

FRANCE:

lessons of the May struggle

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Fourth International
A JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL MARXISM PUBLISHED BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

**Trotsky's Marxism under attack—
a reply to Krasso**

Marxism and Stalinism in Britain

**A history of the
Third International?**

Fourth International

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Published by the International Committee of the
Fourth International

186a Clapham High Street, London, S.W.4

Editors: Tom Kemp, Cliff Slaughter

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EDITORIAL

THE GREAT STRIKE movement of May and June 1968 which brought the French working class within sight of power has enormous political significance and requires careful analysis and study. All the problems raised by the revolution in advanced capitalist countries were suddenly presented in living form. By their action in downing tools together and occupying their places of work ten million workers demonstrated their strength and shook the bourgeois state to its foundations. For the space of two weeks France stood on the brink of a revolution which, given leadership, could have carried the working class to power with little bloodshed. The paralysis of the economy was complete; the state power was in eclipse and the bourgeoisie was stricken with panic and confusion. What many had believed to be impossible, a revolutionary situation in an advanced country, was now plainly in existence. At one point bourgeois rule depended upon nothing more than a few tens of thousands of riot police and an uncertain army largely composed of conscript soldiers who would be asked to fire on their fathers and brothers.

And yet, almost as rapidly as the crisis broke and the question of workers' power was posed, the ruling class resumed its poise; de Gaulle reasserted his command, the strikes were brought to an end and elections confirmed the Gaullist victory by a substantial majority. The change in the situation was so rapid and so complete that the question of how near France actually was to revolution in May will undoubtedly become a perennial subject of historical controversy. In retrospect many of those who, at the height of the battle in May, foresaw a defeat for the bourgeoisie have already revised their opinion and now claim that the issue was never in doubt. True, for a final historical judgement, many of the necessary elements are lacking. In particular it will be a long time before we know what was going on in the inner councils of the Gaullist government. Did it, before de Gaulle's broadcast of May 30, at some point decide that the game was up, as stories that the Ministries were burning confidential papers

seem to suggest? What was the relationship between the government and the leadership of the CGT and the Communist Party and was a guarantee actually given (or even required) from the Soviet Ambassador that there was no intention of turning France into a 'People's Democracy'? In the event of a workers' revolution would the army leaders have plunged the country into civil war?

In fact we do not have to answer these questions in order to be able to raise, and in part answer, the more immediate and vital ones raised by these events.

In the first place the lie has been given to the myth that the working class in the advanced countries has become an inert and demoralized force. In France the workers flexed their muscles and displayed their power. It is true that the signal was given by the students, but the situation did not have revolutionary implications until the workers occupied the factories and began to make their own demands. It is true, also, that in form these demands were mainly of an economic nature; but, by their extent, their manner of presentation and the context in which they were made they also represented a direct challenge to the ruling class and its state.

More important still was the fact that the level of this challenge was directly related to the ability of the Communist and reformist parties and the trade union bureaucracies to control the strike movement and confine it to what were called 'professional' demands. After the massive demonstrations of May 13, in which the workers expressed their solidarity with the students in struggle against the Gaullist regime, the 'left' parties and unions, and especially the Stalinists, hoped that these energies could be channelled back into the usual humdrum forms and that the situation would be restored to normal. It was the action of the workers at Sud-Aviation and the Renault plants in occupying their factories which set in train the mass strikes which the CGT and the other unions had neither prepared for, called nor desired.

It was as though all the locks which the bureau-

cracies had placed on the combativity of the workers for many years were suddenly blown off. Following the example of the students, the young workers in particular demanded action to protect wage packets which were shrinking under the pressure of rising prices and against intolerable working conditions and lack of a real future. Plants which had not had strikes for three decades came out solidly, sections of workers reputedly the most docile and least class-conscious in department stores, offices and banks demanded to join the strike. All over the country universities, schools and public buildings were occupied. Over many the red flag was substituted for the tricolour. The gates were locked, pickets and strike committees were set up. All the major plants, except in a few backward areas, from government arsenals to the big motor works, were in the hands of their workers. Electricity and other services only functioned by permission of the workers.

Yet a general strike was never called by the CGT or any other trade union body. *L'Humanité* never issued such a call nor, in its front page headlines, did it ever provide slogans or a lead for the strikers. The Communist Party, and its members in the leadership of the CGT, struggled might and main to limit the scope of the strike to the basic economic demands which, however heavy for the capitalists to meet, still accepted the framework of bourgeois property relations. There was no national direction of the strike and it was everywhere the policy of the CP to prevent a link-up between the strike committees in the separate enterprises. The CGT negotiated with the government, as did the other national confederations (CFTD, Force Ouvrière, CGC), and as soon as possible went back to the enterprises with the terms which had been provisionally agreed upon. Thus a key role was played by the refusal of the Renault workers to accept the model agreement brought back from his meeting with the government by Georges Ségué, the general secretary of the CGT on May 27. This ensured that the strike would continue and that more than ever, in the next few crucial days, the question of power would be posed.

At this point it is clear that the Communist Party set itself solidly against any movement to take power. This is borne out by the tone of the statement of the Central Committee dated May 27. In substance this declared opposition to those who claimed that the situation was 'revolutionary'; called on followers of the CP not to join in the student demonstration called for that day; and stated its aim to be 'a government of democratic

union' with the Left Federation—at that time in almost complete eclipse—the dissolution of the National Assembly and the holding of new elections.

That was on May 27 when the disarray of the government and the demoralization of the bourgeoisie were still apparent. On May 30, in a radio broadcast, de Gaulle signalled the turn of the tide for the bourgeoisie, echoing the call of the Communist Party for dissolution of the National Assembly and new elections and promising stern measures. Immense relief of the bourgeoisie and a massive Gaullist procession in Paris. Reaction of the CP: relief and satisfaction (the Party had apparently wanted elections all along!).

In the following days and weeks the Stalinist bureaucracy fought day and night to settle the strikes and hand back the factories to their lawful owners. At the same time it settled down to the electoral campaign, carefully distinguishing itself from the 'revolutionaries' of May. The Communist Party was, as Waldeck-Rochet put it, 'a revolutionary party in the best sense of the term', that is to say, a party which ensured that a revolution did not take place.

Then and since Stalinist propagandists, and those who cover up for them, have been working hard to prove that the situation in France in May was not revolutionary and to discredit all those who claim it was. For all the conditions to be present for a revolutionary situation there has of course to be a revolutionary party able to heighten the consciousness of the working class and lead it to power. As the principal political party of the working class, and as the leader of the largest trade union confederation, Stalinism did everything it could to confine the strikes to material objectives consistent with the preservation of capitalism and to prevent the working class from turning them into a struggle for power. It first slandered the students, even when they had become the principal victims of the police repression, and then did everything possible to isolate the students and the youth from the striking workers. Wherever possible it controlled the strike committees to prevent them from becoming instruments of power. The Stalinists had no intention of leading the working class in revolution and made sure that no one else should. After carrying out this policy, which opened the way for the resumption of control of the situation by de Gaulle at the head of a shaken but newly self-confident bourgeoisie, it had the audacity to claim that there had been a revolutionary situation.

In this the Communist Party stood four square with the Soviet bureaucracy which feared nothing more than the opening of the European Revolution, for which a successful revolution in France would have been the prelude. It was clear all along that the CP would therefore place a brake on the movement while taking care to retain its control over the working class. Thus the need to discredit the students, to denounce the 'leftists', to confine the aims of the strikes to questions of wages and hours and to bring them to an end as soon as possible; thus the slogan of a 'popular government' and the acceptance of elections which it knew would be certain to have the form of a referendum for de Gaulle.

The Communist Party has had great difficulty this time in concealing its betrayal from the workers and from its own militants. The drop in the electoral vote of the Communist Party indicates this very clearly. Many workers opposed the return to work to the very end; even more went back reluctantly on the instructions of their leaders with the knowledge that they had not won the power that was in their grasp. Opposition in the ranks of the party has never been so widespread; a renewed ferment has begun amongst the intellectuals but this time it is accompanied to a much greater extent than before by criticism by worker members. Some sections of the party have been further astonished by the failure of the CP and the CGT to protest against the banning of the left-wing organizations and the hounding of their militants.

Although the elections were run by the Gaullists on a 'red scare' platform and with a lot of anti-Communist talk there can be little doubt that the government, and particularly de Gaulle himself, are well aware of the services which the CP rendered in May and June. This was understood during the events by many reporters and commentators of both the French bourgeois and the foreign press. For the first time, in many papers, the conclusion, new and astonishing to the writers themselves, that the Communist Party was a great institution making for the preservation of the bourgeois social order, in other words, was a counter-revolutionary force, as Trotsky pointed out over three decades ago, became a commonplace. As Victor Fay summed it up in *Le Monde Diplomatique* for July:

'By putting a brake on the popular upsurge the leaders of the Communist Party and the CGT upset the vanguard of the working class and cut themselves off from the revolutionary students. At no moment during the crisis did the CP and the CGT push the workers towards direct action; they

followed rather than led this action. At no time did they issue a call for a general strike nor recommend the occupation of the factories by the workers. At no time did they consider the situation as revolutionary. Monsieur Ségué, general secretary of the CGT declared on June 13: "The question of knowing whether the hour for the insurrection had struck was never at any time posed before the Bureau of the Confederation or the Administrative Commission, which are composed, as is well known, of serious and responsible militants who do not have the reputation of taking their desires for reality".'

Whether Ségué is speaking the truth or not is scarcely important. What can be assumed from the whole behaviour of the CP is that its leaders well knew that a revolutionary situation did exist. Their main concern was to prevent the working class pushing towards a seizure of power—a task which they successfully carried out, but only by dint of immense efforts. After the event they were able to explain that there never had been a revolutionary situation, in order to cover up their tracks and their actual role in preventing it from maturing.

Once again, then, as in 1936, as in 1945, as in 1953 and 1958 the Communist Party imposed a strait-jacket on the working class and helped to preserve the bourgeois social order.

The bitterness and hostility of the attacks launched by the CP on the student movement and upon the left-wing groups were required in order to prevent the latter from becoming a pole of attraction and an alternative leadership.

What was the possibility of such an alternative arising? As far as the student movement was concerned, and those groups who concentrated their main efforts in the Sorbonne after its liberation from police control on May 13, it can be said that it evaded in practice such a task. Instead the energies of the students were dispersed in interminable discussions, sallies to the barricades and occasional sorties to the factory gates.

Only the supporters of the International Committee, the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste, the youth movement *Révoltes* and the student movement, the Fédération des Etudiants Révolutionnaires put forward consistently a Marxist policy. Themselves taken by surprise by the rapidity with which the storm broke, fighting with small numbers in a most difficult situation these organizations acquired a valuable capital of experience in struggle from which the whole international movement can draw. Undoubtedly their intervention in a number of decisive instances, including the first

occupation at Sud-Aviation, had an important bearing on the course of events. Links were developed with important sections of the youth and the working class. In the universities the FER put forward a basically correct line against the advocates of 'student power' and the 'critical university'—that is to say against the mainstream of student feeling—with great consistency and courage in the face of slander and misrepresentation.

In the end the smallness of the vanguard enabled the treachery of the Stalinists and the reformists to prevail. The alternative leadership, while it made its presence felt, was not able to take command of the class. Now, along with other left

groups, the OCI, *Révoltes* and the FER have been banned: but their struggle continues. Inside the CGT and the CP there is a growing volume of questions and criticism. The workers were not defeated, and they know it; but the class-conscious elements also know that they could have gained much more—that power was within their grasp. In these conditions, with the crisis of French capitalism aggravated by the events of May and June, the opportunities for intervention, even under conditions of illegality, become very great. The struggle continues and in the coming period the Trotskyists will come forward to lead the final victorious struggle of the French working class.

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Trotsky's Marxism under attack

A reply to the recent articles by Nicolas Krassó in 'New Left Review' attacking 'Trotsky's Marxism' and the reply by Ernest Mandel.

by Cliff Slaughter

SINCE 1956—the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, the Hungarian Revolution and the overturn in Poland—Stalinism has been in a state of profound and open crisis. The events of that year were such an overwhelming vindication of Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism that those who continued that struggle, Trotskyists, were able to strengthen themselves significantly in preparation for the revolutionary political tasks coming to the fore with the eventual end of the boom of the 'fifties and early 'sixties.

But the onset of crisis in the ranks of the Communist Parties throughout the capitalist world produced other results besides this opportunity for Trotskyism. For two generations, the Stalinists had cultivated a section of their membership as 'intellectuals'. The first wave was recruited on the basis of the 'popular front', class-collaborationist, policies of the period between 1934 and 1939. They were followed by the recruits of the 'anti-fascist war' and post-war period.

The Stalin-Hitler pact at the beginning of the Second World War removed a number of these recruits from the ranks and later many others weakened and deserted under the pressure of McCarthyism and the cold war. But we can say that for most of this period their acceptance of the conquests of the October Revolution was adapted to the line that the communist movement was really the logical advance guard of the democratic resistance to fascism.

In the late 'forties and 'fifties the 'peace movement' was the form taken by this political line. Once again the independent class line of the revolutionary proletariat was suppressed, with Communist Party members supplying the leading cadre of all 'anti-war' movements.

The secondary effects of this Stalinist line were

eventually to prove of some importance. Intellectuals in the Communist Party were separated from the trade union and general political work of the Party, and encouraged to pursue their special interests. For all the talk about 'the battle of ideas', and despite certain periods of witch-hunting, these intellectuals were not required to step out of line with the petty-bourgeois 'democratic' atmosphere of their day-to-day work. At those points where the Stalinist bureaucracy did find collaboration with the imperialists difficult, precisely at these points did the Party lose numbers of these intellectuals, above all during the McCarthy period in the USA.

1956: two bombshells

Krushchev's 'secret speech', revealing some of the manifestations of Stalin's personal power, and the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in November 1956, were a bombshell in the lives of every one of these Communist Party intellectuals. The real lesson of this crisis was the counter-revolutionary nature of the Soviet bureaucracy and the need to re-establish continuity with the Bolshevik tradition of October, through the Fourth International and Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism.

But the vast majority of Stalinist intellectuals now set their political course not objectively, but subjectively: they saw their 'communism' as a vast deception; they could no longer hold up their heads in the liberal circles in which they lived and worked; they were outraged to discover that their idealist acceptance of Stalin and Stalinism had been used to cover up murder, torture and the suppression of all freedom; and so on.

Politically speaking, and insofar as any of them remained in politics, the meaning behind these re-

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Politically speaking, and insofar as any of them remained in politics, the meaning behind these re-

actions was the acceptance of the principal capitalist ideological attack on the Russian Revolution and Communism: that Stalinism, with all its abuses and betrayals, is essentially a continuation of Leninism; that the essence of Stalinism is 'dictatorship' or 'totalitarianism', together with 'Realpolitik' or pragmatic power politics; and that the 'ideals' with which rank-and-file members join and build the movement are simply cynically used by the power-seekers in the leadership.

Conscious of this 'continuity', the ex-Communists then cast around for alternative moral and political principles. They find, of course, only the leftovers of bourgeois ethics and the many varieties of reformist and liberal opportunism which have accepted them. None of these, since they flow from, and depend directly upon, a social order which is historically doomed and decaying, can provide a consistent course of action and theory.

Consequently, the many groupings which blossomed (if the word is appropriate in this connection) after 1956 eventually either dissolved into the reformist and liberal movements, or else drifted more and more closely towards Stalinism, sometimes in the form of open and direct collaboration, in other cases through an ideological accommodation. This is because on an international scale capitalism survives not through any inherent strength, but only through the props provided for it by the Stalinist bureaucracy. This is the social force which holds back the proletarian revolution.

Stalinism or Trotskyism

Insofar as there is any political and theoretical work among those claiming to be socialists, it must either gravitate towards Stalinism, or be attracted to revolutionary Marxism, to Trotskyism. The *New Left Review* has a certain continuity since 1956. It was an amalgamation of *Universities and Left Review* and *The New Reasoner*. Both of these were the result of collaboration between ex-Communist Party members and other left intellectuals.

The New Reasoner was originally *The Reasoner*, a duplicated opposition bulletin for dissident Communist Party members in the North of England in 1956. Its editors, Edward Thompson and John Saville, were and remain strongly anti-Trotskyist. Thompson described Trotskyism as a sectarian, ultra-left and anti-revolutionary trend in the British working class. Like those who succeeded them, Thompson and Saville sought for future development from sources outside the Bolshevik tradition, and particularly from some supposedly special

socialist characteristics of the *British* working-class movement.

Their refusal to face up to the historical meaning of Stalinism and of Trotsky's fight against it was reflected in their rejection of any campaign against Stalinism such as that carried out by the Trotskyists, on the grounds that it amounted to 'anti-Communism'. In this way they accepted the basic position of a continuity between Lenin and Stalin. Indeed, Thompson explicitly called for a questioning of Marx's theory of knowledge as a way of getting at the sources of Stalinism. ('Socialist Humanism: an epistle to the Philistines,' *New Reasoner*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Summer 1957. See Peter Fryer's reply 'Lenin as Philosopher' in *Labour Review*, Vol. 2, No. 5, September-October 1957.)

Between those days and 1968, many changes in the editorial personnel and the editorial statements of *New Left Review* have taken place. It no longer attempts the organization and mobilization of socialists and militants in every industrial centre, promised when the magazine was launched. It has become very much a university radical magazine, carrying a high proportion of translated material and literary and philosophical commentary. The *New Left Manifesto* of 1967, revised and re-issued in 1968, is predictably a left reformist plea to all centrists to stand firm on their principles—which must be the most hopeless of all lost causes!

A new relationship

From about 1964, rumours became strong that there was 'Trotskyism' abroad in the editorial offices of the *New Left Review*. The rumours referred in fact to a certain relationship which had sprung up between some of the Editorial Board and the changing group of isolated individuals in Britain who claimed allegiance to the revisionist 'United Secretariat of the Fourth International' in Paris, an offshoot of the anti-Trotskyist programme developed by Michel Pablo in the early nineteen-fifties.

Enthusiasm for the 'Castro-ite' currents in Latin America, expectation of a 'left' development internationally from petty-bourgeois sources and elements within the bureaucracies of the workers' movement—these were the focus of agreement between these two trends. It can be said that people like Ken Coates, who for many years played with the ideas of Pabloism, helped in this way to provide sophisticated formulae through which the *New Left Review* group maintained its anti-Trotskyist position and left itself open to co-existence with Stalinism.

Such co-existence is precisely the starting-point of Pabloism, which abandoned the building of Trotskyist parties based on the revolutionary role of the working class, and instead adapted itself to the supposedly automatic assumption of revolutionary tasks by elements of the Stalinist bureaucracy and by the 'democratic' petty bourgeoisie in the colonial countries. There was a marriage of convenience.

Enter, Krasso

The *New Left Review* from time to time made sniping attacks on Trotskyism, particularly in its earlier phases, but it never provided any analysis of Trotskyism or of its own relation to the Trotskyist movement. Naturally enough, it produced no useful material on the history of Stalinism either, for that would have implied an estimation of Trotsky's role. In recent issues, however, the gap has been filled by lengthy contributions from a new member of the *New Left Review* Editorial Board, one Nicolas Krasso, who has given us 'Trotsky's Marxism' (*New Left Review* 44, July-August 1967). This attack on Trotsky was taken up by Ernest Mandel, a Belgian economist who can be taken to follow faithfully the line of the Germain-Frank group in Paris to which we refer above (*New Left Review* 47, January-February 1968). Krasso returns to the fray (in *New Left Review* 48, March-April 1968) with 'Reply to Ernest Mandel'.

It is of some importance that the *New Left Review* at this juncture now launches an all-out attack on Trotsky and Trotskyism. They claim to publish what is above all a theoretical journal, and this is their 'contribution' to the preparation of the next stage in the political development of the working-class movement in Britain.

Robin Blackburn, to take only one name from the list of editors, makes great play of defending Regis Debray and celebrating the Cuban Revolution, but he chooses in 1967-1968 to publish a magazine jointly with an enemy of Marxism like Krasso, who joins the *New Left Review* board to find a platform to attack the revolutionary vanguard. Krasso himself is an ex-pupil of the Hungarian Georg Lukacs. He has learned and 'improved' upon all Lukacs' well-known capacities for capitulation and bending to the strongest prevailing winds, but without any of the learning and subtlety with which Lukacs conceals his retreat from Marxism. He is precisely one of those who reacted to the 1956 Revolution by moving away from Communism as well as from Stalinism. But,

as we shall see, by rejecting the line of Lenin and Trotsky, he is brought back to the position of an apologist for Stalin.

An Evaluation of Mandel

One purpose of this long introduction to our reply to Krasso is to prepare also our evaluation of Mandel's reply to Krasso. Together with his British followers he too had flirted with the *New Left Review*, submitting articles to them and collaborating in their ventures, and so he was obliged to respond to the diatribe which issued from the pen of their new recruit, Krasso. But precisely because his politics have been of the type which could accommodate to the *New Left Review* line and orientation, both in Britain and internationally, he proves pitifully unable to deal with Krasso. He does not defend Trotskyism for a single minute, and by the feebleness of his reply actually strengthens Krasso's attack. This episode is only one small example of the destructive service rendered to Trotskyism by the revisionists.

Mandel's reply to Krasso cannot be other than weak, allowing Krasso to return to the attack. Mandel's own political revision of the basic positions of Trotskyism and the Fourth International, along the lines of Michel Pablo, took the form of an adaptation to the Stalinist bureaucracy, which involved inevitably an abandonment of the building of revolutionary parties independent of all elements in that bureaucracy.

Krasso's attack on Trotskyism, his wish to advocate a 'Marxism' opposed to Trotskyism, is his own olive-branch to the 'liberalizing' Stalinist bureaucrats in Eastern Europe. He is telling them that any 'independence' from them which he may claim will certainly not involve revolutionary organization of the working class against them, and that he will assist them in their task of repelling Trotskyism. Mandel cannot even bring himself to defend the Fourth International, the crowning political act of Trotsky's career. Instead, he makes a purely abstract assessment of the historical questions and criticisms raised by Krasso.

Even where he makes correct points, this is only part of the overall effect, which is to help Krasso portray Trotsky as, at best, a historical tragedy and at most a dangerously wrong-headed deviationist from Leninism.

Mandel cannot establish himself in the argument as a continuator of Trotsky's work, the only real answer to Krasso, because he is part of a revisionist attempt to destroy the content of Trotskyism.

Similarly, his followers in Britain consciously cut off any connection they had with Trotskyism.

Historical ancestry

We take only two examples. Pat Jordan and his associates, followers of Mandel, have for the past two years devoted themselves entirely to the 'Vietnam Solidarity Campaign'. From the theoretical standpoint, even more significant than the politics of this movement, adapted as they are to Stalinism, is the conscious claim its leaders make for their historical ancestry:

Our campaign recognizes its own historical precedents. In the nineteen-thirties, united fronts composed of liberals, democrats, communists and socialists, were forged to oppose the onslaught of Fascism, and international brigades were organized to lend material support to the heroic struggle of Republican Spain, etc. (*Why Vietnam Solidarity?*, p. 2).

In a recently published collection of writings, *Industrial Democracy in Great Britain*, Tony Topham and Ken Coates, long-time close associates of Mandel and opponents of the Trotskyist Socialist Labour League on his behalf, came out just as clearly:

From the work of the original 'New Left' movement which in 1956 began its independent reappraisal of the socialist interpretation of twentieth-century capitalism, its history and sociology . . . from the more recent activities of the 'Voice' conferences on workers' control in Britain, and from accompanying contributions of the European left, we have drawn our inspiration.

This brings us back to where we began: the relationship between revisionism, anti-Trotskyism and the *New Left Review*. This relationship begins to be revealed especially clearly on the eve of what will be undoubtedly the greatest class struggles for half a century—and the greatest betrayals by the Stalinists, to whom they are all making their way home. And this is the essential meaning of Krasso's attack on 'Trotsky's Marxism'.

Pseudo-Hegelian construction

Krasso is not a modest man. He sets out to demonstrate the 'mistakes' of Trotsky through every phase of his political career. (In the course of this, he condescends to take five pages 'to clarify some recurring misconceptions about the history of the international revolutionary movement since the nineteen-twenties'.) What is more, he claims to have found the secret, the single source, of all Trotsky's mistakes.

The *form* of Krasso's case is a crude application of the notion of 'totality', in the sense of a purely abstract unity, to Trotsky's political writing and politics. This totality is a so-called 'sociologism', which led Trotsky always to relate the class struggle too directly to the course of political events, without ever grasping what Krasso calls the autonomy of political institutions. In consistently idealist fashion, Krasso 'proves' his case by tracing Trotsky's relation to the revolutionary party as the expression of this 'sociologism'. He manages to arrive eventually at a fine pseudo-Hegelian construction: Trotsky began as a crude advocate of centralism; never understanding the political concepts behind centralism, he went from 1903 to the nineteen-thirties through a series of basic errors on the question which decided his political fate; he then returned in old age to the vulgar conceptions of his youth. Into this construction—a house of cards—every 'example' is forced. Krasso begins by himself summing up this approach, an approach typical of bourgeois idealist sociology since the beginning of the century, and recently revived in the fashionable 'structuralism'. The method is to erect an 'ideal type' of the motives which appear to the observer to predominate in the behaviour of the individual or group observed, and then try and 'illuminate' the actual reality through this ideal type, or what Krasso calls 'specific unity'.

Thus:

The aim of this essay is to approach such a problem—how should we judge Trotsky as a Marxist? This means comparing him with Lenin (rather than with Stalin) and trying to see what is the specific unity of his theoretical writings and his practice as a politician. For this purpose, Trotsky's life falls into four distinct phases: 1879-1917, 1917-21, 1921-29 and 1929-40. It will be the thesis of this essay that all four periods are best understood in the framework of a single problem: Trotsky's relation to the Party as the revolutionary organization of the proletariat, and its latent theoretical foundations. This focus, it will be argued, illuminates all the basic characteristics (vices and virtues) of Trotsky's thought as a Marxist, and explains the vicissitudes of his political career. (Krasso, *New Left Review*, 44, p. 65).

Revisionist impotence

This is the form. We have explained the actual content, the attack on the Trotskyist struggle for the continuity of Bolshevism in the building of revolutionary parties, for the social revolution against imperialism, linked with the political revo-

lution in the countries ruled by the Stalinist bureaucracy. Mandel's reply to Krasso is feeble because it is purely abstract. Coming from the camp of revisionism on this very question, it cannot challenge the content of Krasso's article, nor can it expose its anti-Marxist form, for in order to abandon the revolutionary party, our revisionists also abandoned the Marxist method in favour of empiricism and pragmatism (see *Fourth International*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Summer 1965, for the analysis of this revision of Marxist methods).

Trotsky's own writings are, of course, the only complete answer to Krasso's long list of easy judgments on every aspect of his work. Here we shall take the central questions, and demonstrate that Krasso's method involves a distortion which is in every case characteristic of a crude empiricist approach on historical questions which is always the fate of the idealist. This empiricism, as always, has the political consequence of prostration before the relative equilibrium achieved by capitalism at any particular phase of the epoch of proletarian revolution. This 'worshipping of the accomplished fact', as Trotsky would have called it, is directly concentrated upon a justification of the Stalinist bureaucracy. This is only to be expected, since Stalinism has been and remains the principal counter-revolutionary force on a world scale, and thus the most important instrument through which the crisis-ridden capitalist system achieves any temporary unstable equilibrium. Forty years of Stalinist lies about Trotsky's supposed aid and comfort to the international bourgeoisie do not prevent every bourgeois scholar, almost without exception, deciding that Stalin 'given the circumstances' was historically right as against Trotsky.

Justification of bureaucracy

According to Krasso, Trotsky was blinded to the realities of the early Soviet state, to the real dynamics of the struggle in the Bolshevik Party after Lenin's death, to the actual potential of the class struggle in the metropolitan countries after the Russian Revolution. In every case, says Krasso, he ignored the immediate sociological background, substituting for it the play of global social or class forces. For all its appearance of high-sounding theory, this argument of Krasso amounts in every case to a justification of the Stalinist bureaucracy and of bourgeois order against the proletariat and the revolution. Krasso writes, for example:

It may be argued that Stalin, by discounting the possibility of successful European revolutions, effectively contributed to their eventual defeat—this

accusation has often been made against his policies towards Germany and Spain. There was, indeed, an element of the self-fulfilling prediction in socialism in one country. However, given this criticism, which is precisely that Stalin's policies represented a debasement of Lenin's strategy—the superiority of Stalin's perspective over Trotsky's is undeniable. It forms the whole historico-practical context in which the struggle for power discussed above unfolded. No matter how strong Stalin's position in the apparatus, it would have availed him little if his basic strategic line had been invalidated by the course of political events. It was, on the contrary, confirmed by history. In this lay Stalin's ultimate, unshakable strength in the 'twenties.' [my emphasis, C.S.] (Krasso, *New Left Review*, 44, p. 79).

It is immediately apparent that Krasso's attempt, in other parts of his essay, to appear as a great follower of Lenin as against Trotsky and Stalin, is mere window-dressing. If Lenin's strategy was 'debased' by Stalin, and Stalin's 'basic strategic line' was 'confirmed by history', what remains of the 'basic strategic line' of Lenin? In Krasso's book, could Lenin possibly have survived the judgement made on Trotsky—a classical revolutionary thinker, stranded in an impossible historical impasse, committed to the 'ill-starred venture' of building an International of revolutionary parties? (*Ibid.* pp. 84-85).

Krasso's prostration before the existing order of class rule and the power of the Stalinist bureaucracy, expressed most clearly in the passage quoted above on Stalin's 'correctness', is the real meaning of his castigation of Trotsky's supposed 'underestimation of the specific efficacy of political institutions', the so-called 'sociologism' which is Trotsky's original sin. Every one of the doubtful talents of Krasso is turned to 'proving' that, whatever criticisms are permitted of Stalin and Stalinism, they must not lead to the position established by Trotsky.

1927-1940: the alleged myth

The period 1927-1940 must be characterized as 'Myth'. Trotsky is the tragic hero, and the Fourth International an abortion.

The last period of his life was dominated by his symbolic relationship to the great drama of the previous decade, which had become for him a tragic fate. His activities became almost futile. He himself was completely ineffective—the leader of an imaginary political movement, helpless while his relatives were exterminated by Stalin, and interned wherever he went. His main objective role in these pitiful years was to provide the fictive negative centre needed by Stalin in Russia . . . Stalin installed his

iron dictatorship by mobilizing the party apparatus against the 'Trotskyite' threat. (*Ibid.* p. 84).

Mandel, having spent so many years in the task of attempting to liquidate the Fourth International, gives no answer whatsoever to this neo-Stalinist distortion. What Krasso is doing here is providing a more 'subtle' and less brutal version of the old Stalinist falsifications of the Moscow trials. The last refuge of the Stalinists on these questions was for years that the forced confessions and the judicial frame-ups were 'objectively' necessary, whether or not Trotsky 'consciously' acted for the bourgeoisie and counter-revolution. That presentation has become untenable, and Krasso's role is to provide the last threadbare covering for the bureaucracy as its past is exposed: the 'negative' features of Stalin's rule, according to him, were established more easily because 'objectively' Trotsky's 'futile' activities provided a focus for the purges!

Never from the standpoint of the proletariat

However perverse and flimsy, the argument is worth examination. It starts from and ends with only the standpoint of the bureaucracy, the scope and limits of its policy and power, and never from the standpoint of the working class. Internationally, the defeats of the 1926-1936 period are accepted as given and unalterable 'objective' obstacles to Trotsky's policies and aims. In each particular country, the consciousness of those defeats became part of an 'unfamiliar context' for Trotsky, 'the character of the new societies in which he found himself', and of which he was 'uncertain'.

What is the significance of this last point? Krasso develops it in his reply to Mandel:

But in all these cases, Stalin's international policies were ultimately [?] a secondary factor within a contest fought and decided at *national* level. The primary unit [?] of class struggle was the nation . . . (*New Left Review*, 48, p. 101).

The latter point is taken up later in relation to the theory of permanent revolution: in the present context the decisive thing is that Krasso presents and re-writes the whole history of the inter-war period as a justification of the Soviet bureaucracy.

Like every petty bourgeois, Krasso finds a bit of good in everybody. But his praise of Trotsky on certain questions is only part of his attack, and it is made only insofar as it supports Krasso's own orientation to Stalinism today. Krasso refers to the 'tremendous prescience' of Trotsky's writings on German Fascism, and the uniqueness of his analysis

of the Stalinist errors of the 'Third Period'. Similarly, although complaining about the 'demagogic' title of *The Revolution Betrayed*, Krasso commends Trotsky's analysis of the USSR:

While many of his followers were manufacturing new 'ruling classes' and 'capitalist restorations' in the Soviet Union at will, Trotsky in his analysis of the Soviet state and party apparatus emphasized, on the contrary, that it was not a social class. (*Ibid.*, p. 85).

With the sure judgement of the camp-follower, Krasso knows how far to go: he can faintly praise Trotsky for that part of his theory which, when abstracted and robbed of its content, can be used to lend support for Krasso's own celebration of the historical role of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

His praise for Trotsky's work on the rise of Nazism in Germany is just as informative. While recording his agreement with Trotsky that the line of the Comintern was disastrous, he at the same time (indeed, in the next sentence) argues that 'Stalin's international policies were ultimately a secondary factor within a contest fought and decided at *national* level'. (*Ibid.*, 48, p. 101).

Of course, Trotsky's entire analysis was based on precisely the opposite grounds! The 'left' zig-zag into the 'Third Period' in 1929 was an international turn by the Stalinist bureaucracy. The designation of social democrats as 'social-fascists' and the rejection of the United Front was not a product of something 'German' but of the social position, needs and policies of the Soviet bureaucracy, and it proved *decisive* in opening the way to Hitler's victory in 1933. So much was this the *central* feature of Trotsky's analysis that he drew from 1933 the historic conclusion that the reform of the Third International was no longer possible and that the Fourth must be constructed. This is, of course, the one decision above all others made by Trotsky which Krasso rejects outright. His commendation of Trotsky's work on Germany is thus worse than meaningless: it is used to build up a case which is precisely the opposite of that argued and fought for by Trotsky. Since Krasso accuses Trotsky of non-Marxist method, how does he explain his own attempts to abstract 'bits and pieces' from Trotsky's work and damn or praise them? Is it 'Marxist', then, to apply some external norms of judgement to each 'essay' by Trotsky instead of tracing Trotsky's development as a unity of theory and practice? For Trotsky, the German tragedy and the building of the new International were inseparably linked. For Krasso, Trotsky is

'brilliant' on one hand and 'futile' on the other! So much for 'Krasso's Marxism'!

Crammed within one parentheses

Again it is necessary to move immediately from the direct analysis of Krasso's argument to the politics which lie behind it. In his rejoinder to Mandel, Krasso indicates with great clarity (the clarity of the naïve, it should be said, and not of the brilliant) this relation between his opportunist politics and his eclectic method. He writes:

Moreover, Trotsky's critique of the Comintern policies in Germany was excellent (it is perhaps significant, incidentally, that his best polemics of those years were written from a 'rightist' position, parallel to that of Brandler, not from a 'leftist' position, which he adopted during the Popular Fronts) . . . (*Ibid.*)

This passage tells us as much about Krasso's line and method as we need to know, and more than would emerge from going over in detail many of the other questions he raises. Like this question of Trotsky's 'right' and 'left' lines, these have all been answered many times, and in the first place by Trotsky himself.

Here, however, Krasso surpasses himself. So much confusion is crammed into one pair of parentheses that it is difficult to know where to begin. But it must be done.

Brandler and Thalheimer, 'right-wing Communists' close to the thinking of Bukharin, were expelled from the German Communist Party in 1929. They strongly criticised the ultra-left policy of the Comintern, particularly in its application to Germany. In appearances, many of the points they made were the same as points made by Trotsky and the Left Opposition. Did this mean that Trotsky had moved over to their 'rightist' position, later to return to the left after 1933?

Krasso's superficial judgements on Germany

This superficial judgement did in fact prevail in some circles, not least among certain followers of the Left Opposition. But Brandler confined his political criticism entirely to this 'left' swing in the zig-zag of Comintern policies, zig-zags which were stumbling, empirical and tardy reactions to the disastrous consequences of earlier phases of their own policy. It was the *reasons* for the zig-zags, the *nature* of the bureaucracy, to which Marxists must direct their attention. And it was here that Trotsky was completely opposed to Brandler. Just as Brandler separated out one historical stage of Stalinist policy for attack, so he separated his

criticisms of the 'German policy' of the Comintern from every other question of the policy and nature of the Stalinist leadership. Where Trotsky exposed the German Communist Party's policy as only one expression of the whole turn against proletarian internationalism and Marxism by the Comintern leadership under the pressure of the Stalinist bureaucracy, Brandler compromised with the Stalinists, argued that to attack Comintern policy as a whole or Stalin's policy inside Russia would make effective opposition impossible by alienating all Communists. From this standpoint, Brandler argued that the course of the bureaucracy could be corrected without an overall and principled struggle against them.

All this is well known to serious students of the Communist movement, and Krasso's ignorance of it is no more excusable than deliberate falsification. A light-minded attitude towards the history and theory of the revolutionary movement is the most serious fault possible in anyone claiming to be a Marxist. One cannot even be as generous as this in relation to Krasso's imputation that Trotsky changed from a 'rightist' to a 'leftist' position in the period of the Popular Fronts. Trotsky's position was that of continuation of the path of Lenin and of the first four Congresses of the Third International. He fought for and developed these principles, strategy and tactics until his death. The zig-zags to 'left' and 'right' were, once again, the frantic re-adjustments made by the bureaucracy after being brought face to face with the consequences of their own line. Thus, after the victory of Hitler, they belatedly introduced, at the VIIth World Congress of the Communist International, a policy of 'alliances' against Fascism. But it was not a return to the United Front of the early years of the International and explained in detail in the speeches and reports of Lenin and Trotsky. Instead, there were to be 'Popular Fronts' of the 'democratic' parties, i.e. alliances with the bourgeois 'democratic' parties, for the sake of which the independent demands and the revolutionary role of the working class were to be suppressed. Spain was to provide the great example.

The point here is that the change of line, while prompted by the historical defeat of the German working class and all that it threatened to the workers of every country, was shaped by the political requirements of the Stalinist bureaucracy in its position between the Soviet proletariat and property relations on the one hand, and imperialism on the other. Stalin now settled for a strategy of using the Communist Parties as direct agents of

guaranteeing social peace to the bourgeois powers who in return would militarily and diplomatically 'guarantee' the isolation of Hitler and counter his threat to the USSR's Western border.

A special licence

All this Trotsky analyzed with perfect clarity at the time. His position was not 'rightist' or 'leftist' but a Marxist one of fighting for policies based on the international interests of the working class, including the Soviet working class. How much then remains of Krasso's easy formula about Trotsky's change of position and his tendency to write better when in a 'rightist' position? Undoubtedly, nothing other than Krasso's own subjective preference for a 'liberalizing', 'non-sectarian' position, from which he himself prefers to see both the past and the present of the Stalinist bureaucracy. For the same reason he falls easily into the position of arguing, in Stalin's favour, that the unit of class struggle and revolution was primarily the nation.

This is not just an abstract preference for Stalin over Trotsky, though that is congenital to opportunists, but essentially an overture to the 'liberal' wing of the bureaucracy in Hungary and the other East European countries, with their lip service to 'separate, national roads to socialism'. This formula is in fact a special licence to combine sycophantic service to the Kremlin bureaucracy with a measure of privilege and 'independence' as suitable reward. Independence from the Moscow bureaucracy is one thing; 'independence' from the working class, guaranteed by the tanks of this same Moscow bureaucracy, quite another.

Krasso's 'Marxism' is essentially of this type, a set of fixed formulae to explain why things are *just* what they appear to be. It is the revolutionary role of the working class, united and led to power by a conscious revolutionary party, which he rejects. That is the real meaning of his criticism of Trotsky's supposed 'sociologism', or stress on the class struggle as determinant of the course of historical events. Again, Germany provides the best example, and a clearer one than would an analysis of all his abstract arguments. In the same breath as he talks about the 'excellence' of Trotsky's writings on Germany, Krasso says:

The possibilities of a socialist revolution in Germany were also remote. The KPD (German Communist Party) at no time had anything like the force to deal with the Wehrmacht (the German army)—re-armed and equipped by the social democrats for the deliberate purpose of counter-revolution in 1918, and constantly enlarged thereafter. This

strategic situation was prior to any consideration of Nazism. A successful check on Nazism was one thing; a proletarian revolution quite another.' (*Ibid.*)

Trotsky on Germany

Trotsky's writings on Germany could certainly not have been written by a man with Krasso's historical opinions, as expressed in this quotation. Krasso can only see these writings as 'a pathology of the class nature of the dispossessed petty bourgeoisie and its paranoias'; from the comfortable chair of the petty-bourgeois intellectual, he thinks he can simply utilize the ideas of Trotsky for an abstract evaluation of his less enlightened predecessors in Germany. But reference to Trotsky's works on Germany shows that he approached the 'dispossessed petty bourgeoisie' and its politics always from the point of view of the crisis of leadership and independent politics of the working class, the only revolutionary class against the great monopolies and banks. In Germany, as in France and every other capitalist country, the frustrated petty bourgeoisie, battered between these two main classes, would choose the demagogy and anti-proletarian violence of Fascism if the proletariat did not win it to a policy of revolutionary and decisive inroads into big capitalist property: anything else, and in particular the defence of the discredited 'democracy', would only impel the middle classes further to the right. It was for this purpose that Trotsky insisted on a united front of the working class both before 1933 in Germany, during the 'Third Period', and after 1934, when the Stalinists went over to 'Popular Front' politics.

Krasso, as always opposed to a dialectical viewpoint, can only see pre-1933 and post-1933 as two opposites, and not as expressions and developments of the same revolutionary line against Stalinism and its zig-zags. This impressionistic separating out of phases is not just a weakness of logic: on the one hand, it flows from the idealist method of not proceeding from the development of Trotsky's Marxism as revolutionary theory and practice; on the other, it is a necessary parallel of his rejection of the revolutionary role of the working class. Thus, at the end of his reply to Mandel, he defines Marxism, not as the theoretical basis of the proletarian revolution, but as 'the intelligence of an intolerable era and the movement to transform it' (*Ibid.*, p. 103). From this standpoint, Krasso is perfectly able to write the urbane-sounding and cynical verdict on Germany which we have quoted. From the heights of 'sociological' promise we are

thrown down to the most vulgar and everyday judgements of the frightened petty bourgeois, whose sole aim is to make any class-conscious worker who will listen, just as frightened as he is—this is what is meant by pressure of the middle classes on the proletariat. The army was too strong—and so there could be no revolution.

Argument against revolution

This strikingly original theory is of course an argument against any revolution. Of course, Krasso takes into account his 'sophisticated' audience by adding that the social democrats had in 1918-1919 made possible the restoration of the German Army, but he uses this 'fact' purely, as Marx used to say, 'to justify today's swinishness by yesterday's swinishness'. No doubt we should conclude, from the development of modern weapons and the 'fact' that the bourgeois state and army were restored with the active and indispensable help of French and Italian Stalinism in 1945, that revolution in Western Europe today is 'remote'. Krasso's analysis in 1929-1933 would have led to capitulation to Nazism, just as in 1936 in France the Stalinists and social democrats did use precisely the argument that the workers were not armed and so could not envisage revolution.

Finally, when Krasso says: 'A successful check to Nazism was one thing; a proletarian revolution quite another,' he takes us through the last door into metaphysics, where every 'fact' and 'possibility' is separated out from every other to receive the approbation or the condemnation of the petty bourgeois as to its historical permissibility. Perhaps Krasso will now write an article explaining *what policy, and what class, could actually have achieved the defeat of Nazism in Germany without proletarian revolution!* What social force could be mobilized to defeat the Nazis and their capitalist backers? Does Fascism arise from the inability of capitalism to go on in the old 'democratic' way, or from purely political developments which can be halted? (Is *this* the meaning of Krasso's high-sounding talk about the 'autonomy of political institutions'?) Was there then a path of democratic capitalism in Germany after the 1920s? Come, Mr. Krasso! Answer these questions, explain to us just what you mean by 'a successful check to Nazism' but without a 'proletarian revolution'. This was precisely the petty-bourgeois Utopia with which Stalinism infected, misled, and betrayed the international working-class movement in the 1930s and 1940s. In this one 'distinction' between defeating Fascism 'on the one hand' and proletarian

revolution, 'on the other', Krasso's whole political and theoretical position is revealed: his articles are a crude attempt to provide a theoretical support for the Stalinist bureaucracy's struggle against Trotskyism.

For the rest, we must refer the reader to Trotsky's own texts on the question of Germany. In the space of one article, it is of course not possible to take up in detail all Krasso's particular points, but the analysis of any one of them brings out the same essential method: denial of the Trotskyist continuity of Marxism in building alternative revolutionary leadership; justification of the Stalinist betrayals on the grounds of their proceeding from a more 'realistic' perspective.

Spain as another example

We will take the example of Spain because it gives the opportunity to quote Trotsky on the more general theoretical questions raised by Krasso, as well as to answer Krasso on the Spanish Revolution itself. In the course of fulfilling his promise to 'clarify some recurring misconceptions about the history of the international revolutionary movement since the 'twenties', Krasso writes: 'The Spanish Civil War is another example. Mandel implies that the Spanish Communist Party could have made a successful revolution within the embattled Republic in 1936-1937 and then gone on to military victory over Franco. Yet they were only a small minority of the Republican forces at the time, which themselves had little chance of winning the war once the military relationship of forces crystallized in 1936.' (*Ibid.* p. 101.)

Of course, having insisted all along that the class struggle is essentially a national phenomenon, Krasso feels free to see the forces at work in the Spanish Civil War as nothing but numerical proportions of the nation's political divisions, with their military 'crystallizations'. The reality, of course, was different, and Stalinism was actually able to play a decisive role far beyond its numerical strength in the Spanish proletariat. So far as Krasso is concerned, none of the great political and social questions raised in action by the Spanish working class, and in theory and programme by Trotsky, are of any account, once he is able, with the advantage of hindsight, to calculate the 'success' of the 'autonomous' political and military institutions. As always for the petty bourgeois, these pillars of the establishment are more solid and more meaningful than the fact that the Spanish workers actually set their feet firmly on the path to revolution (it was a question of *sup-*

pression by the Stalinists and their allies, not of the Stalinists simply not deciding on a revolution), or than the socio-historical character of the Spanish Revolution, a false estimation of which was used by the Stalinists to provide the cover for counter-revolution. So far from Marxism have we been taken by Krasso's 'autonomy of political institutions' that class forces no longer play any part in political development.

Dominant social and political considerations

Krasso writes about the 'crystallization' of the military relationship of forces in 1936 in Spain. Of course, in civil war the military relations require specific and detailed planning and attention, but they are in general subordinated to social and political considerations. Nineteen-thirty-six was no exception. Where Krasso produces an abstracted summary, an accomplished fact, the reality was different:

In July 1936—not to refer to an earlier period—the Spanish workers repelled the assault of the officers who had prepared their conspiracy under the protection of the People's Front. The masses improvised militias and created workers' committees, the strongholds of their future dictatorship. The leading organizations of the proletariat on the other hand helped the bourgeoisie to destroy these committees, to liquidate the assaults of the workers on private property and to subordinate the workers' militias to the command of the bourgeoisie, with the POUM moreover participating in the government and assuming direct responsibility for this work of the counter-revolution. (Trotsky, *The Class, the Party and the Leadership*, WIR Pamphlet, p. 4.)

Trotsky goes on to summarize the well-known events of May 1937, when the Catalan workers rose up and were bloodily suppressed, and concludes:

The only thing that can be said is that the masses who sought at all times to blast their way to the correct road found no new leadership corresponding to the demands of the revolution. Before us is a profoundly dynamic process, with the various stages of the revolution shifting swiftly, with the leadership or various sections of the leadership quickly deserting to the side of the class enemy, and our sages engage in a purely static discussion: why did the working class as a whole follow a bad leadership? (*Ibid.* p. 5.)

Or, one might say: our sages sit and pronounce on the riddle—is it not a fact that the military relationship had already crystallized? . . .

Primary importance of conscious leadership

Trotsky attached primary importance to the building of a conscious leadership to give expression and direction to the revolutionary struggle of the working class. It was the role of the Stalinists in cementing the Popular Front as a barrier between the working masses and Bolshevism which played the essential part in clearing the path of the Spanish bourgeoisie to preserve their property through the victory of Franco. The Spanish Communist Party was the instrument through which Stalin's policy, the policy of the Stalinist bureaucracy, through the shipment of Soviet arms, was brought together with the policies of the Republican politicians, Socialists and Anarchists, all of whom wanted above all to avoid a revolutionary break with capitalism. As Trotsky pointed out time and again, the democratic and anti-socialist programme of Azaña, Negrin, Companys, Caballero, and Garcia Oliver could be applied only through terror against the proletariat, and this was why they sanctioned the bloody measures of the GPU. Trotsky concluded:

The Spanish revolution once again demonstrates that it is impossible to defend democracy against the revolutionary masses otherwise than through the methods of fascist reaction, and conversely, it is impossible to conduct a genuine struggle against fascism otherwise than through the methods of the proletarian revolution. (*The Lessons of Spain—the Last Warning*, December 17, 1937. p. 10.)

Krasso's seemingly objective pronouncement on the crystallization of forces in 1936 is only another version of the attempt to find some middle road between these two, just as he did for Germany—'A successful check on Nazism was one thing; a proletarian revolution quite another'. This sublime distinction exists only in the head of the petty bourgeois. Its expression in reality was physically crushed by Fascism in the 1930s. The fact that Krasso still wants to justify, one way or another, this Stalinist past of murder and betrayal, only indicates the force exerted on him by counter-revolutionary forces today. (On Spain, see especially 'Trotsky and the Spanish Revolution' by P. Broué, in *Fourth International*, Vol. 4, No. 1, April 1967.)

Attack on Trotsky's notion of the party

The question of leadership, raised very sharply in relation to Spain, brings us to the nub of Krasso's argument, the attack on Trotsky's notion of the party, of the relation between party and class, and his supposed over-estimation of the direct and determining role of the class struggle. Krasso takes

a passage from Trotsky's preface to the *History of the Russian Revolution* as 'the most authentic and powerful expression' of Trotsky's 'sociologism'. It is worth beginning by examining this quotation in detail. First, the paragraph quoted by Krasso is an attempt to prove the point that Trotsky had 'a view of the revolution which explicitly rejects political or economic variables as of permanent importance':

In a society that is seized by revolution classes are in conflict. It is perfectly clear, however, that the changes introduced between the beginning and the end of a revolution in the economic bases of the society and its social substratum of classes are not sufficient to explain the course of the revolution itself, which can overthrow in a short interval age-old institutions, create new ones, and again overthrow them. *The dynamic of revolutionary events is directly determined by swift, intense and passionate changes in the psychology of classes* which have already formed themselves before the revolution. (*History of the Russian Revolution*, pp. 17, 18. Italics added by Krasso. In the original, Trotsky underlined only the word 'directly'.)

In the first place, it must be said that here Trotsky writes directly in the tradition of Marx and Engels, whose classical writings on the 1848-1851 events in France are prefaced by the famous remarks that, while they constitute the first detailed example of the new historical materialism, they are written 'holding constant' the economic basis of society. While these economic conditions affect the course of the revolution, it remains true that the classes set in motion were formed by the economic and social development of the previous decades, and that the tempo of the revolutionary events is a qualitatively new phenomenon. It is of course a downright distortion to say that by writing this paragraph Trotsky excluded 'political or economic variables'. Only *one page* later he writes:

However, the processes taking place in the consciousness of the masses are not unrelated and independent. No matter much how the idealists and eclectics rage, consciousness is nevertheless determined by conditions. In the historic conditions which formed Russia, her economy, her classes, her State, in the action upon her of other states, we ought to be able to find the premises both of the February revolution and of the October revolution which replaced it. (*Ibid.* p. 19.)

Does anything remain of Krasso's fabrication? Perhaps Trotsky, even allowing for the economic and political 'indirect' conditioning of those mass forces which 'directly' determine the course of revolution, still neglects the role of the proletarian party in the revolutionary victory? But on the same

page, Trotsky is highly explicit on this:

Only on the basis of a study of political processes in the masses themselves, can we understand the role of parties and leaders, whom we least of all are inclined to ignore. They constitute not an independent, but nevertheless a very important, element in the process. Without a guiding organization the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston-box. But nevertheless, what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam. (*Ibid.*)

'Autonomy of political institutions'

When Krasso defends so stoutly the 'autonomy of political institutions', he has in mind of course not the revolutionary party so much as the established pillars of bourgeois political order. And this is why the quotation of which he makes so much is torn from its context, a context where Trotsky explains that a revolution is *precisely an end to the normal conditions* in which the appearance of stability of 'political institutions' holds men spell-bound.

In ordinary times the state, be it monarchical or democratic, elevates itself above the nation, and history is made by specialists in that line of business, kings, ministers, bureaucrats, parliamentarians, journalists. But at those crucial moment when the old order becomes no longer endurable to the masses, they break over the barriers excluding them from the political arena, sweep aside their traditional representatives, and create by their own intervention the initial groundwork for a new regime. . . . The history of a revolution is for us first of all a history of the forcible entrance of the masses into the realm of rulership over their own destiny. (*Ibid.* p. 17.)

This passage precedes immediately the paragraph quoted by Krasso, and it brings out once again the way in which Krasso always runs away from the fact of *revolution*. These revolutions, the rude entry of the masses into history, demanding the development of Marxism as the conscious spearhead of their struggle, are rejected as a disturbance of all fixed notions of 'political institutions' and their 'autonomy'.

The *History* itself develops in detail every aspect of this general presentation. After the detailed analysis of economic and political history of modern Russia, Trotsky presents in chronological detail not simply the march of political events and the intervention of the masses, but also the main crises in the Bolshevik Party and the sharp changes in the relations between parties and classes. It is nonsense to say, as Krasso does, that the book is 'not an account of the role of the Bolshevik Party in

the October Revolution so much as an epic of the crowds who were led to victory by it'. Any reader can check Trotsky's intricate analysis of every stage of the contradictory developments inside the Bolshevik Party, as well as the presentation of the relation of other political tendencies to the masses.

A dialectical conception

Trotsky deals with the same question on many occasions, and nowhere does he fall into the error invented by Krasso. Indeed, Krasso's argument is that in the 1920s and 1930s Trotsky overestimated the counter-revolutionary influence of the Comintern's policies. Of course, if Trotsky had ever believed the original simple-minded notion attributed to him by Krasso—that the consciousness of the masses is the directly determining causal factor—he could never have established the counter-revolutionary role of the Stalinist bureaucracy and the Comintern. As we have seen, Trotsky had a dialectical conception: the conscious expression, in principles, strategy and tactics by the revolutionary party, of the historical needs and tasks of the proletariat was an indispensable part of the relationship of forces. Thus, in *Strategy and Tactics in the Imperialist Epoch*, Trotsky explains again the relation between these different aspects:

What have we in Europe in the post-war period? In economy—irregular, spasmodic curtailments and expansions of production, which gravitate in general around the pre-war level despite great technical successes in certain branches of industry. In politics—frenzied oscillations of the political situation towards the Left and towards the Right. It is quite apparent that the sharp turns in the political situation in the course of one, two, or three years are not brought about by any changes in the basic economic factors, but by causes of a purely super-structural character, thereby indicating the extreme instability of the entire system; the foundation of which is corroded by irreconcilable contradictions. This is the sole source from which flows the full significance of revolutionary strategy in contradistinction to tactics. *Thence also flows the new significance of the party and the party leadership.* [My emphasis, C.S.] (*The Third International After Lenin*, p. 82.)

Trotsky adds, two pages later:

But as soon as the objective prerequisites have matured, the key to the whole historical process passes into the hands of the subjective factor, that is, the party. (*Ibid.* p. 84.)

Unfortunately for Krasso, we have here those points on the decisive significance of the party driven home by Trotsky in the midst of his titanic

struggle with Stalinist revisionism, and not only in a literary-historical work. This same emphasis reappeared at every stage of Trotsky's fight for the Fourth International: indeed, the key question raised in the founding programme is that of the crisis of working-class leadership as the key to the crisis of humanity.

A hoary old practice

If Krasso wants to make the point that Trotsky did not have a clear understanding of the importance of the party before 1917, then he is of course free to do so. Trotsky not only several times himself explained his own mistakes on that score, but he also hit out very hard against those who carefully selected such differences as had existed between him and Lenin in order to discredit his fight for Bolshevism *after* 1917. Krasso's presentation is precisely of the latter type. At a time when Stalinism prepares its greatest betrayals, Krasso's fire is turned against the Trotskyists. Krasso himself quotes Trotsky's own verdict on his 'non-Bolshevism' before 1917—that it arose from 'a certain social-revolutionary fatalism'—but it must be said that even in those days Trotsky was closer to a correct Marxist position than Krasso. Even in *Results and Prospects*, Trotsky says, 'The function of the socialist parties (is) to revolutionize the consciousness of the working class,' though Krasso accuses him of 'forgetting' the vanguard of the working class. The real point, missed by Krasso, and quite foreign, naturally enough, to the mind of his shadowy opponent, Mandel, is made by Trotsky when he discusses his own mistakes of 1912, when he tried to conciliate Bolshevism and Menshevism. In *In Defence of Marxism*, Trotsky said about this phase:

I had not freed myself at that period, especially in the organizational sphere, from the traits of a petty-bourgeois revolutionist.

This meant above all that Trotsky had not until 1917 grasped the constant and intimate connection between inner-party struggles and the class struggle. Inside the revolutionary party, a conscious struggle must be waged against every reflection into the party of the one-sidedness, hesitation, opportunism and adventurism of sections of the working class affected by other classes. From Lenin's 1917 struggle against the 'old Bolsheviks' Trotsky learned this lesson in a way which he never once forgot, and on the basis of which he wrote *Lessons of October*, *The New Course* and *In Defence of Marxism*. Krasso simply cannot grasp the signifi-

cance of Trotsky's discussion of the *class* role of the various tendencies in the Party. His 'relative autonomy' has come to mean abstract independence from the living struggle, again a conception by no means foreign to the Stalinist bureaucracy in Eastern Europe. To be victorious the revolutionary party *must* anticipate and fight out within itself the struggles to be resolved in the workers' movement. The party, says Trotsky, 'besides its other attributes, is the central ideological laboratory of the working class'. ('Communism and Syndicalism', in *Marxism and the Trade Unions*, p. 47.)

Krasso, without ever presenting a detailed case, throws in many other allegations of Trotsky's 'mistakes', supposedly flowing from this central 'sociologism', e.g. the Trotskyist line on the 1926 General Strike, the wrong estimation of a 'revolutionary' situation in 1945 in Western Europe, but in every case the same basic issues occur. On most of these questions Trotsky answered for himself (see especially Brian Pearce, *Early History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, and Trotsky, *The Stalin School of Falsification*), and we will rest content with answering in detail the point made central by Krasso, together with the examples already analyzed, which are sufficient to expose his crude and facile method.

Trotsky answers for himself

The best way to complete this reply to Krasso, and also to the pathetic Mandel, unable to defend the Fourth International and Trotskyism today, is to quote at length Trotsky's opinions on these basic questions just prior to his death:

Imitating the liberals our sages tacitly accept the axiom that every class gets the leadership it deserves. In reality leadership is not at all a mere 'reflection' of a class or the product of its own free creativeness. A leadership is shaped in the process of clashes between the different classes or the friction between the different layers within a given class. Having once arisen, the leadership invariably rises above its class and thereby becomes predisposed to the pressure and influence of other classes. The proletariat may 'tolerate' for a long time a leadership that has already suffered a complete inner degeneration but has not as yet had the opportunity to express this degeneration amid great events. A great historic shock is necessary to reveal sharply the contradiction between the leadership and the class. The mightiest historical shocks are wars and revolutions. Precisely for this reason the working class is often caught unawares by war and revolution. But even in cases where the old leadership has revealed its internal corruption, the class cannot improvise immediately a new leadership,

especially if it has not inherited from the previous period strong revolutionary cadres capable of utilizing the collapse of the old leading party. (*The Class, the Party and the Leadership*, pp. 5-6.)

In this passage, Trotsky brings to bear, against the apologists for Stalinism after the defeats of the 1930s, all the fruits of his experience of the revolutionary movement and its leadership. He follows it with a crystal-clear statement of the role of the revolutionary party which is in every way the diametrical opposite both of Krasso's caricature and of the politics of Mandel:

What was the 'active' [i.e., the essential assets] of Bolshevism? A clear and thoroughly thought-out revolutionary conception at the beginning of the revolution was held only by Lenin. The Russian cadres of the party were scattered and to a considerable degree bewildered. But the party had authority among the advanced workers. Lenin had great authority with the party cadres. Lenin's political conception corresponded to the actual development of the revolution and was reinforced by each new event. These elements of the 'active' worked wonders in a revolutionary situation, that is, in conditions of bitter class struggle. The party quickly aligned its policy to correspond that is with the actual course of the revolution. Thanks to this it met with firm support among tens of thousands of advanced workers. Within a few months, by basing itself upon the development of the revolution the party was able to convince the majority of the workers of the correctness of its slogans. This majority organized into Soviets was able in its turn to attract the soldiers and peasants. How can this dynamic, dialectic process be exhausted by a formula of the maturity or immaturity of the proletariat? A colossal factor in the maturity of the Russian proletariat in February or March 1917 was Lenin. He did not fall from the skies. He personified the revolutionary tradition of the working class. For Lenin's slogans to find their way to the masses there had to exist cadres, even though numerically small at the beginning; there had to exist the confidence of the cadres in the leadership, a confidence based on the entire experience of the past. To cancel these elements from one's calculations is simply to ignore the living revolution, to substitute for it an abstraction, the 'relationship of forces', because the development of the revolution precisely consists of this, that the relationship of forces keeps incessantly and rapidly changing under the impact of the changes in the consciousness of the proletariat, the attraction of backward layers to the advanced, the growing assurance of the class in its own strength. The vital mainspring in this process is the party, just as the vital mainspring in the mechanism of the party is its leadership. The role and the responsibility of the leadership in a revolutionary epoch is colossal. This is 'Trotsky's Marxism'.

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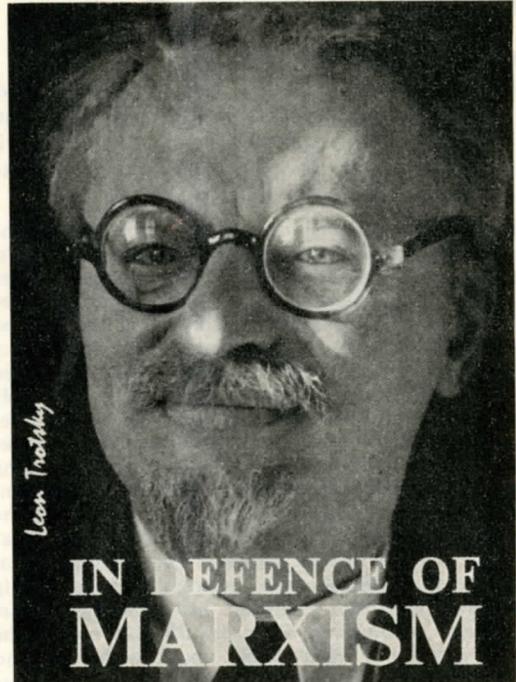


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First Congress of the Third International, March 1919: Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kalinin with the Russian delegation.

Towards a history of the Third International

(Part I)

by Tom Kemp



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Towards a history of the Third International

(Part I)

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THE PURPOSE of this series of articles is not to attempt to write a history of the Third (Communist) International, generally known as the Comintern. A full-scale history of the kind which is desirable would require a detailed examination of the development of the class struggle in many countries. It would have to include the immediate pre-history of the Third International in the war years, an analysis of the nature of the socialist movement as it had developed during the pre-war upsurge of capitalism and the conflict of ideological tendencies discernible in the movement during that period. An examination of the war crisis would involve the question of imperialism and also of the crisis in the bourgeois camp which the war greatly intensified. The stage would thus have to be set by a deliberate and well-prepared excursion into general history, into the economic history of capitalism in the imperialist phase and by a detailed sociological analysis of the labour and socialist movement, its relationship to the working class and to the institutional framework of the capitalist countries in which it operated. Such an introduction would itself fill a volume and it has not yet been attempted by either a Marxist or a bourgeois historian.

It is true that there exist a number of accounts of the Comintern which deal with the whole or part of its existence, various reminiscences and polemical excursions and a few documented studies of the early history of particular national sections. At first sight it is surprising that most of these studies should issue from bourgeois sources; some are exercises in cold war 'scholarship' which have to be treated with caution if not with contempt, others are genuine attempts, within the limitations of bourgeois historiography, to come to grips with the real problems posed by the rise and decline of the Third International. But anyone seeking information about what was once a powerful international body which struck fear into the hearts of the bourgeoisie everywhere is soon aware of the great absentee. There is no authoritative history of the Communist International from the Soviet Union or from the Communist Parties outside it. It is true that outlines have been produced by Foster in the USA and by Palme Dutt in Britain, but these votaries of the Stalin school of history suppress so much and lie so freely that anyone who troubles to read the documents of the Communist International itself will soon have to deny them any serious claim to credibility.

But who mentions the documents of the Communist International immediately reveals another

fact which at first sight appears curious. How is it that the Communist Parties do not reprint, circulate, study and learn from the voluminous proceedings, resolutions and theses of the international body to which they were once formally attached? Even the best informed members of the Communist Parties know little or nothing about this enormous and fascinating body of writing, just as they are in virtual ignorance of the history of the international movement to which they are supposed to belong. This ignorance is not an idiosyncrasy of the movement in the Western countries, but is just as prevalent in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It is no exaggeration to say that the Communist Party, through its publicists and historians, not only in Britain but everywhere else, has given vastly more attention to the First International of Marx than to the Third International of Lenin and Trotsky. In short, it can be said that for some reason the Third International, although referred to when it cannot be avoided, is surrounded by a peculiar taboo as far as serious historical enquiry is concerned and everything is done to avoid recalling the theories and policies proclaimed in the documents of its Congresses. In fact the only collection of such documents available in



**Karl Radek
addresses a
meeting.
Bela Kun on the
right.**

English has been edited by a bourgeois historian and produced by a university publishing house for a scholarly audience in an expensive format. Clearly the Communist Parties have turned their back on an important page in history; nothing, indeed, could proclaim more definitely that there is not a single thread of continuity between the Comintern of the heroic period and the present-day parties, Communist by name.

It is important and instructive, therefore, to see what these parties have turned their backs on and why. A finger can be laid straightaway on a most significant fact and a particularly damning connection. Anyone who begins to study the early years of the Comintern is soon struck by the names which appear time and time again as members of its leading bodies and authors of its principal documents. Apart from Lenin, the names which appear most frequently are those of Trotsky, Zinoviev, Bukharin and others who were to fall foul of Stalin in the 1930s and were to figure prominently in the great purge trials. If one tries to pursue the biographies of many lesser figures such as Bela Kun or Hugo Eberlein the trail ends at about the same time. Many of the leading figures of the Comintern, not only in its early years, but well after it had become a docile instrument of Stalin's policies, had their lives snuffed out, many with not even the pretence of a trial. So no honest account of the Comintern can be written which does not resurrect these personalities, raise the question of the frame-ups of which they were victims and thus the whole problem of Stalinism and the social and political origins of the present Soviet leadership. In fact, in the Soviet Union itself, apart from the generals implicated in the Tukachevsky affair and a few minor figures, there has been no rehabilitation of the victims of the Moscow Trials, though many indications have been given that it is now recognized that the charges made were false and the procedures used against the accused were illegal in Soviet law.

Obviously more is involved than a simple posthumous reinstatement of men who were unjustly accused and murdered. The issues raised go far beyond a miscarriage of justice or Stalin's pathological suspicions and take in the whole question of the social basis of the regime. In the present context it is clear that a full rehabilitation of the victims of the Moscow Trials (and, of course, of the many more victims who had no trial at all) involves necessarily a re-evaluation of the history of the Comintern to which many of them gave devoted service before Stalin murdered them. On the one

hand it poses the question: who today are the legitimate heirs of the traditions which the Comintern established in its early years, the tired men who try unsuccessfully to hold together the disintegrating 'world communist movement' or those who stand for the principles of the early Congresses as developed and continued by the Fourth International?

If this is one reason for emphasizing the need for the study of the history of the Comintern it is not the only one which is of political importance. Where the Communist Party scholars have passed in shamefaced silence, well-financed and ideologically-prepared bourgeois 'authorities' have lately been digging with immense industry. With some honourable exceptions, the accounts which have been financed from American sources have, with varying degrees of sophistication, been intended to expose the Comintern as being mistaken from the start, a docile tool of Russian foreign policy and carrying the seeds of its later degeneration from the time of its foundation. Such accounts have thus been critical, not to say hostile. To some extent one can say it could not be otherwise, given the ideological starting point from which such studies were made. In fact, in the absence of any other sort of study we have to depend to a considerable extent on bourgeois authorities for our knowledge of many episodes in Comintern or early Communist Party history: there are just no other accounts to which we can go. Even the bourgeois scholars are handicapped, of course, by lack of source material which, if not destroyed, is kept under lock and key in Moscow and is not available even to Soviet scholars. What little work is done by the latter is, probably mercifully, not translated and the accounts of it show clearly enough that it is superficial and skates over the main problems.

Some of the information about the operations of the Comintern has been provided by one-time supporters, some of whom, such as Souvarine, have long since broken with Marxism, while others, such as Rosmer, remained faithful to their original principles. Obviously in dealing with such accounts the usual rules of evidence apply. The same applies to the Menshevik and social-democratic enemies of the Comintern, some of whom have been able to make a career as experts on the matter. Notwithstanding their evident bias, this does not vitiate the factual evidence which they provide and which can be checked from other sources. Such people are, or were, exceptionally well informed and, when used critically, their work can be invaluable in the absence of more authoritative material. An-



Alfred Rosmer: remained faithful to its original principles.

other trend in Comintern studies, stemming from similar origins, tries to justify the record of the Second International and its parties, placing the main blame for the defeats of the working class between the wars on to the splitting of the working-class movement by Lenin. The recent weighty work by Braunthal is the fullest expression of this trend

and its basic weaknesses will be analyzed in due course.

To summarize: although there is no full history of the Communist International, or of any period of its existence, a lengthening list of books which discuss it from one or another of the points of view mentioned is now available. It is thus possible for the student to read most of the principal documents in whole or in part in the Degras collection and to follow the main stages in its development in other works which, however, are to be treated with great caution as far as their interpretation is concerned. Lenin's speeches and written contributions are fully available in the *Collected Works*, while Trotsky's have also been published in English in volume form. Perhaps the least biased of the treatments by a bourgeois historian is that by E. H. Carr, where it appears as a subordinate part of the history of Soviet Russia. Trotsky's critique of the programme drawn up by Bukharin and finally adopted at the Sixth Congress in 1928 will be familiar to many readers of this journal. The fate of many Comintern supporters in the 1930s has only been dealt with at all fully from bourgeois sources, but the degeneration of the Comintern under Stalin and the reason for its final winding up in 1943 have been analyzed many times in general if not in detail.

In the following pages it is intended to do no more than outline the main stages in the history of the Comintern and some of the political lessons which it teaches. The first article sketches briefly the background to the first three Congresses, the second will carry on the story from the Fourth Congress to the victory of the Stalin faction and its international consequences and the third and final article will deal with the Comintern's record in the 1930s until its dissolution by Stalin in 1943.

1

The pre-history of the Third International begins with the debacle of the Second when, like many a seemingly stable institution of pre-1914 Europe, it was sucked into the maelstrom of the First World War. At congress after congress, national and international, the parties of the Second International had passed resolutions proclaiming working-class internationalism and their determination to struggle against war. As the great powers mobilized their armies and prepared to throw them into battle almost all the leaders of the great socialist parties placed themselves behind the war policies of their

'own' governments and called their followers to the blood-bath. It was a shocking and discreditable performance which has often come in for learned explanation since but which remains inexcusable. The behaviour of these leaders and the sophistries which they found to cover their apostasy revealed how far they had travelled, despite their revolutionary pretensions and commitment to Marxism, on the road to the acceptance of bourgeois democracy of which they were but the left wing. All supporters of capitalist institutions and the parliamentary life are unable to avoid sympathy for the 'dilemma' of

the German, French and other party leaders in 1914. They had, after all, succeeded in doing what good reformists seek. From within bourgeois society they had worked for the extension of democracy and a peaceful socialist transition. The tolerance with which they were permitted to carry on their activities, the steadily rising membership of their organizations, their increasing parliamentary representation and importance in local government, their press and party apparatus lulled them into the comfortable acceptance of the conviction that, in the fullness of time, they would secure the requisite parliamentary majority to enable socialist measures to be enacted. In the meantime, apart from the occasional presence at international gatherings and the customary repetition of internationalist slogans the great parties of the Second International became more and more closely identified with national life and traditions. The prosperity of the pre-1914 years, the ability to win material gains and social reforms, strengthened this feeling of self-sufficient nationalism and weakened the bonds of international solidarity. In the same way, the ability of diplomacy to ward off crisis after crisis in relations between the great power blocs into which Europe was divided produced the illusion that war was unthinkable and that the terms of the anti-war resolutions would never have to be put to the test.

In the avalanche of patriotic hysteria generated by the European governments in 1914 it was not surprising, in view of the steady seepage of bourgeois and nationalist ideology into the working-class movement, that the workers should also have been swept into it. It is a good trick on the part of leaders to blame the rank and file for situations in which leadership itself is being put to the test. In fact, the leaders showed little hesitation in deciding for the national cause rather than staking on the undoubted feelings of international working-class solidarity which did exist. The example set by leaders was obviously of key importance. They cannot find any alibi by claiming to be following the masses. In only a few cases did parties affiliated to the International in the belligerent countries take an anti-war stand. Most of the individuals who did so maintained a pacifist or neutralist position, not the revolutionary defeatism of Lenin.

The fact was, then, that with a few honourable exceptions the socialist and trade union leaders—including most of the syndicalist leadership of the French CGT—placed themselves not against the patriotic current but in its vanguard. Socialist members of parliament voted war credits and, as open or covert government parties the sections of

the Second International lined up on different sides of the trenches as fervent protagonists of war. It was possible, of course, to find, in each country, arguments drawn from the armoury of bourgeois nationalism and xenophobia to justify these actions. They were even given a socialist gloss: the French were fighting the militarism and imperialism of the Kaiser, the Germans the tyranny and oppression of Tzardom. There was also the hope that by throwing themselves behind the national cause a further step would be taken on the road to socialism: bleed for the bourgeois now and later they will stand aside and allow socialism to be built. All in all it was the greatest deception in history.

When all has been said on behalf of the leaders of the Second International, and they have found some skilled apologists, the conclusion is inescapable. The war only revealed in the flash of gunfire that they had already crept into the enemy camp. A deeply-rooted contradiction in the policy and outlook of the parties of the Second International, which even Lenin had not detected at the time, was thus hastened to the point of decision. The International had irretrievably failed. It could not be put together without repeating the compromises and weaknesses which had brought about that failure and without trying to pass a sponge over the historical record to enable its discredited leaders once again to pose as socialists and Marxists and go on as before. It is true, of course, that as the full horrors of the war were brought home to them, and as the soldiers and workers showed signs of war weariness or open rebellion, more of the old leaders began to shift towards the search for a negotiated peace. The internationalists found growing support and sympathy from the time of the Zimmerwald Conference of September, 1915. However, the international contacts established through the Zimmerwald movement showed both the weakness and the diversity of the anti-war trends. In fact it was an arena of struggle in which Lenin sought to win a basis for establishing a new, Third, International on a programme of revolutionary socialism. But no more than a beginning was made in the regroupment of forces. A new left was emerging but it was still only a small minority.

The last years of the war saw a rising tide of strikes, demonstrations, mutinies and anti-war feeling from one end of Europe to another. Very rapidly and unexpectedly the question of revolution was posed. The overthrow of Tsardom and then the October Revolution created a wholly new situation. Within a year of the latter event the revolutionary opportunities had spread into central Europe with



Second Congress of the Third International in session, December 1919, Hall of Thrones, Kremlin. Zinoviev presiding, Kamenev on his left.

the collapse of the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires. Although in the victor countries the development was understandably slower, after the war's end they too were swept by waves of strikes and working-class discontent strengthened by the embittered demobilized soldiers looking for jobs.

The Russian Revolution did not therefore appear as an exceptional event in an otherwise stable European society. Every European country was seething and some were in chaos, while, recognizing the dangers inherent in what they called Bolshevism, the governments of the more stable countries were intent upon crushing the Revolution, bringing Russia back into the world market and supporting the most benighted forces of counter-revolution.

It would be possible to examine the situation country by country, to discover if and when the conditions for revolution were present in the period from 1917 to 1920. Some were present almost everywhere, all were present perhaps nowhere outside Russia, despite the establishment, for brief periods, of Soviet republics in Hungary and Bavaria. But revolutionary situations are only in part the result of objective forces and even into them many factors enter which include, or are affected by, the presence or otherwise of a conscious revolutionary movement. The self-confidence of the ruling class and its ability to go on ruling in

the old way are partly a function of the nature and strength of the challenge which it faces. Looking back the historian is apt to conclude—all the more if he wants to prove that Lenin and the Bolsheviks should not have taken power in a backward country, or should not have split the International—that the post-war revolutionary wave was bound to fail. He records that it must have failed and there is nothing in the way of documentary evidence to 'prove' the contrary.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks, when they took power in 1917, did, of course, count upon the extension of the revolution into central and western Europe. They hoped, at first, for a rapid movement to the left among the minority trends in the labour movement and that a determined revolutionary leadership would be given to the spontaneous hostility to bourgeois government and capitalism which was growing among the masses. They did not overestimate the objective possibilities as a whole but in particular cases their assessment had to be based upon very limited and not too reliable information. Russia was largely cut off from the outside world in the early years of the new regime and communication between the Russian leaders and sympathizers and supporters in other countries was very difficult. However, the Russian Revolution became a major factor in the European prospects for revolution and constituted a base for its next phase.

2

Lenin had been persuaded, since the disintegration of the Second International under the stress of war, that a new, Third International would have to be formed. Such an International could not be a replica of its predecessors, though it would inherit from them the best traditions of working-class internationalism. It was no longer sufficient to proclaim theses in words at formal and friendly gatherings and then go back to the day-to-day work of the national party and forget about them. The new international had to be composed of parties of a different type, pursuing a common programme and strategy according to the conditions which prevailed in each country. It could only be formed in opposition to those leaders who had betrayed the elementary principles of internationalism in 1914. Lenin therefore looked anxiously from beleaguered Russia for signs of the making of such parties in the main European countries. For the time being, however, the majority leaderships of the parties of the Second International were attempting to ride out the storm and efforts were being made to reinvigorate this body. The movement towards the left was visible in many countries everywhere as an important trend, sometimes affecting entire parties. There was the revolutionary left which had opposed the war all along and which was beginning to take on organizational form, especially in the Spartacus League in Germany. There were revolutionary syndicalists attracted to the Russian Revolution and disgusted with the betrayals of their own leaders. There were numerous small groups and minority tendencies in the old parties and trade unions all struggling to exist outside them. Most socialist parties had grown from a big influx of newcomers: youth, intellectuals, ex-soldiers, all of whom were ready for action and change. Everywhere the industrial proletariat had swollen in size and in social weight as a result of war-time industrialization and was in a militant mood as prices rose and shortages grew. Behind all these trends was the deep mass revulsion against the war and the system which had produced it.

The decision to call the founding congress of the Third International was intended to seize these opportunities. An invitation was thus issued in January 1919, over the names of Lenin and Trotsky and a number of foreign supporters who signed on behalf of parties which did not as yet properly exist. In the circumstances of war and blockade it was difficult to distribute invitations and even

more difficult for foreign delegates and visitors to get to Moscow. In fact, at the First Congress in March 1919, most of the delegates were foreign supporters of the revolution already in Russia and there were, as yet, no Communist Parties which they could formally claim to represent. For Lenin, clearly, the situation demanded revolutionary parties and circumstances had placed the Russians in the position where they had the responsibility to assist in their formation and in the speediest manner possible. The main task, as he saw it, was to wrest control of the working class from the old reformist leaders and prepare the way for a struggle for power against the discredited and decaying bourgeois order. Lenin took as a supreme example of that decay the murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg while prisoners of a bourgeois-democratic republic. Nevertheless, before their deaths the leaders of the Spartacus League had mandated their delegate, Hugo Eberlein, to vote against the setting up of a new International. In fact, he was persuaded to abstain after the delegates from Austria had painted an optimistic picture of the prospects of revolution in central Europe.

At the Congress a number of important theses and resolutions drawn up by the Bolshevik leaders were approved, including a 'Manifesto to the Workers of the World' written by Trotsky. Not surprisingly, in his book *The Internationale*, R. Palme Dutt omits to mention that what he calls the 'New Communist Manifesto' was the work of Trotsky and says very little about the other documents which the Congress adopted. They included, for example, Lenin's 'Theses on Bourgeois Democracy and Proletarian Dictatorship'. In a few sentences Lenin makes the case against bourgeois democracy. 'It would be the greatest nonsense to assume,' declared Lenin, 'that the most profound revolution in mankind's history, the first transference of power from the hands of the exploiting minority to the hands of the exploited majority, could take place within the framework of the old bourgeois parliamentary democracy, without the greatest changes, without the creation of new forms of democracy, new institutions, new conditions for their use, etc'. He looks forward to a new Soviet form of state power which 'must inevitably involve not only a change in the forms and institutions of democracy, but change of a kind which results in an extension of democratic usages, on a scale never before known

in the world, to the working classes whom capitalism enslaved'.

Probably E. H. Carr is right in claiming that 'The fact of the foundation of the Third or Communist International, henceforth familiarly known as Comintern, was more important than anything done at its first congress.' Nevertheless, not only was the framework for a new working-class international established but its theoretical premises and programme were also made absolutely clear. Those who claim that Lenin wished to preserve and extend the split with the old leaderships and policies of the parties of the Second International are, of course, quite correct. There was no deceit or doubt about where the Comintern stood on the major questions and obviously no place in its ranks for leaders or parties of the old type. That there could have been any ambiguity on these matters on the part of those who read the documents of the First Congress is unbelievable. The Congress stood for a complete break with the old International and its practices. It rejected the whole reformist platform of socialism through stages by parliamentary means. It opposed new forms of proletarian rule to the hollow promises of bourgeois democracy. It laid down a strategic line which was clear to every reader. Its condemnation of the 'centre' (such as Kautsky in Germany) was as definite as anything can be in politics, and it stated plainly that it sought to split off the most revolutionary of the elements in the 'centrist' ranks by ruthless criticism and exposure of the leaders of these trends.

During the years in which Lenin and Trotsky guided the work of the Communist International its strategic line was quite clear. Where the trouble arose was in its application, in its translation into tactical terms by the leaders of the young Communist Parties.

In 1919-1920, when the revolutionary current ran deepest, these parties were still in process of formation and beset by enormous difficulties. In fact, therefore, the crucial factor needed to turn the opportunities to account, the revolutionary party, existed only in embryo or as a conglomeration of discordant trends. Where mass Communist Parties appeared they depended, first of all, upon a protracted struggle within the Socialist Parties. The principal leaders of these parties, even those who gave sound support to the foundation of a new international, inevitably carried with them the traits characteristic of the leadership of the great pre-war Socialist Parties. They were used to parliamentary discussion and debate, had absorbed

the national tradition of each party and a loyalty to it as well as a camaraderie with other leaders whose ideas they did not share. They broke often with difficulty and reluctance from the party which had for many years been their home and even the best could not acquire in a day the outlook of Communists.

In great parties like the French or the Italian or the German Independents, from which the Communist Parties split away, the process of birth was a long travail. In fact these splits were far from clear-cut because there went with the Communist Parties many leaders and member whose loyalties were divided. They could not see former colleagues or leaders in the sharp outline of Comintern documents, or they wanted to keep in the Communist Party members who, in their turn, still hoped nostalgically for an all-inclusive party of the pre-1914 sort.

There were also the syndicalist elements, often the most militant in strikes and demonstrations, who joined or gravitated around the Communist Parties. Many retained an aversion to political action and to any form of organization or discipline. Because there were so few potential cadres for the new parties, and from esteem for their personal merits, Lenin and Trotsky worked very hard to convince and to hold these militants with a syndicalist past. It was hard to amalgamate such elements with established socialist leaders who they regarded, sometimes with good grounds, as opportunists.

In any case, between the First and Second Congress, which took place in the summer of 1920, there was little that the Comintern could do to assist in the formation or guidance of parties in Europe. Communications between Moscow and the outside world were virtually cut off and the militants in each country who looked to Russia for inspiration were largely left to themselves. At best the Comintern could send out a few publications and agents, the latter recruited from foreigners who had found themselves in Russia and thrown in their lot with the Bolshevik Revolution, including some ex-prisoners of war. A number, indeed, were Bolsheviks of very recent vintage.

Inside the European countries the governments and press turned on a powerful anti-Bolshevik propaganda campaign. The parties of the Second International sought to re-establish their authority. The various strikes and other mass movements broke against the resistance of the bourgeois state supported by the old-line labour leadership. The Soviet regimes in Bavaria and Hungary were short-



Hungary: short-lived Soviet followed by bloody repression.

lived and followed by bloody repression. The revolutionary wave began to lose its initial momentum. As the cadres of the new Communist Parties were formed they confronted a political situation becoming less favourable for the mass action which the Comintern had sketched out at its First Congress. Nowhere outside Russia did the Communist Party become the principal party of the working class in numerical terms nor, in general, did it correspond in nature or policy to the pre-1917 Bolshevik Party.

Nevertheless it was something of an achievement that by the Second Congress delegates representing mass parties in the main European countries were present in Moscow. The first task was to convert the sympathy for the Russian Revolution into concrete measures to form parties affiliated to the Comintern. This could only be done by sharpening up the struggle in parties where a split had not yet occurred in order to lay the foundations of parties of a Bolshevik type. It was complicated by the fact that in a number of cases whole parties, or substantial sections of parties, wholly or partly led by the old opportunist type of labour politician, were ready to declare their allegiance to the Comintern. There was therefore a danger, in Lenin's estimation, of a dilution of the Comintern by the entry of parties, or wings of parties, which still stood, in practice and in theory, on the level of the Second International. If it was merely a question of having as many adherents as possible, or representing actual tendencies in the working class, no doubt the gates of the Comintern should have been left wide open. But the documents of the First Congress make clear that this was not the original

intention. Moreover, it was pretentious of some of those who were now seeking admission to the Comintern to claim that they did subscribe to the strategy which it had mapped out.

In order to ensure that parties which affiliated to the Comintern were not swamped by opportunists or dragged back to the level of the Second International, very stiff conditions were imposed for entry to its ranks. Bourgeois and social-democratic historians have subjected the famous 'Twenty-one Conditions' which were drawn up by the Second Congress to detailed scrutiny and criticism and have, of course, seen in them the seeds of the monolithic and bureaucratic Stalinized Communist Parties of later date. But as has already been emphasized, there was never any doubt from the beginning of the sort of party which the founders of the Comintern, Lenin and Trotsky, sought to establish from the left wing of the socialist parties. All that the Twenty-one Conditions did was to make explicit and watertight what was already contained in the public documents of the International. That the First and Second Internationals did not impose conditions so rigorous was of course true; but there was no intention of creating a replica of these organizations whose much looser and more heterogeneous structure had, in their time, been justified. What was now being taken into account was the sorry fate of the Second International, the lessons of a quarter of a century of working-class struggle and the needs of a political situation in which the world revolution had already begun. To go back to the methods of the Second International and create parties on similar lines, or to admit people whose intention it was to do so, could only be a retrograde step. It could only have been defended on the grounds that the Third International—and the Russian Revolution itself—was something which should not have happened. If the Second International was right, if it should have been restored and if there were no grounds for a split then it could have been argued, though somewhat perversely, that the Third International should have been wide open to all those wishing to join as a prelude to the restoration of unity with its rival.

As it was the struggle was joined to form Communist Parties in open and declared opposition to the old socialist organizations and where necessary by splitting them. In practice, as already pointed out, where splits did occur they did not entirely conform with what the Comintern had intended. The new Communist Parties still retained much of the character of the organiza-

tions from which they had been broken off or which they continued with only a change of name. The formation of Communist Parties was therefore only the beginning of a struggle to change the character of the party itself and to root it more firmly in the working class. This meant

turning from the labour aristocracy to the most oppressed layers and playing a leading part in all the struggles of the working class: a new, active leadership in every sort of struggle which the old social democracy had abandoned for immersion in parliamentary and trade-union affairs.

3

The years 1920 and 1921 witnessed the petering out of the revolutionary wave in Europe, thus posing the question of how the Soviet regime could survive in a hostile world. New problems occupied the Communist Parties and the Comintern once it was clear that the world revolution was no longer on the immediate agenda.

The advance of the Red Army into Poland had provided an exciting backcloth for the Second Congress. But it depended upon a serious political miscalculation: that there would be a general uprising in Poland to make possible the setting up of a Soviet regime. Instead the Red Army met stiff resistance, was forced onto the defensive and had to contend with the danger of an invasion of the Soviet Union: it was thus necessary to make peace on unfavourable terms. In March 1921, there was another setback with the failure of the uprising in Germany. Although the civil war in Russia had been brought to a close the economy was in chaos and, following the Kronstadt rebellion, the New Economic Policy was adopted.

The setbacks of the previous year made necessary a basic re-assessment of the position at the Third Congress of the Comintern in the summer of 1921. It had to be admitted that Communist Parties had not been built in time to take advantage of the favourable opportunities for revolution which had arisen out of the crisis of capitalism at the end of the war. In the main countries, despite the formation of Communist Parties, the old organizations of the Second International retained their grip on the working class and consciously used their influence to preserve the bourgeois social order. The most critical example, of course, was the role played by German Social Democracy in the whole turbulent series of events from November 1918 onwards. Even the social-democratic author Julius Braunthal, a strong critic of Bolshevism and the Comintern, has to admit that Germany was ripe for social revolution but when the social democrats had power in their hands he claims that they had no idea how to

use it as a means of social change. Instead, they crushed the Spartacists, armed the *Freikorps* and co-operated in the establishment of the sham democracy of the Weimar Republic. This 'democracy' which they called on the German working class to defend left all the real power in the hands of their enemies. To quote Braunthal: 'The state machine was still secretly controlled by the former imperial civil servants, who despised democracy, and the courts were run by reactionary judges who failed to punish acts of political murder by the nationalists. The army was run by the former imperialist officers, and meanwhile nothing was done to stop the Junkers from organizing Fascist *Freikorps*, financed by the tycoons of heavy industry. And the universities still remained hotbeds of darkest reaction.'

It is a contradiction in Braunthal's position that while clearly seeing the shortcomings of the German Social Democrats and their role in restoring the bourgeois state he condemns the Comintern for insisting on a break with such leaders and the pursuit of revolutionary policies. The tragedy of the German proletariat was not disunity or revolutionary impatience, though the left made its quota of mistakes, but the failure to develop in time a party and a leadership able to wrest control of the working class from the traditional organizations. By 1921 the result of the betrayals by the social democracy and the setbacks suffered by the Communist Parties left the responsible forces in the Comintern no alternative but to define the fundamental task as being 'to lead the present defensive struggles of the proletariat, to extend their scope, to deepen them, to unify them, and in harmony with the march of events, to transform them into decisive political struggles for the ultimate goal'.

If there was inevitably a retreat it was to be a tactical one to prepare the way for a renewed offensive as soon as favourable conditions presented themselves. It was necessary now to think of a prolonged revolutionary process extend-



Third Congress of the Third International, July 1921: Lenin addresses the delegates.

ing over years rather than months as had been assumed in the previous optimistic period. In any case the situation inside the major European Communist Parties was difficult. The German Party had lost heavily as a result of the failure of the 'March action' and went into the next round of struggle badly prepared and with big divisions in the leadership. The French Communist Party had only been formed as a result of the split in the Socialist Party at the Congress of Tours in 1920, too late to play a role in the big strike wave of the previous year. The tendency of its leaders to behave much as they had done while in the Socialist Party and the decline in the Party's influence gave the Comintern serious concern. Meanwhile, the majority of the Italian Socialist Party, which had come over to the Comintern under the leadership of Serrati, while proclaiming in words that Italy was ripe for revolution, shrank from preparing a struggle for

power. In fact the workers had occupied the big factories in Northern Italy, the bourgeoisie was forced on to the defensive and even Braunthal agrees that 'If the party leadership had been determined then to bring about a revolution, it could undoubtedly have turned the powerful trade-union campaign into all-out revolution'. However, Braunthal does not accept that the essential condition for victory was a party of the Bolshevik type purged of its reformist wing. As it was, the divided party which Serrati refused to split until the supporters of the Comintern did so at the Livorno conference was condemned to impotence and within a few years was to be driven underground by the coming of fascism.

During this decisive period, when revolutionary situations were still in the making in a number of countries the leaders of the Communist Parties came mostly from the old left wing of the Socialist or Social-Democratic Parties. They found it diffi-



Serrati, leader of the Italian section in conversation with Trotsky.

cult to break with the habits acquired in the environment of an all-embracing party oriented towards parliament and containing 'respected personalities' from the period of the party's formation. There was a marked reluctance to break with these habits and to settle accounts with the old-line leaders. The lessons of the Russian Revolution, and in particular those of the pre-1917 struggles inside the Social-Democratic Party, had not been understood and related to the experience of other countries.

On the other hand, the failure of the revolution to spread strengthened the tremendous prestige and authority enjoyed among the new generation of communists by the Russian leaders—a development which could also become an obstacle to building parties of a Bolshevik type. By some it was believed that this could be done by slavish adherence to Russian models rather than learning the lessons of Bolshevik experience. Some Comintern officials, not excepting Zinoviev and Bukharin, took advantage of this situation to strengthen their personal prestige and influence. In this way the ground was being prepared for Stalin's domestication of the non-Russian Communist Parties. But there is an obvious difference between the mistakes of the early years and the systematic policy of ousting

dissenting leaders and putting in their place docile yes-men willing to follow the Moscow line through thick and thin which became the rule as the bureaucracy consolidated itself in Russia. At first the Russians had much to teach. The situation in the key countries was closely followed by Lenin, Trotsky, Radek and others. Advice was given to foreign supporters of the Third International through long and patient discussions; special commissions were set up, resolutions written and debated in full sessions of the Congresses. It is sheer distortion to confuse this method of conducting international business between fraternal parties with those employed during the Stalin era. It is a matter of bad faith, too, to attribute the failures of the working-class movement in the post-war revolutionary years to the methods of Lenin and the Third International. Braunthal has the effrontery to do this although his own account of events makes it clear, especially in Germany and Italy, that the principal architects of the defeats which the workers suffered were the reformist leaders. Everywhere, in fact, the same leaders who had supported their own governments during the war were now co-operating in restoring bourgeois institutions—even when this meant using force against the revolutionary sections of the working class and shoring up a parliamentary system which was so rotten that the bourgeoisie was getting ready to discard it.

Meanwhile, of course, as a result of these defeats and the failure to build revolutionary parties in time, the isolation of the Russian workers' state produced the conditions for the rise of Stalinism. Already, by the time of the Fourth Congress in 1922, European reaction was launching a counter-offensive. The defeats of the next few years, besides preparing a period of relative capitalist stabilization, were the essential conditions for the bureaucratic degeneration of the Russian party and the transformation of the Comintern into an instrument of its international policy.

4

It is easy to say, as Braunthal and others do, that the working class in its majority in the main European countries had not followed Communist leadership. The explanation generally given for this is that revolutionary politics were alien to the mature working class of the advanced countries able to improve their conditions through

democratic means. Since the world revolution had not happened it must have been a myth, and since this was the aim of the Communist International 'the splitting of the labour movement had been a colossal mistake'. This method of writing history serves two purposes. First it provides an alibi for the betrayals of the parties of the



Fourth World Congress of the Third International, November 1922: Trotsky addresses delegates.

Second International, for did not they in some way 'represent' the majority of the working class? Secondly, it is a comforting application of that historical doctrine which is most adequately described as worshipping the accomplished fact. Since revolutions were not made they could not have been made and those who tried to make them can be shown, in retrospect, to have been deluded.

Now, as has been suggested from Braunthal's own account of post-war European history, the successful re-establishment of bourgeois stability would have been impossible without the co-operation of the reformist parties. It is otiose to claim that these parties only followed the desires of the masses of the working class and that no element of betrayal entered into their conduct. Certainly the workers showed a considerable loyalty to leaders, deferred to their experience and accepted their explanations of their conduct in good faith. In point of social basis, the reformist leadership had its roots in the 'aristocracy of labour' and in large, conservative and bureaucratized trade unions which tended towards class collaboration and integration with bourgeois society if not with the state itself. These trade unions and reformist parties with which they were closely linked thus put their faith in the preservation of bourgeois democracy. In 1922 in Italy and in 1933

in Germany they were smashed without a struggle. Thus were they punished for their stand against revolution, their support for the bourgeoisie, when revolution was on the agenda.

Even apart from this, before the full consequences of their actions could be seen, consistent Marxists were bound to oppose the reformist leadership and to establish new revolutionary parties, the sections of the Third International. Their task was to raise the consciousness of the working class, to break the stranglehold of the old leaders and to take advantage of the conditions for overthrowing bourgeois rule which the post-war crisis of capitalism obviously created or brought near in a number of advanced European countries. To do anything else would have been a betrayal even when it meant advocating a policy which was only able to command the support of a minority of workers. This became still clearer after the Third Congress when there had to be a turn by the Communist Parties towards establishing a solid position in the working class with the aim of winning over a majority rather than aiming at a direct struggle for power at the head of a revolutionary class. The decisions of the Third and Fourth Congresses therefore require careful study.

Marxism and Stalinism in Britain 1920-26

(Part III)

by M. Woodhouse

THE theme of the initial sections of this article has been the failure of L. J. Macfarlane, in tracing the history of the Communist movement in Britain from the 1900s through to the late 1920s, to relate the development of the revolutionary tendencies that emerged across this period to the specific stages of development of the working class, its consciousness and the organizational forms through which this was expressed, and the changing character of British capitalism; the relatively rapid change from the booming imperialist economy of the immediate pre-war years to the stagnant, crisis-ridden economy of the 1920s, and the impact this had on wide sections of the working class, is completely ignored by Macfarlane. Without such analysis, however, it is really impossible to explain in any satisfactory manner how the weak revolutionary sects that came together to form the CPGB in 1920-1921 were in a position, at least potentially and in a fair degree actually, to play an extremely influential role in the major developments that took place in the Labour movement around 'Red Friday' and the General Strike.

Shortcomings of Macfarlane's method

In the earlier sections of this article an attempt has been made to indicate the main phases of development of British capitalism across the period dealt with by Macfarlane's book and to delineate the main revolutionary tendencies that established themselves in the Labour movement by the end of the First World War. It has been argued, against Macfarlane's purely descriptive approach to these tendencies, that it is crucial to understand theoretically the political significance of the tendencies, syndicalist and centrist, which were to be so influential at the time of the formation of the CPGB and which were to determine its character and general political role in its early years. In fact, it was only by a conscious struggle to overcome the legacy of these tendencies that the CPGB was able to create the

conditions for its emergence as a party of the Bolshevik type and in studying the early years of the party's history it is this process that one is studying. Inevitably, therefore, Macfarlane's book provides much information on this process; the theoretical significance of the process, however, and the degree to which the CPGB had established, by 1924-1926, the pre-conditions for effective communist work, he largely ignores.

It is because he ignores these factors that the section of Macfarlane's book with which this part of the review deals, the years from the formation of the party up to the General Strike, is so unsatisfactory and, as a historical evaluation of the significance of the party in the most crucial period of its development, misleading and confused. For those who are concerned with understanding why the CPGB failed dismally in its first serious test as a revolutionary organization during the General Strike of 1926 a clear estimation of the tendencies operating in the party during its early years is essential. The failure of the CPGB to develop the undoubtedly revolutionary potential of the General Strike, its failure to learn from its weaknesses in this period and its inability to resist the pressures working for the Stalinization of the international Communist movement in these years, resulted in the consummation of the process, operating from 1925 at least, whereby the CPGB became utterly subordinate to and dependent on the bureaucratized apparatus of the Comintern. After 1926 the CPGB was never again to be in a position to play any revolutionary role in the British Labour movement. The struggles in the party at the end of the 1920s were not in any real sense connected with an attempt to reverse the rightward tendencies displayed by the majority of the leadership from the time of the General Strike but were, essentially, struggles between two contradictory phases of Stalinism. Significantly enough, it is in this section of his book, where Macfarlane is not concerned with the crucial relationship of the party's theory and policy to the

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working class in a period of revolutionary development, that one finds least to complain of. What is of the greatest concern is Macfarlane's apparent inability to explain why the CPGB was unable to develop the revolutionary potential of the General Strike and at least win from this struggle the basis for its emergence as a mass revolutionary party. As was pointed out in the first section of this article, an explanation of the party's failure entails examining the degree to which it overcame the weaknesses apparent at its origin, the degree to which it was emerging as a really effective alternative leadership in the Labour movement in the period before the General Strike, and to what extent the pressures of Stalinism on the party checked its exploitation of the very favourable conditions that existed for communist work in the period around and after 'Red Friday'. It has been suggested that because Macfarlane never really examines the CPGB as a revolutionary party in the process of development and never in the context of developments in the international Communist movement, except very formally, he portrays the history of the party in static terms and argues, implicitly and from an idealist and superficial standpoint, that the party could play only a limited role in relation to the Labour movement as a whole. In what follows it is suggested that a very different interpretation, based on material from Macfarlane's book and a study of the original sources, can be advanced for the history of the CPGB between 1920 and 1926.

* * *

Within the scope of a review of this character it is impossible to deal in any adequate manner with the crucial movements amongst the working class from the latter stages of the war through to the miners' struggle in 1921 which formed the background against which the negotiations to form a united Communist Party took place. Some understanding of these movements is clearly needed, however, for an understanding of the factors which made for the formation of the CPGB by January 1921. Macfarlane recounts at great length the details of the tortuous process whereby the CPGB was formed, but by treating this process in clinical isolation from the potentially revolutionary developments in the Labour movement he negates much of the value of his account and reveals his deep attachment to the technique of bourgeois formalism endemic amongst students of 'political institutions'.

The war and the impact of 1917

The factors making for potentially revolutionary action by the British working class in the period 1917-1921 cannot be separated out in any clear-cut away; they interacted and reinforced each other. The Russian Revolution aroused tremendous sympathy among wide sections of the working class and a great readiness to defend the revolution from attack by the Coalition Government in 1919 and 1920. At the same time there is plenty of evidence from 1917 of intense war-weariness and a growing determination to demand and fight for major improvements in wages and conditions as some compensation for the intense sacrifices the working class had made in the workshops and on the battle front. The example of the Russian Revolution was of major importance in strengthening the determination of British workers to fight their own bourgeoisie, and while it would be a-historical to argue that the Russian example encouraged direct revolutionary emulation, except among the revolutionary sects that came together to form the CPGB, the very fact that the revolution encouraged the militancy of British workers, and led important sections of them (e.g. the miners) to identify themselves in a general sense with the Bolshevik success, strengthened the consciousness in the bourgeoisie of the need to retain a united front against Labour in the anticipated 'difficult situation' in the post-war period. Moreover, the fact that this united front was maintained in the form of the Coalition Government, which had confirmed itself in power by the most blatant use of political chicanery in the 1918 election, strengthened the consciousness of wide sections of rank-and-file workers of the need to fight the bourgeoisie as a class. That the Labour Party had made few gains in the 1918 election and was an insignificant group in Parliament dominated by some of the most conservative representatives of the bureaucracy of the Miners' Federation meant that in the post-war situation there could be no question of seeking parliamentary channels into which to divert working class struggles. The fight for improved post-war conditions and for the defence of the Russian Revolution inevitably had to be a fight between the organized working class in the trade unions and the Coalition Government. In these conditions, particularly in the crucial year 1919, the very real possibility existed of a general political struggle by the unions against the Government which would inevitably have had revolutionary implications.

The Triple Alliance and the Sankey Commission

The fact that the possibility never became reality in 1919 and the fact that the events of 1920 (Councils of Action against intervention in the Russian-Polish war) and 1921 (the Miners' lock-out) never developed their full potential for revolutionary opposition to the Government was due to the interaction of two opposed tendencies: the opposition of the trade union leadership, both left and right wings, to any form of action against the Government which raised the question of political power, and the inability, both organizational and theoretical, of the revolutionary groupings at the time of the formation of the CPGB to develop the very real revolutionary potential amongst the trade union rank and file which was so clearly held back by their leadership. As noted above, 1919 was the crucial year. The claims of the rank and file, held up during the war by the trade union leadership in the interests of the war effort, could no longer be postponed. The three most important unions, the miners, the railworkers and the transport workers, the constituents of the Triple Alliance, were advancing demands for major improvements in wages and conditions. The Triple Alliance had, in fact, concluded an agreement for mutual support in the furthering of their post-war programmes with a stipulation that none of the constituent unions was to come to terms until the demands of all three unions had been realized. This agreement, coming into force at the time when the struggle for the 40-hour week, with its insurrectionary overtones, was being fought on the Clyde, had very clear political implications. If carried out, it inevitably meant taking on the Coalition Government and being prepared to undertake a general strike. All the evidence, however, indicates that the leadership of the Triple Alliance concluded its agreement very much under the pressure of rank-and-file militancy. None of the leaders of the Alliance, and this included the left-wingers, Smillie and Hodges of the miners, were prepared to make their unions' demands a political, revolutionary issue, i.e. one which raised in a clear way the question of which class held power. After all, while Robert Smillie was a pioneer of the ILP in the Miners' Federation, his political beliefs had become very much shaped by the strait-jacket of orthodox trade unionism, particularly after he became president of the MFGB in 1912, and while he supported in words the pacifist section of the ILP during the war, in practice he lent his services very fully to the Government's war-time schemes for coal pro-

duction with all that they involved in increased exploitation and the maintenance of the slaughter on the Western front. Neither he, nor his colleague Hodges, one-time supporter of the South Wales unofficial movement, now MFGB Secretary and convert to the specious theories of Guild Socialism, was prepared to envisage a struggle against the Government if it could be avoided. Both wanted the nationalization of the mines not as a step in the process of winning working-class power but as a co-operative enterprise between miners, Government and consumers (i.e. private industry) to increase the efficiency of the industry with higher wages and shorter hours as a quid pro quo. Any strike against the Government, in the conditions of 1919, would sacrifice what they regarded as a practical proposition; moreover, to impose the miners' claims on 'the community' by strike action would be unethical. This viewpoint was summed up by Smillie at the crucial conference of the MFGB which met to consider whether to participate in the Sankey Commission or whether to strike for the union's demands:

... we had no right to force conditions on the nation because of our strength if the claims we put forward were not just [he argued] in favour of participating in the Commission. Moreover: If we get into a fight it must be to secure improvements for our people, and if we can get these improvements for our people with a fight, then in God's name, do we want a fight if we can secure them without. . .¹

What lay behind these pleadings was a clear understanding that, with the mood of the rank and file, not only in the MFGB but the Triple Alliance as a whole, a strike would soon pass from a limited economic to a general political affair. The Webbs, who acted as go-betweens for Lloyd George and the MFGB leaders, realized exactly what a miners' strike implied:

If the Government, confident of their power to beat the miners, go into battle—theirs is the responsibility . . . [wrote Beatrice Webb] 'Blockading the miners' will be a difficult and dangerous task: the railwaymen and transport workers might be drawn in, the army might refuse to act. And then? . . .²

In the event, the Webbs, as Beatrice Webb's diaries show, were largely responsible, in consultation with Lloyd George and Smillie and Hodges, for working out the idea of the Coal Commission and thus offering the miners' leaders a possible way out of the apparent impasse.

1 MFGB conference, February 28, 1919.

2 *Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1919-1924*, p. 150.

Nationalization abandoned for Collaboration

The success of the leaders of the MFGB in inducing the union to participate in the Commission, together with the concessions that came from the first stage of the Commission (the 'Sankey wage' and the 7-hour day), sufficed to blunt rank-and-file pressure for immediate action on the question of nationalization, with the result that Lloyd George was relatively safe in rejecting the Commission's recommendation for nationalization later in 1919. The long-term reaction of the miners' leaders to this rejection was of the greatest significance in the context of the general trends within the unions in the inter-war years. After the formalities of the 'Mines for the Nation' campaign and the predictable rejection by the TUC of an appeal for general strike action in support of the miners in March 1920, the leadership of the MFGB moved steadily towards the evolution of some permanent system of wage regulation in the industry which would take over from the system of Government control of the mines which survived from the war period. The ideas that were crystallizing in the minds of the leaders of the MFGB, notably Hodges, and the leaders of the Mineowners' Association from the time of the 'datum line' strike in October 1920 through to the eve of the 1921 lock-out involved co-partnership, with the miners being tied in by their leadership to a long-term productivity deal in which wages were related directly to the profitability of the industry. The owners in the various districts guaranteed a definite level of profits which had to be met before wages could rise. It was a scheme on these lines that came into force after the defeat of the miners in 1921; its essentials had been worked out by the bureaucracy of the MFGB well before this struggle broke out, and had been clearly understood and rejected by the majority of the rank and file at the time of the 'datum line' strike. What had been envisaged in October 1920 was the relation of wage increases to the achievement of higher levels of output by the rank-and-file miner; what came into force in 1921 was a more developed form of this basic idea and the practical results of this system were clearly explained by a representative of the South Wales left-wing:

If our Executive Council would take into consideration what the establishment of a datum line means they would realize that they are playing the same game as the coal-owners . . . to exploit the men to produce coal for the mining industry. To establish a datum line, we have for the first time

admitted that the miners are to blame for the shortage of output today.³

General Retreat by the miners' leaders

These developments among the miners have been noted at some length because they displayed in a very clear way the pressures acting upon the trade union bureaucracies, even where these had an established 'left-wing' content, to come to terms with post-war capitalism once the alternative, the objective need to fight the state and undertake revolutionary action, had been faced and rejected. Amongst the right-wing leaders of the unions, in both the TUC and the Triple Alliance, there was never the slightest hesitation over their role in the critical situation of 1919. During the crucial period in February and March 1919, when the miners were poised on the brink of action which might have precipitated a general strike, the leaders of the MFGB studiously avoided any appeal for joint action to their allies in the Triple Alliance, although both the Transport Workers' Federation and the NUR were pressing their own programmes at this time and the NUR was being held back with the greatest difficulty by J. H. Thomas from strike action. Similarly, in September 1919 when the rail strike did take place the role of the NUR's allies, along with members of the TUC Parliamentary Committee, was to deputize the Government in the hope of obtaining a compromise solution which would end the strike. There was no consideration of sympathetic action in support of the railworkers. These developments, furthermore, negated threats by the Triple Alliance in the latter part of 1919 to undertake industrial action to force the Government to drop its interventionist activities in support of the White Guards in Russia. Under the pressure of rank-and-file opinion the leaders of the Alliance talked in militant terms, but when they failed to get the TUC to take up the question they neglected to

³ MFGB Conference, September 20 and October 1, 1920. This same speaker, Ted Williams, miners' agent in the Garw, gave a dramatic illustration of what the tendencies in the MFGB leadership towards an exploitative form of co-partnership meant. 'I have here on my left,' he said, referring to a delegate at the conference, 'a man of 40 years of age who is absolutely finished as a producer of coal. . . . He is finished because he has been all his life on the piecework system. He has put into every single tram of coal every ounce of energy he possibly could and as a consequence he is old at 40. . . . This is what happens to thousands of men in the mining industry today owing to this speeding up system. . . .'

consider unilateral action despite the fact that they formed the most effective industrial bloc within the TUC.

What was at stake in all these developments, it must be emphasised, was the fear of the trade union leaders that once strike action was unleashed on any of the issues noted above the potentially revolutionary tendencies working amongst the rank and file would come to the surface and destroy all chance of control of the strike movement from above. As Clynes warned at the special conference of the TUC in March 1920, which met to consider sympathetic action in support of the miners' demand for nationalization:

It is far easier to get your men out than to get them back, and all the time your government and the other remaining parts of the community, you imagine, will be doing nothing. . . . Surely all experience is against such lame and impotent conclusions as that. You cannot bring millions of men out to begin a great struggle like this without anticipating a condition of civil war.⁴

Clynes was, of course, completely correct. The Government, during 1919-1921, had fully prepared itself to deal with strike movements which, it considered, might very well develop along the lines envisaged by Clynes. During 1919, particularly at the time of the rail strike, the Government had elaborated plans for an emergency system of communications, maintenance of essential services and the use of the army for strike breaking; in fact, the plans produced by the Government at this time almost directly anticipated those put into effect during the 1926 strike. In addition, the Government had, under the wartime Defence of the Realm Act, unlimited and implicitly dictatorial powers which it hastened to renew via the Emergency Powers Act introduced during the miners' strike in October 1920.⁵ All the preconditions for the 1926 General Strike were thus established in this period of near revolutionary ferment in the immediate post-war years. The essential difference between the two periods was that in 1919-1921 the trade union bureaucracy was, to a considerable extent, able to maintain control. This it did by blocking potentially dangerous working-class movements as far as possible, and where it was impossible to avoid action, as in the 1919 rail strike or the movement against the likelihood of British intervention in the Russian-Polish war in 1920, leading these movements in order to confine them within safe chan-

nels. The militant, even revolutionary, demagoguery of the right-wing Labour Party and trade union leaders at the time of the 1920 Council of Action was employed in exactly this context. In 1919 J. H. Thomas had stated that he had led the rail strike to maintain control over the rank and file and avert the dangers of revolution: the country, he claimed, had never been nearer to civil war.⁶ In 1920 the actions of Thomas and his colleagues were construed in the same terms; at the 1920 TUC, a month after his famous militant speech at the Council of Action, Thomas warned, in connection with developing industrial struggles:

We are far too near the precipice to allow dignity or pride on either side to prevent a peaceful settlement. Let the motto for the workers of the country be, 'Settle Down'.⁷

Revolutionaries unable to capitalize

It would be wrong, however, to imagine that the Labour bureaucracy was in any material sense more powerful than in 1926. Its work of assisting the Coalition Government to overcome the dangers of the post-war period was greatly assisted by the high political consciousness of Lloyd George and his acute perception of the character of the Labour leaders, of how to manoeuvre with them and when to make judicious concessions to assist them in their task of controlling the rank-and-file (as his handling of the miners and rail workers in 1919 demonstrated). Even more important, in fact crucial in this context, was the inability of the revolutionary groups and the unofficial movements in the unions to which they were related to develop among the rank-and-file of the trade unions and Labour Party a level of political consciousness which would have enabled them to exploit the real revolutionary possibilities which existed in the post-war period. It would be too simple, indeed fallacious, to argue that because the revolutionary groups were involved in the negotiations surrounding the formation of the CPGB they were too pre-occupied to play any significant part in the working-class struggles of this period. Basically it was because these groups were so imbued with syndicalist, propagandist and sectarian tendencies that they were unable to give conscious, political expression to the objectively revolutionary currents that became apparent in the struggles of 1919-1921. Even in 1921, when the work of unification of the

4 Quoted by W. H. Crook, *General Strike*.

5 For details, cf. W. H. Crook, *op. cit.*

6 *The Times*, October 1, 1919.

7 Quoted by Blaxland, *A Life For Unity* (Biography of J. H. Thomas).

revolutionary tendencies had been completed, the CPBG was to show that, at this stage, it was little more than a better organized form of what had existed before in the revolutionary movement in Britain. Given the deep-rooted nature of the pre-1920 tendencies, outlined in the earlier sections of this article, this was inevitable. The CPBG was involved from the moment of its inception in a potentially revolutionary situation with which it had neither the theoretical nor organizational equipment to deal. The working-class struggles of 1919-1921 provided the essential pre-conditions for the unification of the previously diffuse revolutionary tendencies and, despite the considerable weaknesses shown by the newly-formed CPBG in coming to terms with these struggles, the experiences of this period were to provide invaluable lessons for the party in its period of consolidation and development in the years after 1921. In short, it took this experience, particularly of the miners' lock-out of 1921, to reveal to the party in a very concrete way the failings of its syndicalist and propagandist methods; without this experience and the assimilation of its lessons the conditions for the establishment of a potentially effective revolutionary party could not have been realized by 1924-1925.

Bolshevism: a new experience

The most distinctive feature of the CPGB as it emerged from the final round of unity negotiations in January 1921 was the extremely formal character of its adherence to the decisions of the Communist International (notably its Second Congress) on the organizational forms and methods of work of Communist Parties. What the vital Second Congress of the CI had attempted to instil in the consciousness of the delegations attending the Congress was an understanding of the character of the Bolshevik form of political organization and its relationship to the successful seizure of power in 1917. In short, what the leadership of the CI was attempting was to generalize upon the Bolshevik experience and educate the participants in the Congress in those principles of Bolshevism which were of general application to Communist work outside Russia. To the British delegates the idea of a disciplined, centralized party, working in a planned, organized way in the trade unions and Labour Party was something completely new and outside their previous experience, as was the emphasis of the CI upon the need for a theoretically-trained membership educated to use Marxism not in the sterile, formal manner of the Second International but

creatively, as a method to evaluate the political perspectives before the party and for relating to this, the day-to-day work of the party in its various forms. The revolutionary groups that had come together to form the CPGB had been attracted by the success of the 1917 Revolution and had been attracted to the *ideal* of a Communist Party, but it took the Second Congress and then the experience of the working-class struggles in Britain in 1921 to produce any real understanding of the major departure from previous political practices required in the formation of a Communist Party affiliated to the CI. J. T. Murphy, a delegate at the Second Congress, described very graphically the shock which the Congress administered to his previous political conceptions which, it may be noted, were those of the British revolutionary groups in general:

I had left England as a young provincial skilled workman with a clear-cut theory of how society could be reorganized under the control of the workers . . . I was quite sure that capitalism was breaking down everywhere and in the process helping the workers to see their way to Socialism through industrial organization and the General Strike. . . . My experience in Russia . . . had shown me the real meaning of the struggle for political power. Instead of thinking that a Socialist Party was merely a propaganda organization for the dissemination of Socialist views, I now saw that a real Socialist Party would consist of revolutionary Socialists who regarded the Party as a means whereby they would lead the working class in the fight for political power.⁸

1921: Sectarian-Syndicalist hangover

The leadership of the newly-formed CPGB in 1921 had undergone the same process of political re-orientation as Murphy but the attachment to the new political concepts and methods of work was inevitably formal; when the crisis of the miners' lock-out arose the party reverted quite instinctively to the predominantly sectarian and syndicalist traditions of its constituent groups. The formal character of the party's acceptance of the directives of the CI for an orientation of party activity towards serious mass work came out initially over relations with the Labour Party. As Brian Pearce notes, the application for affiliation to the Labour Party in 1920 was presented in terms designed to invite rejection and there was clearly general relief in the party, particularly among the tendencies emanating from the SLP and syndicalist groups, at the escape from the

8 J. T. Murphy, *New Horizons*, pp. 189-190.

possible compromise with reformism.⁹ In fact, this sectarian attitude to the mass political organization of Labour, in a period when the Labour Party was beginning to establish an increasingly strong appeal to the working-class electorate, was to arrest the CPGB's own development as an influential force within the Labour movement; until the sectarianism of the early period was overcome, by 1923, much of the potential goodwill among left-wingers in both the Labour Party and ILP was left unrealized, a fact which may well have helped consolidate the ascendancy of the centrist currents around Macdonald and Clifford Allen in the 1922-1923 period.

More important, however, in the context of the events of 1919-1921 was the continuing predominance, indeed strengthening, of the syndicalist element of the revolutionary movement. As noted above, the very weakness of the Labour Party in Parliament meant that the Labour struggles of the period had to be fought out very largely on the industrial front with the intervention of the Coalition Government giving these struggles an inevitably political character. The weakness and ineptitude of the Parliamentary Labour Party together with the existence, up to the end of 1920, of boom conditions in the economy provided the pre-conditions for the resurgence of syndicalist tendencies amongst wide sections of the working class particularly at a time when, under pressure, employers and the Government, in its role as controller of the mines and railways, could make economic concessions. This background is essential for understanding the continuation of syndicalist tendencies in the groups that formed the CPGB for, up to the end of the boom, it seemed to provide the conditions for continuing and extending the established methods of work; while powerful trade union action, 'direct action', could yield results there was no great pressure to think in political terms about the significance of these trade union struggles. This factor was to be of the greatest importance for what might be termed the 'industrial wing' of the CPGB. It was noted, in the second part of this review, that despite the formal policy differences amongst the revolutionary groupings that formed the CPGB there was a general tendency to share a common syndicalist outlook in relation to work in the trade unions. Effective industrial unionism, the steady encroachment on the power of the employers and the eventual take-over of industry through the general strike, these were the commonplaces of

the BSP, the SLP, the WSF of Sylvia Pankhurst, and the Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committee Movement (SS & WCM), in which representatives of the revolutionary groups and 'non-party' syndicalists were active. The SS & WCM did in fact become the industrial basis of the CPGB by March 1921 following discussions between its representatives and the leadership of the CPGB after the Second Congress of the CI and, although the SS & WCM formally agreed to the subordination of its industrial activities to the political direction of the party, there were many indications that leading members of the Movement regarded the party's industrial wing as being of prime importance, a fact which pointed to the likelihood of the continuation of its syndicalist methods.

Syndicalist organization as substitute for the Party

During the period 1920-1921, when the CPGB was being formed and the SS & WCM was being brought into an organizational relationship with it, there was considerable evidence that, despite the work of the Second Congress of the CI, the tendency was to regard the CPGB as a more highly developed form of the syndicalist movement that had existed, in various forms, from the early 1900s. At the Second Congress Jack Tanner, the official delegate of the SS & WCM, explicitly denied the need for any separate party; in his speech he indicated that the SS & WCM now accepted the need for a revolutionary seizure of power, as carried out by the Bolsheviks, but held that this task could be accomplished by the SS & WCM:

We understand and realize that the dictatorship of the proletariat must be wielded by a minority—the revolutionary minority of the proletariat as expressed through the Shop Stewards' Committee Movement . . . , but he added that . . . a number of those who are active in the shop stewards' movement are not greatly concerned about the formation of the party because they have been convinced by their experience in other parties that it was a loss of time to share in the work of such parties . . .¹⁰

Other members of the SS & WCM who were actively involved in the political revolutionary groups might have disagreed with Tanner on the question of the party but at the same time indicated that, essentially, they saw the same role for the SS & WCM as Tanner; such a movement

9 Brian Pearce (Joseph Redman), *The Early Years of the CPGB*, Labour Review, Jan.-Feb., 1958.

10 Cf. *Proceedings of the Second Congress of the CI*, July-August 1920.

would carry out the practical tasks of the revolution, the party would provide the propaganda and the organizational apparatus for bringing the various unofficial, syndicalist groups in the unions into effective contact with each other. It was this sort of attitude to which MacManus, a prominent figure in the formation of the CPGB, gave expression when he stated to a conference of the SS & WCM that:

They (the Bolsheviks) have got to the roots and have found a way out, and what is of even greater interest is that they have found the way out to be by means of just such committees as we are building up in this country. They call them Soviets, we call them Workers' Councils.¹¹

It is of significance that the movement of the SS & WCM towards this position marked a very definite shift away from its war-time attitudes. Then it had existed purely as a co-ordinating organization for the local, autonomous unofficial movements in the engineering industry. Now it was adopting a specifically centralized form in connection with its development into a definite revolutionary tendency. As MacManus' remarks indicated, this had come about very much through the influence of the Russian Revolution; at the same time, the passing of the special war-time conditions which had provided the SS & WCM with its original strength forced the movement to reconsider its position. As the unions asserted control over the Shop Stewards during 1919-1920 and effectively limited their role through agreements with the engineering employers, and as employers were increasingly able, particularly outside Scotland, to break up the workshop committees, so the SS & WCM was forced to move, quite empirically, to realise the weakness of localized, autonomous forms of unofficial movement, particularly at a time when the trade union bureaucracies were holding back the rank and file as far as possible and when there consequently existed the chance of rebuilding the unofficial movement on a much higher level.

Two trends in the SS&WCM

The SS & WCM was made painfully aware from the immediate post-war period of its considerable weaknesses and the need to evolve some more effective form of organization. The action of the Clyde Workers' Committee in January 1919 in launching the action for the 40-hour week without consulting the English section of the movement was an indication of this, as was the total

inability of the movement to give any organized expression to the rank-and-file unrest in the Triple Alliance at the time of the miners' agitation in February-March, 1919. On this occasion the *Worker*, organ of the Scottish section of the SS & WCM, was forced to admit that only rank-and-file committees would make the Triple Alliance act, yet these were non-existent in the TWF while as for the unofficial movement in the NUR '... so spasmodic and at the same time amenable to any emotional outburst on the part of Mr. J. H. Thomas has it been that it can be written down as the unreliable quantity'.¹² The work of the SS & WCM, or those fragments of it that remained after the war, thus took two lines of development from 1919. Increasingly it tried to establish itself as the focal point for unofficial movements in the unions generally, paying particular attention in this context to the miners and railworkers, and at the same time played an increasingly significant part in the events surrounding the formation of the CPGB. By the early part of 1921 the SS & WCM, now formally united with the newly-formed CPGB, had brought within its scope the important unofficial movements which were developing in virtually all the major coalfields, the vigilance committees on the railways and the rank-and-file committees in the docks, notably Liverpool and Glasgow. In addition, the remnants of the workers' committees in the engineering industry remained attached to the movement. In short, the SS & WCM brought into the CPGB all the 'organized' syndicalist movements that existed in the post-war period and brought them in largely on the understanding that the CPGB offered a more effective way of organizing the economic struggle in the workshop or mine. The fact that the Convention of the SS & WCM which met in March 1921 to ratify the alliance with the CPGB formally accepted a constitution which subordinated it to the political control of the party did not alter the fact that the industrial base of the party in its formative years was purely syndicalist in outlook, that many of the leaders of the party were drawn from this industrial base and that no attempt was made in the period of the formation of the party to understand the limitations of syndicalism and to draw the lessons of its weaknesses in a period when working-class struggles in all their forms needed to be fought with a political perspective. On the contrary, the party went out of its way to appeal to industrial militants in purely syndicalist terms.

11 SS & WCM conference, January 10-11, 1920.

12 *The Worker*, March 3, 1919.

The best example of this was in South Wales where considerable potential existed for building a mass CP given the rapid extension of the unofficial movement there. Appealing to the many thousands of militants who followed the lead of the unofficial movement, the party's South Wales organizer, Alf Cook, wrote:

The Communist branches in the coalfield areas can be the centres of the unofficial agitation in the Miners' Federation. Communist branches in areas like Cardiff, Newport, Barry, Swansea, etc., can be a connecting link between the miners' unofficial movement and the unofficial movement among dockworkers, seafarers, railway and transport workers, and at the same time being attached to a centralized and disciplined national Communist Party, connect South Wales rebel activities with those of the rest of the country . . .¹³

Background to the failures of the Party in 1921

The tendency to present the function of the party in this way, the very formal character of the understanding of the leadership of the work of the Second Congress of the CI, and the total failure of the party during 1920-1921 to make a thorough analysis of the tendencies in British capitalism and the inevitably political, revolutionary struggles to which these must give rise, meant that the party functioned in a purely syndicalist manner during the great struggles of 1921 occasioned by the miners' lock-out. It must be kept firmly in mind that the lock-out was, from the start, an objectively political struggle. The collapse of the demand for coal, with the end of the post-war boom, meant that the coal-owners demanded savage cuts in wages and attacks on working conditions to maintain their economic viability, particularly in South Wales, which was hit most severely by the collapse of the export trade. At the same time the Government, in the midst of its deflationary programme, had determined to rid itself of its control of the industry and its attendant obligation to finance the mounting losses of the coal-owners. State and owners were thus united in a move to force down, through decontrol, many hundreds of thousands of miners literally to the starvation level and many thousands more into permanent unemployment. The owners launched the attack on the industrial front; the Government backed them with the full resources of the State in meeting the resistance

of the miners. The attack on the miners, moreover, could not be divorced from the mounting pressure in all major sections of industry, to destroy the gains made by the working class during the post-war boom; the railwaymen were faced with the decontrol of their industry in the latter part of 1921 and although they were a 'sheltered' trade could anticipate wage cuts and speeding up forced through by railway companies, strengthened by the Government-sponsored amalgamation of 1920, anxious to cut freight costs to industry as a whole. The 1921 depression held the same implications for the dockers, while in engineering and the cotton industry pressures were building up for major rationalization of production. During the latter stages of the miners' lock-out a great lock-out in the cotton industry to reduce wages developed; early in 1922 the defeat of the miners encouraged the engineering employers to launch their attack; the turn of the dockers came in 1923, when the gains of the Shaw award of 1920 were challenged. All these developments were implicit in the miners' struggle, for the miners were the strongest, best-organized of the working class with their leadership kept very much in line with rank-and-file militancy by the activities of the unofficial movements. The breaking of this power made possible the attacks on the other sections of the working class which followed the lock-out.

The CPGB was generally aware of the implications for the working class as a whole if the miners were defeated in 1921, but it approached the struggle with all the syndicalist preconceptions noted above and with all the syndicalist illusions of the unofficial movements attached to the party that the struggle could be fought out in purely economic terms. The aim of the party across the lock-out was to hold the MFGB and its allies in the Triple Alliance to the demands of the miners—for the pooling of the profits of the industry to allow the richer districts to finance those worst hit by the depression. But its role in this process was, as Macfarlane rightly implies, totally negative. Macfarlane quotes the constantly repeated slogan of *The Communist* during the lock-out, 'Watch Your Leaders', and indicates that the party's actual activity was confined to the issuing of admonitions from the sidelines. Certainly in terms of its material resources in the unions, other than the miners', it was not at the outset of the struggle to play a very influential role. On the eve of the lock-out *The Communist* was forced to admit:

Only in one industry, the mines, is there any

13 *The Communist*, September 20, 1920. Alf Cook, a veteran SLPer in Cardiff, must not be confused with A. J. Cook.

real organized 'Left' wing opinion, and even that is of recent growth. Can the same be said of any other industry? With the possible exception of the railways—and that exception only partial—the answer is 'No' . . . The National Administrative Council of the Shop Stewards represents powerful ideas, but it is not a powerful organization. . . . Everything has yet to be done . . .¹⁴

An opening for alternative leadership

Yet having admitted this the CPGB did not go on to analyse the very favourable conditions that were being created in the unions by the developments in 1921. The fact that the leadership of the MFGB, and this included some of the left-wing like Ablett, were opposed to a fight explicitly because of its political character, placed the greatest responsibility on the party and its unofficial groups in the MFGB to seize the initiative and work for the consolidation of rank-and-file strength around a definitely political perspective. Such a campaign would, in the conditions of 1921, have driven home in a very clear way the need for powerful unofficial movements in other unions, most notably in the unions allied with the miners in the Triple Alliance. A close examination of the actual developments around Black Friday indicates that in South Wales and other important areas of the country conditions were ripe, had the CPGB been able to take the initiative for the organization of unofficial strike movements in support of the miners, particularly in the NUR. In South Wales, for example, the bitterest condemnation of the action of the executive of the NUR was manifested in a very large number of branches and calls for strike action were widespread, yet there was not the slightest evidence that the CPGB or the local unofficial movement attempted to exploit this situation. The right wing on the South Wales Miners' executive were well aware of the dangers of the situation immediately after Black Friday; Vernon Hartshorn, the prominent South Wales leader, went out of his way to excuse Hodges' actions on the eve of Black Friday and warned:

If the miners only remain passive . . . maintaining their resolution not to return to work until they had terms which they could accept, they would be acting perfectly within their rights and the silent pressure they would exert would be far greater than any action of violence.¹⁵

The most significant feature of the situation around Black Friday was the fact that unless the

initiative could be seized at once movements of spontaneous anger amongst the rank and file in the Triple Alliance would fail to develop into effective unofficial action and the mood of militant anger rapidly degenerate into demoralization. It was, however, a week before *The Communist* had any positive advice for the rank and file, other than that they should continue to watch their leaders. It urged that money be sent to the *Daily Herald* miners' fund and that 'decent' officials in the Triple Alliance should resign. Its other advice took the form of a purely propagandist exhortation which explicitly discounted the hope of organizing unofficial action:

Overhaul the whole (union) machinery from top to bottom, it urged, link up the unofficial movements from industry to industry. Make war . . . on every waverer. . . .

But having made this general point it went on, The mining lock-out continues and it seems that the rank and file of other unions will have to express their sympathy in financial help now that their leaders have thwarted for the time being the general strike.¹⁶

Too little, too late

Admittedly, at a Congress of the party on April 24 (i.e. ten days after Black Friday) delegates who were active in the industrial wing of the party agreed to initiate an 'intensified campaign' among rail and transport workers with the aim of bringing them out in support of the miners¹⁷, but by this stage, inevitably, the momentum of rank-and-file militancy which could have provided the success for such a campaign had largely died away. In South Wales, for example, a conference of the unofficial movement right at the end of April took up this decision of the Congress and decided to co-ordinate action with the railworkers, yet the intense militancy of the South Wales NUR, so apparent at the time of Black Friday, had evaporated. Only two branches out of some twenty which had originally pressed for action agreed to consider the proposals of the miners¹⁸, and in the event, nothing more was heard of the campaign.

This sketch of the response of the CPGB to the events of 1921 is not meant to detract in any way from the party's militancy and courage in support of the miners during the lock-out. In fact its members bore the brunt of the arrests that were made during the struggle. What it is in-

14 *The Communist*, March 23, 1921.

15 *Merthyr Pioneer*, April 4, 1921.

16 *The Communist*, April 23, 1921.

17 *Solidarity*, May 5, 1921.

18 *Merthyr Pioneer*, May 5, 1921.

tended to make clear is the powerful tendency operating in the party, both among the leaders and the membership generally, towards fighting the struggle on purely syndicalist terms. Although Macfarlane indicates implicitly that this was the line adopted during 1921 he totally fails to bring out the very serious effect this had in restricting the very great potential influence the party could have had if it had not succumbed to spontaneity, a-politicism, and the type of 'ginger group' activities which characterized the unofficial movements which made up its industrial wing.

Only the pre-conditions established

It is of importance to note, in this context and as a conclusion to this characterization of the formative years of the CPGB, that the tendencies evident in the party in 1921 were not solely the ideological product, in some sort of isolated way, of the sects which united in 1920-1921. The powerful impulses towards spontaneity and the various syndicalist forms of action were, as has been pointed out in earlier sections of this article, deeply ingrained in the traditions of important sections of the working class. These traditions had been most firmly established in the years of Labour upsurge before the First World War; in the ferment of the post-war period they revealed how strongly they determined the outlook of 'the Left', both leaders and rank and file, in the Labour movement. The CPGB was as much a reflection of these tendencies as it was a conscious participant in them. If the formation of the party had, by 1921, brought the revolutionary tendencies into organizational relationship with each other around the formal agreement on the policies of the CI, it had, in practice, done little by this period to break down the local autonomy which was so characteristic of the revolutionary movement in Britain up to the formation of the CPGB. A really comprehensive history of the party would inevitably have to show that, despite the movements towards Communist unity in 1920-1921, the CPGB as it emerged in 1921 was not a great deal more than a federation of local revolutionary tendencies with a propensity towards forms of action which continued in practice in their day-to-day work whatever the formal decisions of the party nationally on the application of the theses of the CI. This local autonomy had been apparent in the British Labour movement from the formative period of the SDF and the ILP; it was inevitable that so strongly entrenched a tradition should carry over into the CPGB and it was to be one of the most fundamental tasks of the party in the early 1920s

to fight this tendency through the struggle for a centralized, disciplined party based upon a highly politically conscious membership. In 1921 the success of the unification negotiations meant that the preconditions for the achievement of this task had been established, but only the preconditions; the real fight for the revolutionary party in Britain was still to come. In 1921, therefore, the history of the CPGB is as much the history of the local Communist groups—the movement in South Wales, on the Clyde, on Tyneside or in the various districts of London—as it is a history of the national developments in the party. These local tendencies came very much to the fore in the struggles of 1921 and in reality imposed their own pattern on the activities of the CPGB in this period. With their own conception of the character of Communist work still at a very formal stage, the party leadership was not really in a position to attempt to counteract these localized movements whose ideas on revolutionary practice they themselves shared and reflected.

Something to be desired: more research

The present stage of research into the Labour movement in this period does not allow any clear picture to be built up of the way the CPGB in its early years was largely a reflection of local revolutionary tendencies. Had Macfarlane placed his account of the formation of the CPGB in this context and initiated this research the value of his work would have been very greatly enhanced. Evidence that exists on the revolutionary movement in South Wales, however, does show very clearly how the established syndicalist tendencies there did impose themselves very firmly on the work of the CPGB in its formative years and would suggest that a similar state of affairs existed elsewhere.

South Wales as an example

The post-war boom in the coal trade, particularly in the export field in which South Wales was prominent, placed the South Wales miners in an extremely strong economic position and gave a great boost to the revival of the unofficial movement after its dispersal during the war. This revival of unofficial activity took place within the general context of the impact of the Russian Revolution for which there was widespread enthusiasm among the rank-and-file miners, particularly the younger generation, and at the same time that the unofficial groups began to multiply in the mining valleys under the influence of 'missionary' tours by representatives of the SS&WCM and the local

branches of the Labour College movement, important elements of the unofficial movement became involved in the activities between 1919 and 1921 surrounding the formation of the CPGB. The most significant feature of these developments was that the revolutionary movement in South Wales, whether it sided with the BSP and the Communist Unity Groups that formed the CPGB in July 1920 or with the 'left wing' Communist organization of Sylvia Pankhurst¹⁹, was that it centred around a revival, in a far more developed form, of the syndicalism which had been endemic in South Wales since the Cambrian Combine strike of 1910. The great economic strength of the rank and file of the SWMF meant that they were in a most favourable position for wringing concessions on wages and conditions from the local owners and were in a position, furthermore, to force the predominantly right-wing executive of the SWMF to keep closely in line with their demands.

These were conditions in which the tendency for the unofficial movement to function purely as a 'ginger group' upon the union leadership could flourish to the fullest extent. So long as the leaders could be kept in line the long-established aims of the *Miners' Next Step*, which could be summarized as the development of an industrial union with the aim of seizing control of the mines, could be realized. The work of the unofficial movement, and in practice the Communist movement which it dominated, thus came to centre around the task of building up the strength of the union in the mining valleys so that, by progressive stages, the miners would begin steadily to encroach on the power of the owners until, eventually, they would have neutralized the owners' rights of control over production and the work of taking control could be completed. In this context the need for a strongly centralized unofficial movement, closely linked to the overall political strategy of the CPGB, seemed very remote. What mattered was the realization of the full strength of the district organizations of the SWMF in each mining valley for which purpose the agitational enthusiasm of a few local militants in the various unofficial groups could be considered sufficient; the fact that they were at the same time members of the CPGB made little difference and in practical terms merely served to register their adherence to the idea of revolution.

19 Involved in the latter were A. J. Cook and George Dolling, two leading members of the pre-1914 unofficial movement, who found in Pankhurst's organization the complete expression of their a-political revolutionary syndicalism.

The achievements of the unofficial movement were thus represented in the establishment of 100 per cent trade union membership and the bringing into the SWMF of the various 'craft' grades of miners, enginemen, etc., so that a fully effective industrial union might be established. By 1920 this process had gone a long way, particularly in the Rhondda, which embraced a quarter of the mining population in South Wales. So effective was the trade union organization here under the stimulus of the Rhondda unofficial groups, led by militants like Cook, Horner, Dolling, etc., that the power of the coal-owners was very effectively constrained; for example, on two occasions during 1920 the whole of the Rhondda struck against the victimization of a few union members and forced their reinstatement, and at one point in mid-1920 the unofficial movement was able to bring the whole of the SWMF to the verge of a strike in defence of two miners denied the payment of the minimum wage. It was the experience of this sort of strength which gave so great an impetus to the syndicalist belief that the process of seizing power was well advanced. As the South Wales correspondent of *Solidarity* observed:

Each and every time the management of a colliery seek to serve notice on any employee they are faced with the prospect of an immediate stoppage of work. . . . 'Intolerable' is the word used by one coal-owner . . . but for the worker it is the first step that has ever been made on the road to real Freedom.²⁰

At the meetings of the SS&WCM that took place during 1920, delegates from the South Wales unofficial movement made even clearer their confidence in their strength. Describing the situation in the mining valleys, Charlie Gibbons (one of the original authors of *The Miners' Next Step*) stated:

They (the unofficial movement) manufactured pretexts and created situations whereby the workers were forced into a spirit of antagonism to the employers. As a result of their efforts there were now 150,000 in the South Wales coalfield prepared to 'do' the employers as soon as the opportunity came. . . .²¹

In this context it did not matter that the nationalization campaign of the MFGB had failed in 1919. There was no need to examine the political reasons for this failure or to consider the role played in it by the State when the local economic power of the miners was, apparently, increasing so rapidly. It was this situation which prompted a rank-and-file miner to write that

20 *Solidarity*, July 1920.

21 SS&WCM conference, January 10-11, 1920.

Whether the official scheme for nationalization and joint control is granted or not, the South Wales miners are going on quietly with the work of *taking* control. Some day, when the Government at last enacts some scheme of joint control, it will wake up to find that it is only legalizing what already exists in practice.²²

The exception of Wales submits to the rule

The circumstances that produced this attitude in South Wales were, of course, purely temporary. The slump which set in from the end of 1920 completely removed the economic conditions which had given the impetus to syndicalism but this rapid change in material conditions did not in any way force a re-assessment of the syndicalist character of the Communist movement in South Wales. The whole work of the unofficial movement in this area in the period leading up to the 1921 lock-out was conducted on exactly the same lines as in 1920. In the propaganda of the movement there was not the least consideration of the inevitably political character of the coming struggle; all that was necessary for success, it was argued, was an extension of the unofficial movement to ensure that the union leaders did not retreat from the policy of the profits pool and the national wages board. Similar considerations dominated the development of the unofficial movement nationally in this period when the SS&WCM was formally uniting with the CPGB. The South Wales unofficial leaders had been arguing during 1920 at meetings of the SS&WCM that what was needed for the realization of their policy for the seizure of the mines was the extension of their type of organization to all the major coalfields. This would ensure that the MFGB followed the policies laid down by the rank and file. In the months before the lock-out the SS&WCM was successful in initiating on quite an extensive scale unofficial movements of this type in all the major coalfields and the formation of the 'British Miners' Reform Movement' in February 1921 seemed to indicate at last that rank-and-file opinions could be impressed on the union leadership and the coal-owners and Government defeated in the coming struggle in purely economic terms.²³ In this development the leadership of the CPGB gave its complete support to the conception that the preparations for the lock-out should be conducted on purely syndicalist lines. At the Con-

vention of the SS&WCM, at the end of March 1921, right on the eve of the lock-out, when the alliance with the CPGB was ratified, there was no consideration given to the coming struggle. Obviously it was held that the work of the party would devolve on the local unofficial groups who would act in a purely spontaneous, 'ginger group' fashion in response to the struggle as it developed. It was because the local, autonomous syndicalism of the unofficial movements imposed itself on the party in this way that the CPGB played so negative a role in the lock-out, as outlined above, and it was this development which prompted the critique of Radek, at the Third Congress of the CI, part of which is quoted by Macfarlane. Radek's comments revealed very clearly how the traditions of the unofficial movements asserted themselves during the struggle:

In many places, he noted, the Party appears on the scene under the cloak of the 'Workers' Committees' and any success that is achieved by the propaganda does not bring the masses near to the CP. . . .

1921, a necessary condition for change

In his further comments, based on interrogations of delegates from the CPGB, he revealed how completely the party had failed to prepare politically for the struggle and had fallen back on the spontaneity of its members:

To my question, what do you tell the masses, what is your attitude to nationalization? What is your attitude to the present concrete claims of the workers? One of the comrades replied: 'When I ascend the rostrum at a meeting I know as little about what I am going to say as the man in the moon; but being a Communist, I find my way along while I speak'.²³

It was with this evidence before him that Radek forcibly stated:

. . . We consider it our duty to say the following, even to the smallest CPs: you will never have any large mass parties if you limit yourselves to the mere propaganda of the Communist theory.

In fact, it was only by assimilating the lessons of 1921, in the context of the critique of the CI and with the guidance of the latter, that the CPGB was to proceed towards the establishment of conditions for effective mass Communist work by 1924-1925. The experience of 1921 was a necessary condition for the escape from the previous syndicalist, sectarian traditions of the British revolutionary movement.

22 *Workers' Dreadnought*, April 17, 1920.

23 *Communist Review*, December 1921.

The boom . . . that was

Western Capitalism Since the War

by Michael Kidron

Weldenfeld & Nicholson. 36s.

THE MANUSCRIPT of this book, the author tells us, was complete except for details in March 1967. By the time it was published in May 1968, the post-war boom, whose permanence it attempts to 'explain', no longer existed. The only interest the book retains, therefore, lies in the light it throws on the author's method, not in anything he has to tell us about capitalism.

The publisher's blurb describes Dr. Kidron as 'an eminent political economist'. We know him better as a disciple of T. Cliff of the 'International Socialism' group. The title of this book, *Western Capitalism*, has the intention of distinguishing its subject-matter from what Cliff's group calls the 'state capitalism' of the Soviet Union.

The closing chapters expound their ideas about rank-and-file action in the trade unions, which lead them to oppose actively any attempt to develop Marxist leadership in industry. What becomes very clear on reading this book is how closely the reading this book is how closely these views were bound up with the boom, and with the crude vulgarization of Marxism which passed for a theoretical analysis of the period of economic expansion whose end we are now experiencing.

★

More than any other section, the middle class in the metropolitan countries did well out of the boom. Not only did they seem to have found some kind of stability, but the spectre of independent working-class action seemed to have been laid to rest.

This was reflected among the 'New Thinkers' and in the revisionist trends inside the Marxist movement. The permanence of boom conditions

was the context of all their thinking. Despite all his show of sophistication, Kidron is part of this trend.

He poses the problem like this:

High employment, fast economic growth and stability are now considered normal in western capitalism . . . Each can be seen as the immediate cause of the others, together forming a causal loop that can be made to revolve in any direction from any point. The loop itself needs to be explained. In the thirties it was one of unemployment—stagnation—instability; now, of high employment—growth—stability. The interconnexions and sequence are the same. Only the level is different.

(In passing, note here the way in which the Keynesian framework has been taken for granted, and also the use of a little second-hand cybernetic jargon, just to show we are really switched on.)

★

Part One of the book is headed 'Explanations'. Is planning the reason for the difference between pre- and post-war capitalism? No, decides Kidron, it has helped a bit, but it does not suffice as an explanation. What about the idea that technical innovation has meant an expansion of trade? Not an 'autonomous' factor, says Kidron.

And so to Chapter Three, 'An Arms Economy'. Now we are on the right track, he thinks. The idea that world capitalism, and US capitalism especially, had developed a 'permanent arms economy', in which war preparations stabilized the system, is certainly not a new one. The patent, in any case, is not held by Kidron and Cliff, but by the Shachtmanites, whose journal *New Inter-*

national carried a long series of articles with this message during 1950-1951.

By repeating the argument in 1968, however, Kidron helps us to see its mechanical and anti-Marxist character more clearly. Here is the paragraph in which he outlines what he imagines to be a theory of capitalist crisis.

The argument for seeing a permanent threat of over-production (not a threat of permanent over-production) as inseparable from capitalism rests on three empirical propositions: that the relations between different capitals are by and large competitive; that an individual capital's competitive strength is more or less related to the size and scope of its operations; and that decisions affecting the size and deployment of individual capitals are taken privately by individuals and groups which form a small segment of the society which has to live with the consequences. Were it not for the first two there would be no compulsion on each capital to grow as fast as it might through 'accumulation' (that is, saving and investment) and 'concentration' (that is, merger and takeover): were it not for the third, growth would never stumble far beyond society's off-take. Together they also define the mechanism for attaining, and retaining, stability as one that augments offtake while moderating the rate of expansion that would result. Ideally, it should do this without altering too grossly the relations between individual capitals.

Such a mechanism is to be found in a permanent arms budget.

★

Now why did that fellow Marx spend several decades failing to complete a four-volume work on capital and its crises, if the job could be done so simply? Kidron's patroniz-

ing reference to Marx in the preface should be considered before answering this question: 'Marx's attempt to grasp the workings of the system is neither laughable nor holy. Allowance made for its primitiveness, it can be used to effect.'

The old man was very primitive, you know, but we eminent political economists can use him to effect! In reality, Kidron shows not the faintest conception of what Marx was talking about. *Capital* lays bare the economic law of motion of a particular stage of the development of society. At this stage, the producers of wealth are separated from the means of production, and are re-connected only by selling their labour-power as a commodity. The only relationship between producers is that mediated by the market on which commodities are exchanged for the universal commodity, money. Such a society cannot plan industry. The expansion of production must conflict with the relations of production in a series of explosive crises. Driven forward by the search for the highest rate of profit, capital stands as a social power over and above the decisions of any individual, worker or capitalist.

★

The 'underconsumption' which is implicit in Kidron's falsification of Marx has nothing in common with such an analysis. Because, just like any other 'eminent political economist', Kidron takes capitalism as a given object, he thinks he has only to consider the mechanisms through which its component parts are brought into quantitative relationship with each other. The argument really boils down to this profound thought: 'Growth' is outstripping 'offtake'; throw some of the stuff away, and all will be well.

Feeling the need for a rather stronger theoretical prop, Kidron wheels in a reference to the falling rate of profit. Marx, like the earlier political economists, shows that as capital is accumulated and production expands, the surplus value extracted per unit of capital tends to fall because labour power forms a

smaller proportion of total capital. This fall in the rate of profit has to be counteracted if the system can go forward. In this century, as Lenin proved, the export of capital to backward areas of the world is the major form of action taken by the monopolies to maintain the rate of profit.

But Marx does much more than state the law of the falling rate of profit. He also demonstrates that this tendency cannot operate in a smooth, orderly fashion. The opposing forces on the rate and mass of profit can only be resolved through crises. The rate of profit remains stable or increases in the course of a boom, only to come crashing down in a slump. The destruction of capital, both in physical and financial terms, then leads to a renewed rise in the profit rate and a new cycle begins.

None of these contradictory processes could be seen by Kidron and his fellow eminent political economists in the 1950s and 1960s. Looking at the world through the windows of the bourgeois categories of thought, they saw nothing but steady expansion. Some, like Kidron, said they disliked what they saw. They protested occasionally at the iniquities of the world around them. But they were incapable of grasping the explosive conflicts prepared by the expansion itself and consequently the power of the working class, given a leadership which based itself on those conflicts.

★

Kidron's reference to the rate of profit is therefore even more superficial than his meagre ideas quoted above. Rapidly flashing references to von Bortkiewicz and Sraffa (which appear to indicate that arms production has no effect on the rate of profit), he then pretends he has proved that arms production offsets the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. He finds it impossible to get away from the notion that, by providing a market for products of industry, armaments expenditure is somehow draining away a surplus that would otherwise accumulate, and thus keeping the boom moving. But the extent and quality of the

demand for armaments is quite unrelated to the development of the private sector of industry. The essential planlessness of capital is made still more chaotic by the demands of the cold war.

Kidron does explain that the 'permanent war economy' leads to one or two 'problems'. However, he hurriedly reassures us, 'as yet these elements of instability are just a smudge on the horizon'.

★

Part Two of the book is headed 'Problems', and is mainly concerned with prices and wages. But these 'smudges on the horizon' are seen as firmly embedded in the basic stability of the permanent arms boom. When he talks about working-class action, it is of the non-political, militant shop stewards' variety, which was possible only under the conditions of industrial expansion.

Although he refers in Chapter One, 'Planning', to international monetary difficulties, it is only to show that conflicts between capitalist countries interfere with international planning arrangements.

The fundamental nature of the 'liquidity problem' is denied implicitly by him. 'Were it not for a substantial increase in US expenditure abroad since 1964,' says the eminent Dr. Kidron, 'in pursuit of the Vietnam slaughter, and the phenomenal growth in the network of "US swap-credits", a form of US-initiated bilateral mutual currency insurance which has added some \$5 billion to total liquid reserves (1967), the world might well have been in the throes of a serious financial crisis.'

Well said, Dr. Kidron. But how is it that the crisis *did* arrive, precisely *because* Vietnam expenditure had inflated the dollar? Here is the nub of the question.

The outflow of dollars in the forms of aid, investment and purchases of imports was the means whereby the boom was propped up. This was especially so after the 1950 Korean war stockpiling of raw materials. But the outflow, and the world expansion of credit which accompanied it, contained the seeds

of the crisis now threatening to disrupt world trade and production. For it rested on a stock of gold whose price had to remain fixed at the 1934 level. No economist or financial expert, however eminent, could get away from the reality of capitalism, that it involved the exchange of the products of labour and that gold was the universal commodity in the background of all international transactions.

This remained the limit on the boom and, somewhere along the line, the expansion of trade had to run into this contradiction. The fall in the rate of profit could be evaded only up to this point by means of

investment in Europe and state purchases of armaments. And the further the boom continued, the more explosive the contradictions within it. If only a 'normal' post-war slump had occurred, say around 1949 or 1950, the present crisis might well not have proved so dangerous.

But just because Kidron's 'war economy' was so effective for 23 years, the crash now approaching is all the greater.

Revisionists and political economists to the contrary notwithstanding, we live in the epoch of the death agony of capitalism. The struggle for revolutionary leadership in the working class can alone re-

solve the conflicts tearing world society to pieces. October 1917 was the first stage in the world proletarian revolution. Only the betrayals of social-democratic and Stalinist leaderships enabled capitalism to ride out the crisis of 1929-1933 and the war which followed.

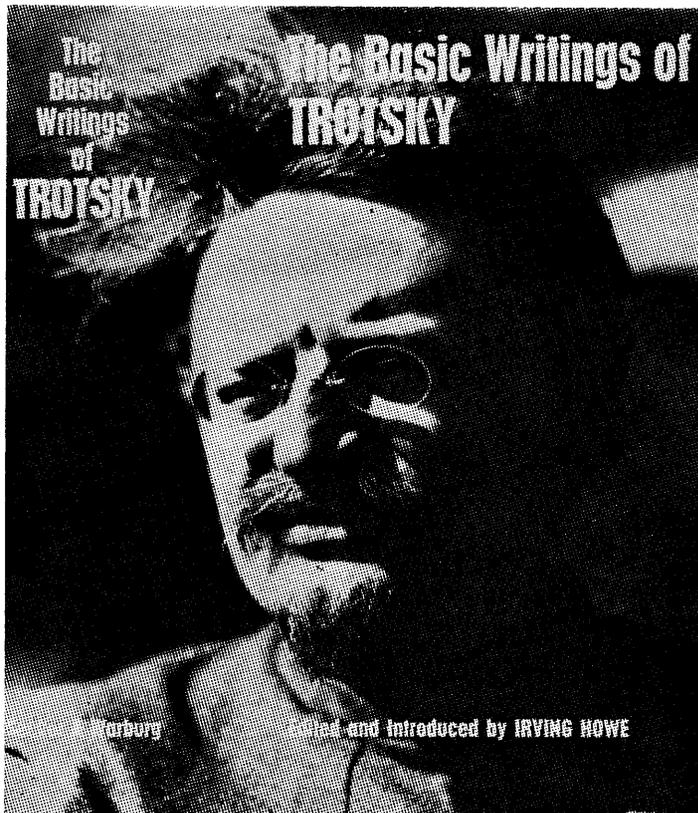
The new crisis prepared by a quarter of a century of capitalist expansion renews the demand which history places before the working class: 'Take power!'

Kidron may not have recognized the contradictions of the late boom. As Trotsky remarked of Burnham; they will certainly recognize him.

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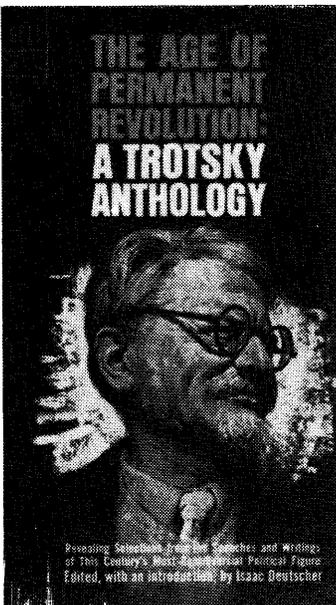
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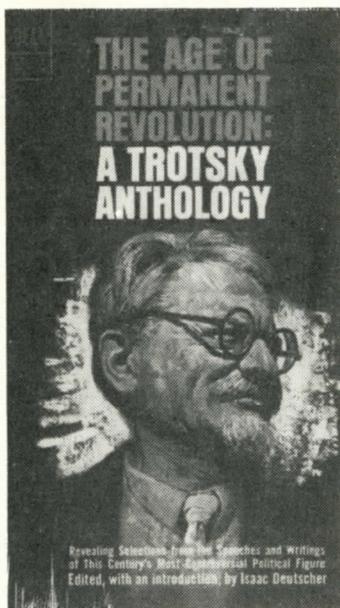
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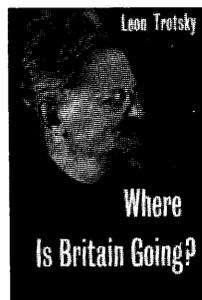
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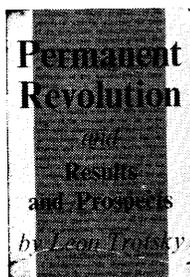
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This is a polemic against Radek in 1928. Trotsky examines the arguments against his pre-war theory of the permanent revolution (as expounded in *Results and Prospects*) and takes up the history of his differences with Lenin before 1917, of which Stalin and his henchmen made so much. Trotsky shows that it was Lenin's criticisms of his attitude to the centralised Marxist party, which he afterwards understood and accepted, that kept them apart, and not their differences on the permanent revolution.

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