



What is the Bolshevik-Trotskyist tradition?

As a follow-up to the pull-out in the last issue of *Solidarity*, "Looking Backward", we publish a summary of the political and ideological traditions on which *Workers' Liberty* and *Solidarity* base ourselves.

Isaac Newton famously summed up the importance of studying, learning, and building on fore-runners. "If I have seen a little further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants", he wrote, referring to René Descartes, his contemporary Robert Hooke, and presumably also to his direct predecessor Isaac Barrow.

In science few people think they can neglect the "tradition" and rely on improvisation. In politics, alas, too many.

The summary here, written in 1995, starts as follows: "Living in an age of apostasy to socialism and Marxism, and of a great turning of backs on the past, it is necessary for us to publicly identify and proclaim our roots and traditions". That is even more true now than it was in 1995.

Reaffirming the tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky, the document is also critical of Trotsky on the question of the Stalinist states, like the old USSR.

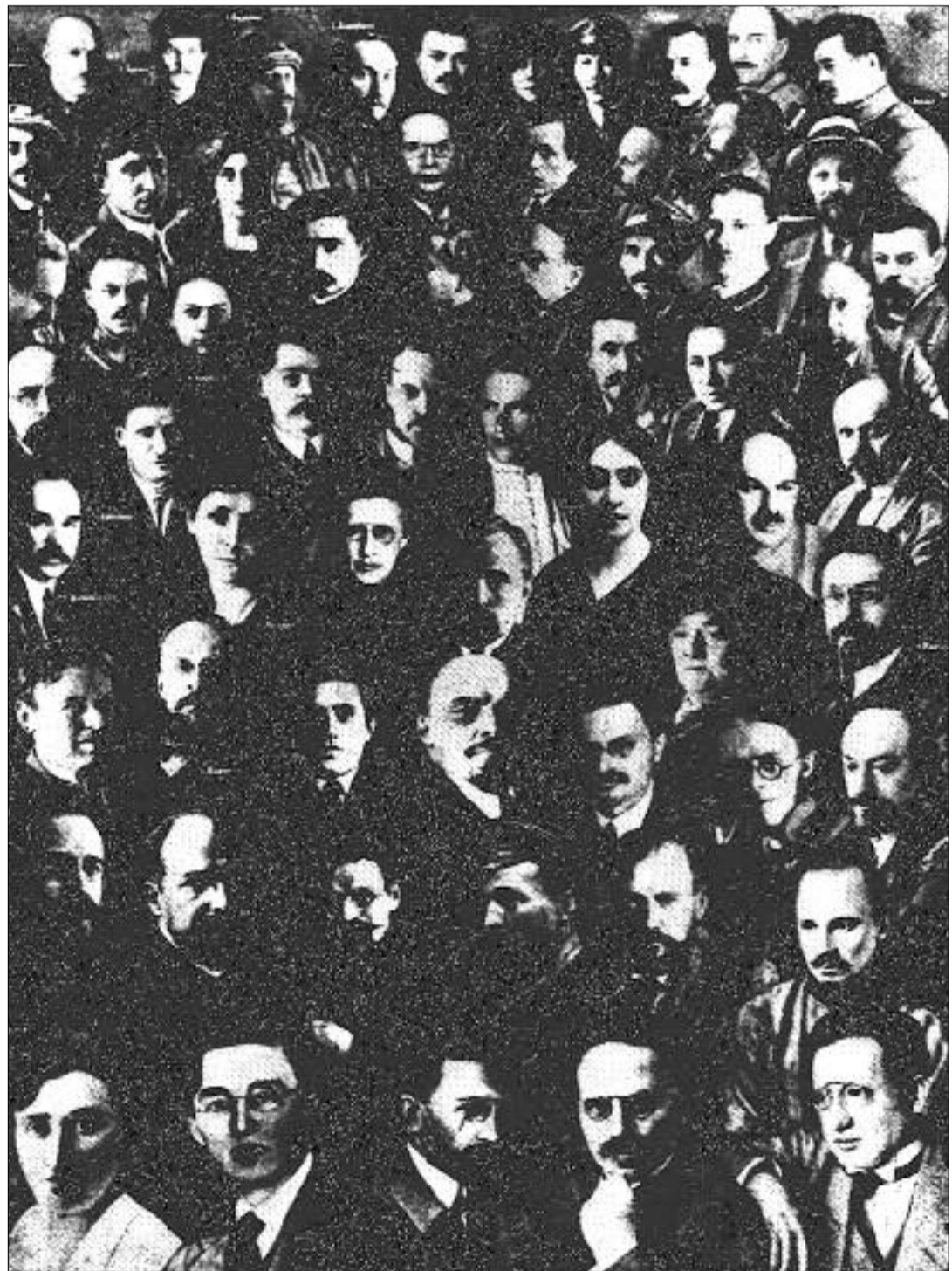
Some socialists today dismiss that whole debate as yesterday's business. But it is not.

The shadow of Stalinism is there over every conversation we have with people new to politics about what "socialism" is, and how anti-capitalism can avoid falling into Stalinism.

Variant Stalinist systems — Cuba, North Korea — still exist, and still have influence as models.

And on a whole range of questions — some not obvious — the activist left today still sails in a vessel awash with Stalinist seepage from decades past.

The siding of many would-be Marxists with Milosevic's Serbia, or Ahmedinejad's Iran, a stance modelled on the schemes and emotions of the "old" siding with the USSR against "imperialism", is a chief example.



Photomontage of leading revolutionary socialists at the time of the Russian revolution

The Bolshevik-Trotskyist tradition

Living in an age of apostasy to socialism and Marxism, and of a great turning of backs on the past, it is necessary for us to publicly identify and proclaim our roots and traditions.

1. We are Marxists: that is, we believe that Marx was right in his fundamental analysis of capitalist society as a regime of wage slavery; in his analysis of the roots of capitalist exploitation; in his understanding of the class struggle as the locomotive of history; in his identification of the proletariat, the slave class of capitalist society, as the bearer of a new and higher civilisation: "The emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working class itself"; "The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of race and sex."

LESSONS FROM 1917

2. We are Leninists: that is, we believe that the October Revolution was one of the greatest liberating events in human history, and that all socialists who came after that revolution must learn, critically assess, and reassess, its lessons, and adapt them to their own conditions.

Centrally, these are:

That the class struggle is fought on at least three fronts — the economic, political and ideological fronts — and that socialists are effective only if they fight that struggle on all three fronts in the Bolshevik way: consistently, relentlessly, implacably, irreconcilably;

That to do this work in the class struggle, socialists organise themselves into a disciplined, educated, democratic collective, guiding themselves by a Marxist theory, constantly examined, assessed and sharpened in the light of working class experience;

That because socialist revolution can be the creation only of a roused, active working class, socialists serve the working class by helping it rouse, educate and organise itself;

That socialists connect themselves indissolubly to the working class wherever it is to be found, at whatever level it is at, in all the varying conditions — political, social, ideological — in which it is held under the rule of capital;

That, because in all conditions, even when they act as a working class vanguard who believe that their propagandising, lesson-drawing and organising work is essential to the class, socialists serve the working class, and therefore can neither substitute themselves for the working class, nor adopt the role of mere passive speculators about future working class activity;

That the serious socialists prepare for the class struggle when they are not fighting it, or when it is at a low ebb: without the slow, preparatory work of many years there would have been no working class revolution in 1917.

TROTSKYISM

3. We are Trotskyists: that is:

We root ourselves in and endorse the politics of the rearward of the Russian Revolution, led by Trotsky;

We endorse and glory in the Trotskyist movement's fight against Stalinist totalitarianism;

Its efforts through a long epoch of murderous reaction to help the working class free itself from the crippling and sometimes suicidal limitations placed on it by Stalinist "communism" and by reformism;

Its efforts after the collapse of the Communist International to rebuild revolutionary working class parties and a new International, organically of the working class;

Its policies for fighting fascism in pre-Hitler Germany and for consolidating and defending the working class revolution in Republican Spain during the Civil War.

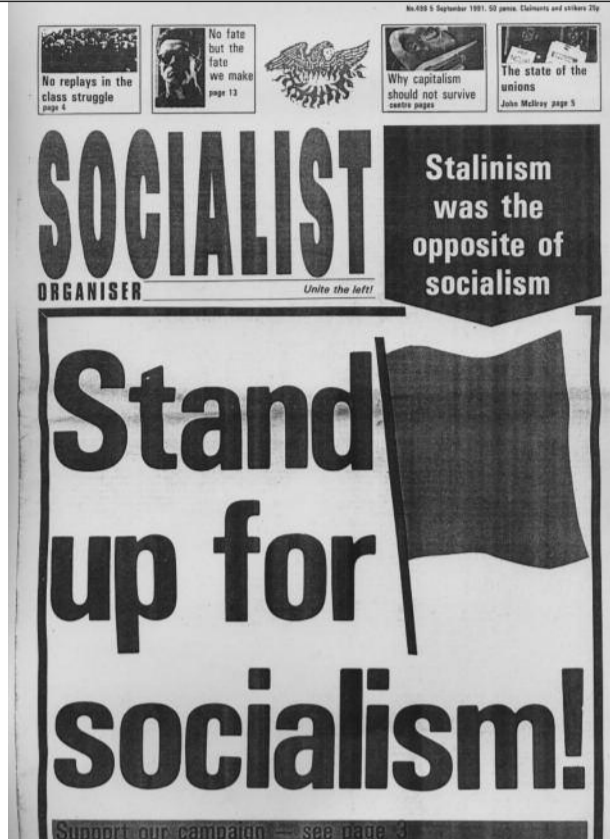
In short, we base ourselves on the first four congresses of the Communist International and on the subsequent development of the politics of those congresses by the movement led by Trotsky until his assassination in 1940.

4. Trotsky summarised his approach thus, in 1938:

"To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's programme on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives — these are the rules of the Fourth International."

[The Transitional Programme]

5. The first manifesto of our tendency (October 1967) defined Trotskyism as we understood it then, and



"Trotskyism" means socialist struggle against Stalinism. Above: Socialist Organiser (forerunner of Solidarity) responds to the collapse of the USSR, 1991.

understand it now:

"Trotskyism is the basic Marxist programme of the conquest of power by the international working class. It is the unfalsified programme, method and experience of the Bolshevism of Lenin and Trotsky.

It embodies the world experience of the workers' struggles, including the defence and development of Bolshevism by Trotsky and the Left Opposition in battle against the Stalinist counter-revolution in the Soviet Union. Trotskyism is the only developed working class alternative to venal Stalinism and supine Social Democracy.

It means reliance on the self-controlling activity of the masses of the working class, which it strives to mobilise on the programme of transitional demands as a bridge to the overthrow of capitalism and the attainment of workers' power.

It is the programme of the workers' revolution, organically linked with the practical struggle to aid its development. It is not only a programme, but the struggle to build a revolutionary party to fight for that programme.

Its traditions are those of the Bolsheviks and the Left Opposition: workers' democracy, unremitting struggle for theoretical clarity, revolutionary activism, unbending hostility to and struggle against capitalism and those within the labour movement who stand for its continuation."

6. The Trotskyism of Trotsky, like Lenin's Bolshevism out of which it grew, suffered defeat because in that epoch the working class suffered defeat; it is not a final defeat. The malign Stalinist counterfeit of socialism is dead; the Trotskyist tradition is alive because revolutionary socialism is alive and will remain alive until the working class wins the last battle in the struggle with the bourgeoisie: "Until the last bond and debenture shrivels to ashes on the grave of the last warlord."

TROTSKY AND THE USSR

7. This is the tradition in which the Alliance for Workers' Liberty has its roots. In an independent history spanning nearly three decades we have on the basis of this tradition, evolved our own distinct AWL tradition. Beginning as adherents of one of the strands of post-Trotsky Trotskyism — that of James P. Cannon — we have critically re-worked and re-evaluated that tradition, supplementing and amending it on both the level of political ideas and organisational practice. We have, over the years moved a long way from our starting point.

8. We were forced to conclude that, though Trotsky's concrete analyses and descriptions of the Stalinist degeneration of the USSR, and of what that means for the working people there, were exact, continuous, accurate and adequate as an account of the USSR — he did not fail to record that Stalinism differed from Hitler "only in its more unbridled savagery" — and though the conclusions he drew for working class politics

inside the USSR were adequate and consistently socialist — from 1935 he advocated a new working class revolution to overthrow the political and social rule of the bureaucracy, calling it a political revolution — Trotsky's conceptual framework was first inadequate and finally led him to radically wrong conclusions.

We can see now that the designation "degenerated workers' state" made no sense in the 1930s.

Trotsky himself tentatively acknowledged this at the end, when he accepted the theoretical possibility that the USSR could, while remaining exactly as it was, bureaucratically collectivised property intact, be conceived of as a new form of class society [*The USSR in War*, September 1939]. He refused to draw that conclusion then only because he believed that the fall of the Stalinist USSR — either to capitalist restoration or workers' revolution — was imminent.

"Stalin testifies to nothing else but the incapacity of the bureaucracy to transform itself into a stable ruling class. Might we not place ourselves in a ludicrous position if we affixed to the Bonapartist oligarchy the nomenclature of a new ruling class just a few years or even a few months prior to its inglorious downfall?" [*In Defence of Marxism*]

9. Trotsky bears no responsibility for the often grotesque politics which his "official", "orthodox" would-be followers built on Trotsky's failure in time to draw the conclusions to which everything he wrote pointed, that the USSR was a new form of class society. Had he lived, Trotsky would either have had to reverse and repudiate his entire train of thought, or draw those conclusions. Everything he wrote on Stalinism in his last three years points to the virtual certainty that he would have diagnosed Stalinism as a new form of class society: Trotsky would not have been a post world war two "Trotskyist" on this question.

The politics of the post-Trotsky Trotskyists towards Stalinism is no part of the authentic Trotskyist tradition but a Stalinist excrescence on it.

"DEFORMED WORKERS' STATES"?

10. The majority of the would-be post-Trotsky Trotskyists followed Pablo, Mandel and their associates in analysing the Stalinist states as degenerated and deformed "workers' states", socially in advance of, and superior to, capitalism. The USSR, its satellites in Eastern Europe, China etc. were, they believed, "post-capitalist", in transition between capitalism and socialism.

Keeping Trotsky's label for the USSR — "degenerated workers' state" — and adapting it to the whole cluster of Stalinist formations, the post-Trotsky official Trotskyists, assembled behind the "workers' state" label ideas and assessments starkly at variance with those Trotsky expressed in the same terms.

Trotsky's label was retained; all his analyses, perspectives and definitions — all the ideas for him encapsulated in that term — were radically changed. The Marxist politics of honestly settling theoretical accounts with the past gave way to the ancient arts of palimpsestry and to the survival techniques of the chameleon. This would be the cause of much obfuscation and confusion.

11. For Trotsky, at the end, the USSR was an unstable, transitional regime; the Stalinist bureaucracy was a "cancerous growth" on the society created by October, not a necessary social organism capable of defending the USSR or of creating the USSR's post-World War Two empire of 90 million people.

In stark contrast to the views Trotsky expressed in the term, "workers' state", Stalinism was seen by Mandel and the post-Trotsky official Trotskyists as stable; as an agency for accumulating and defending the gains of an ongoing world revolution, which, tangibly, was identical with Stalinism itself. Changes could come only by way of reform (Yugoslavia, China) or political revolution (the USSR), not by regression. These were societies 'in transition to socialism', not, as the USSR was for Trotsky, an aberrant, hybrid formation that could not possibly last (and if it lasted, could not continue to be seen as any sort of workers' state).

The Stalinist formations were progressive, post-capitalist, on the broad highway of history — unconditionally progressive, not, as Trotsky at the end said of Stalin's nationalised property, "potentially progressive", on condition that the workers overthrew Stalinism.

STALINIST IMPERIALISM

12. Trotsky had in 1939/40 already recognised "ele-

workers' fight
5p
No. 83 - 18th April to 26th April 1975

MAY 1ST STRIKE TO FREE THE SHREWSBURY 2



VICTORY IN CAMBODIA



Liberated

Masters

BUDGET: SOAKING

workers' ACTION
No. 129 Dec. 16, 1978-Jan. 6, 1979 10p

Labour, break all links with the Shah!
Stop Arms Sales to Iran!
Down with the Shah!
Demonstration, Sunday 17th December
Assembly 1pm, Speakers' Corner.
Called by Committee Against
Repression in Iran.

IRAN: ALL POWER TO THE WORKERS!

Solidarity! Demonstrate Dec. 17

BREAD Police go on anti-picket spree. Demand an inquiry

Labour's Manifesto - a conference must decide

workers' ACTION
No. 150 August 25, 1979
8 pages 10p

IRAN: Holy War against the Left

Save the Iranian Trotskyists





FUND DRIVE

Shipyard workers fight the axe

INSIDE

"Marxism cannot stand still, because social reality does not stand still". In 1975 our paper (then *Workers' Fight*) hailed the Stalinist Khmer Rouge victory in Cambodia. The small print had criticisms, and more than in other would-be Trotskyist papers — but they were in the small print. We were forced to recognise that Stalinism was not a step beyond capitalism towards socialism, but was in history a blind alley murderous to labour movements. Again, in December 1978 our paper (then *Workers' Action*) saw the movement in Iran as having immediate potential to push aside Khomeini and win workers' power; by August 1979 (right-hand picture) we had had to sober up.

ments of imperialism" in Stalin's foreign policy, and said: 'We were and remain against the seizure of new territories by the Kremlin.' Though the USSR had a vast empire, for Mandel and his friends it was not "imperialist."

13. Stalinism destroyed labour movements and imposed totalitarian regimes on the working class of Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland etc., regimes like that of the USSR which Trotsky in 1938 had rightly described as differing from Hitler's regime "only in its more unbridled savagery", but still this was the — deformed — workers' revolution

According to every criterion the labour movement throughout its history had measured by — civil liberties, political democracy, the free existence of labour movements, free press, speech, sexuality — the USSR, China, etc. were at least as much of a regression as Nazism had been. But, because the — totalitarian — state monopolised property, these systems were, for Pablo and Mandel, unconditionally progressive vis-à-vis capitalism.

14. Does the bureaucracy play a necessary role in production? You could not, on the post-world war two facts, continue to give Trotsky's negative answer, not even for the USSR. If these were workers' states it was not according to Trotsky.

15. Pablo, Mandel and others reinterpreted the ideas of Trotskyism so as to present the expansion of Stalinism and the creation of totalitarian states in large parts of the world as the first stage of the socialist revolution. Despite the crushing of the working class in the Stalinist states, and its quietness in the big capitalist countries, the "world revolution" was continuing to "develop" — albeit, said Mandel and company, in a deformed way. Ernest Mandel became the word-spinning high priest of the vast, unstable and inchoate ideological edifice which grew up around these core ideas in the 40 years before the USSR collapsed.

16. Ernest Mandel and his friends accepted on their rulers' terms, "critically", of course, such systems as Mao's China and Tito's Yugoslavia, and for decades adopted the role of loyal critic, adopting for these Stalinist states the "reform" politics which the Brandlerites, Lovestoneites, ILPers etc. had, for the USSR in the later 30's counterposed to Trotsky's call for a new — "political" — revolution to overthrow the bureaucratic caste. It was twenty years after Mao's victory before Pablo and Mandel's "Fourth International" came out for a working-class "political" revolution in China.

"PROGRESSIVE BUREAUCRATIC COLLECTIVISM"

17. For the post-Trotsky official Trotskyists the workers' state label expressed new ideas, not what it had expressed in Trotsky — and new politics, not those of Trotsky. Whose ideas did the term now express?

Bruno Rizzi's! Trotsky had polemicised with Bruno Rizzi's acceptance of Stalinism as a stable system of post-capitalist rule by a collectivist new class. In fact, Rizzi — mimicking Fabians such as Bernard Shaw —

believed that Stalinism and fascism were essentially the same, and that — though Trotsky's polemic ignored this aspect of his thought — both were progressive, both transitional between capitalism and socialism, evolving towards socialism; he saw their horrible features — such as Nazi anti-semitism — as mere kinks in an immature but sufficient anti-capitalist consciousness.

By the end of the 40s Official Trotskyism was expressing not Trotsky's but, essentially, Rizzi's — and Bernard Shaw's — ideas about Stalinism in the terminology Trotsky had used to express his radically different ideas.

18. The epigones of Trotsky proclaimed that the survival and expansion of Stalinism meant defeat for Stalin's "Socialism In One Country" and posthumous triumph for Trotsky and his Permanent Revolution. Mao and Ho were Trotsky's legatees, not Stalin's. In fact, this assessment of the Stalinist states and the Stalinist-led world revolution implied acceptance of the essentials of Socialism In One Country.

The point for Trotsky and his comrades, as for all earlier Marxists, was that socialism had to come after advanced capitalism, could not come otherwise. Though the workers might take power in a backward country, socialism could not be built in backwardness. If the revolution did not spread to countries ripe for socialism, it would be doomed.

The idea of stable, evolving socialist growth from peripheral backwardness to socialism, in competition with advanced capitalism, was a revival on a gigantic scale of the pre-Marx colony-building utopian socialism of people like Etienne Cabet, who built small socialist colonies, parallel worlds, in the American wilderness in the 1840s.

Pablo and Mandel in their "World Congress" documents [The Rise and Decline of Stalinism (1954) and The Decline and Fall of Stalinism (1957)] vainly chopped logic to hide this. One country? No longer one country! Socialism in isolation? Not isolated now! Etc.

It was the work of religious zealots, reasoning around daft, unquestionable, fixed ideas, not Marxism. The need for it arose because all the "revolutionary" perspectives and hopes of "official" post-Trotsky Trotskyism were spun from the survival, expansion and likely continuing success of "Socialism In One Country", that is, of the USSR, a world power 'in transition to socialism'.

THE "WORLD REVOLUTION", 1943-89

19. Worse than that. In Lenin and Trotsky, as in Marx and Engels, the historical protagonist of the anti-capitalist revolution is the proletariat. The Trotskyism of Trotsky was the revolutionary working class politics and perspectives of the early Communist International minus, deprived of, the working class armies assembled by the Communist International to make the revolution. Stalinism had "captured" and perverted them. Thus the terrible combination in 1930s Trotskyism of

acute awareness, accuracy in understanding and prediction — in pre-Hitler Germany, and in Spain for example — combined with the incapacity to affect events of tiny, tiny groups whose natural identity, like their "constituency", had been stolen.

All Trotsky's "optimistic" hopes and perspectives were premised on the shifts and regroupments in the proletariat and its parties which he worked to bring about. There would be working class self-clarification, self-regeneration and political regroupment in the heat of class struggle. Wrong, certainly. Fantastic, possibly. But Trotsky's was a perspective in which ends — democratic workers' power — and means — working class risings, the creation of soviets — were appropriate to each other.

By contrast, in post-Trotsky official Trotskyism — "Mandelism" — the identification of Stalinism and Stalinist expansion as the "actually existing" unfolding, albeit deformed, workers' revolution led ineluctably to the destruction of all rational notion of ends and means. The 'official Trotskyist' fetish of nationalised property — which for Marxists is a means, not an end, and by no means a self-sufficient means — took the central question out of rational assessment: Stalinist statification and its alleged working class character was a 'given', something to reason from, not about.

20. When the "Trotskyists" transformed themselves into an epiphenomenon — critical, of course — of Stalinism, they thereby became millenarians.

Primitive millenarian sects, often communistic in their desires, have looked to supernatural events like the second coming of Christ, to transform the world into an ideal place. They had no notion of ends and means such as the labour movement would develop — action by named human forces for specific goals. In practice, they would look to some bandit, warlord or lunatic to begin the designated change. Central for our purposes here was their lack of a rational notion of ends and means.

In post-Trotsky Trotskyism, c.1950, both the ends and means of the proletarian revolution in the original Trotskyism, as in traditional Marxism, disappear — or are pushed to the far horizon of history. The "world revolutionary perspectives", which Mandel wrote and refurbished for successive world congresses were, though dressed up in the husks of ideas taken from Trotsky and Lenin, now spun around the USSR, not around the proletariat or its methods or its old socialist goals.

The protagonist in "the workers' revolution" is, for now, the Stalinist bloc — Mandel's mentor Raptis-Pablo once speculated that Stalinism would last for centuries — not, as in Trotsky, the working-class, self-clarified and politically regrouped. The protagonist is the Stalinist state, the "Red" Army, the Chinese peasant army. Though "perspectives" and hopes for bureaucratic reform and for working class democracy are plentiful in Mandel, they are just tagged on.

21. The proletariat may be crushed under regimes akin to fascism but despite such 'details' this, nevertheless, they said, is the proletarian revolution.

“Nationalised economy” conditions and defines all.

How could a Chinese peasant army led by declassed intellectuals, be seen, as the “Fourth International” saw it, as a workers’ party? By circular logic: only a workers’ party could do what the Maoists did, replicating Stalin’s USSR. Ergo, this is a workers’ party. Rationalising the Stalinist phenomenon, Mandel’s Marxism became arid, eyeless scholasticism. Trotsky’s ideas of 1940 were turned into their opposite.

MILLENARIANISM

22. The point at which millenarianism triumphed can be dated: the Korean War and the belief that the seemingly inevitable World War Three would be a war-revolution, an international civil war. The nuclear Armageddon — albeit with early nuclear weapons — would also be the revolution. The “Red” Army and its Communist Party allies in western Europe would bring working class victory in the looming war-revolution.

You could not go much further from the idea of the socialist revolution — protagonist, ends, means — in Trotsky, and in all previous Marxism.

When, a decade later, the Posadas wing of Mandel’s organisation took to advocating that “the Russian workers’ state” start the third world war, because this would accelerate the world revolution, it only brought out the crazy other-worldly millenarian logic with which Mandel’s group had replaced the Trotskyism of Trotsky at the time of the so-called third congress of the Fourth International.

23. The tight millenarianist scenario of 1951-3 centred on Stalinism and war as the agency. Eventually that gave place to a looser millenarianism, promiscuous in its ever-changing choice of saviours.

Various nationalist forces, plausibly and implausibly assessed, were anointed — though Stalinism always would be central to the “world revolution” perspectives of all the factions — WRP, SWP USA, Morenists, Lambertists — that made up the “Fourth Internationals” of Trotsky’s epigones. Trotsky’s tradition and Trotsky’s political terminology were thus reduced to mere building blocks in scholastic constructions. Ernest Mandel was from his youth the pre-eminent master in this work. He had many imitators and competitors.

24. Of course their adaptation to Stalinism was never uncritical adaptation — those who ceased to be critical ceased to be even nominally Trotskyist — never inner acceptance of it, never a surrender of the idea that the Stalinist states had to be democratised and transformed.

But a man like Ernest Mandel used his erudition and his intellectual talents to weave, from the ideas of Lenin and Trotsky, ideological clothing which could be draped on Stalinism to identify it as part of the world revolution of the proletariat. Directly and indirectly, Mandel and his organisation and its ideological splinter groups such as the Lambertists and Healyites over the years tied large numbers of anti-Stalinist militants into accepting, tolerating or justifying, “critically”, Stalinist regimes and aspects of Russian Stalinist imperialism.

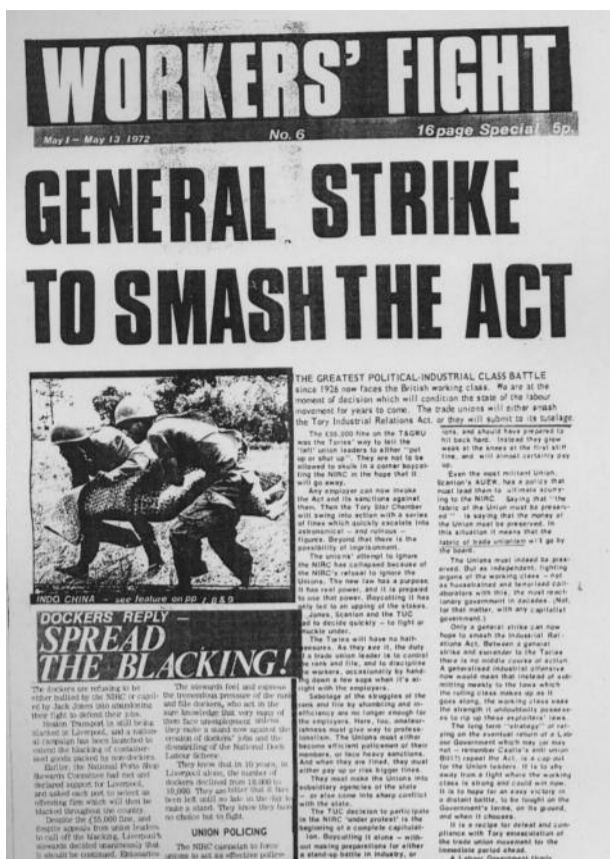
25. Mandel especially played a role similar to that of Karl Kautsky two generations earlier, who rationalised, from the point of view of a hollow “orthodox Marxism”, what the leaders of the German social democracy and trade unions did.

Here Mandel and his friends were worse than Kautsky. Kautsky devised ideological schemes to depict the time-serving activities of a bureaucratized labour movement as an effective drive for working-class liberation; Mandel produced similar rationalisations for totalitarian Stalinist machines, convinced that they embodied the spirit of history and that it was his job to interpret and rationalise for it. Mandel was the Kautsky of “the historic process” itself.

26. And then, fifty years after Trotsky’s death, Stalinism collapsed in Europe. It was revealed as nearer to being pre-capitalist than post-capitalist. Far from “defending and extending, in its own distorted way, the gains of the 1917 workers’ revolution”, Stalinism must be judged historically to have had no relationship to socialism and working-class emancipation but that of a destroyer of labour movements and an enslaver of working classes.

THE “OTHER TROTSKYISTS”

27. In the course of our work the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty discovered that there were other Trotskyist traditions paralleling Cannon’s, Mandel’s, and that of post-Trotsky official Trotskyism, and in conflict with its peculiar positions on Stalinism; traditions — importantly that of Shachtman’s Workers’ Party — to which our own evolution, on the question of Stalinism and of democratic procedures in our own



“To be bold when the hour for action arrives”. Workers’ Fight campaigns in the run-up to five dockers being jailed under Tory anti-union laws in July 1972, and then freed by a mass strike wave.

ranks, for example, has brought us close. We have learned, and intend to go on learning, from the Workers’ Party of the ‘40s and its successor in the ‘50s, the Independent Socialist League.

28. In essence our moves away from our origins in post-Trotsky “orthodox Trotskyism” have been part of a journey back to Marx’s clear doctrines of working class liberation, without the mystifications and confusions generated in post-Trotsky Trotskyism by its identification of Stalinist states, in which a savage system of class exploitation of workers prevailed, with “deformed” working class revolutions.

29. Tradition is never finished so long as an organisation lives; it goes on being lived, reassessed, amended, transmuted, and developed in the life of a political tendency like ours. In sources of ideas and in the examples — negative as well as positive — we learn from, we are both Cannonite and Shachtmanite: in our continuing development we are neither: we continue to evolve our own AWL tradition.

TASKS OF THE AWL

30. Critically drawing from the experience of the whole current of Trotskyism, in Trotsky’s time and after, the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty will continue to build up its forces and fight to win influence for Marxism in the labour movement.

31. Proudly proclaiming that we are Marxist, Leninist, Trotskyist, the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty asks for the support of those who see the need to combine clear adherence to the great traditions of the working class past with a commitment to open-minded Marxist thinking about that past and about the struggles of the present.

In the name of our traditions, the traditions of militant class struggle and honest revolutionary Marxist socialism — the tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Mehring, Connolly and countless others — we call for the adherence to our ranks of serious socialists, determined to devote, not the spare evenings of dilettantes, but active dedicate lives to the greatest cause in the world — the fight for the liberation of humankind from capitalist wage slavery and all that goes with it.

32. Marxism is the single most precious achievement of the international proletariat. Of course, Marxism is a product in part of working class experience. The continuing experience of the proletariat is its nourishing life blood.

Yet Marxism, scientific consciousness, does not arise spontaneously in the working class. Initially, as the Communist Manifesto rightly says, it comes from outside of the proletariat. It is created by members of the enemy class who come over to the working class, Marx, Engels and others, who fuse the early bourgeois scientific economics, German philosophy and French utopian socialism, with the experience of the first mass working-class movement, Chartism, to create a new world outlook, a proletarian world outlook.

Marxism, whose adherents analyse, interpret, codify and try to shape an ever changing, evolving, permuting, social world is never ‘finished’. It grows and develops, or else — as in many of its sectarian embodiments — it petrifies or withers; and thereby dies. Marxism can not stand still, because social reality does not stand still.

CENTRALITY OF SELF-EDUCATION

33. The AWL bases itself on Marxism — that is, an awareness of the basic texts and theories, and history of Marxism, together with knowledge of the history of society and of the working class and social movements required to make sense of the codifications that make up Marxism.

One of two things then. Either: ‘Marxism’ is the property of the whole organisation, that is, the whole organisation consists of Marxists educated above a high basic level; or Marxism in the organisation is the property of a minority, even a small minority, who form a mere sect inside the organisation. If they are the leadership, they assume the role of a priestly caste in relation to the rest of the organisation’s members.

It is a pre-requisite of a healthy Marxist organisation, that everybody knows the basics; that, up to a high minimum, everybody is able to understand what is going on, what the ramifications and implications of the issues raised are.

If a basic minimum education is not a condition of participation of the organisation’s deliberations, that is, of membership in the Marxist organisation, then inequality is built into the organisation, and into its system of recruitment and induction. So is the potential of the emergence of a priestly caste, and of the corruption of the organisation’s internal life by demagoguery and, even as in the case of SWP, of the suppression of all real internal political life in the organisation.

34. A feature of most of the kitsch-Trotskyist sects is that in them there is a priestly caste, with an unhealthy, manipulative relationship to the membership.

The SWP which is a mutant strain of kitsch-Trotskyism is one of the clearest examples. Even when it was an open, more or less democratic organisation, ‘theory’ was the property of a small elite of bourgeois intellectuals, and not even minimally — on such a thing, for example, as the group’s fetishised theory of state capitalism — the property of the membership.

We criticised them early on, for that and for the crude and manipulative demagoguery that served the priestly caste to mediate between their theory and the rank and file of the organisation. They did not, we said, understand what theory was for in a revolutionary organisation; that either it was a real guide to cogitations, discussions and decisions by all the members of the party, or else that the organisation could not be a functioning Marxist collective at all.

We said with tragic accuracy, before it occurred, that this state of affairs would inevitably lead to the degeneration of the organisation (see documents reprinted in *International Communist* No.5, 1977).

35. There will of course, unavoidably, always be different levels of understanding and of learning in any organisation; and then again different levels within any leading committee. Some people will know and understand more, and contribute more in the common deliberations.

A serious Marxist organisation has no tolerance for denial of this, or for demagogic pseudo-workerist demands for levelling down — no one has a right to know more, or if they know it, to express more than us poor workers can effortlessly understand — of the sort the (essentially petty bourgeois) Thornettites once made notorious in our ranks. The Marxist movement levels up, not down.

The serious Marxist organisation will normally insist on a process of recruitment and induction where the aspirant member is put through a basic minimum education in Marxism, and does not acquire full rights inside the organisation until such an education is completed.

In conditions of major working class upsurge we would of course recruit more loosely. We can only do that with safety to our basic identity and security for our political integrity when:

- 1) There is already a properly educated cadre
- 2) And when that cadre understands that one of its cardinal functions is to educate the militants recruited in the heat of the class struggle. Thus it was with the Bolshevik Party in 1905-7, and again in 1917.

Any organisation trying — as organisations like the AWL must — to function as a collective, able to analyse the world as Marxists while making propaganda for Marxism inside the labour movement, and in the class struggle, will suffer a number of terrible, and ultimately self destroying, consequences if it recruits too loosely and neglects education.