the rest of the fake Trotskyists in hailing anti-Soviet counterrevolutionaries. Since the collapse of the USSR, the Northites have gone on to both renounce the defense of the remaining workers states and oppose even trade-union struggles in capitalist countries with the argument that the unions have ceased to be any sort of working-class organizations. By equating both the Stalinist-ruled workers states and the trade unions with their reactionary leaderships, the Northites in effect renounce the necessary political struggle against the pro-capitalist misleaders of the working class and find themselves on the side of the exploiters who seek to destroy the unions and overturn the remaining gains of the Chinese Revolution.

A "Perspectives and Tasks Memorandum" adopted by the International Executive Committee of the ICL in January 1996 states:

> "The next period is likely to see the breakdown and terminal crisis of Stalinist rule in China as powerful elements in the bureaucracy, directly tied to offshore Chinese capital and actively supported by Western and Japanese imperialism, continue to drive toward capitalist restoration. The Chinese working class, although heretofore limited by police repression to actions at individual workplaces, has in recent years exhibited massive discontent with the social degradation, insecurities and blatant inequalities generated by Deng's 'market socialist' program. The rural economy has experienced the rise of a class of relatively wealthy peasant smallholders while an estimated 100 million landless peasants have flooded into the cities. We can thus foresee monumental class battles leading either to proletarian political revolution or capitalist counterrevolution in the most populous nation on earth."
>
> — *International Bulletin* No. 38 (Third Edition), November 1996

To smash the threat of capitalist re-enslavement and open the road to a socialist future, Chinese workers must look to the international class struggle. It is by linking their fight for political revolution with the struggle to smash capitalist rule from Indonesia and South Korea to Japan and the U.S. that the Chinese proletariat will form the bridge to a socialist future. Above all, China's workers must be won to the authentic communism of Lenin and Trotsky and of the early Chinese Communist Party led by Chen Duxiu, which for decades has been trampled on by Stalinism. For a Trotskyist party in China, section of a reborn Fourth International! ■

Permanent Revolution vs. the "Anti-Imperialist United Front"

The Origins of Chinese Trotskyism

Humanities Press

Leon Trotsky's *Problems of the Chinese Revolution*. Trotsky's criticisms of Communist International's suicidal political support to bourgeois-nationalist Guomindang and his advocacy of program of permanent revolution had deep impact on Chinese Communist cadres. Chen Duxiu, founding leader of Chinese Trotskyism, in 1937.

To build the revolutionary proletarian party which is necessary to lead a socialist revolution, the working class must be armed with the consciousness of its historic rôle and an understanding of the victories and defeats in the class struggles of the past which have shaped the world we confront today. Not the least of the crimes of the Stalinist bureaucratic clique which usurped the mantle of the Russian Revolution and the Communist International (see article page 36) was the undermining of the historically acquired class consciousness of the vanguard of the world's proletariat. Lacking real continuity with the aims and program of the founders of the Communist International, Stalin and his epigones had to create for themselves an ersatz legitimacy, twisting and perverting beyond recognition not only the real history of the international communist movement but the essential concepts and terminology of Marxism itself.

In the Stalinist-ruled states, the cynical manipulation of the great liberating ideals of socialism in the service of bureaucratic regimes of repression, lies and privilege has engendered widespread demoralization and cynicism among the working people. In 1991, the workers of the Soviet Union did not fight to defend the remaining gains of the 1917 October Revolution, doubtless because they saw no way to do so as their own rulers joined in the chorus that "communism is dead," but also because of the deep erosion of basic pro-socialist consciousness.

Not only by alienating the working masses from "socialism" but equally by degrading the meaning of every essential idea of revolutionary Marxism, the Stalinists have robbed the proletariat of its own history. To sell as "Marxism-Leninism" the anti-Leninist program of "socialism in one country," Stalin and his heirs had to totally falsify the past while emptying the language of Marxism of any real meaning. So the struggles between *classes* are rewritten as a moral battle between "progressives" and "reactionaries"; the "united front" becomes a formula for subordinating the proletariat to its class enemies.

The Chinese Stalinists led by Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung) developed a particularly demented version of Stalinist doublespeak. "Capitalism" ceased to mean a concrete form of property relations; "following the capitalist road" became an epithet to be thrown at Mao's opponents in the bureaucracy. Students were hailed as "proletarian revolutionaries" while being cynically mobilized to break workers strikes during the intrabureaucratic war known as the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution." In Mao-speak, the struggle against supposed "Soviet social-imperialism" justified China's rapprochement with the real American imperialists at the height of their dirty, losing war against the Vietnamese Revolution.

Today the bureaucrats who rule in the Forbidden City continue to call themselves "Communists" as they scramble to enrich themselves and their progeny and seek to become part of a new class of capitalist exploiters on the Chinese mainland. Like their Russian and East European counterparts who handed the former deformed workers states over to capitalist counterrevolution, the Chinese ruling caste must be swept away by proletarian *political revolution*. Those who seek today to defend and extend the social gains which resulted from the smashing of capitalism by the third Chinese Revolution of 1949 must reappropriate the program and goals which animated the founders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), who sought to build a party representing the revolutionary class interests of the proletariat.

Leon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution provides the cornerstone of revolutionary strategy in countries of belated capitalist development. It anticipated and was confirmed by the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, when for the first time in history the proletariat under revolutionary leadership took and held state power. In China in particular, the theory of permanent revolution, and Trotsky's subsequent devastating critique of the Stalinized Communist International's program of subordinating the Chinese proletariat to the bourgeois Guomindang (Kuomintang [KMT]), had an electrifying impact on many Chinese Communists.

The theory of permanent revolution was developed during the period 1904-1906 by Trotsky and A.L. Helfand (Parvus), as a projection of the likely future course of revolutionary development in tsarist Russia. As finally codified by Trotsky, the theory held that the Russian Revolution would be proletarian socialist in character; that the solution of the bourgeois-democratic tasks (such as destruction of the tsarist autocracy, land to the tiller, democratic solution of the national question) was conceivable only in the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, leaning on the peasantry. The dictatorship of the proletariat would inevitably place on the order of the day not only democratic but socialist tasks as well. The Russian revolution would be a powerful impetus to proletarian revolutions elsewhere, especially in the advanced imperialist countries of Europe; workers revolutions there would, in turn, provide the vital material assistance necessary to open the road to building a socialist society in Russia.

Within the Russian Social Democracy prior to the February 1917 revolution, there were two other viewpoints. The Mensheviks asserted that the revolution would occur in distinct stages: first a bourgeois-democratic revolution and then later a socialist revolution. They argued that the victory of the Russian bourgeois revolution was possible only under the leadership of the liberal bourgeoisie and must put the latter in power.

Lenin's Bolsheviks were closer to Trotsky's view, in that they insisted that the Russian bourgeoisie was ***incapable*** of leading a democratic revolution. The Bolsheviks argued that what was necessary was an alliance between the working class and the peasantry, culminating in the establishment of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry." Lenin believed that this revolutionary regime would necessarily be confined to a bourgeois-democratic program, but he argued that the Russian revolution would help spark socialist revolution in the West, enabling the Russian proletariat to come to power on a socialist program in a comparatively brief historical period.

Jules Humbert-Droz Archives, Switzerland

Proletarian revolution is road to liberation of women and all oppressed. Demonstration of Baku Women's Union in conjunction with Comintern's "First Congress of the Peoples of the East," 1920.

The victorious October Revolution of 1917 fully confirmed Trotsky's position on the character of the revolution in Russia. Lenin's slogan was flawed in any case because it projected the creation of a state defending the interests of two different classes, the proletariat and the peasantry; in April 1917 he rejected it. In his "Letter on Tactics" Lenin stated: "The person who ***now*** speaks only of a 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' is behind the times, consequently, he has in effect ***gone over*** to the petty bourgeoisie against the proletarian class struggle; that person should be consigned to the archive of 'Bolshevik' pre-revolutionary antiques." However, as the International Communist League has pointed out:

> "The party, led by Lenin and aided by the more radical Petrograd committee, semi-empirically overcame the limitations of this 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' because their political appetite was clearly for proletarian power and that's what they fought for despite the theoretical ambiguity. But in fact the Bolsheviks never adopted Trotsky's correct and essential theory of permanent revolution. This theoretical failure, and the failure to explicitly repudiate the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry,' then became a conduit for the forces later posturing as the Bolshevik 'old guard' (e.g., Stalin) to attack Trotsky, the theory of permanent revolution, and the revolutionary internationalist premises and implications of the Bolshevik revolution itself."
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> — Letter from the ICL to the LQB of Brazil, 11 June 1996 (*International Bulletin* No. 41, April 1997)

During the Chinese Revolution of 1925-27, the Comintern, under the leadership of first Zinoviev and then Bukharin/Stalin, regenerated the Menshevik theory of stages and applied it to the young Chinese Communist Party. The Comintern's policy of liquidating the CCP into the party of the national bourgeoisie, the Guomindang, was imposed despite the doubts and opposition that were repeatedly raised by leading Chinese cadres, who deferred to Moscow's authority. The result was the bloody defeat of the revolution, as the Guomindang drowned the Chinese working class in blood, a catastrophe which decapitated the Chinese working class.

For Trotsky, who had fought against this betrayal, the Chinese events of 1925-27 were pivotal, enabling him to generalize the theory of permanent revolution to countries outside Russia. The Chinese Revolution proved by negative example that the path of permanent revolution was the ***necessary*** course for revolutionary change in all the countries of belated capitalist development. After 1927 Trotsky waged the struggle against the Stalinist usurpers under the banner of the permanent revolution.

The Early Comintern and the Colonial Question

When the Comintern (CI) first sought to address the question of the relationship between Communist parties and bourgeois-nationalist movements in the countries of the East, it was breaking new ground. The Bolsheviks' expectations for extension of October were focused on Europe, where proletarian revolutions were imminently possible. With a few

A. H. Buchman Collection, Hoover Institution

Chinese Communist students at congress in Paris, February 1923. Zhou Enlai is sixth from right in top row; Zheng Chaolin is fourth from left in front.

exceptions, there was little or no tradition of Marxist workers parties in the countries of the colonial and semicolonial world, and most of the bourgeois-nationalist parties, like the Chinese Guomindang, were also of relatively recent origin. The proletarian movement in the colonial world was itself new and small. Hence the CI's early work on the national and colonial question was largely directed at the workers movement of the advanced countries, to draw a hard programmatic line between the Communists and the chauvinist cesspool of the Second International. The "Twenty-One Conditions" adopted at the Comintern's Second Congress demanded that the Communist parties in the imperialist countries support "every liberation movement in the colonies not only in words but in deeds," and carry out "systematic propaganda among their own country's troops against any oppression of colonial peoples."

Revolutionary struggles had been sweeping through much of Europe. Lenin and Trotsky expected that proletarian revolution would triumph in several advanced capitalist countries in Europe within a relatively short period of time. The Comintern tended to view the possibility of socialist revolution in the colonies as an ***outgrowth*** of successful revolutions in the imperialist heartland. In a report to Russian Communist Party delegates to the Tenth Congress of Soviets in December 1922, Trotsky asserted that "the colonies, if taken independently and isolatedly, are absolutely not ready for the proletarian revolution. If they are taken isolatedly, then capitalism still has a long possibility of economic development in them. But the colonies belong to the metropolitan centers and their fate is intimately bound up with the fate of these European metropolitan centers" (Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol. 2).

The Theses on the National and Colonial Questions, passed at the Second Congress of the CI in 1920, asserted the importance of "establishing the closest possible alliance between the West-European communist proletariat and the revolutionary peasant movement in the East, in the colonies, and in the backward countries generally. It is particularly necessary to exert every effort to apply the basic principles of the Soviet system in countries where pre-capitalist relations predominate—by setting up 'working people's Soviets,' etc."

In addressing the question of organizing peasant soviets in the report of the Commission on the National and Colonial Questions, Lenin gave the example of Turkestan, part of Soviet Central Asia. The achievement of workers rule in Russia had facilitated the establishment of the soviet system in parts of the old tsarist empire where the proletariat barely existed. Lenin asserted more generally that the extension of proletarian rule in the metropolitan countries might make it possible for the colonies to skip the capitalist stage of development: "If the victorious revolutionary proletariat conducts systematic propaganda among them, and the Soviet governments come to their aid with all the means at their disposal—in that event it will be mistaken to assume that the backward peoples must inevitably go through the capitalist stage of development."

The 1920 Theses dealt with the relationship between the Communist parties and bourgeois-nationalist movements in a fairly algebraic manner. They asserted that "The Communist International must enter into a 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." In particular, the Theses pointed to "the need to combat Pan-Islamism and similar trends, which strive to combine the liberation movement against European and American imperialism with an attempt to strengthen the positions of the khans, landowners, and mullahs, etc."

By the time of the Fourth Congress of the CI in late 1922, the situation had changed. The postwar revolutionary wave in Europe had receded. By now, as the new "Theses on the Eastern Question" noted, Communist parties had been formed in many of the countries of the East. The question of these young communist organizations' relations with bourgeois-nationalist movements demanded concrete answers. Although the Theses condemned the colonial bourgeoisie, the section entitled "The Anti-Imperialist United Front" provided an ambiguous answer to the problem of communist perspectives in the colonial world:

> "The proletariat supports and advances such partial demands as an independent democratic republic, the abolition of all feudal rights and privileges, the introduction of women's rights, etc., in so far as it cannot, with the relation of forces as it exists at present, make the implementation of its soviet programme the immediate task of the day."

While criticizing the colonial bourgeoisie, the Fourth Congress Theses clearly went beyond recognizing the possibility of common actions with bourgeois nationalists, such as a

military bloc against an imperialist power. The Theses were mooting a call for a ***political*** bloc with bourgeois nationalism around a minimum program of democratic demands. Implicitly they posed a Menshevik, two-stage program for the colonial revolution, with the first stage being a democratic struggle against imperialism (the "anti-imperialist united front").

It was of course a sharp descent from these opportunist impulses expressed at the Fourth Congress of the revolutionary Comintern to the full-blown catastrophic betrayal subsequently carried out in China by Stalin and Bukharin. But already some Comintern leaders, like Zinoviev, were coming to the conclusion that proletarian revolution in the East was not a possibility except in the distant future. The First Congress of the Toilers of the Far East, which had taken place several months earlier (January 1922), had adopted "Theses on the Tasks of Communists in the Far East" which stated:

> "Although under the present international conditions the division of the program of the Communist Parties into a minimum program and a maximum program is important only under certain circumstances, such a division must be considered valid in the immediate future particularly for the countries of the Far East, to the extent that the next stage of development of these countries is the democratic overturn and the independent—political and economic—class organization of the proletariat."

The Fourth Congress Theses provide almost no concrete detail about the work of sections in the colonial countries. But the import of what was going on is clear from the speeches of the delegates to the Congress. The Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) had already entered the Islamic League, Sarekat Islam. After the communists were expelled by Sarekat in 1921, the PKI attempted unsuccessfully to launch its own "Red Sarekat Islam" groups. The Indonesian delegate to the Fourth Congress, Tan Malaka, argued for a "united front with revolutionary nationalism," defended pan-Islamism as corresponding "to the national liberation struggle" and justified the PKI's entry into Sarekat Islam. The Fourth Congress Theses revised the hard line against pan-Islamism taken at the Second Congress, neutrally observing that "As the national liberation movements grow and mature, the religious-political slogans of pan-Islamism will be replaced by political demands."

Significantly, the Fourth Congress took place only a few months after Comintern envoys had persuaded the reluctant leadership of the Chinese Communist Party to shelve their opposition to entry into the bourgeois-nationalist Guomindang. One Chinese delegate at the Fourth Congress declared:

> "On the assumption that the anti-imperialist united front is necessary to get rid of imperialism in China, our party has decided to form a national front with the national revolutionary party of the Kuomintang.... If we do not enter this party we shall remain isolated, preaching a communism which is, it is true, a great and sublime ideal, but which the masses do not follow."
>
> — Jane Degras, ed., *The Communist International 1919-1943: Documents*, Vol. I (1956)

The Founding of Chinese Communism

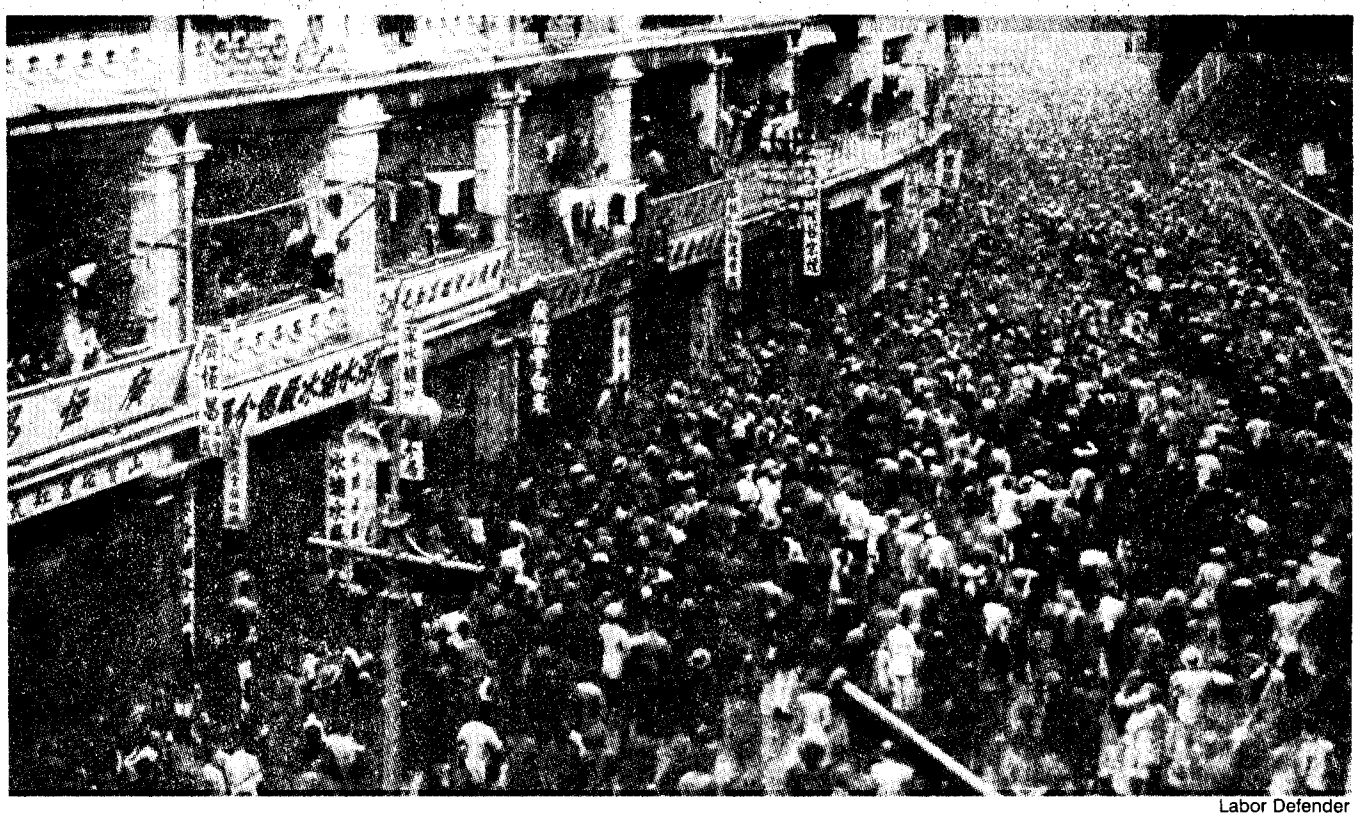
Only the theory of permanent revolution enabled Marxists to transcend the confusion, limitations and in some instances errors of early Comintern policy on the colonial and national questions. The early CI resolutions did not answer the essential question confronting the new Communist parties in the East: What would be the ***class*** character of the coming revolution? Permanent revolution projected that short of the establishing of the ***dictatorship of the proletariat***, even the most basic democratic tasks could not be resolved. The competing programs of permanent revolution or class collaboration were fought out in the Communist movement over policy toward China and the bourgeois Guomindang.

It was the economic developments accompanying World War I which gave flesh and blood to the perspective of permanent revolution in China, and also India. The war choked off the supply of consumer goods and capital from the West European powers, giving a powerful impetus to local capitalist industry. In China, both Chinese- and Japanese-owned enterprises burgeoned during the war, supplying the huge domestic market, with most new investment centering in the coastal urban centers and concentrated in cotton and silk mills, as well as food processing. By 1919 there were some 1.5 million industrial workers, most of them newly urbanized and retaining strong links with the countryside. While still a tiny minority of the population, the proletariat was concentrated in large enterprises in a few urban centers, giving it enormous social power.

Imperialist penetration had introduced the most modern techniques in production, but the imperialists simultaneously perpetuated the backwardness of the country. The existence of the foreign "spheres of influence" prevented China from achieving any real degree of national unification. The vast majority of the population still lived in the countryside. Over ***half*** of the Chinese peasantry was entirely landless, and another 20 percent were holders of land inadequate for bare subsistence. The title to much of the land was held by absentee landlords, government officials, banks and urban capitalists, who controlled the commercial capital penetrating to the remotest villages via the local merchants and usurers, and who were in turn dominated by foreign finance capital and the regime of the world market.

It was the recent and explosive growth of the Chinese working class which opened up a perspective of the proletariat leading the peasant masses in social revolution. The first union in China wasn't organized until 1918. But seven years later, a million Chinese workers participated in strikes, many of them directly political in character (Harold Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*). Two years after that, Chinese unions counted three million members, and in Shanghai the workers carried out a victorious insurrection which placed political power within their grasp. The young CCP quickly gained hegemony in this volatile workers movement.

The first Marxist study circles were organized in China in 1918. Marxism and Soviet Russia became attractive to students and other intellectuals, as their illusions in the "democratic West" were dashed. The founding cadres of the Chinese CP were assembled during 1919 in the May 4th Movement, named for the date of huge student demonstrations which erupted in protest at the terms of the Versailles Treaty granting Japanese imperialism sweeping concessions in China. The leader of the Chinese Communists was Chen Duxiu (Ch'en Tu-hsiu), then a professor at Peking National University. A brilliant Chinese linguist, Chen had introduced a system simplifying the written language to make it accessible to the masses. As a revolutionary democrat, Chen had served as an adviser to a provincial governor in the Nationalist regime following the overthrow of the Qing (Manchu) dynasty in the first Chinese Revolution of 1911. Disillusioned through experience with the Guomindang's pretensions to democracy and progress, Chen became an organizer of the May 4th Movement and a founder of the CCP.



Labor Defender

Mass workers' demonstration during seamen's strike against British colonial rulers of Hong Kong, 1922.

A November 1920 manifesto of the Chinese Communists declared that "The Communist Party will lead the revolutionary proletariat to struggle against the capitalists and seize political power from the hands of the capitalists, for it is that power that maintains the capitalist state; and it will place that power in the hands of the workers and peasants, just as the Russian Communists did in 1917."

The first program of the CCP, adopted at its founding conference in July 1921, declared for the soviet system and described its aim: "To overthrow the bourgeoisie with a revolutionary army of the proletariat and to rebuild the state with the toiling classes, until all class differences are abolished" (quoted in Gregor Benton, *China's Urban Revolutionaries* [Humanities Press, 1996]). If anything this program was somewhat ultraleft, as one might expect from a very young communist party. It rejected ***any*** tactics toward the bourgeois nationalists, declaring: "Towards the existing political parties, an attitude of independence, aggression and exclusion should be adopted...our party should stand up in behalf of the proletariat, and should allow no relationship with the other parties or groups" (cited in Chen Kung-po, ed., *The Communist Movement in China* [C. Martin Wilbur, 1979]).

The initial healthy impulses of the CCP to seek a solution along the lines of the Russian October Revolution were ***reversed***, through the intervention of the degenerating Comintern. Under pressure from the Comintern envoy, Maring (Henricus Sneevliet), a Dutch Communist who had engineered the entrist policy of the PKI in Indonesia, the CCP had reluctantly agreed to a partial entry into the Guomindang in August 1922. Sun Yat-sen had refused to sign a united-front pact with the CCP and insisted that their members enter as individuals, where they would be under Guomindang discipline. In January 1923, a month after the conclusion of the Comintern's Fourth Congress, Soviet diplomat Adolf Joffe signed a "non-aggression pact" with Guomindang leader Sun Yat-sen, which declared in part:

> "Dr Sun Yat-sen holds that the Communistic order or even the Soviet system cannot actually be introduced into China, because there do not exist here the conditions for the successful establishment of either Communism or Sovietism. This view is entirely shared by Mr Joffe, who is further of opinion that China's paramount and most pressing problem is to achieve national unification and attain full national independence."

This was a diplomatic codicil, although in reality it was part of the preparatory negotiations paving the way for the CCP to enter the Guomindang. Much the same substance was contained in a resolution of the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) the same month, "On the Relations Between the Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang." Citing the alleged weakness of the workers movement in China, the resolution concluded that the "national revolution" was the central task, and furthermore advised that the place for CCP members was inside the Guomindang. Later that year, again under Comintern "guidance," the CCP third national conference voted to turn the partial entry into a full entry. The same conference voted a motion asserting that the "KMT should be the central force of the national revolution and should assume its leadership." By now the independence of the party had been surrendered, and proletarian revolution had been replaced by a strategy of "national revolution," i.e., bourgeois revolution.

As Chen Duxiu pointed out later, when Maring proposed entry into the KMT in 1922, he asserted that "the Kuomintang was not a party of the bourgeoisie but the joint party of various classes" and concluded that therefore the Communists should join it. This "bloc of four classes" line was in keeping with the international policy of the Comintern in this period, which included such ventures as the Farmer-Labor Party in the U.S.

Chen noted that initially all five members of the Central Committee of the CCP ***opposed entry***. The CCP leaders were deeply skeptical about the KMT, knowing full well its penchant for banditry and maneuvering with warlords, and its disdain for social struggle. The Chinese party's objections should have been fully discussed and debated inside the Comintern. But these differences were kept secret from opponents of the bureaucratic clique then congealing at the top of the Soviet state and Comintern.

But Trotsky's Left Opposition did initiate a political fight against Stalin's policy in China, and unlike the CCP leaders, the Left Opposition did not back down to Stalin and Bukharin. It was not until well after the demise of the second Chinese Revolution that CCP leaders like Chen learned of this fight. By then Chen had been removed from leadership of the CCP and made the scapegoat for the bloody disaster of ***Stalin's*** class-collaborationist policy in China. Though the Stalinist epigones in the Comintern sought to isolate and discredit him, Chen still had many defenders among the cadre in the top ranks of the party. As Gregor Benton describes it:

> "So in China a constituency existed that unwittingly echoed—and had even foreshadowed—Trotsky's two main positions on the Chinese Revolution: that it was wrong to subordinate the party to the Guomindang and that the failure to follow a course independent of the Guomindang had led to the Communists' defeat....
>
> "For though the embryonic Opposition in the CCP had heard that there was a political struggle going on in Russia, they had no idea of the issues in it or that those issues included the nature and condition of the Chinese revolution. When they were eventually able to read Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution for themselves, the effect was electrifying."

Trotsky and the Second Chinese Revolution

The second Chinese Revolution began with the Shanghai Incident of 30 May 1925, when a demonstration protesting repression against strikers marched to a police station, where 12 of their number were killed by British troops. In response, a general strike was called in Shanghai, which quickly spread to Canton (Guangzhou), Hong Kong and elsewhere. British goods were boycotted and Chinese longshoremen in Hong Kong bottled up the port.

The KMT established its first "regime" in Canton in 1925, driving out the local warlord. But a growing general strike movement made a clash between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat inevitable. Chiang Kai-shek's coup in Canton in March 1926 was the opening shot in the reaction's drive to crush the Chinese proletariat. Chiang had all the CP political workers attached to the army arrested and raided the Canton-Hong Kong strike committee, seizing their arms. In May the Guomindang Central Executive Committee forbade the CP to criticize the views of KMT founder Sun Yat-sen and ordered the CP to turn over a list of its members working inside the Guomindang. Despite renewed requests from the CCP leadership to quit the KMT, Stalin and Bukharin held fast. Borodin, assigned by Moscow to act as Chiang's political adviser, declared that Communists should do "coolie service" for the Guomindang. Chiang was made an honorary member of the Comintern with only one opposing vote—Trotsky's.

The decisive political events took place the following year in Shanghai. As Chiang Kai-shek's army approached the city in March, over 500,000 workers staged a general strike, which turned into an insurrection. Armed with only 150 pistols, the workers stormed the police stations, and by morning the warlords had fled the city. The proletariat had Shanghai in their hands, but Stalin's treachery offered it up

A. Mondadori

Armed workers militia in Shanghai, March 1927.

to Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang entered Shanghai on March 26. While the CCP was organizing a triumphant welcome for him, the Generalissimo was receiving important figures from Shanghai's underworld. Fifty companies and banks donated a $10 million war chest which Chiang used to employ every known thug in Shanghai to crush the unions. On March 28 he declared martial law.

While these events were proceeding, Trotsky urgently demanded that the CCP organize soviets and initiate a revolutionary struggle for power:

> "1. The Chinese revolution has taken over such major proletarian centers as Shanghai and Hankow.... Everything seems to point to the fact that the ***first thing*** that should be done in these proletarian centers is to organize soviets of workers' deputies.
>
> "2. Revolutionary collaboration between the proletariat and the urban and rural poor is a matter of life and death.... This kind of actual, genuine, day-to-day collaboration among the masses of the people awakened by the revolution can only be brought about in reality through the creation of soviets of workers', artisans' and peasants' deputies.
>
> "3. The national army, whose political education has only begun, will inevitably become swollen out of proportion as it is joined by new, provincial forces, completely green and raw as far as politics is concerned. The officer cadre...is characterized by bourgeois and landlord origins.... Under existing conditions it would seem there is no more effective measure for countering such dangers than the establishment of soldiers' sections of soviets...."
>
> — "To the Politburo of AUCP (B) Central Committee," 31 March 1927

The same day the Comintern ordered the CCP to hide all the weapons they had seized earlier. Stalin had ordered a surrender; Chiang would take no prisoners. On April 12 he staged a massive bloody coup, which beheaded the Chinese proletariat. Tens of thousands of communists and trade unionists were slaughtered. Yet the Comintern continued to support the Guomindang's "left" faction, centered in Wuhan. But Wang Ching-wei, the leader of the Wuhan KMT, quickly turned on the CCP and reunited with Chiang.

In December 1927, in an utterly cynical ploy to undercut criticism by Trotsky's Left Opposition as the Fifteenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party opened, Stalin made an 180 degree turn and called an abortive uprising in Canton.

The advanced workers, despite their heroic efforts, never had a chance; the working masses remained largely passive. When Chiang sent in 45,000 troops to suppress the Canton uprising, a mass rally called to defend the city brought out only 300 workers. The Canton Commune added an estimated 5,700 fatalities to the terrible losses the proletariat suffered in 1927.

A political assessment of the catastrophic defeat of the second Chinese Revolution was indispensable, and that course was charted by Trotsky. From 1926 right on through until the creation of the Communist League of China in 1931, Trotsky's attention was riveted on China. Among the many questions to be clarified, two stood out as critical: the entry into the Guomindang, and the class character of the Chinese revolution.

Trotsky had voted against entering the Guomindang when that question was brought to the Russian Politburo in 1923. However, he does not seem to have intervened in the political fight over China in a major way until the spring of 1926. Trotsky knew very little about the founding period of the CCP and was deliberately kept in the dark by Zinoviev and Stalin about differences between the CCP leaders and the Comintern leaders. As he later noted:

> "During '24 and '25 the Chinese question was handled through the channels of the Comintern by personal agreement between Stalin and Zinoviev. The Polit-Bureau was never consulted.... Only episodically could I intervene in the matter, for example, when I voted in the Polit-Bureau against the admission of the Kuomintang into the Comintern as a sympathizing party. Only in '26, after the split between Zinoviev and Stalin, did the secrets become by and by revealed."
>
> — Letter to Harold Isaacs, 29 November 1937
> (quoted in Benton, *China's Urban Revolutionaries*)

For most of the period when the dispute over China raged, Trotsky's Left Opposition was in a political bloc with Zinoviev's Leningrad-based opposition. Within this Joint Opposition there were significant differences over China. Zinoviev, who until his falling out with Stalin had been the president of the Comintern, had a heavy responsibility for early CI policy in China, including the decision to enter the Guomindang. Within the Joint Opposition, the Zinovievites were opposed to demanding that the CCP leave the Guomindang, even after the latter had begun ***openly*** carrying out counterrevolutionary policies. By the time that the Joint Opposition publicly called for the CCP to leave the Guomindang, in the fall of 1927, the question was moot, since by then not only Chiang Kai-shek but also the so-called "left" Guomindang had turned on the Communists.

Trotsky faced opposition over the question of entry not only from the Zinovievites, but also from several members of his own faction who either agreed with Zinoviev, like Radek, or were afraid to argue out the question lest it precipitate a break with Zinoviev. Trotsky later acknowledged in a letter to Max Shachtman, dated 10 December 1930, that he himself had been too conciliatory on this. While noting that "from the very beginning, that is, from 1923," he had resolutely opposed the Communist Party joining the Guomindang and had voted accordingly in the Politburo, Trotsky added:

> "In 1926 and 1927, I had uninterrupted conflicts with the Zinovievists on this question. Two or three times, the matter stood at the breaking point. Our center consisted of approximately equal numbers from both of the allied tendencies, for it was after all only a bloc. At the voting, the position of the 1923 Opposition was betrayed by Radek, out of principle, and by Pyatakov, out of unprincipledness. Our faction (1923) was furious about it, demanded that Radek and Pyatakov be recalled from the center. But since it was a question of splitting with the Zinovievists, it was the general decision that I must submit publicly in this question and acquaint the Opposition in writing with my standpoint....
>
> "Now I can say with certainty that I made a mistake by submitting formally in this question."

Trotsky now asserted categorically:

> "The Chinese Communist Party entered a bourgeois party, the Kuomintang, while the bourgeois character of this party was disguised by a charlatan philosophy about a 'workers' and peasants' party' and even about a party of 'four classes' (Stalin-Martynov). The proletariat was thus deprived of its own party at a most critical period.... The responsibility falls entirely on the ECCI and Stalin, its inspirers....
>
> "***Never and under no circumstances may the party of the proletariat enter into a party of another class or merge with it organizationally.*** An absolutely independent party of the proletariat is a first and decisive condition for communist politics."
>
> — "The Political Situation in China and the Tasks of the Bolshevik-Leninist Opposition," June 1929

In early 1927, as part of his accommodation with Zinoviev, Trotsky had supported the call for a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry," a slogan he had rejected 20 years earlier in the Russian context. This slogan

Universal

Earl Swisher

Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, bloody butcher of "Canton Commune," December 1927.

was defective, blurring over the class line between the workers and the peasantry. For this reason Stalin and Bukharin were able to appropriate it as their own, filling it with a class-collaborationist content. It was not until the fall of 1927 that Trotsky unambiguously asserted that "The Chinese revolution at its new stage will win as a dictatorship of the proletariat, or it will not win at all" ("New Opportunities for the Chinese Revolution," September 1927).

In generalizing the theory of permanent revolution to the economically backward countries, Trotsky politically smashed the underpinnings of the "anti-imperialist united front." He pointed out that there was no "anti-imperialist" wing of the bourgeoisie; the bogus argument that the colonial bourgeoisie could lead a struggle against imperialism was in fact no different in principle from the Menshevik argument that the liberal bourgeoisie would lead a democratic revolution against the tsarist autocracy in Russia. As Trotsky concluded:

> "The 'democratic dictatorship' can only be the masked rule of the bourgeoisie during the revolution. This is taught us by the experience of our 'dual power' of 1917 as well as by the experience of the Kuomintang in China....
>
> "It is precisely here that we come up against the two mutually exclusive standpoints: the international revolutionary theory of the permanent revolution and the national reformist theory of socialism in one country. Not only backward China, but in general no country in the world can build socialism within its own national limits."
>
> — *The Permanent Revolution* (Merit Publishers, 1931)

When did Trotsky come to this conclusion? In a letter to Preobrazhensky in 1928, Trotsky said that he realized that there could not be a viable democratic dictatorship from the time the Wuhan government was first formed, that is, after the Shanghai massacre. However, the likelihood is that Trotsky's slowness to publicly call for permanent revolution involved more than an inability to work out the class dynamics of the unfolding revolution. "Permanent revolution" had been treated as tantamount to the original sin of Trotskyism by the Stalinist epigones, including Zinoviev and Kamenev. And if Trotsky made bad compromises on the question of entrism, he was worse than evasive about permanent revolution. He even publicly condemned his earlier views, which had been confirmed in Russia. Thus, the platform of the Joint Opposition, published in September 1927, contains the following: "Trotsky has stated to the International that on all the fundamental questions over which he had differences with Lenin, Lenin was right—in particular on the questions of the permanent revolution and the peasantry. That announcement, made to the whole Communist International, the Stalin group refuses to print. It continues to accuse us of 'Trotskyism'."

As early as September 1926, Trotsky had pointed out:

> "The petty bourgeoisie, by itself, however numerous it may be, cannot decide the main line of revolutionary policy. The differentiation of the political struggle along class lines, the sharp divergence between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, implies a struggle between them for influence over the petty bourgeoisie, and it implies the vacillation of the petty bourgeoisie between the merchants, on the one hand, and the workers and communists, on the other."
>
> — "The Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang"

From this statement alone it is clear that Trotsky understood that there were two fundamentally counterposed classes in China, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie; and that the petty bourgeoisie, including the peasantry, could not play an independent role. From these premises the ***only*** revolutionary solution could be workers rule, the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasantry.

When Trotsky came out openly for permanent revolution, he was sharply attacked not only by Zinoviev, who had by then capitulated to Stalin, but also by prominent members of his own faction. Thus, Preobrazhensky declared, "We, the old Bolsheviks in opposition, must dissociate ourselves from Trotsky on the point of permanent revolution" (Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*). And as Trotsky later noted, those members of the Left Opposition who had the most conciliationist views on China were the first to capitulate to Stalin. Discouraged by the defeat in China, a section of the Left Opposition decided that the prospects for international proletarian revolution were nil, and reconciled themselves to Stalin's nationalist line of "building socialism in one country." By fighting out the question, Trotsky hardened up his own faction, getting rid of the demoralized elements, and was able to regroup to the Left Opposition outstanding elements from among the Chinese Communists.

The communist movement, however, paid heavily for the failure to codify permanent revolution earlier. To be sure, one could not say with certainty in 1918 that permanent revolution as demonstrated in Russia would apply to China. Tsarist Russia had imperialist ambitions in its own right; it was not a colonial vassal like China, though much of its industry was foreign-owned, and social relations derived from feudal backwardness dominated the Russian countryside. Whereas Russia had thrown off the Mongol conquest by the 17th century, the Chinese intelligentsia really entered the modern world only after the Boxer Rebellion (1900). Moreover, the working class was a smaller percentage of the Chinese population than it had been in Russia in 1917.

Yet the failure to clearly state that the October Revolution had followed the course of permanent revolution made it easier for the Stalinist leadership of the Comintern to obscure their escalating rejection of Lenin's internationalist program. It meant that permanent revolution did not appear as even a possible variant in subsequent Comintern deliberations over the colonial question.

The Chinese cadre who were struggling to work out tactics and to resolve the class character of the revolution in their country had no access to Trotsky's earlier writings. Had they known of them, it could well have stiffened their

UPI

Borodin, sent to China by Stalin to serve as Chiang Kai-shek's "political adviser," told Chinese Communists to do "coolie service" for Guomindang.

A. H. Buchman

Provisional Central Committee of the Communist League of China, winter 1936. Clockwise from left: Wang Fanxi, Frank Glass, Hua Zhenbin, Han Jun, Chen Qichang, Jiang Zhendong. Hua Zhenbin, not a CC member, was the party's printer.

resolve, and forced a fight much earlier in the Comintern, when Stalin's position was less well consolidated. The programmatic disputes over China might have been otherwise decided, leading to a different outcome in China, and a different determination of the relationship of forces politically within the Comintern.

The Founding of Chinese Trotskyism

Chiang Kai-shek drowned the second Chinese Revolution in blood: an estimated 25,000 CCP members were killed in 1927 alone, and the original massacre was followed by a reign of white terror. All labor and working-class organizations were decapitated; many disappeared and those that did not were forced underground. The dislocations caused by the worldwide economic collapse of 1929 further decimated the working class.

In a cynical attempt to cover his tracks, Stalin continued to lurch to the "left" after the debacle of the Canton Commune in December 1927. While abandoning the cities in practice, the CCP denied that there had been a defeat at all and took up again the call for soviets! The ultraleftist, adventurist posturing of the Comintern during the "Third Period" also contributed greatly to the demoralization of the Chinese proletariat.

Trotsky insisted that communists must face the bitter reality squarely. He asserted that counterrevolution had temporarily triumphed in China; what was necessary was a tactical retreat, in order to regroup the shattered forces of the proletariat through a series of defensive battles. Only then would the ground be prepared for the third Chinese Revolution. Trotsky asserted:

> "The government that will emerge from the victorious revolution of the workers and peasants can only be a government of the ***dictatorship of the proletariat***, leading the majority of the exploited and oppressed people. But the difference must be clearly understood between the general ***revolutionary perspective*** which we must tirelessly develop in articles and in theoretical and propaganda speeches and the ***current political slogan*** under which we can, beginning today, mobilize the masses by actually organizing them in opposition to the regime of the military dictatorship. Such a ***central political slogan*** is the slogan of the ***constituent assembly***."
>
> — "A Reply to the Chinese Oppositionists," December 1929

The slogan of a constituent or national assembly was linked to a series of other revolutionary-democratic slogans, including the eight-hour workday, expropriation of the landlords and complete national independence of China. These expressed urgent democratic tasks embodied in the perspective of permanent revolution.

The Sixth Comintern Congress in 1928 had rejected transitional revolutionary-democratic slogans, thereby denying the Chinese CP the possibility of mobilizing the masses under conditions of counterrevolution. The Stalinists now claimed that the Left Opposition represented a "right deviation." But Trotsky had anticipated this, and countered that those who subordinated the Communist Party to the Guomindang "will now attempt to outbid the left wing and to charge our way of putting the question with containing 'constitutional illusions' and a 'Social Democratic deviation'." Based upon the centrality of permanent revolution and a sober assessment of the current situation in China, Trotsky was laying out the programmatic basis to regroup those Communists who wanted to fight for proletarian victory.

Trotsky was under no illusion that being right over China meant that he would recruit masses. As he later noted ("Fighting Against the Stream," April 1939):

> "The strangulation of the Chinese revolution is a thousand times more important for the masses than our predictions. Our predictions can win some few intellectuals who take an interest in such things, but not the masses. The military victory of Chiang Kai-shek will inevitably provoke a depression and this is not conducive to the growth of a revolutionary fraction."

But while Trotsky knew he could not win the masses over this bitter defeat, he concentrated on analyzing the lessons of the Chinese Revolution and other key political struggles, seeking to expand support for the Left Opposition within the Communist International. To this end he submitted to the Sixth Congress of the Comintern "The Draft Program of the Communist International—A Criticism of Fundamentals," published in English under the title *The Third International After Lenin*. (This material, under the title *The Communist International After Lenin*, was finally made available to Russian readers in 1993 in an edition published by the Prometheus Research Library.) The question of the Chinese Revolution would become a key programmatic criterion for membership in the International Left Opposition.

Trotsky's efforts bore fruit, especially in China, where they fell on fertile soil. Hundreds of young Chinese Communists

were won to Trotsky's views while studying in Moscow at either the Communist University for the Toilers of the East (KTVU) or Sun Yat-sen University; they brought his writings to China, resulting in the recruitment of Chen Duxiu and a small group of the CCP's founding cadre. The only other country outside of Soviet Russia where there was a significant accretion of Communist cadre to the Left Opposition was the United States, where, after reading Trotsky's critique of the draft program as a delegate to the Sixth CI Congress, James P. Cannon brought about 100 of his factional supporters to the Trotskyist movement.

One of the best accounts of the Chinese students in Moscow and a major work on Chinese Trotskyism, *Memoirs of a Chinese Revolutionary* (Columbia University Press, 1980), was written by Wang Fanxi (Wang Fan-hsi) in 1957. Wang studied in Moscow from 1927-1929, part of a generation of bright young Chinese recruits who were sent to the USSR for political education. According to Wang, approximately 400 Chinese students in Moscow considered themselves Trotskyists. But when the Stalinist authorities got wind of this burgeoning opposition, repressive measures were instituted. The purges began after a number of Chinese students joined the Left Opposition contingent that tried to march on the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. Ten of these student militants were expelled from school and sent home. These purged students were the founders of the *Our Word* group whose journal was the first Trotskyist publication in China.

In late 1928, the first Russian underground group of Chinese Trotskyists was organized and Wang Fanxi was elected one of their three leaders. Wang's group saw as their main activity the translation of Trotsky's most important works into Chinese, and their first effort was the "Critique of the Draft Program." As many of these students' education terms were coming to an end, they met clandestinely in early 1929 on the campus of the Moscow Artillery school. The Chinese students decided that their returning members would stay inside the CCP as long as possible, concealing their views where necessary, in order to gain time and win respect among the CCP veterans to get a hearing at a later date. If expelled, they would still consider themselves a faction of the CCP (in line with Trotskyist policy at that time).

By 1929 it proved hazardous and in many cases impossible for known Trotskyists to get out of the USSR. Trotsky was expelled from the Russian party in 1927, exiled to Soviet Central Asia in 1928 and deported to Turkey in 1929. This escalation of Stalinist repression was keenly felt by the Chinese students. Earlier, harassment took the form of beatings at the hands of pro-Stalinist Chinese, but after 1929 the suppression of Trotskyists was the job of the GPU police apparatus. Inciting the GPU's frenzy was the news that former CCP chairman Chen Duxiu had gone over to Trotsky. In late 1929, a confession was extracted from a Trotskyist student along with a membership list, and later that night a GPU raid carried out mass arrests. According to Wang:

> "Of more than 200 Trotskyists arrested, less than ten made a complete recantation and were afterwards sent back to China. Another two comrades managed to escape back to China from Siberia. There is no record of what happened to the rest, but many undoubtedly died in Stalin's prisons or in front of a GPU firing squad."

The degeneration of the Russian Revolution created a bureaucracy with a narrow and nationalist outlook that led to a re-emergence of Great Russian chauvinism. Wang cites a book by Yugoslav Communist dissident Anton Ciliga, also a prisoner in Stalin's jails, who reported that "Communists with yellow skins received far worse treatment than their white fellow-prisoners." GPU interrogation netted the names of Trotskyists who were working inside the CCP. Most were immediately expelled. Among them was Wang Fanxi, working as a secretary for Zhou Enlai (Chou En-lai).

The returning Chinese students played an important role in the early Chinese Trotskyist movement. But the Moscow students were not the only communists in motion trying to understand and draw revolutionary conclusions from the disaster of 1927. By far the largest and most significant branch of Chinese Trotskyism was the Proletarian Society, organized by Chen Duxiu himself. Chen had been made the scapegoat for Stalin's betrayals and expelled from the Central Committee. Although Chen had earlier expressed substantial doubts about the Comintern's line, it was not until he finally read translations of Trotsky's documents that he was won over hard against Stalin's line. The first documents he read were "Summary and Perspectives of the Chinese Revolution" (contained in the "Critique of the Draft Program") and "The Chinese Question After the Sixth Congress."

Armed with Trotsky's perspective for the future course of the revolution, Chen wrote his "Appeal to All Comrades of the Chinese Communist Party" on 10 December 1929. This powerful document, essentially Chinese Trotskyism's founding statement, concludes:

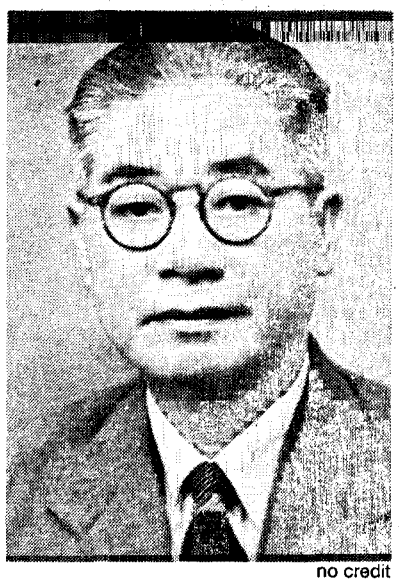
> "Comrades! The present errors of the party are not partial or accidental problems: As in the past, they are the manifestation of the whole opportunist policy conducted by Stalin in China.... We must return to the spirit and political line of Bolshevism, unite together solidly, and stand straightforward on the side of the International Opposition led by Comrade Trotsky.... We are opposed not only to the opportunism of Stalin and his like, but also to the compromising attitude of Zinoviev and others. We are not afraid of the so-called 'jumping out of the ranks of the party' and do not hesitate to sacrifice everything in order to save the party and the Chinese revolution!"

Five days later a "Declaration of the Left Opposition" was signed by 81 CCP cadre, and they soon published a journal, *Proletariat*.

It would seem that after the horrifying bloodbath the CCP

had just suffered, those who saw the wisdom and correctness of Trotsky's analysis would be eager to regroup their forces. But history in general, and certainly our own experiences in building the ICL, have shown that the process of revolutionary regroupment is full of minefields. A serious attitude toward political clarity, based on ***programmatic criteria***, is required. The fusion of the four existing Trotskyist organizations in China took nearly two years and the personal and authoritative intervention of Trotsky himself.

Among the student-based groups, there was initially some resistance to the slogan of a constituent assembly. A more substantial obstacle was the hostility that most of the returning students from Moscow exhibited toward Chen Duxiu. The students were horrified at the thought of uniting with Chen, in part buying into the Comintern campaign which had made him a scapegoat. The flames of discontent were fanned the hardest by Liu Renjing (Liu Jen-ching, also known as Neil Shih), who only a few years later was to go over to the Guomindang. Liu, who had visited Trotsky in his Turkish exile, thought he himself should be the undisputed leader of Chinese Trotskyism.



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Leaders of the Chinese Trotskyists: Peng Shuzhi (left), Wang Fanxi.

During this internecine warfare Trotsky refused to take sides. But after finally receiving and reading Chen's open letter to the CCP, he intervened more forcefully. It was clear that Chen accepted the Trotskyist program. While Chen had implemented the Comintern's disastrous line in China, he had thought through his mistakes, which made him a ***better*** communist. It was not easy for a man of over 50 years of age to start all over again in helping to launch a small revolutionary organization which was the object of persecution by hostile state forces and the much larger Stalinist CCP. Trotsky wrote:

> "Today I finally received a copy of Comrade Ch'en Tu-hsiu's letter of December 10, 1929. I feel that this letter is an extremely good document. Totally clear and correct attitudes are taken in answer to all the important questions; especially on the question of a democratic dictatorship, Comrade Tu-hsiu takes a completely correct stand....
>
> "When we have such an outstanding revolutionary as Ch'en Tu-hsiu, who formally breaks with his party, is then thrown out of the party, and finally announces that his stand is 100 percent in accord with the International Opposition, how can we ignore him?... We have many young people in the Opposition who can and should learn from Comrade Ch'en Tu-hsiu!"
>
> — "Two Letters to China," August-September 1930

As Trotsky recognized, it took many years to create an experienced revolutionary cadre, particularly one of Chen's stature and ability. Throughout the succeeding years, as long as Chen remained loyal to the revolutionary program, Trotsky intervened to defend Chen's authority against those who attacked him for cliquist reasons.

The Chinese comrades organized a unity negotiating committee but its deliberations continually stalled. Trotsky waited three months and, seeing no movement, finally wrote a letter to the Chinese comrades in January 1931. This letter summarized his views on the major questions for China. Trotsky saw the main point as a fight against a "spirit of clannishness." Seeing no fundamental political differences at that moment, he insisted: "***Dear friends, fuse your organizations and your press definitively this very day!***"

On May Day 1931, the Communist League of China (CLC) was founded, with a Central Committee including members from all four groups that fused to make up the new organization. According to the various accounts subsequently written about this conference, the CLC had between 400 and 500 members, with local committees in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Canton, Beijing, Nanjing, Wuhan and Guangdong. The CLC's industrial concentration was impressive for a group of its size. Their trade-union base was in Shanghai, with working fractions in the Shanghai power works, telephone, post office, textile and silk mills; the CLC also had a trade-union fraction at the strategic Tai-Koo shipyard in Hong Kong.

In the Guomindang Jails

It was only the supporters of Leon Trotsky who, in the period of catastrophic defeat after the second Chinese Revolution, sought to maintain their roots among the urban working class. The 1930s did see some sporadic workers' economic struggles in Shanghai and Hong Kong, in which the Trotskyists played leading roles. However the general prostration of the working masses, whose trade unions and other legal organizations had been smashed, took a great political toll.

For almost the entire period of its existence, the Chinese Trotskyist organization was condemned to an underground existence, first hunted down by the Guomindang police, then by the Japanese Occupation and Mao's Stalinists. Within a month of the founding of the CLC, the entire Central Committee except Chen and Peng Shuzhi (Peng Shu-tse) were arrested as the result of the actions of an informer; Chen and Peng were arrested in late 1932, transferred from Shanghai to Nanjing, put on trial, and sentenced to 13 years in jail.

The trial was a major event in China. Fearing that these two leaders would be condemned to death, a defense effort was launched that did succeed in getting the case transferred from a military to a civil court. Chen used the trial as a forum to indict the Chinese ruling class and defiantly defended his revolutionary career. His opening statement, an example of his great personal courage, is a passionate expression of the internationalist program of permanent revolution:

> "In the economically backward and semi-colonial China, which, oppressed by the international imperialism from the outside and suffering under the warlords and Mandarins within...the national emancipation and democratic politics can never be undertaken by the coward[ly], compromising upper exploiting classes which think [only] about their own hides.

> Moreover, they fear and hate the rising of the lower masses, whom they have trampled hitherto under their feet.... Only the combining of the most oppressed and most revolutionary toiling masses of workers and peasants within China with the forces of the anti-imperialistic proletariat, in the world-wide scale can, by means of [a] gigantic and furious surge of revolution, destroy the yoke of imperialism on the one hand and sweep away all the oppression of warlords and Mandarins on the other.... The struggle of the emancipation of the toiling masses of workers and peasants and the struggle of national emancipation are streaming together objectively into one current and cannot be separated from each other. This was the reason why I began to create the Chinese Communist Party after the Movement of May 4th in the year of 1919."
>
> — Handwritten English translation of Chen Duxiu's "A Protest to [the] Kiangsu High Court," 20 February 1933 (obtained from the Hoover Institution archives, Stanford)

Most of the CLC leadership perished in prison. Chen and Peng were not released until the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937. It was not until 1935 that a functioning CLC leadership was rebuilt after Wang Fanxi was released from prison. This body, the Provisional Central Committee, was elected at a conference in Shanghai in late 1935 and included among its members C. Frank Glass (whose pen name was Li Furen [Li Fu-jen]). Glass, a founding member of the Communist Party of South Africa won to Trotskyism in Johannesburg, played not only a leading role within the CLC but was a valuable link to the rest of the International Left Opposition. Glass was also instrumental in recruiting Harold Isaacs, an American journalist who authored the classic work *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* (London, Secker & Warburg, 1938) in collaboration with Trotsky, who wrote an introduction for the work. Isaacs later broke with Marxism and revised the two subsequent editions of the book (1951, 1961) in an anti-communist direction, deleting Trotsky's introduction.

The Stalinists, meanwhile, were being transformed into a peasant-based party. After Canton, another round of adventurist actions in the cities led to another round of defeats. Many of the CCP's proletarian supporters were butchered by Chiang, while others left the party en masse. The CCP was also sending members from the cities to the countryside, where some peasant revolts continued. The party's percentage of working-class members fell from 58 percent in April 1927 ***to less than 1 percent*** by 1931. Refusing to admit there had been a defeat, the Stalinists set up bases in the rural areas to which they had retreated, calling them "soviets."

In November 1931, a conference in the new "soviet" capital of Juichin proclaimed the establishment of a "Provisional Central Government of the Chinese Soviet Republic." With the depletion of its membership base in the cities, the CCP became increasingly financially dependent on the rural areas. This in turn led it to lean politically on the wealthier sections of the peasantry and the merchants in the countryside. Within a period of several years, most CCP leaders were students from the families of small farmers, professionals, merchants and even aristocrats, according to Benjamin I. Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (Harper Torchbooks, 1951). The CCP membership was increasingly drawn from the peasantry, and those of working-class background had long ago severed their ties with the city. As Harold Isaacs noted in *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* (1938 edition):

> "The 1927 defeat had physically divorced the Party from the working class. The adventurist course after 1927 converted it into a peasant party without roots or influence among the workers. It had become the Chinese equivalent not of the Russian Bolshevik Party but of the Social Revolutionary Party, whose example it followed in proposing to carry out an agrarian transformation on the basis of bourgeois property relations."

Citing Engels, Trotsky had earlier noted that a party that had let a revolutionary situation escape it inevitably disappears from the scene for a certain period of history. Trotsky asserted that "It is only by clearly and courageously posing the fundamental questions of today and yesterday that one can avert for the CCP the fate that Engels spoke of, in other words, liquidation, from the political point of view, for a certain period" ("The Chinese Question After the Sixth Congress"). The CCP's ignoring of the lessons of the second Chinese Revolution led it to liquidate itself as any kind of working-class instrument. To be sure, the CCP continued to proclaim itself a proletarian revolutionary party. But as Trotsky pointed out, while a genuine Bolshevik party in China would strive through the workers to lead a peasant war, the CCP and its armed peasant detachments ("Red armies") had no base of support in the cities and were deeply stamped by their peasant environment. This impacted sharply on the ***consciousness*** of its membership:

> "The worker approaches questions from the socialist standpoint; the peasant's viewpoint is petty bourgeois. The worker strives to socialize the property that is taken away from the exploiters; the peasant seeks to divide it up. The worker desires to put palaces and parks to common use; the peasant, insofar as he cannot divide them, inclines to burning the palaces and cutting down the parks. The worker strives to solve problems on a national scale and in accordance with a plan; the peasant, on the other hand, approaches all problems on a local scale and takes a hostile attitude to centralized planning, etc."
>
> — "Peasant War in China and the Proletariat," September 1932

Trotsky envisioned the possibility that in a revolutionary crisis armed peasant bands led by Stalinists might confront insurrectionary workers led by Bolsheviks. This did not happen in 1949—when Mao's peasant-based army, under exceptional historical circumstances, succeeded in driving out Chiang's corrupt capitalist gang—because the urban working masses were never mobilized as an independent force fighting for the abolition of capitalism. But Trotsky's words were nonetheless prophetic. The Maoist ideology of the Chinese bureaucratically deformed workers state reflected the provincial, anti-internationalist consciousness characteristic of the mass of the peasantry, which was perfectly consonant with the conservative outlook of the Stalin bureaucracy in the Kremlin. The only difference was that the Chinese Stalinists defended "socialism" in a different "one country."

The Sino-Japanese and Pacific Wars

The central issue dominating China during the 1930s was the increasing encroachment of Japanese imperialism. Japan invaded Manchuria in September 1931, securing its conquest almost immediately. In February 1932 Tokyo established the puppet state of Manchukuo in the occupied territory, and launched a brief punitive expedition against Shanghai. The occupation of Manchuria was followed by six years of uneasy truce, until the Japanese invasion of central China in the summer of 1937, which opened the Sino-Japanese War.

Proceeding from the fact that Japan was an imperialist power and China a semicolonial nation, the Trotskyists adopted a policy of military support to China, while opposing Chiang politically. As Trotsky expressed it: "In participating in the ***military*** struggle under the orders of Chiang Kai-shek, since unfortunately it is he who has the command

Der Spiegel

Victims of Japanese aerial bombardment. After the fall of Nanjing in December 1937, Japanese imperialist troops massacred more than 340,000 in the city.

in the war for independence—to prepare ***politically*** the overthrow of Chiang Kai-shek...that is the only revolutionary policy" ("On the Sino-Japanese War," September 1937).

The intensification of Japanese aggression sparked a "second united front" between the CCP and Chiang's Guomindang. This was not limited to a military bloc against Japanese imperialism, but amounted to another attempted political rapprochement with the KMT. As Frank Glass explained:

> "Let us note that today 'Soviet China' and the 'Red Army' have disappeared totally from the scene. Soviet China has become a 'Special Administrative District' under the jurisdiction of the Kuomintang government at Nanking, and the Red Army is now the 'Eighth Route Army' subordinated to the high command of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. No longer is it asserted that the overthrow of the Kuomintang regime is the condition of a successful national-revolutionary war. Indeed, anyone who ventures to state this elementary truism is branded as an 'enemy of the Chinese people' and an 'agent of Japanese imperialism.' The policies of the class struggle and the agrarian revolution have been publicly jettisoned."
>
> — Li Fu-jen, "End of the Chinese Soviets," *New International*, January 1938

The Stalinists attempted to slander the Chinese Trotskyists as "agents of the Mikado." After Chen was released from prison in 1937, the Stalinists accused him of accepting Japanese money. This slanderous attack was defeated. Trotsky had anticipated such lies, predicting that "Tomorrow the GPU, which is in alliance with the Kuomintang (as with Negrín in Spain), will represent our Chinese friends as being 'defeatists' and agents of Japan. The best of them, with Ch'en Tu-hsiu at the head, can be nationally and internationally compromised and killed. It was necessary to stress, energetically, that the Fourth International was on the side of China as against Japan" ("On the Sino-Japanese War").

Age and prison had begun to take their toll on Chen. He now began to moot the idea of submerging the Trotskyists into a "democratic" military force to fight the Japanese imperialists. Although Chen never renounced Trotskyism, he developed fundamental differences and drifted into inactivity. With the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact and then the eruption of war in Poland, Chen began to doubt that the Soviet Union remained a workers state. He adopted a position in support of the "democratic" imperialists in World War II. His health broken by years in prison, Chen died on 24 May 1942.

Other differences emerged within the CLC on the issue of the war against Japanese imperialism, particularly with its absorption into the interimperialist conflict. With the outbreak of World War II in Europe in 1939, and amid growing tensions between the U.S. and Japan, the Guomindang government turned away from the Soviet Union and moved toward an alliance with the United States. Even before the United States and Japan declared war in December 1941, General Chenault had organized the volunteer "Flying Tiger" squadron of American airmen and fighter planes flying under the Chinese Nationalist flag.

In the autumn of 1940 Wang Fanxi wrote "The Pacific War and the Chinese War of Resistance" for publication in the Trotskyist journal *Struggle*. Wang argued that if the U.S. entered the Pacific War, China's war of resistance would now be subordinated to the interests of U.S. imperialism, losing its progressive character; the CLC should then advocate a revolutionary defeatist position toward both sides in the Sino-Japanese War. Peng Shuzhi argued that China's war against Japan was still progressive and would remain so unless the U.S. committed significant ground forces to the war in China. Wang originally won a majority of the Chinese organization to his view, but this was reversed after Frank Glass returned from a trip to New York where he had consulted with the International Secretariat, which broadly supported Peng's view.

We are at great historical and physical distance from the Chinese Trotskyists of the late 1930s and 1940s, and we lack documentation on the many issues which split the Chinese Trotskyists into separate organizations led by Wang Fanxi and Peng Shuzhi in May 1941. But it is clear that differences over the relationship between China's war against Japanese imperialism and the interimperialist World War II were a critical contributing factor. On this particular question, Wang's arguments were correct, as far as they went. In World War II, China's right of national self-determination became subordinated to U.S. imperialism.

From the beginning of the Japanese war against China in July 1937, Trotsky and the Fourth Internationalists had given unconditional military support to the Chinese resistance to Japanese conquest. But Wang rightly observed that once the U.S. entered the war, the Guomindang's war effort would be subordinated to the interests of U.S. imperialism. Nationalist China was an ally of the Americans during the war. The chief of staff of the Chinese armed forces was the American general Joseph Stillwell. Chiang's air forces consisted of Americans, and China's air bases served as bases for American imperialism. Chiang's troops fought under the British general Alexander against the Japanese in Burma. What was decisive is that it was the imperialists, particularly the Americans, who had the final say in how Chinese forces were to be used. When Stillwell complained bitterly that Chiang refused to commit his troops to battle, U.S. president Roosevelt upheld Chiang, and Stillwell was eventually dismissed. Roosevelt felt Chiang's troops were serving a useful purpose in pinning down substantial Japanese troops in China. What was important is that it was Roosevelt who decided.

The views expressed by Wang on the Sino-Japanese War

were broadly held by Max Shachtman's Workers Party in the United States; they were opposed by the American section of the Fourth International, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), led by founding American Trotskyist James P. Cannon, which broadly agreed with Peng's views. In 1939-40 Max Shachtman had broken from the Fourth International, writing off the Soviet Union as a workers state and refusing to defend it against imperialist attack. Years later Shachtman's politics led him into the camp of Social Democracy and to embrace the U.S. imperialist invasion of Cuba in 1961. But on the issue of the China-Japan war, Shachtman's Workers Party—a left-centrist formation—had a correct position as against that of the Trotskyist SWP.

As Shachtman noted, the Guomindang was not simply accepting military aid from an imperialist power, as the Irish nationalists had done from Germany in World War I. Rather, Chiang decisively subordinated his forces to U.S. imperialism. An analogy was Lenin's attitude to Poland or Serbia during World War I. Lenin strongly supported Poland's right of self-determination, arguing this point against other revolutionary socialists like Rosa Luxemburg. But in the particular context of World War I, Lenin argued, "The Polish Social-Democrats cannot, at the moment, raise the slogan of Poland's independence, for the Poles, as proletarian internationalists, can do ***nothing*** about it without stooping, like the 'Fracy' [social-chauvinists], to humble servitude to ***one*** of the imperialist monarchies" ("The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up," July 1916). Similarly, Lenin considered Serbia's war against Austro-Hungary a just war. But in World War I, support for this war simply meant support for the British, French and Russian imperialist robbers—Serbia's allies—against another set of imperialists.

Shachtman noted that the SWP, in militarily supporting Chiang, was defending an ally of their own bourgeoisie, the U.S. imperialists. This was a step in the direction of social-patriotism, linked to the SWP's advocacy of a "proletarian military policy" (PMP) during World War II. Initiated by Trotsky, the PMP involved the call for the trade-union movement to control military training for the imperialist army during World War II. As we in the ICL have pointed out, the PMP was at best a utopian appeal for workers' control of the bourgeois state; at worst it provided the basis for a social-patriotic accommodation to the "democratic" Allied imperialists (see *Prometheus Research Series* No. 2, "Documents on the 'Proletarian Military Policy'").

Shachtman's correct opposition to the PMP and to the SWP's military support to the KMT was, however, also fatally flawed; Shachtman was blinkered by his own Stalinophobia. For he drew no distinction between Chiang's Nationalists and the CCP's Eighth and Fourth Route Armies. Nor, to our knowledge, did the group of Chinese Trotskyists led by Wang. But this distinction was crucial to a revolutionary policy. Mao's forces were ***not*** militarily subordinate to U.S. imperialism. Thus a correct position would have been to give military support to Mao's Red Army against the Japanese, seeking to rally the urban workers, while denouncing the Stalinists for suppressing social struggle—for example, their holding back the peasants from land seizures so as not to offend the KMT. At the same time, the Trotskyists now lacked the ties to the proletariat necessary to be able to effectively intervene for any program or policy.

Destruction of the Chinese Trotskyists

In the period of the Civil War (1946-49), the Trotskyists were able to function somewhat more openly, and recruited some younger elements. But a combination of factors had taken their political toll: the murderous repression, the isolation and the political passivity of the proletariat. Physically, there was very little in the way of a proletariat to organize among; much of the previously existing industrial base had been physically destroyed by aerial and artillery sorties in the early stages of the Sino-Japanese War.

Trotsky of course recognized that the Comintern's betrayal in 1925-27 had dealt a devastating political and physical blow to the Chinese proletariat. However he hoped that an economic upturn might revive the working class and enable the Bolshevik-Leninists to again intervene. But the Chinese proletariat never recovered from the worldwide economic depression which followed hard on the heels of the beheading of the working class at the hands of Chiang abetted by Stalin. Chen Duxiu described the situation in a letter to Trotsky in 1939: "[The workers] have gone back to where they were 30 to 40 years ago" (quoted by Gregor Benton in his introduction to Wang Fanxi's *Memoirs of a Chinese Revolutionary*).

As a means of combatting their isolation, the Chinese Trotskyists, unfortunately, could not do what the Bolsheviks had done, which was to establish an émigré leadership that was able to coordinate work with its illegal party in Russia. It might have been possible to bring one or two individuals like Chen out of the country to function as part of an international leadership, as Trotsky advocated. But the CLC's options to set up an effective émigré center were much more limited than those available to Lenin's Bolsheviks. With the degeneration of the October Revolution Moscow was not available, and the neighboring urban centers in East Asia were either directly controlled or influenced by hostile Japanese or Western imperialist powers.

After World War II, both the Wang and Peng wings of the Chinese Trotskyists showed political disorientation, refusing to take a clear position for the military victory of Mao's peasant-based Red Army over Chiang's forces. While both organizations claimed to recognize the Guomindang as the

main enemy, the Wang group called for an "immediate cessation of the war without disarming the Stalinist armies," while the Peng group demanded that the Chinese CP "give up their arms in order to fight for the constituent assembly."

In reports sent to the International Secretariat in 1946 and 1947, both organizations wrote of participating in a KMT-led demonstration in Shanghai demanding withdrawal of Soviet troops from Manchuria. Especially after Mao tacitly broke from Stalin in 1947 and began calling for the overthrow of the Guomindang, the failure of the Chinese Trotskyists to unequivocally side militarily with Mao's forces rendered them sterile.

When Mao's forces took the cities in 1949 and established a bureaucratically deformed workers state, the Trotskyists were once more forced underground. Finally in December 1952, as the CCP government moved to nationalize all capitalist property, Mao's police undertook a massive roundup of almost a thousand Trotskyists and their sympathizers. Many Trotskyists died in Mao's dungeons; others served decades in jail. Only a few veteran cadre, including Peng and Wang, made it to exile. Chinese Trotskyism was effectively destroyed.

Zheng Chaolin (Ch'eng Ch'ao-lin) was only released in 1979, after 27 years' imprisonment. His memoirs of the early history of Chinese Trotskyism were published, for restricted circulation, in China in 1986; they have now been published in English (*An Oppositionist for Life: Memoirs of the Chinese Revolutionary Zheng Chaolin* [Humanities Press, 1997]).

In *China's Urban Revolutionaries*, Gregor Benton questions the Trotskyist strategy of concentrating on winning a base among urban workers before trying to influence and lead the peasants:

> "Yet after the Japanese invasion this strategy was no longer feasible. The Trotskyists failed to see that the workers had been neutralized as a cumulative effect of the 1927 defeat, the ensuing Guomindang repression, and—most decisively of all—the Japanese occupation of China's main industrial centers and that for the revolution to succeed, it was essential to start organizing the peasants even before the movement in the towns revived. At the root of this failure lay an excess of orthodoxy."

Here Benton's criticisms dovetail with those expressed in the memoirs of Wang Fanxi, whose wing of Chinese Trotskyism Benton strongly sympathizes with. However, peasant-based "Trotskyism" would quickly replicate the parochial, conservative Stalinist outlook. Indeed, some elements of the world Trotskyist movement, such as Frank Glass and the American SWP's Arne Swabeck, certainly did not suffer from the "excess of orthodoxy" about which Benton complains, arguing in the 1950s against the call for proletarian political revolution to oust the Maoist regime. This is the logical conclusion of the view that the Trotskyists' mistake lay in not beating the Maoists to the peasantry. The reality is that the small Trotskyist movement, driven underground, did not have the forces to organize proletarian military units under its own command. And both Benton and Wang acknowledge that in the few instances that the Trotskyists engaged in guerrilla warfare, they were wiped out by either the Stalinists or the Japanese army.

Benton writes that "after 1949 the old Trotskyist polemic about the nature of the Chinese Revolution (proletarian or bourgeois-democratic, permanent or staged?) and the strategy and tactics to pursue in it was relegated to the history books." This is quite wrong. The Chinese experience powerfully confirmed the theory of permanent revolution, albeit in a negative fashion. Mao's "New Democracy," the Chinese version of the two-stage theory, was proved bogus. Maoist China was not a peasant state or a "bloc of four classes." With the victory of the Red Army, the bulk of the Chinese bourgeoisie ***fled to Taiwan*** with the Guomindang and, despite the fig leaf of a few bourgeois politicians who briefly joined the government, power was completely in the hands of the CCP. There is ***no*** third road between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

The Chinese workers state established in 1949 was bureaucratically deformed from its inception. The subsequent evolution of China, now brought to the very brink of capitalist restoration by Mao and his successors, has thrown into sharp relief the crucial distinction between such a deformed workers state and the Soviet state when it was led by Lenin and Trotsky. From our founding as a tendency, the International Communist League has insisted:

> "Experience since the Second World War has demonstrated that peasant-based guerrilla warfare under petit-bourgeois leadership can in itself lead to nothing more than an anti-working-class bureaucratic regime. The creation of such regimes has come about under the conditions of decay of imperialism, the demoralization and disorientation caused by Stalinist betrayals, and the absence of revolutionary Marxist leadership of the working class. Colonial revolution can have an unequivocally progressive revolutionary significance only under such leadership of the revolutionary proletariat. For Trotskyists to incorporate into their strategy revisionism on the ***proletarian*** leadership in the revolution is a profound negation of Marxism-Leninism no matter what pious wish may be concurrently expressed for 'building revolutionary Marxist parties in colonial countries'."
>
> — "Toward Rebirth of the Fourth International," June 1963

The mobilization of the working class behind an internationalist Leninist vanguard party, drawing in behind it the peasant and other oppressed masses, in revolutionary struggle to bring down the imperialist world order, is the only road to a socialist future. This is the program the Chinese Trotskyists fought for. In their time they represented China's future, and they will be remembered as the pioneer Chinese Marxists who fought to lead the proletariat forward after the 1927 defeat. Today a Chinese Trotskyist party must be forged, standing on the heritage of the Communist League of China, to lead the proletariat forward in a fight against the heirs of Mao who have brought China to the brink of counterrevolution. Chinese communists today must rediscover the road of Lenin and Trotsky, as the founding Chinese Trotskyists did: the road of permanent revolution. ■

CORRECTIONS

In our last issue of *Spartacist* (No. 52 [English-language edition], Autumn 1995), our obituary for Ernest Mandel slightly misquoted Mandel as having called for a "unified mass vanguard to the left of the CP..." (*Militant*, 14 June 1968). The quote should have read: "There is not yet a sufficiently influential, organized, unified vanguard to the left of the CP, that could lead the masses to victory immediately." We also misdated as 1972 a United Secretariat "World Congress" which "rediscovered" the working class; the correct year is 1974. A later Congress referred to was held in June, not July, 1995.

Original Documents Published from Soviet Archives

Trotsky's Fight Against Stalinist Betrayal of Bolshevik Revolution

Eighty years ago this November, the Bolshevik Party headed by V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky led the Russian working class of the tsarist empire to the conquest of state power. This was the first time, aside from the brief and limited episode of the Paris Commune, that the workers were able to put the program of Marxism into flesh and blood: the dictatorship of the proletariat as a living historical phenomenon. Amidst the mass slaughter of World War I, the Russian workers' conquest of power shone like a beacon of hope both to the bleeding European proletariat and also to the oppressed masses in the imperialist colonies.

Yet scarcely a dozen years later, Leon Trotsky, co-leader with Lenin of the October Revolution and founder of the Red Army, was expelled from the Russian Communist Party, his followers imprisoned and himself exiled from the USSR. The Communist International, founded by Lenin in 1919, was transformed from the agency of world revolution to the "international" appendage of an increasingly conservative, nationally limited bureaucracy at the head of the Soviet state.

The degeneration of the Soviet Republic in the early 1920s—from its proletarian internationalist birth to the monstrosity of Stalinist state terror—was ***fought***. On one side was the conservative bureaucratic caste epitomized by Stalin, with his doctrine of "socialism in one country." On the other was Trotsky and the Left Opposition, who fought for the revolutionary internationalist program which had animated the Russian Revolution in the first place.

A recently published book, *The Struggle for Power: Russia in 1923*, by Valentina Vilkova (Prometheus Books, 1996) offers newly available documents from that struggle. The material published by Vilkova, which was briefly opened to researchers in the Soviet archives, is now locked up again in the private files of Boris Yeltsin, overseer of the capitalist counterrevolution in the former Soviet Union. Outside of a few pieces which have appeared previously as excerpts in English, Vilkova's book presents over 50 documents, some 20 of which have never before been published and over 30 which have only appeared in Russian journals in relatively limited circulation during 1989-1991. In bringing these original documents to the public Dr. Vilkova has rendered a valuable service.

The essential history of Trotsky's fight against the Stalinist degeneration of the Russian Revolution has long been known and available, at least in the West. In addition to collections of Trotsky's own writings (published in English by Pathfinder) such as *The New Course* (1924), *The Third International After Lenin* (1929), *The Stalin School of Falsification* (1931) and *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936), competent and compelling histories of the Russian Revolution exist such as E.H. Carr's 14-volume *History of Soviet Russia* (Macmillan) and memoirs by participants in the October Revolution and Trotskyist movement such as Alfred Rosmer's *Moscow Under Lenin* (Pluto Press, 1971), Victor Serge's *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (Oxford University Press, 1963) and Max Eastman's *Since Lenin Died* (Whitefriar Press, 1925). Outstanding particularly for a study of Trotsky's role in continuing the fight for the Bolshevik program of the October Revolution is the three-volume biography of Trotsky by Isaac Deutscher (Oxford University Press): *The Prophet Armed* (1954), *The Prophet Unarmed* (1959), *The Prophet Outcast* (1963). Deutscher was a leader of the Polish Left Opposition which was expelled from the Communist Party in 1932. Even after breaking with Trotskyism in disagreement over founding the Trotskyist Fourth International, Deutscher remained an eloquent and ardent opponent of Stalinism from a socialist perspective.

Still, Vilkova's book presents the actual documents of a critical turning point in the history of the Soviet Republic and they merit very thorough study. The documents give one a sense of the unfolding of the fight as it happened, without benefit of historical hindsight or through the prism of another's lens. The fight against the Stalinist degeneration of the Russian Revolution is imperative for revolutionary communists to understand today. Just as previous generations of revolutionaries, such as Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, studied and learned from the French Revolution of 1789, the European revolutions of 1848 and the Paris Commune of 1871, revolutionaries today cannot dismiss the Russian Revolution as a "dead letter," but must come to an understanding of how Stalinism led to the final undoing of the Russian Revolution if they are to learn from the past and go forward with the authentic program of Bolshevism to fight for new October Revolutions today. As James P. Cannon, the founder of American Trotskyism, said of the Russian Revolution:

> "Purely sentimental motivations, speculation without fundamental class premises, so-called 'fresh ideas' with no programmatic base—all this is out of place in a party of Marxists. We want to advance the world revolution of the proletariat. This determines our attitude and approach to the Russian question. True, we want to see reality, but we are not disinterested observers and commentators. We do not examine the Russian Revolution and what remains of its great conquests as though it were a bug under a glass. ***We have an interest! We take part in the fight!*** At each stage in the development of the Soviet Union, its advances and its degeneration, we seek the basis for revolutionary action. We want to advance the world revolution, overthrow capitalism, establish socialism. The Soviet Union is an important and decisive question on this line."
>
> — *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* (Pathfinder, 1972)

Permanent Revolution

The October Revolution brought the working class to power, but it did so in a country dominated by a vast and backward peasantry. It was the agrarian revolution—the desire of the peasants to seize the lands of the feudal aristocracy—which provided a powerful impulse to revolution. The

Socialist Appeal

After taking control of a consolidating bureaucracy in 1923-24, Stalin eventually had to murder all the remaining Old Bolsheviks in order to transform the Communist International from an agency for world revolution into an obstacle to it. American Trotskyist journal *Socialist Appeal* (1938) documented Stalin's extermination of the Bolshevik Party's 1917 Central Committee.

revolution's success was a resounding vindication of Trotsky's perspective of permanent revolution: in the epoch of imperialism, the bourgeoisies of nations of belated capitalist development were incapable of solving even the democratic tasks (overthrow of feudalism and redistribution of the land) which had been carried out in the French Revolution of 1789. Only the working class, having seized power, could implement such measures, and by necessity in defense of the latter, would be forced to undertake the reorganization of the economy on a socialist basis.

The Russian workers were able to break the chain of imperialism at its weakest link, but the survival and fulfillment of the workers state depended upon the extension of the revolution to the advanced capitalist countries. This alone would provide the industrial and technological assistance required for Russia's development—one could only expect implacable hostility from the imperialist bourgeoisies.

In fact, one of the primary motivations of the Bolsheviks was that a revolution in Russia would act to stimulate proletarian uprisings in the West. This calculation was hardly a pipe dream: the cataclysm of war resulted in a wave of revolutionary upsurges not seen in Europe since 1848. The Russian Revolution took place in the context of the crumbling of no less than four dominant centuries-old empires in middle and eastern Europe: the Habsburg, the Hohenzollern, the Romanov and the Ottoman.

Lenin had an acute sense of the intersection of the fight for the equality of nations and freedom for the enslaved peoples from the yoke of imperialist domination with the proletarian seizure of power. One of the conditions of admittance to the CI was that the parties of the imperialist countries were duty-bound to support the liberation struggles of the colonial peoples. In the colonial countries themselves, Lenin's 1920 theses emphasized the necessity for the Communists to maintain the ***class independence*** of the proletariat, even though they might have to make temporary alliances with bourgeois-democratic forces.

When the Bolsheviks published the imperialists' secret treaties in December 1917 and renounced any claims on the Dardanelles and former lands of the Ottoman and tsarist empires, this was a concrete act that showed the oppressed nationalities that emancipation would come through proletarian socialist international revolution. Desperately searching for a bulwark against the communist agitation against the imperialist war and restive working-class ferment on the home front, the capitalist class hypocritically became defenders of "independence" for, e.g., the Baltic states, only *after* the Bolshevik seizure of power. As Trotsky noted in his *History of the Russian Revolution*:

> "The bourgeois circles in the borderlands which had heretofore invariably and always gravitated toward the central power, now launched into a separatism which in many cases no longer had a shred of national foundation. The Baltic bourgeoisie, which only yesterday had been following in a state of hurrah-patriotism the German barons, the first bulwark of the

V.K. Bulla

The Bolsheviks and the Soviet working class looked to the powerful German proletariat. Lack of resolute, tested revolutionary leadership in Germany forestalled workers' victory in 1918-1919 and 1923, spelling continued isolation for Soviet workers state. At Comintern's Second Congress, July 1920, Lenin dedicates a monument to martyred German Communists Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg and the heroes of the Paris Commune.

> Romanovs, took its stand in the struggle against Bolshevik Russia under the banner of separatism."

In November 1918, the Kaiser was forced to abdicate and a German workers revolution was cut short by the treachery of the Social Democrats (SPD). In their determination to save the German bourgeoisie from the well-deserved wrath of the German workers, the SPD tops had their bloody hands in the suppression of the 1919 Spartakus uprising in Berlin, during which Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered, as well as in the crushing of a Soviet republic in Bavaria. In 1919 a short-lived Soviet republic was declared in Hungary and as late as September 1920, Italy was convulsed with a wave of factory occupations which directly posed the question: Which class shall rule?

In a very real sense, the Bolsheviks were caught in a dilemma: the seizure of power could (and did) create a workers state, but one immersed in a sea of peasant backwardness. Without the extension of the revolution into at least one of the advanced countries—Germany being key—the Soviet Republic could not survive indefinitely. But without the seizure of power in Russia, the Bolsheviks would have no ability to regroup the revolutionary elements out of the treacherous Second International, which would be necessary to forge new parties capable of leading the Western proletariat in their own revolutions. Lenin and Trotsky didn't simply believe in the world socialist revolution as an abstraction—they felt compelled to *act*, in order to ***change*** the course of history.

This was the whole *raison d'être* for the formation of the Communist International (CI), proclaimed by Lenin in 1919. One of the lessons of the failure of the post-war revolutionary wave to achieve the overthrow of capitalism in West Europe was that despite their betrayals on behalf of the bourgeoisie during the war, the mass social-democratic parties still held the allegiance of a large fraction of the working class. In most cases, Communist parties did not exist or were only formed at the very end of the war—they were simply too weak to break the workers from social-democratic influence. This was the major problem that the CI sought to address.

Far from issuing diktats (as would be the case later when the Stalinists took control), the leaders of the CI sought to patiently educate and assist the foreign parties in building their own organizations, rooted in their own national terrain. The Organizational Resolution passed at the Third Congress of the CI in 1921 was a handbook, based on the experiences of the Bolsheviks both in the underground period and during the October Revolution itself. Though the treacherous leaders of the Second International had assisted the bourgeoisie in maintaining capitalist rule, the European situation was far from stable, and the reparations imposed on Germany under the terms of the Versailles peace created hardships which fueled a revolutionary situation in the not too distant future. Hence, the CI paid special attention to the German Communist Party (KPD).

The crucial importance of extending the proletarian revolution to an advanced capitalist country like Germany also gripped the Soviet proletariat. Workers gathered outside factory gates to read and hear the latest news from Germany. E.H. Carr cites the Bolshevik Karl Radek's impression when Lenin addressed crowds at the time of the November 1918 events which toppled the German Kaiser:

> "Tens of thousands of workers burst into wild cheering. Never have I seen anything like it again. Until late in the evening workers and Red Army soldiers were filing past. The world revolution had come. The mass of the people heard its iron tramp. Our isolation was over."

In the fall of 1923, again, the urban masses of Russia were closely following events in Germany, in the immediate anticipation of the German Revolution bringing help to the besieged Bolshevik regime. A German KPD delegate to Tukhachevsky's military headquarters reported finding Red Army men eager "to march with arms in their hands to the aid of the German and Polish proletariat" (E.H. Carr, *The Interregnum*).

Aftermath of War and Revolution

While the Bolsheviks were doing as much as they could to further the revolution abroad, their internal situation was desperate. The ravages of the imperialist war had been followed by a bloody civil war; by 1920, industrial production was only ***16 percent*** of the 1912 level. With the breakdown of industry and transport, the working class virtually disappeared: in 1921, Moscow's population was reduced by half and Petrograd's by two-thirds. The proletarian base of the party was thus reduced to a shell, and the party itself had suffered losses of between 50 and 80 thousand killed, and this had a heavy impact on the older, more experienced cadres. The regime of "war communism," including forced grain requisitions, while necessary to win the Civil War, had strained relations with the peasantry to the breaking point.

This was symbolized by the uprising of the Kronstadt garrison, which took place during the party's Tenth Congress in March 1921. In 1917, the Kronstadt sailors were

representative of the vanguard proletarian participants in the October Revolution. Wherever and whenever the revolution was endangered throughout the Civil War, detachments from Kronstadt were dispatched to assist the Red Army's victory against the White Guards. But by 1921, this revolutionary vanguard was largely wiped out through the Civil War, or demobilized and atomized by the economic dislocations in industry. Indeed, by 1921 the Kronstadt garrison was populated largely by "peasants in uniform" whose sympathies lay with the anti-Bolshevik peasant revolts flaring up like brushfires in the countryside. The leaders of the Kronstadt revolt openly conspired with the Whites who sought to wield this strategic garrison as the lever for capitalist counterrevolution against the new workers state.

The demand raised at Kronstadt for "soviets without Bolsheviks" was a veiled appeal for counterrevolution. Without the Bolshevik Party in command, the Russian Revolution would perish. This was understood even by delegates at the Tenth Party Congress who sympathized with the Kronstadters' demands but were outraged that these mutineers held a gun pointed at the head of the revolution. Some 300 party delegates rushed out of the Congress to accompany Marshal Tukhachevsky and his troops in their heroic and perilous crossing of the ice to the Kronstadt garrison. Deutscher described it as a "glacial Valhalla"—many perished defending the revolution as the ice broke under their feet and the water swallowed them. Those who reached the fortress issued leaflets to the rebels stating that "free soviets" would mean the return of the "bourgeoisie, landlords, generals, admirals and noblemen, the princes and other parasites" and told the Kronstadters to choose: "either with the White Guards against us, or with us against the White Guards" (see "Kronstadt and Counterrevolution," *Workers Vanguard* Nos. 195 and 203, 3 March and 28 April 1978). Indeed after the Kronstadt mutiny was crushed, the leaders of the revolt fled to Finland where they conspired with the Whites to form a "temporary military dictatorship" after their planned overthrow of the Bolsheviks.

But contrary to mythology, Kronstadt did not force the Bolsheviks into a change of policy. Earlier, in February, Lenin had submitted proposals for the "New Economic Policy" (NEP) to the Politburo. Chief among these was the replacement of the forced grain requisitions so despised by the peasantry with the material incentive of a tax in kind (a measure which Trotsky had proposed a year earlier). Lenin's proposals were adopted by the Tenth Congress, and they were frankly seen as a retreat. NEP meant in essence the restoration of capitalism in the rural economy, with all the dangers that incurred. But the Bolsheviks had no choice: in the absence of assistance from a victorious revolution in the West (one of Lenin's first points in his report), Soviet industry was simply incapable of providing the machinery which was essential to make large-scale, collectivized agriculture economically feasible. To revive agricultural production, the Bolsheviks were forced to make concessions to the petty-bourgeois farmers and small proprietors in the countryside.

Another significant measure passed at the Tenth Congress was the ban on factions. There had been discontent within the working class, including strikes in which Bolshevik Party members participated. The dissidents had coalesced into two groups: the Workers Opposition (WO) and the Workers Group. WO called for a Congress of Producers to be given control of the economy, which in essence was a call for the party to give up its leading role in the state, *i.e.*, ***an end to the dictatorship of the proletariat.***

Lenin was extremely worried about the danger of a split in the party, particularly given a severe dispute he had had with Trotsky prior to the Congress. Trotsky had proposed the militarization of labor, and had issued a factional platform. Trotsky's motivation was to try to find some way to cut through the devastating impasse that state industry was in, but his proposals were an inadequate ***administrative*** attempt to solve deeper problems. Trotsky was at odds with Lenin in this particular dispute, and the fact that he pushed it cost him a considerable amount of authority within the party. The emerging bureaucratic "troika" of Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev used this past battle as a pretext to posture as "the Lenin faction" without Lenin. Indeed, in the elections to the Central Committee in the immediate aftermath of this trade-union dispute, many of Trotsky's supporters were removed from the Central Committee and replaced by people close to Stalin.

Lenin had envisioned the ban on factions as a ***temporary emergency measure*** to maintain the unity of the party, not to strangle its internal life. Thus when Ryazanov submitted an amendment calling for no elections based on platforms, Lenin emphatically rejected the idea:

> "If fundamental disagreements exist on the question, we cannot deprive members of the Central Committee of the right to address themselves to the party. I cannot imagine how we can do this. The present Congress can in no way and in no form engage the elections to the next Congress. And if, for example, questions like the Brest-Litovsk peace arise? Can we guarantee that such questions will not arise? It cannot be guaranteed. It is possible that it will then be necessary to elect by platform. That is quite clear."
>
> — quoted in Max Shachtman, *The Struggle for the New Course* (1943)

Unfortunately, the nascent bureaucracy felt no such constraints and used the ban as an organizational convenience and factional club against Trotsky and his supporters when the fight against Stalin's national narrowness and bureaucratic stranglehold opened in late 1923.

Lenin's overriding concern was to establish a configuration of leading elements in the party which could administer the Soviet state and prepare the International for the coming wave of revolutions. Despite his sober criticisms of Trotsky's role in the trade-union debate, Lenin saw in Trotsky many of the political qualities that were necessary to lead the party. Shortly after the Tenth Party Congress a pre-factional situation arose in the Politburo over the question of the "theory of the offensive." This theory, espoused by the Hungarian communist Béla Kun, played no small part in the then-recent defeat of the "March Action" in Germany. Both Lenin and Trotsky saw in Kun's false "left" adventurist current a mortal danger to the future of the CI. At the Third Congress of the Comintern in the summer of 1921, Lenin directly intervened in defense of Trotsky against Béla Kun. The political collaboration between Lenin and Trotsky at the Third Congress prefigured the bloc they found themselves in at the end of 1922 and beginning of 1923 against the emerging Stalinist bureaucracy.

The Emergence of the Stalin Faction

The political fight documented in Vilkova's book took place due to the conjunction of several factors. First was the economic situation: the adoption of the NEP had stimulated agriculture, but state industry had not grown nearly as fast. This was encapsulated by Trotsky as the "scissors crisis": the dichotomy between falling agricultural prices and high industrial prices. Trotsky had long advocated centralized planning in Soviet industry, both for economic and political

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Lenin denounced Stalin (left) and his lieutenant Ordzhonikidze (at right), shown here in 1925, for trampling on the Soviet principle of national equality in Georgia in 1922.

reasons. In the realm of economics, the prevailing anarchy in the organization of industrial resources had to be overcome: industries were starved for credits and material inputs, and without a central plan the right hand would never know what the left hand was doing. In late 1922, Lenin himself was won to Trotsky's proposals to increase the powers of Gosplan, the state agency in nominal charge of industrial planning. In the political sense, Trotsky advocated a much stronger effort for the reconstruction of Soviet industry to ***rebuild*** the Soviet proletariat.

Had conditions been "normal," Trotsky's proposals would have been enthusiastically accepted, particularly given Lenin's endorsement. But conditions were far from normal —a growing bureaucracy had taken control of the party and the Soviet state, and it was increasingly politically self-conscious of its own parasitic role and needs. This bureaucratic corrosion was the second principal factor leading to the fight in 1923.

At the Eleventh Congress of the party in March-April 1922—the last he was to attend—Lenin had pointed to the problem of bureaucratism:

> "The economic power in the hands of the proletarian state of Russia is quite adequate to ensure the transition to communism. What then is lacking? Obviously, what is lacking is culture among the stratum of the Communists who perform administrative functions. If we take Moscow with its 4,700 Communists in responsible positions, and if we take that huge bureaucratic machine, that gigantic heap, we must ask: who is directing whom? I doubt very much whether it can truthfully be said that the Communists are directing that heap. To tell the truth, they are not directing, they are being directed."
>
> — *Collected Works*, Volume 33

Here Lenin was referring to the large mass of tsarist holdovers who had been incorporated into the Soviet state apparatus. This was necessitated by the low level of literacy in the country. But more dangerous was the fact that the "Communists" in the bureaucracy were those who had adopted the national-parochial view of the NEPmen.

Chief among these was Stalin. Though an "Old Bolshevik," he had played no significant role in the October Revolution, slinking instead into the shadows following Lenin's return to Russia and his sharp criticisms of the party leadership's conciliation of Kerensky's bourgeois Provisional Government. Despite his demonstrated shallowness in theoretical matters, Stalin acquired a reputation for organizational competence. Lenin had opposed Stalin's appointment as General Secretary at the Tenth Congress, but acquiesced at the Eleventh in 1922. Stalin transformed the Secretariat, previously a mere administrative adjunct to the Central Committee, into his own apparatus of hand-picked followers and sycophants. This extended into the party as well: previously elected posts, such as regional party secretaries, became "recommendations" from the party center, i.e. Stalin. This was perverted to the point that by the Twelfth Congress, the bulk of the delegates were in fact ***appointed*** by the regional secretaries rather than being ***elected*** by the party ranks.

Trotsky later noted in his book *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) that "The demobilization of the Red Army of five million played no small role in the formation of the bureaucracy. The victorious commanders assumed leading posts in the local Soviets, in economy, in education, and they persistently introduced everywhere that regime which had ensured success in the civil war. Thus on all sides the masses were pushed away gradually from actual participation in the leadership of the country." These were men accustomed to taking orders—and giving them. And, as Trotsky noted in *The Revolution Betrayed*, rank increasingly had its privileges:

> "If you count not only salaries and all forms of service in kind, and every type of semilegal supplementary source of income, but also add the share of the bureaucracy and the Soviet aristocracy in the theaters, rest palaces, hospitals, sanatoriums, summer resorts, museums, clubs, athletic institutions, etc., etc., it would probably be necessary to conclude that 15 per cent, or, say, 20 per cent, of the population enjoys not much less of the wealth than is enjoyed by the remaining 80 to 85 per cent.... The distribution of the earth's goods in the Soviet Union, we do not doubt, is incomparably more democratic than it was in tzarist Russia, and even than it is in the most democratic countries of the West. But it has as yet little in common with socialism."

The third factor was Lenin's failing health—in May 1922 he suffered his first stroke. Whether Stalin might have considered the question of succession prior to this is open to question; what is certain is that following Lenin's stroke, Stalin and his then allies Zinoviev and Kamenev came ever closer together to block Trotsky. The latter two brought Stalin a measure of respectability and political polish which he was most certainly lacking. Zinoviev was one of Lenin's oldest collaborators and was at the time the leader of the party organization in Petrograd and president of the CI; Kamenev was head of the Moscow party organization and a longtime member of the Bolshevik Central Committee.

In December 1922, prior to the upcoming Twelfth Congress, Lenin had proposed a bloc with Trotsky to fight Stalin. One of the foremost issues related to the national question: Lenin was horrified to learn that one of Stalin's minions, Ordzhonikidze, had gone to the point of physically attacking one of the Georgian Communists. Behind this bullying was Stalin's determination to push through his "autonomization" plan—an attempt to impose a single Transcaucasian republic upon the Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and against the will of local communists. This was a move which violated the right of national self-determination which Lenin insisted (over Stalin's opposition) be incorporated into the founding constitution of the USSR. Lenin wrote a strongly worded memo attacking Stalin by name and he demanded that Trotsky

carry out a fight at the Twelfth Congress in defense of the Georgians and against the Great Russian chauvinism exhibited by Stalin and Ordzhonikidze.

Lenin's anger flowed not simply from domestic concerns—he was keenly aware of the brewing revolts among the colonial masses of Asia. How could the Soviet Union serve as an example to the colonial peoples if its treatment of the national minorities within its borders appeared but a rehash of tsarist bureaucratic abuse? As he noted in his memo: "It would be unpardonable opportunism if, on the eve of the debut of the East, just as it is awakening, we undermined our prestige with its peoples, even if only by the slightest crudity or injustice towards our own non-Russian nationalities" (*Collected Works*, Volume 36).

Another issue was Stalin's proposal in October 1922 to relax the monopoly of foreign trade. This proposal was an unambiguous sign of the pressures of the growing petty-bourgeois forces engendered by the NEP, who chafed at their inability to trade directly on the world market, and to allow foreign capital direct penetration into the Soviet economy, thereby jeopardizing the very foundations of the workers state: collectivized property and a planned economy. To have relaxed the restrictions on foreign imports and exports would have greatly increased the independence of the petty traders, a group which could form the nucleus of a new bourgeoisie and hence strengthen the forces of capitalist restoration. Lenin strongly objected, and Stalin backed down.

Lenin was determined to have a showdown with Stalin. In notes dictated in late December 1922, which have come to be known as his "Testament," Lenin openly called for Stalin's removal from the post of General Secretary. But Lenin was unable to deliver the bombshell—in early March 1923 he suffered a second stroke. This was to remove him from political activity, although this was by no means certain at the time. When the Twelfth Party Congress opened in April, Trotsky was faced with a real problem. Lenin was incapacitated but not dead, and Trotsky was extremely fearful of having even the appearance of putting himself forward as Lenin's heir. When Stalin coyly suggested that Trotsky should give the main political report at the Congress (something which had always been done by Lenin), Trotsky refused. But at the same time, Trotsky failed to wage the battle Lenin had urged.

Contrary to the histories presented by Carr and Deutscher, Trotsky ***did*** address the national question and Lenin's notes at the Congress, but he did so in a conciliatory fashion. Prior to the Congress Stalin had agreed to whatever changes Trotsky proposed on the national question and the Georgian affair—indeed at that point Stalin would have agreed to anything to deflect Lenin's criticisms and the threat to his power they represented! And Stalin knew nothing was written in stone: in a polemical passage in his 1913 article "Marxism and the National Question," Stalin wrote that "paper will put up with anything that is written on it." In the intervening years, Stalin certainly had taken that lesson to heart!

Lenin had warned Trotsky to avoid any slippery compromises which Stalin might offer; on the face of it Trotsky failed to heed Lenin's advice. Even given the stacked nature of the delegates "elected" to the Twelfth Congress, an open fight using Lenin's notes and proposals still would have dealt Stalin a blow and ***bought time***. But Trotsky did not have either the experience or authority of Lenin in inner-party struggle, and he really counted on Lenin's recovery.

Regarding Trotsky's hesitation to pursue the necessary fight, it is worth quoting from the last letter of Trotskyist Oppositionist Adolf Joffe who committed suicide some years later when the full impact of the failure to fight Stalin in 1923-24 was abundantly clear. In November 1927, Joffe wrote to Trotsky:

> "I have never doubted the rightness of the road you pointed out, and as you know I have gone with you for more than twenty years, since the days of 'permanent revolution.' But I have always believed that you lacked Lenin's ***unbending will,*** his ***unwillingness to yield,*** his readiness even to remain alone on the path that he thought right in the anticipation of a future majority, of a future recognition by every one of the rightness of his path. ***Politically, you were always right,*** beginning with 1905, and I told you repeatedly that with my own ears I had heard Lenin admit that even in 1905, ***you, and not he,*** were right.... But you have often ***abandoned your rightness*** for the sake of an overvalued agreement, or compromise. This is a mistake. I repeat: politically you have always been right, and now ***more right than ever.*** Some day the party will realize it, and history will not fail to accord recognition. Then don't lose your courage if some one leaves you now, or if not as many come to you, and not as soon, as we all would like. You are right, but the guarantee of the victory of your rightness lies in nothing but the extreme unwillingness to yield, the strictest straightforwardness, the absolute rejection of all compromise; in this very thing lay the secret of Lenin's victories."

This letter had a profound impact on Trotsky and the rest of his political life as a tenacious fighter for his principles showed how fully he had drawn the lessons of this earlier and crucial failure.

The Fight in 1923

The bureaucracy lost no time—Stalin used his secretarial powers to "relocate" Trotsky's supporters and to transfer in replacements more to the liking of the bureaucracy. One example was Christian Rakovsky—Stalin "promoted" him from his justly deserved position high in the Ukrainian soviet republic to a diplomatic posting in Britain. These maneuvers served not only to isolate Trotsky, but also strengthen Stalin's grip on the apparatus—those having been appointed obviously had a very direct material interest in keeping their posts and pleasing the man who had put them there.

However, things were not to go as smoothly as the Stalin faction wished. First came an outbreak of strikes within the USSR itself; secondly there was tremendous unrest in Germany in the summer and fall of 1923 which directly posed the possibility of a workers revolution. One thing which comes through clearly from the documents in Vilkova's book is that the Stalin faction itself understood the linkage between the two—and was afraid of both.

Trotsky had spent most of the summer of 1923 out of Moscow on medical leave. He returned in August to participate in the discussions with the head of the KPD, Heinrich Brandler, who had come to Moscow. Trotsky insisted that the Germans ***fix a date*** and urgently begin ***planning*** for an insurrection—the political crisis which had begun with the French occupation of the Ruhr could not be expected to last indefinitely. Trotsky was very worried about the vacillations and hesitancy of the German leadership and the upper echelons of the CI itself. In August, Stalin had sent a letter to Zinoviev and Bukharin, one of his first forays on the international plane, in which he expressed doubt in the possibility of a German revolution and urged that the KPD "be restrained and not spurred on" (Deutscher, *Stalin* [1949]). One can assume that Trotsky did not know of this letter at the time, but it could only have reinforced his worries—Zinoviev, then the head of the CI, had also earlier panicked, vacillated, and opposed Lenin on the very eve of the October Revolution.

For his part, Brandler was honest in his evaluation of the

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Leon Trotsky, Commissar of War and organizer of the Red Army.

capacity of his own and the KPD leadership's abilities to carry off so momentous an action. Brandler even implored the Russians to send Trotsky to Germany to supervise the organization of the insurrection. Trotsky was willing to go, but this was out of the question for Stalin & Co.—the obvious question in their minds was: "What if he succeeded?"

Whether or not Trotsky could have overcome the weaknesses of the KPD is an open question—but his presence on the scene certainly would have improved the chances for success. As Trotsky later noted in his classic *Lessons of October* (1924), which drew the lessons of the German defeat by contrasting the experience to that of the 1917 October Revolution, "We witnessed in Germany a classic demonstration of how it is possible to miss a perfectly exceptional revolutionary situation of world historic importance." ***A proletarian revolution in Germany in 1923 would have changed the entire history of this century.*** The default of the German party leadership—aided and abetted by the Zinovievist leadership of the Comintern—hit the domestic political situation in the Soviet Union like a bomb blast. If the industrial power of a German workers state could finally provide the resources so badly required by the Soviet republic, who would need an arbiter of scarcity? Now the hope for international extension of the proletarian revolution crashed in widespread demoralization and despair. And it was this wave of despair which the Stalinist apparatus rode to power and which enabled it to secure its position as the bureaucratic caste ruling over a workers state of economic scarcity.

Scarcity was indeed a problem. Not of food so much—the adoption of the NEP and some good harvests had reduced the threat of famine, such as had occurred in 1921. But nothing had been done to address the extreme disorganization of state industry. Deprived of state credits, state industries were unable to obtain parts or even pay their workers. Production slumped, unemployment soared and the disparity between the prices for agricultural goods and industrial products sharply increased. This was the "scissors crisis" writ large—and now the working class itself was deeply discontented.

Trotsky had earlier demanded a program of planned industrialization, but despite Lenin's endorsement of his call to strengthen Gosplan, and its nominal acceptance at the Twelfth Congress, the bureaucracy had dithered. So Stalin & Co. were caught totally off guard by the strikes which swept Petrograd and Moscow in the summer of 1923. As Deutscher relates:

> "The shock was all the more severe because it was unexpected. The ruling circles had viewed the economic situation with smugness and had boasted of continuous improvement. They had not received timely signals of the approaching trouble; or, if any warning had reached them, they ignored it."

Bureaucratic muddling had led the country into an economic impasse, and instead of addressing the problem, the Stalinists resorted to repression. Party members, mostly splinters of the oppositional groupings at the time of the Tenth Congress, were found to have been active in the agitation, and they were arrested. Much to the chagrin of the bureaucracy, a commission headed by Dzerzhinsky to "investigate" the strikes found that many party members thought the oppositionists were loyal party members and refused to testify against them. The commission's response was to propose that any party member aware of factional activity be required to report it immediately to the GPU (state security police), the Central Committee (CC) and the Central Control Commission (CCC)!

Trotsky responded in a series of letters addressed to the CC and CCC in October 1923. These appear in Vilkova's book in full for the first time. Excerpts of two of these (8 and 23/24 October 1923) were later published in an émigré Menshevik newspaper in Berlin in 1924 and these have been translated into English in *The Challenge of the Left Opposition, 1923-1925* (Pathfinder Press, 1975). The émigré Mensheviks, being counterrevolutionary opponents of the Soviet republic, naturally chose their "excerpts" with care—to pick out only Trotsky's criticisms of the regime while gutting the letters of their essential intent. For example, the second letter appears in the Pathfinder translation as a mere three pages, whereas the full text in Vilkova is *26* pages long.

In the 8 October letter, Trotsky lays the blame for the economic crisis on the party leadership: "There is no Party or Soviet body, where economic subject[s] are considered and settled with regard to their interrelationships and the proper perspective. To be completely accurate, one should say: there is no management in the economy, the chaos originates at the top." He added: "Public discontent is caused mainly by wasteful and uncontrolled activity of a great many managerial bodies, whose administrators the more willingly obey the so-called Party 'leadership' (in the form of senseless advertisements and other extortion), so that all their major activity remains out of real leadership and control."

Trotsky also cited conflicting orders from the Politburo (PB) as to the increase or decrease of personnel in the armed forces—the leadership's haphazard and often conflicting demands sowed confusion within the military staff who actually had to plan (and then reverse plans) for the mobilization or demobilization of 100,000 troops. But to address these problems, ordinary party members had no recourse—without the ability to air differences and elect their own local leaderships, all the discontents in the ranks could find no other expression than "illegal" factionalism.

After noting the failure of his attempts to change party policy within the CC, Trotsky summed up with an attack on the brute force repression proposed by Dzerzhinsky, arguing for the party to revitalize itself through an internal discussion and reorganization so that it could be rearmed to face its

domestic and international tasks:

> "It is clear that such a regime and such Party health are incompatible with the challenges that may and, judging by all evidence, will arise for the Party from the very fact of the German revolution. We must put an end to the secretary's bureaucratism. Party democracy, at least within limits guaranteeing the Party a buffer against intransigency and degradation, must be enforced. Party masses should speak out within the Party about what troubles them and must be afforded a real opportunity to form its organizational apparatus according to the Party rules and, what is more, according to the spirit of our Party....
>
> "In view of the current situation, I consider it to be my right and duty to give my opinion on the matter to every Party member whom I regard as adequately prepared, mature, consistent, and therefore able to help the Party emerge from the deadlock without factional convulsions and shocks."

The gloves were off.

Trotsky had been careful to limit distribution of his letters to the PB and CC members; that Stalin's apparatus circulated "clandestine" copies in order to draw out and identify Opposition supporters is a distinct possibility. They needn't have bothered—barely a week later on October 15, a document was submitted to the CC in the name of a number of prominent party members; this has come to be known as the "Platform of the 46." (This document was published in English as an appendix to E.H. Carr's volume, *The Interregnum 1923-24* [1954].) It made a direct connection between the bureaucratic mismanagement of the economy and the bureaucratic regime in the party which stifled inner-party discussion and forced any members with dissident views into "illegal" factional activity. The ***real*** danger of factionalism was at the top:

> "The economic crisis in Soviet Russia and the crisis of the factional dictatorship within the Party will strike a severe blow both to the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia and to the Russian Communist Party [RKP], if the existing situation is not crucially changed in the very near future. Having this load on its shoulders the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia and its leader (RKP) can enter the period of approaching world troubles with only the prospect of failure along the whole front of proletarian struggle."

The authors of the document were not minor figures. As Deutscher described them, they were 46 "generals of revolution." They all had held prominent posts, many at one time on the CC, and most had served heroically during the Civil War. Trotsky himself was not a signatory, and it is not clear how much of a role, if any, he played in producing this platform. For its part, the Stalin faction could only assume that he had inspired it; they were to accuse him of it in any case.

On October 19, a document was submitted by "members" of the PB in reply to Trotsky's 8 October letter, and this is one of the real gems in Vilkova's book. The list of full and alternate PB members listed as signatories was: Bukharin, Zinoviev, Kalinin, Kamenev, Molotov, Rykov, Stalin and Tomsky, in that order. Listed as "absent" were Lenin and Rudzutak, thereby giving (or hoping to give) the impression that Lenin had some role in the preparation of the document! Vilkova suggests in a footnote that Stalin in fact was the main author, both from the style and pejorative references to political opponents and from the fact that corrections in Stalin's handwriting appear on the typescript. Bukharin, the nominal first author, was not even in Moscow at the time the document was submitted.

It is a long document (22 pages) and we can only present the most egregious selections which reflect its arrogant, bureaucratic smugness and distortions. It is also interesting in that ***all*** the future attacks on Trotsky can be seen in embryo in this piece. It begins by noting the restraint of the PB majority in not responding in writing to Trotsky's many criticisms of its actions, and then coyly adds that Lenin had "only occasionally" given written explanations regarding Trotsky's errors. Vilkova's footnote declares this to be a reference to the dispute Lenin had with Trotsky on the trade-union question. Of course, Stalin does not mention Lenin's ***agreement*** with Trotsky from 1922 onward on such crucial questions as the monopoly of foreign trade, the necessity to strengthen Gosplan and the nationalities question. Instead, a series of "straw man" arguments are raised: first, Trotsky's supposed "underestimation of the peasantry," second his "adventurist" notions in foreign policy and last, his "factionalism." Referring to Trotsky's "letter-platform" of 8 October, Stalin writes:

> "First, in this letter Comrade Trotsky, ***starting an attack against the Party TsK*** [CC], acts as an instigator of struggle against the TsK, as an initiator putting forward a slogan of attacking the TsK at a difficult moment from the viewpoint of [the] international situation, on account of which the Politburo simply hasn't the right to leave Comrade Trotsky's letter unanswered." (emphasis in original)

Naturally, the issuance of the "Platform of the 46" was taken as prime evidence of Trotsky's factionalism. According to Stalin, the PB also had to prevent Trotsky's ambitions:

> "In fact, Comrade Trotsky has put himself in the following position in relation to the Party: either the Party confers upon him practically dictatorial powers in the sphere of people's economy and armed forces, or he actually refuses to do any work in the fields of economics and industry, retaining only the right of systematically disorganizing the TsK in its difficult everyday work."

This is nothing but a repetition of the whispering campaign about Trotsky's supposed "ambitions" which the Stalinists carried on at the Twelfth Congress. In the same document, Stalin dredges up Trotsky's refusal to take on the post of Deputy to the Soviet Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom), which Lenin had suggested years earlier. It is a crude attempt to highlight past differences between Lenin and Trotsky, which ignores an obvious question: if Trotsky had such ambitions toward "dictatorial powers," why would he have turned down Lenin's offer to become his second-in-command in the highest body of the Soviet state? Trotsky did have reasons, as we shall see, but not those ascribed to him in Stalin's disingenuous polemic.

One really sees the smugness of the bureaucracy when it comes to the question of the economy and the autumn strike wave:

> "Past irregularities in payment of wages...caused ferment among workers in some towns. Naturally, the Party ought to pay most close attention to these phenomena...
>
> "However, on the whole, the working class' attitude is quite sound, and with the Party's sufficiently close attention to the questions of wages (Narkomfin should receive the TsK's direct order to most accurately pay wages in all worker districts) and prices, there are ample grounds to hope that the attitude of the working class and peasantry will be quite satisfactory."

So according to Stalin, everything was basically going smoothly, except perhaps for a wee bit of unrest in a few unnamed towns where the CC should endeavor that the workers be paid. Left unsaid is that these "towns" happened to be ***the major industrial centers of the country***—Petrograd and Moscow!

Stalin's forays on the international plane were equally enlightening: all he could offer was that Trotsky's criticisms of the incapacities of the German leadership "made a dispiriting impression on all those present" at a September CC

plenary session. Stalin had no positive contributions; the most he had to say at the end of the section on the German revolution was that "Comrade Trotsky just cannot be unaware of the fact that discord and disagreement in our TsK and our Party at the present moment will be a most severe blow to the German Communist Party, holding now the outposts of the world revolution." In other words, if Trotsky would only stop rocking the boat, we bureaucrats would be less "dispirited" and the German revolution would take care of itself. It is noteworthy that Stalin's document was presented just ***one week*** before the German leadership, under Stalin's guidance, flinched and let slip the possibility of a proletarian revolution. One presumes Stalin must have been pleased—after all, the Germans had been restrained.

Bukharin, then in Petrograd, sent a telephone message on October 20 to the Secretariat and Stalin demanding changes in Stalin's document. Bukharin noted that "it is impossible to depict the economical crisis by looking at it through such rose-colored spectacles" and pointed out the need for more stress on inner-party democracy and a less ham-handed treatment of the opposition. Bukharin perhaps sensed that the opposition had more support in the party than his bureaucratic allies realized.

Trotsky responded to Stalin's diatribe in a long letter dated 23 October. In it, he noted that rather than addressing the issues urgently requiring discussion, the CC majority had resorted to charges of factionalism and had attempted to drag Lenin's name into the dispute. Trotsky cites the letters Lenin had sent him prior to the Twelfth Congress, which made it clear that Lenin fully supported Trotsky against Stalin on the question of the monopoly of foreign trade, the Georgian affair and Lenin's severe criticisms of the Rabkrin (Workers and Peasants Inspection). The latter was supposed to have been an independent body to curb bureaucratic excesses; Stalin had been its head and contrary to Lenin's intentions it became more of a rest home for failed bureaucrats. Lenin's criticisms of the Rabkrin obviously redounded heavily against Stalin, and the PB majority had tried to suppress its publication in *Pravda*.

Trotsky's letter refuted point by point all of the allegations, smears and innuendos in Stalin's document. At its conclusion, he took up the charge that his actions and statements were "unprecedented among Bolsheviks." This was hardly the case—Lenin himself had threatened to go to the party ranks in April 1917 if he could not secure support in the CC. And in a remark directed against Zinoviev and Kamenev, Trotsky stated:

> "By the way, there were some cases with us, when, on the eve of the decisive battles and in the course of them—it was in October 1917—some important executives deserted their posts, appealing to the Party against the TsK, in face of non-Party elements and opponents."

A Plenum of the CC and CCC was held on 25-27 October, ostensibly to thrash out the differences. In point of fact it was convened so that the Stalin faction could secure an official imprimatur against Trotsky and the signatories of the "Platform of the 46." Given that the Stalin faction had the majority of votes, this comes as no surprise. But in the stenographic record, Trotsky revealed why he had refused Lenin's proposals to take on the post of Lenin's deputy in the Sovnarkom. The documents unearthed by Vilkova indicate how deeply Trotsky felt that being a Jew in backward Russia impeded his political options because he feared his ethnicity could become a weapon in the hands of enemies of the revolution.

> "The thing is, comrades, that there is a personal element in my work, which, being of no importance in my private life, so to speak, is of great political importance in my everyday life. This is my Jewish origin. I remember quite well that on October 25, 1917, lying on the floor in the Smolny, Vladimir Ilyich said: 'Comrade Trotsky! We will make you People's Commissar for Internal Affairs. You will crush the bourgeoisie and nobility.' I opposed. I said that, in my opinion, one should not place such a trump card in our enemies' [hands]; I thought that it would be much better if there were no Jews in the first revolutionary Soviet government. Vladimir Ilyich said, 'Nonsense. Never mind!' But despite his attitude, my arguments seemed to have influenced him somehow.... When it was necessary to organize our military forces, they chose me; I should say that I opposed the office of People's Commissar of War still more resolutely. Well, comrades, after all my work done in this sphere, I can tell with certainty that I was right. I won't talk about direct results of my work; you know that I fulfilled my duties and you will evaluate my work positively. But, comrades, perhaps I could have done much more, if this element did not intrude in my work and did not interfere with it. Remember what a hindrance it was in some acute moments during Yudenich's, Kolchak's and [W]rangel's offensives, how our enemies in their agitation used the fact that the Red Army was headed by a Jew."

The Stalinists were to play on the vile anti-Semitic prejudices within the Russian population in the struggles with the Left Opposition later in the 1920s.

Trotsky was politically vilified and isolated at the Plenum, with only his own vote and that of Preobrazhensky against 102 for the Troika. His treatment there caused Krupskaya, Lenin's wife and a longtime party member, to write an indignant letter to Zinoviev on 31 October. This perhaps was a factor in the leadership's decision to open up the pages of *Pravda* to discussion, which they did on November 7, on the sixth anniversary of the October Revolution. What was intended as a safety valve to blow off steam turned into a ***massive*** outpouring of discontent from the party ranks—and leaders. Stalin received a hostile reception from party members in the Krasnopresnensky district. Leading party members sympathetic to Trotsky such as Preobrazhensky and Pyatakov intervened at public meetings and easily obtained large majorities for bluntly worded resolutions. Anton Antonov-Ovseenko addressed the party organizations of the garrisons and won one-third of those organizations to side with the opposition. When a statement by Karl Radek about Trotsky's support in foreign parties was followed by a telegram from the Polish Communist Party in support of Trotsky, Stalin moved rapidly. He publicly attacked Trotsky in a letter published in *Pravda* on December 15 and the editors of *Pravda* were replaced by Zinoviev and Stalin supporters. By the end of December, the pages of *Pravda* were effectively closed to democratic inner-party discussion ***forever***.

The support for Trotsky within the garrisons ***really*** frightened the Stalinists—Trotsky had been the organizer and leader of the Red Army and if the party cells in the military were to go over to the opposition it would be disastrous. Thus Antonov-Ovseenko was removed from his post. Stalin's fear of the legacy of Trotsky as commander in chief of the Red Army and his distrust of the Soviet military apparatus never abated: in the late 1930s he conducted a bloody purge in which Marshal Tukhachevsky and a large component of the officer corps were executed.

On 5 December, a resolution on the "New Course" was adopted unanimously by the PB and the Presidium of the CCC. Ostensibly, this was to restore some degree of inner-party democracy. But despite the wording, the bureaucracy had no intention of carrying out the spirit of the resolution. Vilkova's book includes a very revealing memo written by

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Soviet Trotskyists opposed Thermidorian bureaucracy and forces of capitalist restoration. Demonstration by Left Oppositionists in Siberian exile: "Turn the Fire to the Right—Against Kulak, Nepman and Bureaucrat."

Zinoviev addressed to his factional partners on December 5:

> "They are acting in accordance with all the rules of factional art. If we fail immediately to create our own extremely unified faction, everything will be doomed.
>
> "I put forward a proposal to come to this conclusion at the first opportunity. I suggest getting together especially in order to discuss this question, probably at Comrade Stalin's place in the country or at my place.
>
> "Delay may mean death."

The dénouement came at the Thirteenth Party Conference, held in January 1924, just before Lenin's death. Despite the support for the opposition in the party cells, they obtained only 3 of 128 delegates; indeed, despite the fine words in the "New Course" resolution, the Stalinists rigged the elections. One of the three delegates for the opposition, Ivan Vrachev, rose defiantly above the orchestrated chorus of hecklers to denounce Stalin's course and warn the delegates that they were witnessing the end of party democracy. Vrachev appealed, "***Comrades, it may be that we have only a few hours left of full democracy, so let us use it!***"

Indeed the January 1924 conference marked the decisive point of the Soviet Thermidor, the political counterrevolution which took place in 1923-24. As we wrote: "After January 1924, ***the people who ruled the USSR, the way the USSR was ruled,*** and ***the purposes for which the USSR was ruled had all changed***" ("When Was the Soviet Thermidor?", *Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 43-44, Summer 1989).

On the heels of the failed German revolution, which brought with it a considerable demoralization of the Soviet working class, the bureaucracy was able to put itself forward as the best defenders of the status quo—no more foreign adventures, let's just stick to the work of "socialist" construction right here in Russia. Some of this is implicit in the bureaucracy's actions and documents in the fall of 1923, but it wasn't explicitly programmatically codified until Stalin came out with his "justification" for the status quo with his reactionary anti-Marxist "theory" of "socialism in one country" in the autumn of 1924.

Trotsky himself only later realized the importance of the 1923 fight. It took the experience of the fights within the Russian Communist Party in the 1920s, exile and finally expulsion from the Soviet Union before he was able to see that the decisive ***political*** change had already occurred:

> "The smashing of the Left Opposition implied in the most direct and immediate sense the transfer of power from the hands of the revolutionary vanguard into the hands of the more conservative elements among the bureaucracy and the upper crust of the working class. The year 1924—that was the beginning of the Soviet Thermidor."
>
> — "The Workers' State, Thermidor and Bonapartism," 1 February 1935

1924 was the turning point, but it would take Stalin another decade and more to consolidate the full-blown apparatus of police-state terror which emerged by the time of the Moscow Trials. This evolution paralleled that of the CI: during the 1920s, first Zinoviev and later Stalin directly experimented with various coalitions with bourgeois forces. These led to the diplomatic alliance and bloc with the trade-union tops who knifed the British General Strike in 1926, and to the more direct and murderous sabotage of the Chinese Revolution of 1925-27. By 1933, Stalin's Comintern could not be awakened by what Trotsky called "the thunderbolt of Fascism," and had proved itself utterly dead as a force for revolution. By 1935 the CI had explicitly codified a program of class collaboration (the Popular Front) and played an aggressive counterrevolutionary role in the Spanish Civil War to prop up bourgeois rule. Stalin was indeed, as Trotsky described him, "the great organizer of defeats."

But the ***political*** counterrevolution represented by the bureaucracy's ascendancy did not mark the end of the economic conquests ushered in by the October Revolution. While the capitalist world was mired in the Great Depression, the Soviet Union embarked on its first Five Year Plan. With gross bureaucratic distortions, the Stalinists were forced to use the ideas of the Left Opposition and to create an entire industrial infrastructure. This was critical in enabling the USSR to defeat the German Nazi invasion of World War II. And the very existence of the military and industrial powerhouse of the Soviet Union—despite bureaucratic deformations—allowed the post-war overturns of capitalism such as occurred in China and later in Vietnam and stayed the hand of U.S. imperialism from unbridled international acts of terror and genocide.

But bureaucratic commandism could only go so far—the Soviet Union could not survive indefinitely against the inexorable pressure of the imperialist world market. Barring an extension of the world revolution—and the Stalinists did their utmost to prevent ***that***—the Soviet Union would inevitably succumb. Decades of Stalinist "leadership" had so disorganized the Soviet proletariat and sapped its revolutionary consciousness and spirit that it was incapable of offering resistance to the capitalist counterrevolution finally accomplished by U.S. imperialism and Boris Yeltsin in 1991-92.

In contrast, and urgently, in the remaining deformed workers states which emerged while the USSR existed, there is still a narrow window of time open for Trotskyist intervention, fighting to defend the remaining gains of the revolutions from China to Cuba through workers political revolution. Trotskyist parties, part of a reforged Fourth International, must be built to lead new October Revolutions to bring the workers to power all over the globe. It is for this aim and purpose that the International Communist League fights. ■

Centrist Alchemy...

(continued from page 56)

bureaucratically deformed workers states in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The various opportunist appetites of the different components find reconciliation in a common perspective of tailing Labourite/Third World nationalist forces.

Revolutionary Regroupment— The Fight for a Leninist Party

Revolutionary regroupment—the struggle to win subjectively revolutionary elements from reformist and centrist organisations to the programme and party of Leninism—is indeed vital and driven home with renewed urgency today as the question of forging a genuinely revolutionary internationalist leadership of the world's working class is starkly posed. In the aftermath of the destruction of the Soviet Union, the ruling classes are waging a ruthless offensive against the working class, ripping up any and all social programmes while fanning the flames of racist reaction to make immigrants the scapegoat for increased unemployment and misery. As they seek to increase their competitive edge against their imperialist rivals, the international bourgeoisies are bringing the world closer to obliteration in interimperialist World War III.

Across Western Europe, the working class has fought back in some of the largest and most militant battles in years; yet, for the first time since the Paris Commune, the masses of workers in struggle do not identify their immediate felt needs with the ideals of socialism or the programme of proletarian revolution. As we of the International Communist League wrote in our international "Perspectives and Tasks Memorandum" in January 1996:

> "The ICL exists today in a new period in world history, one conditioned by the colossal defeats for the proletariat with capitalist counterrevolution in the former Soviet Union and across East Europe, and the potential for similar defeats looming in Cuba, China, Vietnam and North Korea. As Trotskyist internationalists we fight for the unconditional defense of these deformed workers states against capitalist counterrevolution. Lacking historical precedents as a guide, Marxist programmatic clarity is essential as a compass. As revolutionary Trotskyists ***we are, still, the party of the Russian Revolution.*** This defines not only or mainly our unique Soviet defensism, which today has few points of application, but charts our fight for genuine communism today: to pursue the class struggle to workers' victory with their power implanted in workers councils across the world—the necessary condition to begin the elimination of the economic exploitation and social oppression within the human species and the transition to a stateless, socialist society.... Struggle with contending parties and currents within the class is essential for the ascendancy of a clear, defined and organized revolutionary vanguard party."

Since our inception we have understood that revolutionary regroupment is a crucial element to forging a Leninist international party, requiring both patient and intransigent polemical struggle and work such as united-front actions in which the political viewpoints and strategies of different organisations are tested in action. The purpose of such struggle is to split subjectively revolutionary elements from reformist and centrist organisations and lay the basis for fusion into a common, principled organisation based on the programme of revolutionary Marxism.

This was the method of the Communist International of Lenin and Trotsky, which established "21 Conditions" for admission, based on sharp programmatic points designed to draw a clear distinction between revolutionaries and centrists or reformists. This was carried forward by Trotsky in his struggle to found and build the Fourth International through merciless battle against the Stalinists, the social democrats, and also against centrist pretenders to revolutionary politics, whom he described as "revolutionary in words, reformist in deeds."

Our international tendency was built through a process of revolutionary regroupment, largely with cadre from the United Secretariat in the 1970s. The programmatic basis for regroupment with such leftward-moving elements was outlined in the following draft declaration written by these former USec cadre in the late 1970s:

- "No political or electoral support to popular fronts; for conditional opposition to workers parties in open or implicit class-collaborationist coalitions;
- Uphold the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution; for proletarian leadership of the national/social struggle;
- For military support to petty-bourgeois nationalist forces fighting imperialism, but absolutely no political support to such forces; for Trotskyist parties in every country;
- For unconditional defense of all the deformed/degenerated workers states against imperialism; for political revolution against the bureaucracies; no political support to competing Stalinist cliques and factions;
- Against violence within the workers movement;
- For communist fractions in the unions, based on the Transitional Program;
- For the communist tactic of the united front from above; for the tactic of regroupment to unite subjective revolutionists in the vanguard party; for intransigent exposure of centrism;
- Rejection of the claims of ostensibly Trotskyist Internationals to speak for the Fourth International, destroyed by Pabloism in 1951-1953;
- For the reforging of a democratic-centralist Fourth International which will stop at nothing short of the dictatorship of the proletariat."

— *Spartacist* (English edition) No. 27-28, Winter 1979-80

This declaration was printed in the document for the first international conference of our tendency which was held in 1979, on the eve of the full-fledged outbreak of imperialist anti-Soviet Cold War II. As we noted there: "The Trotskyist position of unconditional defense of the gains of the October Revolution will have the same cutting edge as our opposition to the popular front in West Europe and Chile had in a previous period."

We fought intransigently for the defence of the Soviet Union and the other deformed workers states against imperialist attack and internal counterrevolution. As Trotskyists, we understood that the fight for workers to seize power from the anti-revolutionary Stalinist usurpers of the Russian Revolution was the only real defence of the gains of the revolution as part of a struggle for world socialist revolution. Meanwhile, every variety of self-described Leninist groups and "internationals," including the LTT conference's "regroupers," fought neither for defence of the deformed workers states nor for political revolution. Rather they took up the cause of imperialist-inspired counterrevolutionary forces.

Of course, today there are few leftists around who don't bewail the consequences of the counterrevolutions they helped foment together with the pro-imperialist social democrats and their bourgeois masters. Capitalist counterrevolution has led to the drastic impoverishment of the Soviet/Eastern European masses and brutal "ethnic cleansing." This comes alongside the imperialist "New World Order" with its reactionary triumphalism and brutal anti-working-class attacks and the desperate situation of the "Third World" in a

DPA

Afghanistan: U.S.-backed fundamentalist reactionaries shot schoolteachers for the "crime" of teaching young girls to read. ICL hailed Red Army intervention which defended modernizing left-nationalist regime and unveiled women against *mujahedin* terror.

"unipolar" post-Soviet world. In an issue of its theoretical journal *In Defence of Marxism* (No. 3, June 1995) titled "The Marxist Theory of the State and the Collapse of Stalinism," the LTT writes:

> "The collapse of Stalinism throughout eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union between 1989-91 is the most important development in world politics in the past half century. It has resulted in a major shift in the international balance of power, and unleashed in its wake wars, economic crisis and upheaval throughout the region."

Easy to say now. But let's look at where the LTT, the LCMRCI and their "regroupment" partners stood at every crucial juncture when the defence of the Soviet Union was urgently posed.

Afghanistan— The Opening Shots of Cold War II

In December 1979, the Soviet Army intervened in Afghanistan in support of the modernising nationalist PDPA regime against Islamic reactionaries and to protect the Soviet Union's crucial southern flank against imperialist incursion. This signalled the opening shots of imperialist Cold War II. In the biggest CIA operation in history, over US$2 billion of equipment was supplied to the Afghan *mujahedin*, who were also armed with munitions from Thatcher's Britain. While recognising that the Kremlin bureaucracy had only reluctantly intervened in order to stabilise a client state, we nonetheless also understood that it was only the Soviet military intervention which offered the possibility of opening the road to emancipation for the hideously oppressed people of Afghanistan, particularly women. The International Communist League (then international Spartacist tendency) declared: "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan! Extend Social Gains of the October Revolution to Afghan Peoples!"

The forebears of the LTT were cadre in Gerry Healy's Workers Revolutionary Party which screamed bloody murder over the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. After emerging from the implosion of Healy's outfit in the mid-1980s and forming the Workers International League (WIL), they continued to denounce the Soviet Army's presence in Afghanistan. Even while admitting the potential for a social transformation opened up by the Red Army intervention, the WIL nonetheless denounced it as "completely inadmissable [sic] even if it is intended as a means of extending nationalised property relations" (*Workers News* No. 8, April 1988)!

The LCMRCI continues to uphold the position taken by Workers Power in response to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan as a "big revolutionary step forward." While Workers Power finally recognised the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers state, as opposed to "state capitalist," its position on Afghanistan was an extreme example of centrist shilly-shallying. On the one hand, they declared, "We oppose the invasion of Afghanistan." On the other hand, they declared it would be "tactically wrong for revolutionaries...to demand the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops." In other words, for Workers Power Soviet defencism was reduced to a "tactical" question.

In 1989 the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan by Gorbachev's Kremlin regime, with the futile aim of trying to appease imperialism, was the ***direct*** precursor to the counterrevolutions that engulfed Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union itself. Through the Partisan Defense Committee, we offered to organise international brigades to help fight the CIA-backed *mujahedin* cutthroats in the city of Jalalabad. This proposal was aimed not only at providing concrete military assistance. It was also premised on the understanding that such an international brigade could further the struggle for political revolution in the Soviet Union, against the traitorous Stalinist bureaucrats, among soldiers and officers who had believed in the internationalist implications of their involvement in Afghanistan.

Solidarność Counterrevolution in Poland

Following Afghanistan, the rallying cry of the imperialist drive to overturn the gains of the October Revolution was "Solidarity with Solidarność!" When Solidarność emerged out of a mass strike movement of the Polish working class in August 1980, we noted that insofar as the strikes enhanced the workers' capacity to struggle for proletarian political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy—which had mortgaged the economy to the IMF bankers and conciliated the Catholic church and small-holding peasantry while lording it over the working class—revolutionaries could support it. At the same time we warned that "only a blind man could fail to see the gross influence of the Catholic church and pro-Western sentiments among the striking workers" ("Fight Clerical Reaction! For Proletarian Political Revolution! Polish Workers Move," *Spartacist Britain* No. 25, September 1980).

The forces of clerical reaction and capitalist restoration emerged triumphant at Solidarność' first national conference in September 1981. Recognising that this "union" was nothing other than an agency for the Vatican, the CIA and the IMF, when Solidarność made a bid for power in December 1981, we called to "Stop Solidarność Counterrevolution!" While standing militarily with the government of General Jaruzelski in defence of the Polish deformed workers state against capitalist counterrevolution, our call to stop Solidarność was integrally linked to the need to forge an internationalist Trotskyist party in Poland that could lead a proletarian political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy. In contrast, all throughout Europe, most "leftists" were wild for Solidarność as the means of diving into the Cold War Social Democracy—the SPD in Germany, Mitterrand's Socialist Party, the British Labour Party and so on.

Der Spiegel

Poland, 1980: Workers on their knees join with Lech Walesa in prayer in Gdansk. Social-democratic "leftists" and fake Trotskyists hailed Walesa's Solidarność, company union for imperialism and the Vatican.

The LCMRCI continues to uphold the line taken by Workers Power at the time, which admitted that all the dominant tendencies in Solidarność were counterrevolutionary but supported it anyway! The leaders of the LTT were then ensconced in Healy's WRP, which was so fulsome in its support for Solidarność that it supplied ammunition to Thatcher's drive to destroy the British miners union. On the eve of the miners strike the Healyites "leaked" a letter by Arthur Scargill which denounced Solidarność as "anti-socialist" to the Fleet Street press who, together with the Cold War TUC tops, used it for an anti-Communist crusade aimed at isolating the miners union.

After the victory of capitalist counterrevolution in Poland, the WIL itself enthused: "The unprecedented scale of the struggle of the Polish working class [in 1981] showed the writing on the wall for international Stalinism" (*Workers News* No. 30, April 1991). Not an entirely incorrect statement. Except it was not the forces of the working class that prevailed but rather the forces of imperialism in the final unravelling of the former Stalinist-ruled countries of Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union.

Germany 1989: The Fight Against Capitalist *Anschluss*

With the collapse of the Honecker regime in East Germany and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the DDR was engulfed in a developing political revolution. The impulses of the East German masses were directed not towards capitalist restoration but rather to building what they considered to be a decent socialist society on the foundations of the DDR's nationalised economy. This produced an exceptionally open situation for Trotskyist intervention. The ICL undertook the biggest sustained mobilisation in the history of our tendency, drawing upon the personnel and resources of all sections.

In our propaganda, which was circulated in tens of thousands of daily newssheets, we pressed the urgent need to forge a Leninist-egalitarian party to establish a government of workers councils (soviets) in the DDR as a springboard to a unified German ***workers*** state based on a perspective of a Socialist United States of Europe. Although shaped by the disproportion between our small forces and those of the Stalinist SED, there was in fact a contest between the ICL programme of political revolution and the Stalinist programme of capitulation and counterrevolution.

Our political impact was shown when 250,000 turned out for the 3 January 1990 united-front demonstration initiated by the Spartakist Workers Party of Germany in East Berlin's Treptow Park to protest the fascist desecration of a memorial to Red Army soldiers who died liberating Germany from the Nazis. The SED belatedly joined in building for this protest out of fear of completely losing its bureaucratic hold over the working class, placing itself at the head of the demonstration. This united front heightened the political fight between the programme of revolutionary Trotskyism and Stalinism. For the first time since Trotsky was driven out of the Soviet Union, Trotskyists spoke to a massive crowd in a deformed workers state.

From the platform, Spartakist spokesmen denounced the forces of capitalist counterrevolution, condemned the "SED party dictatorship" and called for "workers and soldiers soviets to power" through socialist revolution in West Germany combined with proletarian political revolution in the DDR. The spectre of organised working-class resistance to capitalist reunification manifested at Treptow alarmed the West German imperialists and their Social Democratic front men, who turned up the heat in their campaign to stampede the DDR into reunification. The elections were moved up two months while the DDR was flooded with Deutschmarks. The SED disavowed the Treptow demonstration and forswore the Spartakists for denouncing the SPD as the "Trojan horse" of imperialist counterrevolution.

The Stalinists in the Kremlin and the DDR handed over the East German deformed workers state to imperialism. Two months later, the parties of West German imperialism swept the March 1990 East German elections and the DDR was swallowed up in a reunified capitalist Fourth Reich. In those elections, the Spartakist Workers Party was the only organisation to run on a programme of intransigent opposition to capitalist *Anschluss*.

The cadre from Workers Power's League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) who went on to form LCMRCI subsequently criticised the LRCI's call for "a constituent assembly for the two Germanys in 1989," noting that this would subordinate the East German deformed workers state to "the bourgeois forces of another capitalist country and that the East German Degenerated Workers State could be more easily destroyed by German imperialism." Nonetheless, defence of the former deformed workers state was evidently not a question of principle for those who went on to form LCMRCI, as they remained in Workers

Power's "international" for some years.

Moreover, even to this day the LCMRCI groups have never disputed LRCI's 1989 call for the withdrawal of the Red Army from the former DDR. This call was a direct echo of NATO imperialism's demands. And when Gorbachev acceded to the NATO powers and agreed to withdraw troops, it was a decisive factor in the eventual counterrevolutionary reunification. Although on the surface sounding somewhat more orthodox than Workers Power over the events in East Germany, the LTT/WIL's "Draft Programme of Action" for the DDR also called for Soviet troops out. Otherwise, the clarion call of this programme was the slogan, "Neither capitalism nor Stalinism, but a democratically planned socialist economy" (*Workers News* No. 24, May 1990).

If this sounds like an echo of the Cliffites' slogan, "Neither Washington nor Moscow but International Socialism," it is for the simple reason that it is derived from the same source, an imbibing of the "virtues" of "democratic imperialism" dressed up as "the fight for socialism." As Trotsky noted in a footnote to a polemic against the POUM in his writings on the Spanish Revolution, the invocation of "democracy" is the social-democratic alibi for support to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, as against the fight for workers democracy to be realised in the revolutionary state power of the proletariat:

> "Socialism cannot be subordinated to democracy. Socialism (or communism) is enough for us. 'Democracy' has nothing to do with it. Since then, 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."
>
> — "Tasks of the Fourth International in Spain," 12 April 1936

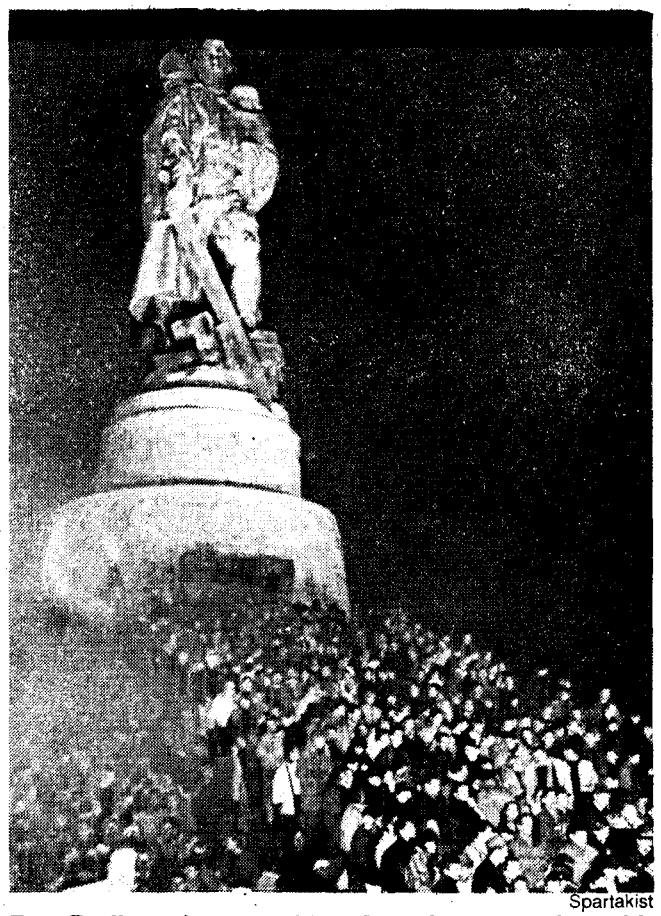
When it came to the final destruction of the gains of the October Revolution, the side of the LTT, Workers Power and their sometimes objecting descendants was on the barricades of Yeltsin's counterrevolution in the name of "democracy."

On the Barricades of Yeltsin's Counterrevolution

The pivotal point in the destruction of the gains of the degenerated Soviet workers state was Yeltsin's successful August 1991 countercoup against the pathetic coup plotters' "State Emergency Committee" (made up of Gorbachev's chief lieutenants). Insofar as the Committee had a programme, it was for "perestroika without glasnost," i.e., bureaucratically controlled restoration of capitalism. They made no attempt to suppress Yeltsin and the reactionary scum (fascists, black marketeers, yuppies) who had mobilised on his barricades, for fear of offending the Western imperialist powers.

The ICL argued that what was necessary was a call on workers to clean out the counterrevolutionary rabble on Yeltsin's barricades. Such an independent mobilisation of the workers could have been the spark for a proletarian political revolution, to oust the crumbling bureaucracy, through a showdown with the imperialist-backed forces of capitalist restoration. At the time we noted:

> "The 'gang of eight' was incapable of sweeping away Yeltsin in its pathetic excuse for a putsch because, as we wrote, it was a 'perestroika coup.' But both imperialism and the forces of internal counterrevolution were aligned on Yeltsin's side. The coup plotters were not only irresolute but didn't want to unleash the forces that could have defeated the more extreme counterrevolutionaries, for that could have led to a civil war if the Yeltsinites really fought back. And in an armed struggle pitting outright restorationists against recalcitrant elements of the bureaucracy, defense of the collectivized economy would have been placed on the agenda whatever the Stalinists' intentions."
>
> — *Workers Vanguard* No. 535, 27 September 1991



Spartakist

East Berlin, 3 January 1990: Mass demonstration initiated by German Spartakists against fascist desecration of war memorial to Soviet Army which smashed Hitler's Nazis in World War II.

The WIL/LTT today openly acknowledge that Yeltsin's countercoup was the key event in the destruction of the Soviet Union, deriding the ICL because we did not immediately declare at the time that the Soviet Union had ceased to be a degenerated workers state. While recognising that the state power had been decisively fractured by the August events, we looked to spark working-class action in defence of collectivised property. The ICL distributed tens of thousands of copies of our leaflet, "Soviet Workers: Defeat Yeltsin-Bush Counterrevolution!" It was only when it became clear that the working class, which had been atomised and its consciousness thrown back by decades of Stalinist bureaucratic misrule, was not going to move against Yeltsin that we recognised that the Soviet workers state had been definitively destroyed.

And what was the position of the WIL/LTT, which now prides itself on recognising that the victory of Yeltsin spelled the end of the Soviet degenerated workers state, at the time of Yeltsin's countercoup? While taking out Workers Power for their call for a "united front" with Yeltsin (and effectively demolishing WP's inane denial that capitalism has been restored) the LTT nonetheless declared that "those supporters of the LRCI and the WRP/*Workers Press* who appeared at the barricades were entirely correct to do so" (*Workers News* No. 46, August 1993). Small wonder: at

Radial Press

Refugees amidst rubble of Vukovar, Yugoslavia. Capitalist restorationists used nationalism as battering ram to destroy East European deformed workers states, unleashed murderous "ethnic cleansing."

bottom the LTT had exactly the same position as Workers Power, albeit dressed in somewhat different verbiage.

In *In Defence of Marxism* (No. 3, June 1995) they write:

> "...as at August 19, 1991 the most important task was to defend the democratic rights of the working class and the minority nations against the immediate threat of the coup, by mobilising for a general strike, and, if conditions had ripened, by organising an armed uprising....
>
> "The success of such a policy presupposed a willingness to fight in a military bloc alongside Yeltsin and his supporters. Similar tactics were applicable towards the nationalists in the non-Russian republics, most of whom sat out the coup in cowardly neutrality."

In the name of "democratic rights" the LTT not only proposed "a temporary bloc with the Yeltsinites"—i.e., the forces that were the spearhead of capitalist restoration—but denounced the various reactionary nationalist regimes (many of which, like in the Baltics, were filled with fascists), for not actively participating!

As for the LCMRCI group, when they left Workers Power's international in 1995 they excoriated the LRCI's call "for a 'united front' with Yeltsin without conditions" as tantamount to a "united front" with imperialism. True enough. But this didn't stop the LCMRCI group in New Zealand from proposing the possibility of a "military bloc" with Yeltsin, offering that if Yeltsin "broke with the bourgeoisie," revolutionaries would have demanded that he call for a general strike. In other words, their "opposition" to the LRCI's line of unconditional support to Yeltsin's counterrevolution was a call for a "united front" with Yeltsin...under certain conditions.

Nonetheless, the LCMRCI still has problems in squaring their condemnation of Workers Power with their fusion with the LTT, which had a virtually identical position. At a 15 December London public meeting on "regroupment," a leader of the LCMRCI tried to discover a "class line" between WIL and Workers Power's attitude to Yeltsin. To this end, he cited an LTT statement issued ***after*** Yeltsin took power, proclaiming that "while a military bloc with Yeltsin and his supporters would have been appropriate had the August Coup developed into a civil war, there could have been no united front with a restorationist government bent on the destruction of the workers' state" (*In Defence of Marxism* No. 4, May 1996). Only a centrist manoeuverer, looking for a home in a bigger swamp, could find a principled difference in the LTT's "opposition" to a united front with a restorationist government when it was quite prepared to line up with Yeltsin in creating just such a government.

"Workers Aid to Bosnia"

Capitalist counterrevolution and the resulting destruction of the Yugoslav bureaucratically deformed workers state has brought the Balkan peoples all-sided communalist massacres, fuelled by contending imperialist rivalries and intervention. As proletarian internationalists, we have opposed all of the competing nationalist forces in the wars that have raged in the former Yugoslavia, while militarily defending the Bosnian Serbs against imperialist attacks. We have stood against all forms of imperialist intervention, including under the UN flag, and called for an end to the economic embargo of Serbia.

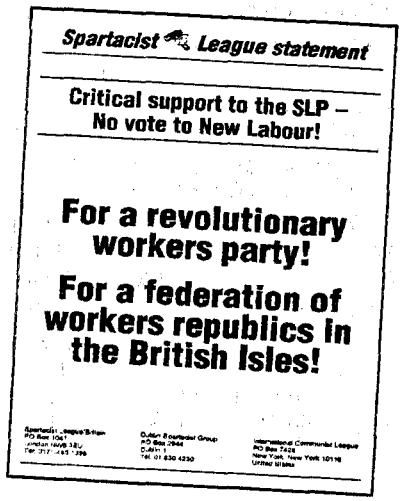
Most of the centrist and reformist left lined up behind one communalist force or another and, at least tacitly, behind imperialist intervention. Workers Power, the United Secretariat and the WIL/LTT all boosted "Workers Aid to Bosnia," which was a stalking-horse for NATO/UN intervention on the Bosnian Muslim side. Their repeated call to "lift the arms embargo of Bosnia" was simply a thinly veiled call for the imperialists to arm the Bosnian Muslim forces. The LCMRCI split from Workers Power as a purported "left opposition" after the latter flagrantly refused to call for defence of the Bosnian Serbs against NATO bombing in the summer of 1995. Denouncing their former organisation's support to the Bosnian Muslims in the Balkan conflagration, the LCMRCI wrote that "all sides were reactionary" and called for "defeatism on both sides and the transformation of an inter-ethnic slaughter into a class war" (*Workers News* No. 56, March-April 1996). But now this is put to one side, as the LCMRCI prepares to join forces with the LTT, which called for support to the Bosnian Muslims (and earlier Croatia) in the nationalist fratricide.

Bosnia is not a nation and there is not a Bosnian "people." As part of the former Yugoslavia, prior to the communalist slaughter of recent years, the population of Bosnia consisted of a mix of Slavic Muslims, Croats and Serbs living together within the same territory. In such situations, there can be no "democratic solution" within the confines of capitalism where "self-determination" of one people takes place through denying that right to another, through bloody "ethnic cleansing." The only just solution to the Balkan crisis lies in socialist revolution to sweep away all the reactionary regimes and establish a socialist federation of the Balkans. Above all this task requires the building of revolutionary Trotskyist parties, bound together by the principles of proletarian internationalism.

Tailing Labourism "Old" and "New"

A strategic task for genuine revolutionaries is to break the stranglehold of Labourism on the working class. For much of the so-called "far left" in Britain, however, the very idea of breaking from Labour is unthinkable. This has been brought home in their reactions to the formation of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party (SLP). WIL is cravenly loyal to Labour, and hostile to Scargill's break from the Labour Party. They admit that New Labour's election material is a "bosses' charter," and that "Labour's pro-imperialism is stronger than ever" (*Workers News* No. 58, October-November 1996) but advocate that workers must vote for it, and therefore against the SLP, come hell or high water. Others like the International "Bolshevik" Tendency (IBT) have simply liquidated

Spartacist Britain



British miners strike of 1984-85 was crucial class confrontation. Spartacist League/Britain called for expanding strike; Labour Party/TUC tops left miners to fight alone. In May 1997 general election, SL/B gave critical support to SLP left split from Blair's "New Labour." SL/B election statement puts forward program for socialist revolution.

into the SLP (or partly liquidated as in the case of the Communist Party of Great Britain [CPGB]).

The formation of the SLP as a split from the Labour Party represents a challenge to the hegemony of the Labour Party over the workers movement. As such it provides a potential opening for a Marxist party to intervene and to demonstrate the necessity for an authentic Leninist party by exacerbating the contradictions between the aspirations and interests of the working-class base of the Labour Party and its pro-capitalist leaders. That is the basis upon which the Spartacist League/Britain has sought to intervene into the developments in and around the SLP.

While maintaining our own political independence, SL/B comrades have actively campaigned for SLP candidates in Hemsworth and Barnsley East, noting that their platforms addressed felt needs of working people, and that they stood in opposition to Tony Blair's "New" Labour Party. Together with going door-to-door with SLP members and distributing their election materials, we also intervened in SLP election meetings where we distributed our own leaflet calling for critical support to the SLP candidates and sold our newspaper *Workers Hammer*. While the IBT, the CPGB and others are busily engaged in internecine manoeuvering for internal influence in the SLP, we made clear our fundamental disagreement with the political programme of the SLP which is one of "Old" Labour reformism, tacitly accepting the framework of British imperialism and its parliamentary institutions. We counterpose the need for a Leninist party committed to the revolutionary overthrow of British imperialism and the establishment of a federation of workers republics in the British Isles.

As for the WIL, they have a history of attacking Scargill from the right. Thus they published a Stalinophobic denunciation of Scargill's SLP by Al Richardson, which rails that the SLP "appears to be mesmerised by Stalinism" and refers to ex-Communist Party members now in the SLP as "the fag ends of the most servile defenders of the old Russian bureaucracy" (*Workers News* No. 57, May-June 1996). Here is a measure of the commitment to "democratic socialism" (otherwise known as social-democratic betrayal) of the Labourite left in Britain. Harsh words for Stalinism—which even the imperialists proclaim is dead—from those who amnesty that servile instrument of British imperialism, the Labour Party. Nothing new here either for the WIL, which has never repudiated their past role as servants of Gerry Healy and his vicious anti-Communist attacks on the miners union leader.

As for the Committee for Revolutionary Regroupment (CRR), they split from the British USec rejecting the latter's proposed fusion with Militant. As cheerleaders for Green nationalism, the CRR couldn't stomach Militant's fawning over notorious Ulster Loyalist paramilitary figures such as Billy Hutchinson. Yet the CRR retains the USec's commitment to support for and "entry" work in Blair's Labour Party, while turning a blind eye to Blair's enthusiasm for Loyalist leaders like David Trimble, who last year stood at the head of some of the largest Loyalist mobilisations against Catholics which have been seen for years in Northern Ireland.

In this centrist lash-up, WIL and the CRR are wedded to Blair, yet the LCMRCI calls for a vote to the SLP, having declared that "The creation of the SLP represents the most important left wing split from Labour in more than sixty years" (*Internationalist Bulletin* No. 1, August 1996). Nonetheless, the LCMRCI still calls for a vote to Tony Blair's Labour Party in constituencies where the SLP is not standing.

The Leninist Tactic of the United Front v. the "Anti-Imperialist United Front"

Our intervention into and concrete work around the SLP candidacies in Hemsworth and Barnsley East were an application of the tactic of critical support proposed by Lenin in 1920 as a means for a small communist vanguard to "get a hearing" from the masses. Critical support is an application of the tactic of the united front: by proposing urgent united *action* around concrete issues in defence of the working class, the young Communist parties sought to win the mass of workers who retained allegiance to the reformist social-democratic parties, proving in struggle the superiority of the communist programme and leadership. Through the clash of opinion in open political debate and common action the consciousness of the working class is raised and the workers can be broken from their reformist misleaders and their centrist tails. The ICL bases itself on this Leninist tradition, summed up in the slogan "march separately, strike together," *because* our aim is to fight for proletarian state power.

In his 1934 piece on "Centrism and the Fourth International" Leon Trotsky described how a "centrist swears readily by the policy of the united front, emptying it of its

revolutionary content and transforming it from a tactical method into a supreme principle." These words aptly describe the LTT, whose lengthy tomes about the "united front" serve as a justification for supporting class-collaborationist alliances.

Independence of the working class from their exploiters is ***the*** fundamental principle of revolutionary Marxism. Yet the LTT not only calls for electoral support to workers parties in popular-front coalitions with the parties of the bourgeoisie but even gives electoral support to bourgeois-nationalist parties. In the 1994 elections in South Africa, WIL called for a vote to the nationalist popular-front "tripartite alliance" of the ANC, Communist Party and COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions). Yet, even at the time they openly admitted that "the ANC has ceased to be a national liberation movement, and has become an increasingly conservative bourgeois nationalist party, ready to give white-dominated South African capitalism a black political face" (*Workers News* No. 50, May-June 1994).

This is characteristic of centrists. They are quite capable of a perfectly correct "analysis" from which they draw absolutely no practical revolutionary conclusions. On the contrary they act, in practice, in a manner indistinguishable from organisations to their right. As Trotsky noted, "Centrists talk a lot about the 'masses,' and always end up orienting themselves towards the reformist apparatus." The LTT uses this centrist rationale for their capitulation to anti-proletarian forces. Thus, their South African group, Comrades for a Workers Government (CWG), tries to justify supporting the ANC with the argument that it "has a mass proletarian following."

In the South African elections we called for a vote to the Workers List Party (WLP). While noting that the WLP's programme did not go beyond the bounds of left reformism, we wrote:

> "The question of political organisation of the proletariat, independent from and in opposition to the nationalist ANC, is a key strategic question for South Africa today. In this regard, the WLP does draw a crude class line and a vote for it will be seen in South Africa as a vote for a workers party rather than the ANC."
>
> — "ANC/DeKlerk Neo-Apartheid Regime: Enemy of Black Freedom," *Workers Hammer* No. 141, May/June 1994

For its part, the LTT/WIL has also supported Gennady Zyuganov's Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) in the 1995 elections. In spite of its name, Zyuganov's party is a thoroughly bourgeois party committed primarily to fostering Great Russian chauvinism and the revival of Russian imperialism. Evidently the LTT/WIL's previous concern for the "democratic rights" of minority nations in the former Soviet Union vanished in the aftermath of the counterrevolution.

The Latin American component of the LCMRCI tries to invent a supposedly "anti-imperialist" wing of the bourgeoisie in underdeveloped countries in order to politically capitulate to it. They call this the "anti-imperialist united front." For the LCMRCI, along with all Latin American centrist organisations, this is a convenient cover for their position that the "main enemy" is ***not*** at home. This centrist methodology, which is also shared by WP, flatly contradicts Trotsky's perspective of permanent revolution. Trotsky insisted that the bourgeoisie in backward countries is so dependent on imperialism that even the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution can only be accomplished through a proletarian seizure of power, and its international extension.

Leon Trotsky, writing in "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay" (1940), described the political oscillations of the neo-colonial ruling classes:

> "Inasmuch as foreign capital does not import workers but proletarianizes the native population, the national proletariat soon begins playing the most important role in the life of the country. In these conditions the national government, to the extent that it tries to show resistance to foreign capital, is compelled to a greater or lesser degree to lean on the proletariat. On the other hand, the governments of those backward countries which consider it inescapable or more profitable for themselves to march shoulder to shoulder with foreign capital, destroy the labor organizations and institute a more or less totalitarian regime. Thus, the feebleness of the national bourgeoisie, the absence of traditions of municipal self-government, the pressure of foreign capitalism, and the relatively rapid growth of the proletariat, cut the ground out from under any kind of stable democratic regime."

When local groups of exploiters, disgruntled with their share of booty from the imperialists, take on nationalist and/or religious coloration and push an ersatz "anti-imperialism," the revolutionary proletarian party must maintain the ***strategic*** independence of the working class in the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat, even while engaging in episodic tactical military blocs with sections of the colonial exploiters, ***in order to better compete with them for leadership of the oppressed masses***. This is the central task of the program of permanent revolution. The cost of the subordination of proletarian forces to the colonial bourgeoisies in an "anti-imperialist united front" is bloody defeat for the workers when the colonial exploiters, fearing a challenge to their class rule, move in league with the imperialists to crush the proletariat. As Chiang Kai-shek's bloody suppression of the 1925-27 Chinese Revolution showed, the second stage of "two-stage" revolution is mass murder of the communists!

The "21 Conditions" for entry into the Communist International (CI), adopted at the Second Congress of the CI, included the condition that: "Every party that wishes to belong to the Communist International has the obligation of exposing the dodges of its 'own' imperialists in the colonies, of supporting every liberation movement in the colonies not only in words but in deeds." At the same CI Congress, in his "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions," Lenin also clearly spelled out the tasks of the Communist Parties in relation to the colonial countries, calling for:

> "...a determined struggle against attempts to give a communist colouring to bourgeois-democratic liberation trends in the backward countries; the Communist International should support bourgeois-democratic national movements in colonial and backward countries only on condition that, in these countries, the elements of future proletarian parties, which will be communist not only in name, are brought together and trained to understand their special task, i.e., those of the struggle against the bourgeois-democratic movements within their own nations."

The slogan of the "anti-imperialist united front" issued out of a disoriented discussion at the Fourth Congress of the CI. It was seized on and perverted by Stalin to justify his policy of political liquidation of the Chinese Communist Party into the bourgeois-nationalist Guomindang of Chiang Kai-shek, which led to the massacre of tens of thousands of Communists and militant workers in Shanghai in 1927.

A more recent application of the "anti-imperialist united front" was the support given by the left, including the forebears of the LCMRCI, the LTT and the CRR, to the Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic revolution in Iran in 1978-79. The bloody outcome of this "movement" has long been completely apparent: the jailing and execution of countless numbers of leftists, the reimposition of the veil and brutal persecution of women, workers and national minorities. Yet, at the time, we were unique in demanding: "Down With the Shah! Down With the Mullahs! For Workers Revolution in Iran!"

While their support for Khomeini is something rarely mentioned today, Workers Power and the LCMRCI continue to boast of their call for military support for General Galtieri's Argentina in the Falklands/Malvinas war. Even after splitting with Workers Power, the LCMRCI approvingly noted that in 1981 Workers Power "had the courage to agitate for the victory of Argentina in the war that was fought by its 'own' British imperialism." The Spartacist League/Britain fought for revolutionary defeatism on both sides. Raising the call "Sink Thatcher! Sink the Junta!" we argued that the best possible outcome would be if the military machines of both governments were ground up.

As we noted in our pamphlet "Workers Power's Phoney International Splinters Over Balkans Betrayal" (November 1995):

> "Argentina was not a semi-colony nor was this a war against imperialist aggrandisement. Britain went to war with the Argentine bourgeoisie over a desolate piece of land hundreds of miles from the Argentine mainland, which had had no Argentine population for 150 years. As for the oil fields around the Malvinas, the Argentine and British governments are cheerfully divvying up the potential proceeds in friendly New York confabs.
>
> "Workers Power's line of military support for General Galtieri's Argentina may not have had fatal consequences in Britain, but in Argentina and elsewhere in Latin America it was a criminal betrayal which bolstered national chauvinism against proletarian class struggle."

Of course, there can be specific united-front actions of an anti-imperialist character between proletarian revolutionaries and bourgeois or petty-bourgeois nationalist forces. For example, revolutionists supported Nasser's Egypt when it attempted to take the Suez Canal out of imperialist hands in 1956. Our international tendency, particularly our American section, campaigned to raise money for the embattled petty-bourgeois nationalist Sandinista government in Nicaragua in the 1980s against the U.S.-backed *contra* war. Our slogan was "Defend, Complete, Extend the Nicaraguan Revolution!" But this is a far cry from the LCMRCI's idea of an "anti-imperialist united front" which means ***political*** support for "Third World" nationalist regimes.

A Touching Faith in the Capitalist State

The LCMRCI's support for an "anti-imperialist united front" is complemented by their revisionist conception of the capitalist state. Their documents raise the call for "penetration of the army and the military police, creating communist cells and committees of soldiers and military policemen." Ludicrously implying that the savagely brutal ***military police*** in Bolivia can be won to the side of the working class, the LCMRCI's line is anti-Marxist and potentially suicidal. It purposefully obscures the difference between ***soldiers*** in a conscript army, who are used as cannon fodder in the capitalist bosses' wars and the ***police*** (including military) who voluntarily hire themselves out as the capitalists' armed thugs.

Under conditions of great social struggle and revolutionary ferment, it becomes possible and indeed vitally necessary to split the army along class lines, and to organise workers and soldiers councils. But it is an elementary point of Marxism that the racist, strikebreaking cops are ***deadly enemies*** of the workers movement, which must be swept away completely in the course of workers revolution.

But if the LCMRCI does at least maintain a posture about "arming the masses," Gerry Downing's CRR hysterically denounces us for upholding the Chartist slogan "for the right of the citizens to bear arms!" Yet, with true Labour-cretinism, Downing fulminates about the "consequences of exporting the US gun-culture along with its horrific murder rate" (*Workers Republic* No. 2, December 1996). This "little England" parochialism is a racist echo of the American bourgeoisie who "abhor" the "gun culture" in the black ghettos of the U.S. If Downing would really like to know what it is like to be unarmed in American society, perhaps he could try interviewing Rodney King, who was beaten to within an inch of his life by the highly armed criminals of the Los Angeles Police Department. On "British soil," so sacred to the Labourite left, what Downing's position boils down to is a recognition of the "right" of Her Majesty's state to have an absolute monopoly over weapons. Here is revealed the anti-revolutionary yellow belly of the Labourite left.

The Fight for a Leninist Vanguard Party

We fight to complete the task begun by Lenin and Trotsky when they led the working class to victory in Russia in 1917—the fight for new October Revolutions across the globe. The essence of Trotskyism is the fight for a revolutionary leadership to lead the proletariat to power internationally. As Trotsky wrote in the founding document of the Fourth International: "The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership."

Unlike our centrist and reformist opponents, who wallow in their opportunism while denying any internal problems, we strive to be honest and straightforward in assessing our tasks and the difficulties we face. As we wrote in our international "Perspectives and Tasks Memorandum" last year: "Failure to recognize the period we are in and the necessary relationship of our small revolutionary vanguard to the proletariat, and the absence of the Soviet Union as an active and defining factor in politics, have led to disorientation and appetite to follow alien political programs and forces."

An early manifestation within our organisation was the 1994 minority faction of Y. Rad and Marie Hayes in our Canadian section. Frantically seeking to discover forces other than the proletariat to lead "the struggle," they lauded various ex-Stalinist formations, like the fascist-infested Russian "red-brown coalition"; looked to the Algerian military regime to combat Islamic fundamentalism and called for support to the bourgeois-nationalist African National Congress in the 1994 South African elections. Their penchant for unsavoury nationalist formations rapidly led them out of our international after a sharply fought political struggle. Today, Rad and Hayes constitute the Canadian section of the LTT.

In their factional struggle inside our organisation, Rad and Hayes raved on about the supposed "Stalinophobia" of the ICL, charging that we had "joined the anti-communist crusade." After quitting the ICL, and "regrouping" with the LTT, their line was the exact opposite. In an article announcing their adherence to the LTT, they denounced us for "Stalinophilia" while they retrospectively embraced the cause of anti-Communist forces like Solidarność. But nowhere was Rad/Hayes' 180-degree line shift more stunning than over Yugoslavia. From a position of virtual unconditional support to the Serbs in the bloody nationalist fratricide in Yugoslavia, they were now calling for "struggle in defence of the Muslims" against the Serbs. Such was evidently the price of admission to WIL's international.

At the same time, the fact that Rad/Hayes were capable of instantly flipping over to positions ***diametrically counterposed*** to those which led them to form a faction within our organisation didn't bother the LTT speaks volumes about

their idea of "regroupment." Far from the struggle for Leninist programmatic clarity needed to forge a genuinely democratic-centralist revolutionary international, the LTT's "regroupment" process seems to have more in common with handing out overseas "Wimpy's" franchises.

For all of the "regroupers," the idea that internal political struggle is a necessary component in the fight to preserve the programme and the purpose of the revolutionary vanguard is completely foreign. In an article titled "Revolutionary Regroupment" (*Workers Republic* No. 2, December 1996) Gerry Downing of the CRR sneers that the most recent political struggle in the ICL against a revisionist course being pursued by the longtime editor of *Workers Vanguard*, Jan Norden, was merely an attempt to "scapegoat" Norden for our supposed "line change" on the nature of Stalinism.

According to Downing, the defection of Norden from our organisation reflects "acute disappointment at the failure of the Stalinist [sic] to fulfill the historic role ascribed to them by the Sparts and defend the nationalized property relations in Eastern Europe and the USSR." There is no question that Norden had ascribed such a role to the Stalinists. But, if the ICL had expected the Stalinists to defend the workers states, then why would we have, for example, mobilised the cadre and resources of our international in East Germany to fight for a workers political revolution ***against*** the Stalinist betrayers? Indeed, one of the issues that has Norden denouncing us is that we openly said that the Stalinists ***led*** the counterrevolution in the DDR, doing everything in their power to suppress any insurrection by the working class, because they knew they would be the targets.

As we wrote in our article "A Shamefaced Defection from Trotskyism" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 648, 5 July 1996):

> "...we fight for a new October Revolution. But the disproportion between this purpose and the current political consciousness of the working class, youth and the left internationally is great. Today, even most subjective leftists view as rather esoteric the idea that a proletarian revolution, like that successfully pursued by Lenin's Bolshevik Party in Russia in 1917, is the key to the liberation of mankind. This is due in no small measure to the crimes of the Stalinists, and the Social Democrats before them, who made a mockery of the program and ideals of revolutionary Marxism."

For Norden, the disproportion between what we strive for and the current consciousness of the working class had become a yawning, unbridgeable abyss. His increasing pessimism about the ability of our party and its programme to have any impact in the "New World Order" was reflected in an increasingly desperate search for, and accommodation to, social forces other than the proletariat and vehicles other than a Leninist vanguard party to advance the cause of human emancipation.

While declaring that Norden doesn't seem "amenable to change on the question of Stalinism," Downing gives favourable mention to Norden's "attempts to engage in the class struggle in Brazil." Indeed, Norden's centrist conciliation of the Luta Metalúrgica (LM) group, with whom the ICL had fraternal relations, was cut of the same cloth as the rotten-bloc "international relations" pursued by CRR, LTT and LCMRCI.

Our relations with LM were guided by Trotsky's call:

> "To treat with the greatest attention those groupings that actually gravitate to us; patiently and carefully to listen to their criticism, doubts and vacillations; to help them develop toward Marxism; not be frightened by their caprices, threats, ultimatums (centrists are always capricious and touchy); not to make any concessions to them in principle...."
>
> — "Centrism and the Fourth International," 22 February 1934

After some months of testing through trips to Brazil, and letters addressed to struggle with political problems and differences, we finally broke fraternal relations with LM when it became quite apparent that they had elevated their opportunist union work and positions above the struggle to forge a nucleus of a Trotskyist party in Brazil. Splits as well as fusions are the means through which a Leninist party is built. But the idea of splitting with a group of militant trade unionists in the name of programme and principle is completely alien to centrist manoeuverers such as Downing, the LTT and LCMRCI.

As the Transitional Programme, the founding document of the Fourth International written in 1938, states:

> "The Fourth International does not search after and does not invent panaceas. It takes its stand completely on Marxism as the only revolutionary doctrine that enables one to understand reality, unearth the cause behind the defeats, and consciously prepare for victory. The Fourth International continues the tradition of Bolshevism, which first showed the proletariat how to conquer power."

For authentic revolutionaries, political struggle over programme is key to building a politically homogeneous and disciplined international revolutionary party. For groups like the LTT conference's "regroupers," political programme is the enemy to be buried as far as possible, in the name of "unity." But politics has its own logic, and as centrists and reformists are ever susceptible to the pressures of their own national ruling classes, international non-aggression pacts will always blow up in their faces. Whatever issues from this lash-up will be as violently unstable as it is deeply unprincipled. ■

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Revolutionary Regroupment or Centrist Alchemy?

The statement reprinted here was issued by the Spartacist League/Britain in February 1997 to counterpose the fundamental political principles and actions of the Trotskyist International Communist League to the unprincipled "regroupment" frenzy of various centrist currents in this post-Soviet period. The statement has been slightly adapted for Spartacist.

The imperialist triumphalism over the counterrevolutionary destruction of the bureaucratically deformed workers states in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union has impacted widely on those who claimed to adhere to the programme and principles of revolutionary Marxism. As the world's ruling classes pronounce the "death of communism," much of the left is rapidly repudiating even any pretence of Leninism as they seek "regroupment" in larger reformist organisations together with social democrats, ex-Stalinists, Greens, other so-called "progressives" and even openly capitalist forces.

Cliff Slaughter's Workers Revolutionary Party, one of the degeneration products of Gerry Healy's organisation of the same name, has liquidated itself. The Slaughterites are now seeking to form a broad church encompassing "environmental and justice campaigning organisations, all socialist groups, the Labour Party and the trade unions." Militant Labour has recently decided that its name was far too "radical" and has opted for the more "palatable" name of the Socialist Party. The "United Secretariat of the Fourth International" (USec), which for years falsely laid claim to being the continuation of Trotsky's revolutionary Fourth International, is in a state of near-terminal collapse.

In France, the former "star" section of the USec is casting about for an electoral alliance with the French Communist Party and the petty-bourgeois Greens. In Italy, USec members have joined all manner of other groups in liquidating into Rifondazione Comunista (RC). An offshoot of the old Italian Communist Party, RC serves as a left prop for the Italian popular-front government that is enforcing vicious capitalist austerity and racist attacks on immigrants.

Posturing as an alternative to this wholesale liquidationism is the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency (LTT), who are hosting a conference on "revolutionary regroupment" aimed at picking up disaffected groups from the disintegrating USec. The particular consummation of this intention is to be a fusion with the ex-USec members now in the Committee for Revolutionary Regroupment as well as with elements of the Liaison Committee of Militants for a Revolutionary Communist International (LCMRCI), a split from Workers Power's "international" tendency of roughly the same name with a few less initials.

A joint statement issued by the LTT and LCMRCI declares "the two tendencies agreed that it is necessary to attempt a discussion and regroupment process with all forces that are in favour of a Leninist-Trotskyist international opposed to centrism" (*Workers News* No. 58, October-November 1996). Yet the coming together of these tendencies has nothing to do with "revolutionary regroupment." Rather, this fusion is a rotten bloc predicated on papering over political differences. At the same time, it is a genuine right-centrist "regroupment" based on a shared record of championing the forces of anti-Soviet reaction in the pivotal events leading to the counterrevolutionary destruction of the

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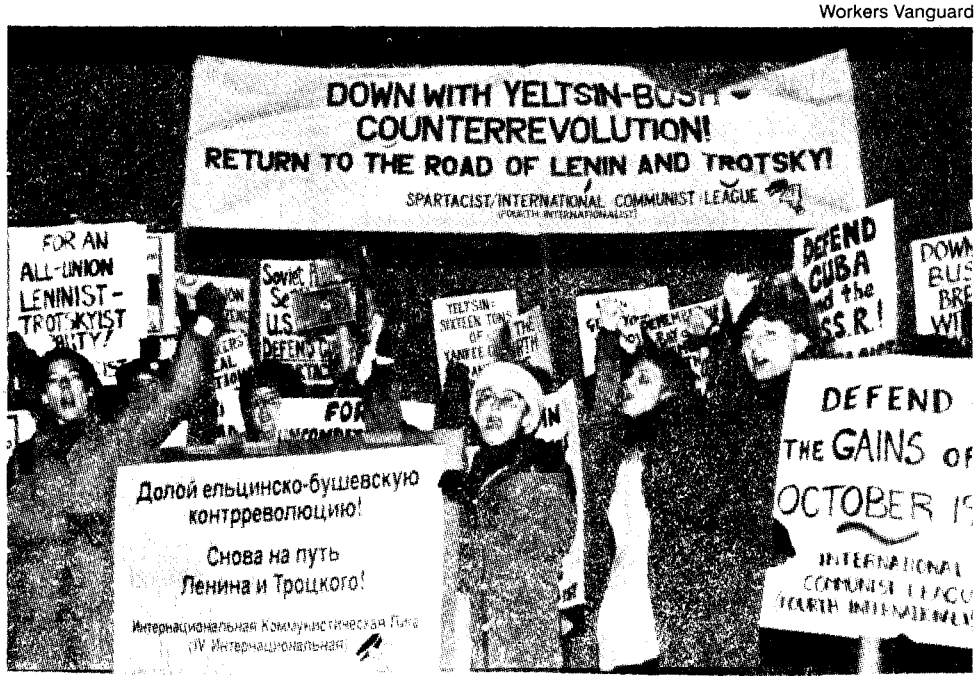
Workers Vanguard



January 1992: International Communist League protests in New York as Boris Yeltsin is fêted by his Wall Street paymasters. Trotskyists fought for unconditional defense of the Soviet Union and for proletarian political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy. Reformists and centrists made common cause with U.S. imperialism against degenerated workers state.