

# 'THE REVOLUTION BETRAYED'

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In spite of Trotsky's tremendous role in the victory of the Russian Revolution, his name will be forever associated primarily with the struggle against its decline, with his patient exposures of Stalin's falsifications of the programme, and the history, of the revolution.

The unprecedented and unforeseen problems associated with the decline of the revolution faced Marxism with an acute crisis of theory and practice. No-one can deny Trotsky the foremost place amongst those who faced up to them seriously on the basis of uncompromising revolutionary principle.

In my view his main work of analysis in this field, *The Revolution Betrayed*, has still not been superseded. (1) Most of Trotsky's critics fall into one or other of two camps whose physiognomy he accurately described as follows:

*"There are some who say that since the actual state which has emerged from the proletarian revolution does not correspond to ideal a priori norms, therefore they turn their backs on it. That is political snobbery, common to pacifist-democratic, libertarian, anarcho-syndicalist, and generally ultra-Left circles of the petty-bourgeois intelligensia. There are others who say that since this state has emerged from the proletarian revolution therefore every criticism of it is sacrilege and counter-revolution. That is the voice of hypocrisy behind which lurk most often the immediate material interests of certain groups among this very same petty-bourgeois intelligensia, or among the workers' bureaucracy." (2)*

However, it would be surprising if this first attempt, by even a very capable Marxist, to grasp theoretically the meaning of the horrors of Stalinism had succeeded, given the unforeseen nature of the circumstances. I think one can detect a certain forcing of the Marxist categories in Trotsky's attempts to comprehend the new material, conceptualise it, and adapt the revolutionary programme to the new tasks. Here I try to argue, in a tentative way, that the concepts relied on in *The Revolution Betrayed* do not adequately grasp the dialectic of transition from capitalism to socialism. The received doctrine revolves around the Trinity of concepts: (a) Workers' State; (b) Political Revolution,

1 Even such a severe critic of Trotsky as Nicolas Krasso (in his *New Left Review* article of 1967) can find no objection to the work other than its "demagogic title". The debate started by Krasso has been republished as TROTSKY: THE GREAT DEBATE RENEWED, ed. N Krasso, New Critics Press (St Louis, Mo.) 1971. This book also contains an earlier, longer, version of my present argument.

2 'The Workers' State and the Question of Thermidor and Bonapartism', *New International*, July 1935

as opposed to, (c) Social Revolution.

The doctrine is that in the Workers' State a bureaucratic degeneration or deformation has occurred which requires a political revolution to establish socialism proper, but that no social revolution is required because capitalist property relations have, broadly speaking, already been replaced. The objection that a Workers' State can hardly be said to exist when the workers have no rights and are tyrannised over by bureaucratic gangsters is got round by pointing out that the political form of bourgeois dictatorships can vary from parliamentary to fascist without affecting the social base of society, because the latter is determined primarily by the economic form.

It is this doctrine, and in particular the idea that we can counterpose political and social revolution in our programmes so slickly, that I propose to re-examine.

## Preliminaries

In the first place let us note the unfortunate ambiguity in the term "Workers' State". By this is meant, of course, the basic character of society as a whole. The state in the narrower sense of the word (i.e. the complex of coercive institutions) is acknowledged by Trotskyism not to be in the hands of the proletariat, but of the party bureaucracy, which has expropriated the proletariat politically. Even so, it is held that in so far as the interests of the bureaucracy itself are connected with nationalised property, it will in some way or other be likely to defend the latter against capitalist encroachment and thus be partially a defender of proletarian interests.

So far so good. However, the neat dichotomy political/social begins to disintegrate when Trotsky argues that it is inexplicable how such a degeneration could occur solely at the political level and fills out his account of the political expropriation of the proletariat by giving this a social basis.

*"This whole stratum which does not engage directly in productive labour, but administers, orders, commands, pardons and punishes - teachers and students we are leaving aside - must be numbered at five or six million ...*

*"In the whole mass of the bureaucracy, the communists together with the Communist Youth constitute a block of 1½ to 2 million - at present, owing to continued purgations, rather less than more. This is the backbone of the state power. These same communist administrators are the backbone of the party, and of the Communist Youth. The former Bolshevik party is now no longer the vanguard of the proletariat, but the political organisation of the bureaucracy ...*

*"Hypothetically, we may assume that the labour and collectivised peasant aristocracy,*

the Stakanovists, the non-party 'active' trusted personages, their relatives and relatives in law, approximate the same figure we adopted for the bureaucracy, that is five to six million ... Twelve per cent, or perhaps 15 per cent of the population - that is the authentic social basis of the autocratic ruling circles." (3)

Thus Trotskyists always argue that even the personal dictatorship of Stalin had social roots in a stratum of society - a stratum which Trotsky had little difficulty in showing had very considerable material privileges which sharply differentiated their interests from those of the masses.

A question that immediately arises is that if, even allowing for the relative autonomy of the political sphere, we find this political expropriation has a social basis in such a stratum, can we talk about a merely political revolution when such a revolution would clearly involve dispossessing this stratum not only of its political expression but also of its material privileges? Especially when Trotsky computes that over twelve per cent of the population may be involved?

In *The Revolution Betrayed* Trotsky bases his analysis primarily on antagonisms in the sphere of distribution flowing from a low level of productivity. However far more important than its effect on distribution will be the effect of the so-called political revolution on production itself. Trotsky does not stress this, partially because of the administrative bent Lenin noted (4) no doubt, partially again perhaps because the low level of the masses in his day makes my point academic. This point is that the social character of production in the Soviet Union sets fetters on the most important productive force of all, namely the initiative and creativity of the worker himself. The completely hierarchical command structure of the Soviet economy makes the individual worker the same kind of labour power machine and nothing else, that he is in a capitalist factory. Who can doubt that a new upsurge of proletarian revolution, sweeping away bureaucratic privilege, would also restructure production itself so as to provide avenues of expression for the enthusiasm and ingenuity of the workers. It is not at all a question, as the C.P.S.U. right-wing and the bourgeois press duet, of personnel changes, i.e. replacing politically reliable but stupid cadres with technically competent ones; but of the entry of an educated working class into the arena.

Such an access of strength to the productive forces again requires us to ask if it can be comprehended by the merely 'political revolution'.

Moreover (if with some trepidation) one is also forced to speak of cultural revolution here. A new upsurge of proletarian revolution in the Soviet Union could not possibly succeed in changing organisational forms in abstraction from the forms of thought, values, and character of the population. It is perfectly clear that, in many respects, bourgeois values and ideology, superstition, religion, all kinds of vice, profoundly permeate Soviet society.

One simple example from Wolfgang Leonhard's book *Child of the Revolution* illustrates the necessity for a thoroughgoing reappraisal of Soviet style 'socialism' by its citizens - though the actual example is from Soviet-sponsored East Berlin. Leonhard relates that in Berlin in October 1945 a communist from the West, who had spent the war underground, accosted him in the Central Committee

buildings:

"I am a K.P.D. official invited here from the West. I have been given some chits for meals, but I don't know where the dining room is."

"That depends what sort of ticket you have." He looked at me in surprise and showed me his ticket. It was Category III - a ticket for less important members of staff. I showed him the way.

"But tell me - are the meals different for different members of staff in the Central Committee?"

"Yes of course. There are different kinds of ticket, according to the class of work one is doing. The last two categories are for technicians and clerks."

"Yes but ... aren't they all members of the Party?"

"Yes, of course, They are all certified Party members, including the charwomen and chauffers and night-watchmen."

He looked at me in astonishment and said, "Different tickets - different meals - and they are all members of the Party!" He turned and went without another word.

A moment later I heard the creak of the front door. My comrade had left the Central Committee building. Thoughtfully I crossed the courtyard to the dining-room. I went through the rooms in which Categories III and IV - the lower classes were fed; and for the first time I had an uneasy feeling as I opened the door into the dining-room reserved for our category. Here at a table covered with a white cloth, the senior members of staff enjoyed an excellent meal of several courses. Curious, I thought, that this has never struck me before!" (5)

What is important in this example is not so much that such a hierarchy exists but that no-one thinks it particularly odd. Values have to change with the structures - large-scale transformations of people's understanding of themselves and their social relationships - if socialism is to come out of this

#### The Basis of the degeneration

Before we proceed let us consider the vulgar Trotskyist thesis that the case of the Soviet Union and its degeneration is an 'exception' easily explicable by certain special circumstances - ones that we have no reason to expect to obtain generally: - backwardness, isolation, encirclement, and so on. However, although it is obvious enough that the circumstances cited clearly conditioned Soviet development, the 'exception' theory begins to seem over-simple when we take into account other experiences. There are now some dozen or more "workers' states" and, although there are enormous differences between them, none of them corresponds to the expected 'model' of socialism. All these regimes, like the U.S.S.R. are in a traditional state somewhere between capitalism (or colonialism) and socialism.

Indeed, only abstract moralisers with no Marxist understanding could fail to understand that a more or less long period of transition towards socialism is unavoidable. Furthermore, this period cannot be expected to be one of continuous smooth transition: it too must have its dialectic, its periods of decline and renewal. It should be recognised that historical experience proves that any revolution inevitably undergoes a period of ebb, of degeneration,

3 THE REVOLUTION BETRAYED (below R.B.) 1965 ed. NY, p.138

4 In the 'Testament'

5 W Leonhard: CHILD OF THE REVOLUTION (London, 1957), p.377

its severity depending on circumstances. The swift rise of bureaucratism in post-revolutionary Russia was conditioned not only by the allegedly exceptional conditions of the time, but also had, in addition, endemic roots in the revolutionary process itself.

When the Left Opposition was grappling with the frightening phenomena of degeneration, Rakovsky was the one who saw this most clearly. Trotsky justly quotes his document on the subject several times in *The Revolution Betrayed*.

In his analysis of the "professional dangers" of power, Rakovsky stressed:

*"I do not refer here to the objective difficulties due to the whole complex of historical conditions, to the capitalist encirclement on the outside, and to the pressure of the petty-bourgeoisie inside the country. No, I refer to the inherent difficulties of any new directing class, consequent on the taking, and on the exercise of power itself, on the ability or inability to make use of it" (6)*

The main such inherent feature is that upon taking power proletarians do not automatically become supermen. They are the same proletarians whose behaviour before the revolution fluctuated wildly; as their confidence rose and sank; as they were shaped by their political and cultural experience. The revolutionary seizure of power by a previously oppressed class that has lived all its life under the hegemony of another class, represents by definition an extraordinarily high peak of activity, unity and consciousness on its part. Is it surprising that when all problems are not solved the day after taking power, the revolutionary tide begins to ebb?

Apathy, cynicism, fragmentation, selfishness, withdrawal, disperses the masses from the stage of history again, leaving behind the apparatus thrown up by them, but no longer representative of, or controlled by, the class in whose name it rules. Now the road is open for negative developments in the apparatus itself which reinforces the demoralisation of the class (bureaucratic arrogation of power and privilege; careerism; corruption); until finally, instead of expressing the dictatorship of the proletariat the apparatus exercises dictatorship over the proletariat. How far such tendencies actually go, of course will be conditioned by the kind of circumstances usually cited in explaining the degeneration that took place. Also, it goes without saying that we have here, not simply an objective process, but one mediated by particular people and their subjectivity (Stalin etc.) so that there is a certain openness about the situation, within which area subjective factors (e.g. Stalin's jealousy and suspiciousness) help to determine the outcome. Nevertheless, we must recognise that the objective forces do set limits to what even the greatest individual can achieve.

It is not a question of saying that if Trotsky had been leader, he would have done the same as Stalin. That is horribly abstract. For Trotsky to have been at the head of affairs, either the objective circumstances would have had to have been other than they were, or, Trotsky would have had to have been ... Stalin!

On any objective consideration, the Left Opposition was doomed to defeat. This is not to say that their struggle was worthless, that they should have helped Stalin or retired into private life. Apart from the psychological impossibility of such a course by a man like Trotsky, at the time they were

not in a position to know all the relevant considerations. It was always possible that some new revolutionary breakthrough in the West might have come to the aid of the U.S.S.R., which would have changed the conditions of their struggle. Then again it could be argued that a stubborn rear-guard action might ameliorate or slow-down a process of degeneration. Finally it is possible for a revolutionary tendency, even if defeated, to make a positive contribution from the longer term point of view; for when a new upsurge of revolution comes it can go back and learn from the struggle and analyses of the heroic groups that kept alive the programme of revolution instead of capitulating to 'realities'. That is why *The Revolution Betrayed* is still an important book today - because it represents not only the dying embers of one revolutionary upsurge but also a point of renewal for the future.

To return to the main point: we have enough experience of transitional regimes to see now that tendencies towards bureaucratic degeneration are endemic to the transitional situation, are internal to it, and would have to be guarded against even if Imperialism did not exist.

All these preliminary queries impel us to try to develop a more sophisticated methodology for analysing transitional regimes.

We must understand that the historical dialectic is not one-dimensional; nor are its phases of a single amplitude. Indeed it might be more accurate to speak of an infinitely large number of dialectics; of differing social levels (economic, ideological, etc.); of differing historical specificity; and of differing generality with regard to space and time. (Thus from the point of view of a very general historical dialectic, proletarian revolution may represent a simple moment of transition, but judged internally it reveals enormous complexities which require a more specific historical analysis to supplement the other.) Those who think that all Dialectics has to say about the transition from capitalism to socialism is: *bourgeoisie v proletariat* results in *classless society*; or, *private property relations v socialised productive forces* results in a *socialist mode of production* - or even both - inevitably fall into mechanistic or fatalistic views with regard to questions posed at more concrete levels. They tend to reduce the related but autonomous dialectics to a single simple contradiction; and they treat transitional phases with the criteria of formal abstract categories (often of a highly 'moral' content) instead of grasping their historicity, seeing them as moments of a development and analysing their specific contradictions.

What I am pointing to here, to put it crudely, is the 'Chinese-box' character of the historical dialectic - we have totalities within totalities, dialectics within dialectics.

This involves, not only seeing that the transitional period has its own phases and stages, but also of seeing that an epoch like capitalism is not just a stage in history but has its own history, i.e. is made up of a series of transitions. It does not just grow smoothly up to its limit, it has its own internal dialectic in which various subordinate contradictions work themselves out and fetters are overcome. The Common Market project for example, is an outstanding case of an attempt by the more far-sighted European capitalists to overcome the fetters of tariffs and piddling markets, and to resolve the contradictions between national capitals, by creating European firms in a European market.

Once we get away from concentrating on the single, simple, global contradiction and begin to develop the idea of dialectics of different levels of specificity, it begins to seem less extraordinary that post-revolutionary societies may exhibit all kinds of contradictions, and may ossify into various

forms of partial supersession of previous conditions which then become fetters on further development. (7)

The disjunction *political revolution/social revolution* obscures this reality because it locates the trouble (at any rate, in its terminology) at only one level, thus introducing a radical discrepancy between this level and others. In fact a more sophisticated analysis would surely show contradictions at other levels. The terminology is an attempt to express theoretically the progressive character of Soviet society with respect to capitalism; but because of its poverty-stricken conceptual framework it can do so only by locating the 'good side' in the base and the 'bad side' in the superstructure.

### The Nature of Bureaucracy

Let us now proceed to look more closely at the nature of bureaucracy. To begin with it is necessary to recognise that the institution of state property is an historical necessity. As Trotsky puts it:

*"In order to become social, private property must inevitably pass through the state stage as the caterpillar in order to become a butterfly must pass through the pupal stage. But the pupa is not a butterfly ... State property becomes the property of 'the whole people' only to the degree that social privilege and differentiation disappear and therewith the necessity of the state ..."* (8)

State property is therefore an intermediate form. From one point of view it is the first form of communism; from another, the final term of the property system, universalised private property - hence private property in the process of being negated.

This property form has its peculiar ideological expression. The state is seen as the incarnation and guardian of the socialist economy over against the individual members of society. The individual is subjugated to a hypostatized universality which nominally includes him, but also constrains him. Marx criticised this ideology in advance when he wrote:

*"What is to be avoided above all is the re-establishing of 'society' as an abstraction vis a vis the individual. The individual is the social being."* (9)

However the existence of some form of state through the transition period seems to imply that there are good material reasons why this implicit

7 There is a utopian, apocalyptic strain in Marxism that views socialism as the final resolution of all contradictions. Personally I take such talk with a grain of salt, preferring to regard such a resolution as an asymptotic limit never reached. In particular I reject Marcuse's reduction (in REASON AND REVOLUTION) of the manifold contradictions of social life to a single class-based dialectic. He concludes that socialism makes it obsolete, and the new development must be understood as a 'purely rational' one. This looks suspiciously like the re-insertion of Hegel's absolute. Curiously enough the Maoists characterise Liu Shao-ch'i in a similar way: "In the opinion of [Liu] Communist society is a bed of roses, without darkness or contradiction; all is well, without the existence of opposites.... What [Liu] is doing here is preaching metaphysics." *Peking Review*, 12 May 1967, p.9.

8 R.B., 248

9 Marx: ECONOMIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL MANUSCRIPTS (1844) Moscow FLPH, p.104.

sociality cannot be completely established in a positive way.

As far as the Soviet Union is concerned, its constitution declares that the state is 'the state of the whole people': but this is an obvious mystification. In the absence of concrete institutions of proletarian democracy - soviets, rights of tendency, workers' councils etc. - talk of 'the state of the whole people' is a form of fetishism behind which are concealed the interests of the bureaucratic stratum. (10)

Clearly, in the case of the U.S.S.R., state property is more than a convenient juridical mediation, because of the role played by the bureaucracy (which Trotsky did not hesitate to compare with the fascist bureaucracy.)

There has always been a somewhat intractable problem of locating the state bureaucracy in the class structure of society. Marx criticised, very early on, Hegel's idealisation of bureaucracy, (11) and he writes (in a striking passage in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*) of "this executive power with its enormous bureaucratic and military organisation, with its ingenious state machinery, embracing wide strata, with a host of officials numbering half a million, besides an army of another half million, this appalling parasitic body which emeshes the body of French society like a net and chokes all its pores."

This is very reminiscent of Trotsky's description of the Soviet bureaucracy. However the problem is compounded here by further features:

*"In no other regime has a bureaucracy ever achieved such a degree of independence from the dominating class. In bourgeois society, the bureaucracy represents the interests of a possessing and educated class, which has at its disposal innumerable means of everyday control over its administration of affairs. The Soviet bureaucracy has risen above a class which is hardly emerging from destitution and darkness, and has no tradition of dominion or command."* (12)

The Stalinist bureaucracy appears to have a preponderant role in social life beyond anything previously experienced in history. This is what makes facile comparisons between it and previous étatist formations located within class systems so misleading. The Stalinist bureaucracy has not only

10 I Deutscher once said to me, on the question of the existence of alienation in the U.S.S.R., that it was not their labour but their state that was alienated from the proletariat.

11 "Hegel proceeds from the separation of the 'state' and 'civil society' - from 'particular interests' and the 'completely existent universal'. And bureaucracy is indeed based on this separation.... For the individual bureaucrat the state's purpose becomes his private purpose of hunting for higher positions and making a career for himself.... In bureaucracy the identity of the state's interest and particular private purpose is established in such a way that the state's interest becomes a particular private purpose opposed to other private purposes. The transcendence of bureaucracy can mean only that the universal interest becomes the particular interest in actuality and not, as with Hegel, merely in thought and abstraction. This is possible only when the particular interest becomes universal." ('Critique of Hegel' 1943: WRITINGS OF THE YOUNG MARX ON PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIETY, ed. L D Easton and K H Guddat [NY, 1967] pp.183-187)

state power but all power in its hands. As Trotsky admits, the class in whose name it rules is utterly without power, means whatever of exerting hegemony over the nation which has separated itself from the class and opposed itself to it. Indeed some commentators have gone so far as to say that, following the liquidation of the old proletariat (itself a tiny minority in Russian society) in the Civil War, and the gradual displacement and final liquidation of their political representatives (the revolutionary Bolsheviks), the Stalinist bureaucracy created and moulded the expanding proletariat that is supposed to furnish its basis.

Trotsky concedes that:

*"... the very fact of its appropriation of political power in a country where the principal means of production are in the hands of the state, creates a new and hitherto unknown relation between the bureaucracy and the riches of the nation. The means of production belong to the state. But the state, so to speak, 'belongs' to the bureaucracy." (13)*

Trotsky characterises this new and hitherto unknown relation as one of a gigantic parasitism. However this metaphor strikes me as giving rather too passive a picture, and one too orientated towards distribution. The metaphor implies that, attached to an otherwise whole and healthy body, there is a separate organism exacting tribute. But it is clear that there is no such distinct separation in Soviet society. The bureaucracy is as much constitutive of the body of Soviet society as is the working class. It does not simply levy a toll on the produce of the economy - it organises production itself; it alone projects the course of the economy.

Of course there are sectors of the bureaucracy solely employed on the non-economic functions necessary for the general rule of the stratum (army and political police) and this represents an enormous waste of resources. Nevertheless it is incontestable that the bureaucracy does not simply exact tribute with the mailed fist, but has a basis in production itself right down to factory level. The mode of production itself has a bureaucratic character.

In this connection it is interesting to see what Marx had to say about the managerial stratum in industry:

*"The labour of superintendence and management will naturally be required whenever the direct process of production assumes the form of a combined social process, and does not rest on the isolated labour of independent producers. It has, however, a two-fold character.*

*On the one hand, all work in which many individuals co-operate necessarily requires for the co-ordination and unity of the process a directing will, and functions which are not concerned with partial operations but with the total activity of the workshop, similar to those of the conductor of an orchestra. This is a kind of productive labour which must be performed in every mode of co-operative production.*

*On the other hand ... this supervisory labour necessarily arises in all modes of production which are based on the antagonism between the worker as direct producer and the owner of the means of production. The greater this antagonism the more important is the role played by supervision. Hence it reaches its maximum in the slave system. But it is indispensable also in the capitalist mode of production, since the process of production is at the same time the process by which the capitalist consumes the labour-power of the worker. In the same way, in despotic*

*states, superintendence and universal interference by the government comprises both the discharge of community affairs, the need for which arises in all societies, and the specific functions arising from the antagonism between the government and the mass of the people." (14)*

This dual function is also apparent in the case of the Soviet bureaucracy. Some of its functions and functionaries are concerned with the organisation of production, others with the subjugation of the workers. But here this is not done in the interests of some third group, the rentiers, but, through the mediation of state property, simply in the interest of defending the material privileges of the bureaucracy itself.

The organisation of industry has been rationalised, by instituting, at the level of the economy as a whole, the rationality of the capitalist workshop. This is good: but it is not good enough.

*"The same bourgeois mind which prizes the division of labour in the workshop, life-long annexation of the labourer to a partial operation and his complete subjection to capital, as being an organisation of labour that increases its productiveness- that same bourgeois mind denounces with equal vigour every conscious attempt to socially control and regulate the process of production, as an inroad upon such sacred things as the rights of property, freedom and unrestricted play for the bent of the individual capitalist. It is very characteristic that the enthusiastic apologists of the factory system have nothing more damning to urge against a general organisation of the labour of society, than that it would turn all society into one immense factory." (15)*

Although the workshop organisation is more rational than the macro-economic anarchy, it remains despotic, maintains a division of labour (especially crippling in the form of a division between mental and physical labour), and makes the labour of the producers a meaningless routine. It is clear that this estrangement from the process of production, this 'forced labour', is as characteristic of the Soviet Union's industry (as far as its factory organisation is concerned), as it is of capitalist industry. In ideology this is denied. The Soviet worker has a quite different attitude to his work, finds meaning in it, because he is now working for himself instead of for the capitalist - such is the story. It follows that he has no right to strike because that would be striking 'against himself'. Such a purely ideological connection of the worker with the purposes of the despotic hierarchy above him has no empirical meaning because there exist no mediating institutions which would enable the workers in reality (not in ideality) to control their collective organisation, to set its purposes, rules, etc.

#### "Bonapartism"?

This direct organisation of production by the bureaucratic stratum as an independent power, serving no class but itself, represents a new historical situation.

Trotsky tries to understand this power on the basis of traditional analyses by taking over, and making use of, the somewhat problematical term, "Bonapartism".

*"Caesarism, or its bourgeois form, Bonapartism, enters the scene in those moments of history when the sharp struggle of two camps raises the state power, so to speak, above the nation, and*

14 Marx: CAPITAL, Vol.III (FLPH 1962 p.376; Kerr 1909 pp.451-452)

15 CAPITAL, Vol.I, ch.XIV, FLPH 1954 p.356; Kerr p.391

guarantees it, in appearance, a complete independence of classes - in reality, only the freedom necessary for the defence of the privileged. The Stalin regime, rising above a politically atomised society, resting upon a police and officers' corps, and allowing of no control whatever, is obviously a variation of Bonapartism - a Bonapartism of a new type not before seen in history.... Stalinism is a variety of the same system, but upon the basis of a workers' state torn by the antagonism between an organised and armed soviet aristocracy and the unarmed toiling masses." (16)

Thus Trotsky sees the novelty solely in the occurrence of a Bonapartist regime in a workers' state. But since Bonapartism is supposed to take advantage of a sharp struggle between the classes to perform a balancing function it is a little hard to interpret this in the case of the antagonism between the "armed soviet aristocracy" and the "unarmed toiling masses". How, and in what way, could the Stalinist bureaucracy be independent of both camps when it constitutes the core of one of them, the side that has all the cards?

Sometimes Trotskyists refer to Stalinism as a Bonapartist mediation between the Soviet proletariat and Imperialism. But this is even more problematical. It is true that the Soviet bureaucracy accommodates itself to Imperialism and demobilises the world revolution by playing the 'peaceful coexistence' game. Nevertheless, although this illustrates something about the nature of the regime, I do not find it plausible to use this to explain its basis. After all, any conservative national bureaucracy has to pay some attention to the international conjuncture in its policy.

More suggestive perhaps than these accounts is to compare the situation in Russia with the analysis Marx gives in *The German Ideology* of conditions in Germany around 1800:

*"The impotence of each separate sphere of life (one cannot speak here of estates or classes, but at most only of former estates and classes not yet born) did not allow any of them to gain exclusive domination. The inevitable consequence was that ... the special sphere in which, owing to the division of labour, was responsible for the work of administration of public interests acquired an abnormal independence, which became still greater in the bureaucracy of modern times. Thus the state built itself up into an apparently independent force, and this position, which in other countries was only transitory, a transition stage, it has maintained in Germany until the present day."* (17)

Is not the situation in which the only forces in the field are a primitive peasantry, a dispossessed bourgeoisie, and a small proletariat whose experienced cadres were shattered by civil war and economic collapse precisely such a situation of universal impotence? And of hiatus between a broken social order and an unformed new one?

This thoroughly atomised social situation was reconstituted under the aegis, and in the image, of the bureaucracy into whose hands power fell.

However, the weakness of the 'Bonapartist' analysis, I suggest, is that it does not do justice to the extent of the bureaucracy's power. Bonapartism is essentially a state form, which, however much it interferes in civil life, leaves the class structure more or less as it finds it. The role of the Stalinist bureaucracy in production itself seems to me

to go beyond anything that could be comprehended by such analogies with the past.

The only sound point in Tony Cliff's book *Russia: A Marxist Analysis* is that, with a nationalised economy, the distinction between the political and the social revolution is put in question. Of course he gives away more than he realises here, since, if this is the case in the U.S.S.R.; then it must have undergone a profound transformation which makes it absurd to classify it as capitalist, because in the latter system the distinction can be made.

(Even so, one should always bear in mind Marx's remark:

*"There is never a political movement which is not at the same time social."* (18) )

Leaving aside the precise way in which one might distinguish political and social revolution there seems to me no question but that, because of the role the bureaucracy plays in the 'base'-production itself - and its fettering of the most important productive forces, it represents a social layer related to production in a definite way (.i.e. control) and one which is opposed to the working class (which latter naturally has an interest in controlling production for its own benefit).

Even when Trotsky formulates his thesis in terms of "political revolution" he is forced to mention "social consequences":

*"The revolution which the bureaucracy is preparing against itself will not be social, like the October revolution of 1917. It is not a question this time of changing the economic foundations of society, of replacing certain forms of property with other forms. History has known elsewhere not only social revolutions which substituted the bourgeois for the feudal regime, but also political revolutions which, without destroying the economic foundations of society, swept out an old ruling upper crust (1830 and 1848 in France, February 1917 in Russia etc). The overthrow of the Bonapartist caste will, of course, have deep social consequences, but in itself it will be confined within the limits of political revolution."* (19)

Notice here that Trotsky bases his case on the assertion that the bourgeois epoch can and does accommodate itself to radical changes in political superstructures without these affecting the base. Are we being perverse in questioning this possibility in the proletarian epoch? I do not think so, because it is precisely the separation of political and civil life that Marx takes to be one of the key features of the bourgeois epoch - and this makes such a way of talking plausible in that case but not necessarily in other cases - such as feudalism for example. It is the partial overcoming of this separation, in societies transitional between capitalism and socialism that produces the sense of strain in carrying over a way of speaking previously appropriate.

When a critic seized on the phrase "social consequences" in the above quotation Trotsky replied by arguing:

*"But the bourgeois political revolutions of 1830, 1848, and September 1870 also had social consequences in so far as they seriously changed the division of the national income. But ... the*

18 Marx: THE POVERTY OF PHILOSOPHY (Moscow FLPH, n.d.) p.197

19 R.B., 288. Notice the expression "caste". In struggling to avoid "class" Trotsky has hit on an even more rigid, hereditary, type of social stratification.

*social changes provoked by the so-called political revolutions, serious as they were, really appear to be secondary when they are compared with the great French Revolution, which was the bourgeois social revolution par excellence." (20)*

He goes on to invoke the law of quantity into quality.

The trouble is that in Russia we are not talking simply of changes in income, but of the management of industry. If this change is "secondary" it must be so in a quite different sense.

#### The Ultra-Left View

However I do wish to say that I distinguish my position from that of many ultra-lefts.

As far as the history of the Russian Revolution is concerned my view, very definitely, is that the negation of the revolution was brought forth by, was internal to, the revolution itself. Just as in developing its power and strength the bourgeoisie produced its own gravediggers, the revolutionary proletariat; so the proletariat, on a less 'cosmic' scale, produced its own butchers who expropriated the revolution and built a society in their own image rather than that of the proletariat. However, because this negation developed within the movement itself, on the basis of new conditions and structures, it could not be simply a re-installation of the former regime - however updated.

Once again a movement in the name of humanity, has negated conditions which were the negation of human ones. But, once again, instead of this negation of the negation growing over into the self-sustaining positive, free of contradiction, it has developed its own contradictions, and established a new negation of humanity in the shape of the repressive bureaucratic machine.

But that this system, permeated as it may be by contradiction, is *different* from capitalism can only be denied by those who have no dialectical sense and simply lump together all conditions that are formally opposed to truly human ones, as indifferently hostile, thus in effect eliminating history as a form of knowledge and going back to utopianism.

The kind of people that I am thinking of here are those who talk in terms of a capitalist restoration - not just of tendencies, but of actual restoration. The main trouble with the label 'state capitalism' as applied to Russia, is that it makes no economic sense, but I have no space to deal with that - I simply draw attention to a sociological point.

What the ultra-left critics simply refuse to recognise is the origin of authoritarian strata in the workers' own organisations; they simply spirit in a state-capitalist class from nowhere, without explaining its origins. It is useless to point to the old Tsarist officers - the working-class can and did provide plenty of its own bureaucrats.

It is not accidental, by the way, that the same ultra-lefts who view the Soviet bureaucrats as a state-capitalist class, generally see in the Trade Union bureaucrats in the West nothing but capitalist lackeys; without locating their specific role through the fact that they are also dependent on a working class basis. Conceiving of the proletariat in an essentially idealist way, as the bearer of simon-pure socialist values, they persistently duck away from the problem of bureaucratisation, which must be understood as a problem *internal* to the workers' movement.

It was relatively easy to evade the problem in the analysis of the pre-revolutionary period by seeing bureaucratic formations, even including the labour bureaucracy, simply as servants of capital. Thus, denying that any authentic problem exists in its own right, this crude approach in the case of Russia results either in denying the facts (i.e. white-washing of the bureaucracy) or in saying that since the bureaucracy was an epiphenomenon of capitalism before, so it must be now - ergo capitalism still exists!

Although taking state power enormously facilitates the opportunities for bureaucracy to develop, its germ can easily be seen in existing working-class organisations. (One classic study of this was Robert Michel's book *Political Parties*, written before the First World War, and based mainly on a study of the Continental social-democratic parties. It provided the empirical basis for his well-known "iron law of oligarchy". (21)

#### Conclusion

In the last part of this paper let us summarise Trotsky's view and advance our qualifications of it. Trotsky provided his own summary in Chapter IX of *The Revolution Betrayed*:

*"To define the Soviet regime as transitional, or intermediate, means to abandon such finished social categories as capitalism ... and also socialism.... The Soviet Union is a contradictory society halfway between capitalism and socialism, in which: (a) the productive forces are still very far from adequate to give the state property a socialist character; (b) the tendency toward primitive accumulation created by want breaks out through innumerable pores of the planned economy; (c) norms of distribution preserving a bourgeois character lie at the basis of a new differentiation of society; (d) the economic growth, while slowly bettering the situation of the toilers, promotes a swift formation of privileged strata; (e) exploiting the social antagonisms, a bureaucracy has converted itself into an uncontrolled caste alien to socialism; (f) the social revolution, betrayed by the ruling party, still exists in property relations and in the consciousness of the toiling masses; (g) a further development of the accumulating contradictions can as well lead to socialism as back to capitalism; (h) on the road to capitalism the counter-revolution would have to break the resistance of the workers; (i) on the road to socialism the workers would have to overthrow the bureaucracy. In the last analysis, the question will be decided by a struggle of living social forces, both on the national and the world arena.*

*Doctrinaires will doubtless not be satisfied with this hypothetical definition. They would like categorical formulae; yes-yes, and no-no ... In our analysis, we have above all avoided doing violence to dynamic social formations which have no precedent and have no analogies. The scientific task, as well as the political, is not to give a finished definition to an unfinished process, but to follow all its stages, separate its progressive from its reactionary tendencies, expose their mutual relations, foresee possible variants of development, and find in this foresight a basis for action." (22)*

This insistence by Trotsky on doing justice to

21 R Michels: POLITICAL PARTIES (English translation 1915) (See especially p.305, 383, 407-8)

22 R.B., 254-256

the complexity and originality of the problem is undoubtedly impressive.

As he points out elsewhere there are further implications of one's analysis of the Soviet Union (and, one must now add, of the other countries that have escaped the domination of Imperialism). For the question is bound up with the more general problem of World Revolution.

It has been said that Lenin worked always on the basis that this century is at the time of the *actuality of proletarian revolution*. To put in question the achievements of the October Revolution is to put in question the whole historical perspective of Marxism.

The bourgeoisie came into the world as a social class born of a new form of production; it remained an historic necessity as long as the new form of production had not exhausted its possibilities. The same applies to all previous social classes. "In their time, they were all the representatives and leaders of a system of production which had its place in the advance of humanity." Trotsky argues that "to give the bureaucracy the name 'possessing class' is not only an abuse of terminology, but moreover a great political danger which can lead to the complete derailment of our historical perspective." (23)

He counterposes to such a pessimistic outlook the view "that the degeneration of the Soviet State is the product of the retardation in the world revolution", that is to say, the result of political and conjunctural events.

I would certainly agree that the period up to the completion of the world revolution, through the final overthrow of Imperialism on a world scale, is bound to be one in which we cannot expect socialism to be established in a single country - it is a transitional epoch with the problems of transition.

However I would argue that even after the overthrow of capitalism on a world scale problems will still exist because they are internal to the nature of post-revolutionary society and its struggle to move towards abundance. Michels' 'Iron Law of Oligarchy' remains a permanent danger, but one which becomes less acute as the material basis of society improves (thus allowing the masses to express more of their energy in controlling the direction of social life), and as people learn from experience of the problem.

Nationalisation of the economy does not dispose overnight of deeply-rooted social habits and attitudes. Given a material basis in relative scarcity, these will find expression somehow. (Everyone knows that there exist enormous scandals in the U.S.S.R. about the turning of state property to personal use.)

The root cause of the consolidation of a bureaucratic dictatorship in the Soviet state is undoubtedly the low level of productive forces in the country. The further development of the productive forces will bring present contradictions (economic, political, cultural etc) to a head, and the future history of the U.S.S.R. and the establishment of socialism on a world scale will continue to develop on the basis of the working out of further contradictions.

The contradiction as far as the sphere of production is concerned, is that between the productive force represented by the initiative of the workers and the command structure into which they are integrated and which stifles this force. The contradiction between social forces is that between those who relate to the means of production as controllers and those who relate to it as its slaves. Associated with this are conspicuous differentials in income.

Given that, in spite of its primitive character and its infection by bourgeois norms of distribution, consumerist ideology etc, the U.S.S.R. is a crucial step beyond capitalism, it is still worth defending. Just as Marx said that the proletariat could join with the bourgeoisie in the overthrow of feudalism, but must maintain its own organisation to fight its future enemies, so today capitalism is the main enemy: but we must be preparing to smash the existing bureaucracies (not least in order to fight capitalism more effectively) and must fight the seeds of authoritarianism already evident in the workers' organisations.

The bureaucracy (particularly once in power in society) is a social layer developed on the basis of functional differentiations in the workers' organisations and post-revolutionary institutions, which soon develops interests of its own, becoming a conservative force strangling further revolutionary development. However, precisely because of its origin in the process of the proletarian revolution itself, the distinction between the proletariat and the bureaucracy is more ill-defined and variable than is the sharp distinction between capitalist property owners and the proletariat. This means that the 'space' between capitalism and pure socialism, can be filled by an almost infinite variety of transitional forms, in assessing which more than one dimension has to be taken into account - inequalities in income, distribution of power, even ideological criteria that may help to determine the direction of change etc. The U.S.S.R. is an extreme case. Yugoslavia, China, and Cuba, provide less severe, more complex, cases, in which one should by no means assume homogeneity in the bureaucracy. There is the political bureaucracy, the technocrats, and even sections still in contact with the masses that might well come over if the latter launch a struggle.

Broadly, these transitional regimes are ones in which proletarian power has been deformed and overlaid by bureaucratic power; in which the programme of socialist revolution remains in the consciousness of the toilers, if in a distorted way (so that the bureaucracy has to legitimate itself in these terms).

The task is to establish workers' power. What I think is inadequate, even to Trotsky's own analysis, is the slogan 'make a political revolution'; because more or less acute contradictions exist at all levels. What is required is a *new upsurge of proletarian revolution*. Permanent proletarian revolution must continue throughout the pre-socialist epoch. Its meaning will vary according to the precise nature of the fetters that need to be overcome at each time and place. There is no general formula. The demands that revolutionaries will advance will depend upon what is possible and where the contradictions are manifesting themselves. However, the aim should always be to maximise the opportunities for the creative energy of the masses to express itself. Communism, the fullest expression of human power and freedom, is not a state of affairs to be presented on a plate; it grows throughout history by the continual overcoming of obstacles, through the struggle of the masses. Marx has already replied to those who talk of the benignity of certain rulers, or of the possibility of reform from on top.

*"Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew."* (24)