

# TROTSKY



**Vol. 4**

**The Darker the Night the Brighter the Star  
1927-1940**

**Tony Cliff**

**Trotsky: The Darker the Night the Brighter the  
Star  
1927-1940**

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Tony Cliff  
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# Introduction

## Living hell

THE PRESENT volume, the last in this political biography of Trotsky, covers the period between his banishment to Alma Ata, the capital of Kazakhstan on 17 January 1928, and his assassination in Mexico on 20 August 1940. This period was the most tragic of his eventful, stormy life. It was a period of some thirteen years of deep darkness unbroken by a single shaft of light.

When Trotsky stated in 1927 that 'the vengeance of history is more powerful than the vengeance of the most powerful General Secretary', he could not have had an inkling of the horrors this General Secretary would inflict on himself and his family.

First Zina, his eldest daughter: she had tuberculosis, and had been given permission by the Soviet government to go to Germany for treatment. One of her two sons, Seva, was allowed to go with her, while another, a daughter of six or seven years, was kept as a hostage by Stalin. Her husband, Platon Volkov, was deported to a labour camp in Siberia. The death of her sister Nina, the persecution of her father, the deportation of her husband, and the difficulty of keeping herself and her two children alive, strained her mental balance. After undergoing several operations on her lungs, she had to be treated by psychologists. Her doctor reached the conclusion that to recover she should rejoin her family in Russia. But Stalin's spite knew no bounds: she and Seva were deprived of Soviet citizenship. In desperation Zina committed suicide on 5 January

1933. She was 30 years old. Six days after Zina's death Trotsky wrote an *Open Letter* to the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party and government: Zina was too sick to be able to be active politically, and it was simply venomous cruelty that deprived her of Soviet citizenship and finally broke her spirit. She 'did not choose that of her own will. She was driven to it by Stalin'. [1]

Zina's sister, Nina, had died five years earlier, on 9 January 1928. Nina's husband, Man-Nevelson, was arrested and sent to a labour camp in Siberia. Nina, who was very active in the Opposition, was expelled from the party and kept from all work. Laid low by illness, she died of tuberculosis a few weeks later. She was 26 years old. The letter she wrote to her father from the hospital took 73 days to reach him, arriving after she died. She left two children who were cared for, together with Zina's daughter, by her mother, Alexandra Sokolovskaia, Trotsky's first wife.

The third of Trotsky's children was Leon Sedov, Lyova. He accompanied his father to banishment in Alma Ata, and then to exile in Turkey. He was forced to leave his wife and child behind. Leon Sedov was Trotsky's right-hand man in the leadership of the Opposition. At the beginning of February 1938 he fell sick and went into a small private clinic run by some Russian émigré doctors in Paris. There the hand of the GPU caught up with him. He was poisoned and died on 16 February 1938, at the age of 32.

Trotsky's youngest child was Sergei. He was a scientist, a professor in the Institute of Technology, who shunned politics. Hence he did not wish to join his father in banishment or exile and he avoided all contact with his father. But 'Genghiz Khan with a telephone' did not spare him. In December 1934 he was imprisoned and then exiled to Vorkuta labour camp. The last news of him came in 1936 when he joined a hunger strike of Trotskyists in all the Pechora camps, which lasted 132 days.

Finally, Alexandra Sokolovskaia: she was an active Oppositionist who had to take care of three of Trotsky's grandchildren. In 1936 she was expelled from Leningrad, first to Tobolsk, and then to a remote settlement in Omsk Province. The grandchildren were given to an

old aunt to look after, and were at fate's mercy. She was shot in 1938, like all Trotsky's four children the victims of Stalin.

Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered, and the working class movement has many, many other martyrs. But Trotsky's position is unique. He was murdered not once, but again and again. His suffering and courage were unequalled. Prometheus was chained to a rock and the eagle picked into his liver but he never yielded or had any doubt about his stand. On 4 April 1935 Trotsky wrote in his diary: '[Stalin] is clever enough to realise that even today I would not change places with him.' [2]

Nothing relieved the agony, but still there was no self-pity, no pettiness; only a combination of clarity of thinking, passion and indomitable will.

Stalin's revenge on Trotsky's supporters was also terrible. In 1927-8, the mass of workers in Russia were depressed by the isolation of the Soviet Union as a result of the defeat of international revolutions, from Germany to China. Still the Trotskyists had an impressive influence among hundreds of thousands of Russian workers. Heightened Opposition activity was reported from all over the USSR. In widespread industrial disputes it played a very significant role. The number of Trotskyists in prison and places of exile was very large indeed, estimated at 8-10,000.

But the years 1928-9 saw the collapse of the Left Opposition in the USSR. Two forces squeezed it. First, there was a decline in the struggle and consciousness of the working class. As a result of the massive industrialisation under the Five-Year Plan the composition of the proletariat changed radically. The old, experienced proletariat formed under Tsarism, found itself swamped by millions of new workers, largely ex-peasants, who had no tradition of industrial life, no tradition of solidarity, no class consciousness. The proletariat was now completely atomised.

The same process that led to the atomisation of the industrial proletariat, led also to a devastating ideological crisis in the Left Opposition. Trotsky and the Left Opposition had for years called Stalin a Centrist – arguing, quite rightly at the time – that he and his bureaucracy vacillated between the proletariat on the one hand and

the kulaks and NEPmen on the other. Trotsky assumed that Stalin could never take an independent position, that he was bound to fall as a result of the victory of one of the two basic forces. He thought that, in the final analysis, the fate of Soviet society would be decided by the struggle of the working class against the kulaks and NEPmen, while the bureaucracy would play only a secondary, mediating role. In fact the mutual paralysis of all social forces enabled Stalin's bureaucracy to pragmatically muddle through the economic and social crisis. Using brute force Stalin imposed a series of *ad hoc* measures which, in their totality, constituted a state capitalist way out of the impasse. The bureaucracy was thus able to raise itself even further above the rest of society, establishing the most vicious mechanism of exploitation in order to accumulate capital at the expense of both the working class and the peasantry. The bureaucracy did not rout the proletarian vanguard – the Left Opposition – only to capitulate before the kulaks and NEPmen; once it defeated the former, it turned its fire on the latter. When it came to a struggle between the centralised state bureaucracy and the fragmented, dispersed peasantry, though numerous, there was no contest.

With hindsight this development is far clearer to us than to those who participated in the events. In analysing the very complex situation in Russia at the time Trotsky had no historical precedent to fall back on. The only previous workers' state, the Paris Commune, existed in just one city and for only 74 days. The degeneration of a workers' state was an unprecedented phenomenon. For Trotsky it was like walking in the dark in a snowstorm, with no light, no roads, on ground riddled with pitfalls.

The Five-Year Plan, the turn towards collectivisation and speedy industrialisation, left the Left Opposition politically disarmed. In the years 1928-9, thousands of Oppositionists – many of them veterans who had served years in Tsarist prisons and Siberia – capitulated. At the end of 1929 it was estimated that only 800 of the 8-10,000 did not capitulate to Stalin. It was the ideological crisis, far more than police pressure, that broke the spirit of the Trotskyists in the prisons and tamps of exile. As the veteran Old Bolsheviks, leaders of the

Opposition, Kh. Rakovsky, M. Okudjava and V. Kossior explained: 'Without the new course [the turn to collectivisation and industrialisation] repression would not have had the effect it had achieved.' [3] The police persecutions could not in themselves explain the capitulation of thousands of Oppositionists over a very short period of time: after all, many of the Old Bolsheviks had stood the test of years of imprisonment and exile in Siberia under the Tsar. Capitulation came with the belief that Stalin's policy of collectivisation and industrialisation was a *socialist* policy and that there was no alternative to it. Although Stalin was carrying out the swiftest industrialisation *at the cost of the workers* – real wages were cut by half, he identified industrialisation with a proletarian socialist policy. This robbed the Opposition of any historical justification.

If massive primitive accumulation of capital is socialism, then the proletariat is, and must be, not the subject of historical advance, but the object, its raw material. If the brutal forcing of millions of peasants into collective farms is equal to socialism, then the whole justification of working class democracy is eliminated.

Very few of the veteran, Old Bolsheviks, especially the leading personnel of the Left Opposition, remained steadfast. The great honourable exception was old Khristian Rakovsky, comrade-in-arms of Trotsky for some three decades. But even he finally collapsed. On 23 February 1934, *Izvestia* published a telegram from Rakovsky addressed to the Central Committee of the Party, which said: 'Confronted with the rise of international reaction, directed in the last analysis against the revolution of October, my old disagreements with the party have lost their significance. I consider it the duty of a Bolshevik-Communist to submit completely and without hesitation to the general line of the party.'

Trotsky, dismayed by the news, explained: 'Without exaggerating by a hair's breadth, we can say that Stalin got Rakovsky with the aid of Hitler.' [4]

After Trotsky was exiled to Turkey (January 1929), he made a strenuous effort to build the Opposition outside the USSR.

This was the time of the worst economic slump in the history of capitalism, when Nazism was on the march. Trotsky wrote the most



brilliant articles, essays and books on the developments in Germany. What is particularly impressive is that the author was far distant from the scene of the events. Still he managed to follow the day-to-day twists and turns. Reading Trotsky's writings of the years 1930-1933, their concreteness gives the impression that the author must have been living in Germany rather than very far away on the island of Prinkipo in Turkey. These writings are unsurpassed in their use of the historical materialist method, in their descriptions of the complicated relationships between economic, social, political and ideological changes, the relations between the mass psychology of different sections of German society, from the proletariat, the petty bourgeoisie and lumpen proletariat, to the role of the psychology of the individual, such as Hitler. These writings rank with the best historical writings of Karl Marx – *Eighteenth Brumaire* and *The Class Struggle in France*. Trotsky not only analysed the situation, but also put forward a clear line of action for the proletariat. In terms of strategy and tactics they are extremely valuable revolutionary manuals, comparable to the best produced by Lenin and Trotsky during the first four years of the Comintern.

Unfortunately, ideas become a material force only when they are taken up by millions. Trotsky's writings failed to do that. His call was like a cry in the desert. Very few in Germany listened to him, or even heard him. The Trotskyist organisation in Germany was puny, isolated and with a very poor social composition – it contained hardly any workers. It was unable to translate Trotsky's ideas into action. The tragedy of the wide cleavage between end and means hit Trotsky full in the face.

The weakness of the Trotskyists in Germany was partially due to the fact that the German proletariat was not politically virgin soil. It was overwhelmingly under the influence of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Communist Party (KPD). Besides these mass working class parties, there also existed three relatively large opposition parties: the right-wing Communists (KPO) under Brandler, the Leninbund of Ruth Fischer, Arkady Maslow and Hugo Urbahns, and the Socialist Workers' Party (SAP). The historical past smothered the new young shoots of Trotskyism – there was very

little space for them to grow. Trotsky witnessed the most catastrophic defeat of the international working class by the Nazis without being able to affect the march of events.

Following the German catastrophe he saw the great revolutionary events of May-June 1936 in France. Here the tragedy of Trotsky was perhaps even more profound. His writings on France, as on Germany, were brilliant and inspiring, but again his voice was practically unheard.

One defeat led to another. After the collapse of the revolutionary wave in France came the victory of Franco in Spain. Once again Trotsky's writing was brilliant. Yet still in May 1937 the total number of members of the Trotskyist organisation in Spain was only 30! How could they influence events?

In the same period the horrors of Stalinism in the USSR proceeded apace. Forced collectivisation led to the deaths of millions; to show trials in which all the surviving leaders of Bolshevism were executed or incarcerated for years, accused of being 'agents of Hitler and the Mikado'.

It was during the bacchanalia of Stalinist terror that Trotsky produced his great work, *The Revolution Betrayed*. This was an analysis of Stalin's regime that was thoroughly Marxist, thoroughly materialist. It took as its point of departure the objective conditions, national and international, in which the Russian revolution found itself. It was not the whim of Stalin, nor the superstructure of ideas that were the keys to understanding the developments in the USSR. The book sees the battle between the two main contending classes – the proletariat and the bourgeoisie on a national and international scale – as the key to the history of the country. Trotsky restates and brilliantly develops the real concept of socialism, and gives no concession to the Stalinist forgery of the same. *The Revolution Betrayed* opposes Stalinism very sharply, while avoiding the anti-Stalinist hysteria that led many others to make concessions to capitalism. Thus *Revolution Betrayed* played a crucial role in restating the main features of Trotskyism – international revolutionary opposition to both Stalinism and capitalism.

So unrelieved tragedy did not mean that the last decade of Trotsky's life was futile. On the contrary, the darker the night the brighter shines the star. Trotsky's writings, written with passion and genius, are an inestimable inheritance. Above all, Trotsky kept the torch, the tradition of revolutionary socialism, alight. He was correct to write on 25 March 1935: '... I think that the work in which I am engaged now, despite its extremely insufficient and fragmentary nature, is the most important work of my life more important than 1917, more important than the period of the Civil War or any other'. [5]

Trotsky's whole being, his mind, his will, his energy, were directed towards the future. As a young man of 21 he wrote:

*Dum spiro, spero!* As long as I breathe I hope – as long as I breathe I shall fight for the future, that radiant future in which man, strong and beautiful, will become master of the spontaneous stream of his history and will direct it towards the boundless horizon of beauty, joy and happiness ... *Dum spiro, spero!* [6]

A short time before his assassination, in his testament, Trotsky reasserted his optimism for the future:

My faith in the Communist future of mankind is not less ardent, indeed it is firmer today than it was in the days of my youth ... I can see the bright green strip of grass beneath the wall and the clear blue sky above the wall, and sunlight everywhere. Life is beautiful. Let the future generations cleanse it of all evil, oppression, and violence, and enjoy it to the full. [7]

## Notes

1. *Biulleten Oppozitsii*, No.33, March 1933, pp.29-30.
2. L. Trotsky, *Trotsky's Diary in Exile*, London 1958, p.66.

3. Kh. Rakovsky, M. Okudjava, V. Kossior, *On Capitulation and Capitulators*, *Biulleten Oppozitsii*, No.7, November-December 1929, p.4.
4. *Writings of Leon Trotsky*, hereafter *WLT*, (1933-34), p.277.
5. *Trotsky's Diary in Exile*, p.53.
6. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, Moscow, Vol.20, p.78.
7. S. Lovell, ed., *Leon Trotsky Speaks*, New York 1972, p.312.

## 1. Stalin Turns to Forced Collectivisation

THE FIRST two chapters of this book deal with the very complicated development of an economy, society and politics that had no historical precedent. The October Revolution, conceived as the first step on the road to the liberation of humanity, led instead to the most terrible tyranny, oppression and exploitation.

Massive industrialisation and forced collectivisation started in 1928. It was conceived by Stalin and the Communist Party as the 'building of socialism'. It was impossible to visualise what the outcome of the forced industrialisation and collectivisation would be. To start with, the embryo of the new state capitalist society had no clear shape, and the monstrous beast it developed into was not yet discernible. The development was irrational and very messy. Stalin, who appeared as the demiurge, the shaper of history, in fact acted completely empirically. He was pushed on to the path of the massive transformation of the economy, as his own policies of the years 1923-27 had led the Soviet Union into a cul-de-sac and paralysis. Even Trotsky in 1928 was unable to visualise the horrors of the primitive capitalist accumulation carried out on an unprecedented scale and in a very short time. He and his supporters believed that Stalin's new policy was a turn to the Left – away from the NEPmen and the kulaks.

When describing Trotsky's reaction to this unprecedented development, it is necessary to avoid attributing to him concepts which could be grasped only with hindsight. Trotsky was far too great a person to need to pretend that his ideas were suprahistorical, independent of actual past experience. One of the reasons why the Trotskyists in the USSR in 1928-30 were so hesitant and why the

morale of so many collapsed was the lack of theoretical clarity. Courage and decisiveness depend on a clear understanding of the way ahead. As we shall see, even Trotsky, despite his genius, did not grasp clearly the real impact of Stalin's policy of mass industrialisation and forced collectivisation. It is easy to have perfect vision with hindsight, but to understand the struggle of Trotsky and his supporters at the time, one must take into account the lack of clarity of all the participants regarding the situation.

One cannot divorce a political biography from the history of the time even though the complexity of the economic and social changes do not fit easily. One cannot do justice to Trotsky if one evades their analysis. An account of the 'Great Industrial and Agrarian Revolution' must therefore precede a description of Trotsky's reaction to events and the path taken by his supporters at the time, the great majority of whom lost heart and capitulated to Stalin.

It is very difficult, perhaps impossible, to make the confused, bewildering developments easily understood. But I attempt in the first two chapters to describe and analyse the interaction of the tortuous events as simply as possible. These chapters provide the background to the difficulties and crises that affected Trotsky and his followers.

### **Russia Enters a Deep Economic and Social Crisis**

TROTSKY HAD hardly arrived in Alma Ata when his long-held prognosis that the lag of industry threatened the link between town and country and undermined the worker-peasant alliance (smychka) was confirmed.

Already at the Twelfth Party Congress (April 1923) Trotsky predicted that a good harvest might bring the crisis to a head as it would favour the capitalist elements – the kulaks and NEPmen – rather than the socialist elements in country and town. This was vehemently rejected by Stalin and Bukharin.

In April 1927 Stalin poked fun at the idea that a good harvest could cause trouble. [1] Bukharin, at the seventh enlarged session of

the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) in December 1926, ridiculed Opposition predictions a year earlier of 'a kulak grain strike' ; the grain collections from the 1926 harvest were 35 percent ahead of those of the previous year. Indeed, 'the whole foundation of the main economic theory of the Opposition has *collapsed*'. [2]

Towards the end of 1927 it became clear that the supply of grain was in great difficulties. In November Trotsky could quite rightly argue that his prediction had come true: a serious grain scarcity arose as a result of 'the entirely inadequate supply of industrial goods to the rural districts'.

Three facts alone serve to explain the difficulties in the grain market: the goods famine (backwardness of industry); the accumulation of reserves by the kulaks (differentiation in the countryside) and an imprudent policy in the sphere of money circulation (excessive issue of currency). If this is not grasped, the country will be plunged into an economic crisis. [3]

The grain collection situation suddenly deteriorated at the end of 1927. In September the volume collected fell slightly, and this was followed by disastrously low figures for the succeeding three months. In October grain collection was only two-thirds of the previous year's total, November yielded less than half, December likewise. [4]

In his brilliant book, *The Birth of Stalinism*, Michal Reiman writes:

The difficulties with grain deliveries had an immediate and powerful effect on the entire unhealthy mechanism that was the Soviet economy ...

... Grain exports fell off dramatically, and at the same time the Soviet balance of trade became increasingly unfavourable ... the government hastily reduced imports. The supply of many goods urgently needed in production was thus cut off, greatly aggravating the shortage of raw materials, especially in light industry. In February 1928, a number of factories were threatened with closure. The metallurgical and metalworking

industries experienced difficulties. Everywhere the exhaustion of industrial machinery and equipment began to have its effect. In November 1927, industrial production was 18 percent lower than had been projected; in December 21.4 percent lower ...

The supply of goods to the market was in a disastrous state. In the course of a month – from December 1927 to January 1928 – it decreased by 15.5 percent. Severe shortages arose, involving an entire range of basic necessities. In a number of provincial cities, supplies fell so low that the needs of the population could be met for only a few days. By the end of January 1928 it was evident that rationing would have to be introduced. [5]

The basic cause of the difficulties of grain collection was the scarcity of industrial goods to induce the peasants to sell grain.

... many industrial consumer goods were in short supply, so the peasants were reluctant to convert their grain, which could easily be stored, into cash which they could not use to buy the goods they wanted. Finally, the peasants were in a stronger position than in previous years to resist changes in the terms of trade which were to their disadvantage. Their stocks of cash were higher, and by 1927 they had acquired sufficient basic consumer goods to be prepared to wait for the variety or quality they preferred. [6]

Furthermore, the main suppliers of grain were a fairly narrow group, and if they resisted the state was vulnerable: 'a mere 10-11 percent of all households in the European USSR supplied 56 percent of all net sales of grain in 1927/8. [7]

Reiman describes the party and state leaders' reaction:

The deep economic crisis, which broke out with unusual speed, caught the party leadership completely off guard. Extraordinary measures were needed to save the day, but the leadership was not prepared to enact them ...



The situation was very threatening ... and time was running short ...

In the period from December 21, 1927 (two days after the end of the party congress) to January 6, 1928, Stalin sent out three directives in the name of the Central Committee to the lower party organizations, demanding that they make a quick breakthrough (*perelom*) in the grain collection campaign. The third directive was 'altogether exceptional both in its tone and in its demands,' directly threatening reprisals against local officials if they failed to bring in the necessary amounts of grain. Nevertheless, the situation improved only slowly, if at all.

Higher-level party officials, including members of the top leadership, were sent out to the provinces, armed with special powers. They were to oversee the 'breakthrough' in person. Stalin himself went to Siberia ... When Stalin arrived on the scene in Siberia, he immediately bore down on the local party officialdom for slipshod work, for underestimating the danger from kulaks, and for having connections with 'kulak and capitalist elements.' He recommended the use of Article 107 (of the criminal code of the RSFSR), which permitted the confiscation of grain surpluses from wealthy peasants, and urged the local authorities to purge the party and government apparatuses of 'corrupt elements.'

Extraordinary measures were applied intensively throughout the country: party bodies and the GPU were given special powers in regard to grain collection, special 'trojkas' were formed, and thousands of activists were sent into the countryside. An obligatory 'agricultural loan' began to be imposed, villages were forced to increase self-taxation for social and cultural needs, the collection of arrears on unpaid taxes and of payments on loans and credits was intensified, and so on. All this was aimed at sharply reducing the amount of spendable money available to

the peasants, thus inducing them to sell more grain. However, it also laid the basis for a rapid increase in acts of violence and arbitrariness. [8]

Special powers were given to the GPU.

On the basis of Politburo decisions made in February 1928, the groundwork was laid for new, massive pressure on the peasants. The GPU's intervention in the grain procurement campaign intensified, and preparations were made for the deployment of military units in the villages. [9]

With this, the USSR took a big step toward fundamental change in its internal living conditions and power structure. The entire atmosphere in which economic, governmental, and party work went on was abruptly altered. The GPU had not only succeeded in securing the positions it had won but enlarged them, extending its tentacles ever deeper into the economic and social sphere. The extraordinary measures enacted in response to the economic crisis began to change the pattern of economic and social relations and brought heavy pressure to bear on the very foundations of the accepted economic strategy. [10]

The combination of an abrupt fall in grain deliveries, industrial stagnation, and a sharp worsening of relations with the West, especially Britain, led Stalin to resort to coercive measures to extort grain from the peasants. This expedient led inexorably to the forced collectivisation of agriculture and rapid, forced industrialisation. The result was a radical transformation of Russian society and politics.

Following the extraordinary measures for collecting grain of February, on 15 May the Central Committee issued an appeal to local party organisations to intensify the work of 'socialist construction' in the countryside. This was noteworthy as the first document which openly proclaimed the liquidation of the kulaks as a goal. [11]

The rural population suffered most heavily from the consequences of this policy. Orgies of violent excess occurred in the countryside ... Incited from above, the power apparatus – a major role being played by the GPU – went after not only the well-to-do peasants but also the middle peasants and often the rural poor as well. The amount of grain to be delivered was set for every household. The agents of the central government went from farm to farm searching silos and confiscating ‘surpluses.’ Often they took anything they came across and left the peasants without enough to meet their own basic needs. They used threats, arrests, and prison sentences to reach their goals. In some villages which had already fulfilled their quotas, requisitioning was carried out a second time. In many parts of the USSR, local markets were closed. On country roads, checkpoints and roadblocks reappeared, as during the civil war, to prevent peasants from taking grain away from the villages. [12]

In March and April 1928 the situation became really critical.

The situation worsened in regard to the availability of food for the population. Things were especially hard for the rural poor, who had to buy grain in the spring. Peasant women standing in line in front of city stores became a common sight at the time. Significant numbers of peasants, sometimes entire rural districts, were essentially placed on starvation rations.

... In several regions, the peasants sharply reduced the amount of land under cultivation, thereby endangering the year's harvest. Massive slaughtering of cattle began. Peasant disturbances broke out and were suppressed in some places by force of arms. By the summer of 1928, almost 150 peasant revolts had occurred. Cases in which officials were murdered or beaten increased in frequency. [13]

Things were no better in the cities.

The urban masses suffered as a result of the severe breakdown in food supply. As early as the end of 1927, major shortages of flour, groats, milk, eggs, butter, and oil occurred in the state and cooperative trade network; soon afterwards bread, meat, tea, coffee, textiles, and a number of other goods also became scarce. Contemporaries tell of long lines of hundreds of people that would start to form in the early hours of the morning and became breeding grounds for open discontent. [14]

A number of industrial conflicts broke out.

Strikes broke out at Mytishchi and Liubertsy near Moscow, the Putilov works, the Yenakievo metallurgical plant in the Donetsk Basin, Moscow's 'Hammer and Sickle' metalworking plant, and other factories in various parts of the country. [15]

Reiman provides evidence for his conclusion that 'the influence of the opposition was a noticeable factor in political life and remained fairly strong until fall 1928 or spring 1929.' [16] This will be further elaborated below.

When Stalin was unexpectedly confronted by the grain crisis, he was not at all clear what he was going to do. He acted empirically and pragmatically. He did not know that he was taking the first steps towards the 'great leap forward' of forced collectivisation and industrialisation, that he was going to expropriate 25 million peasants at a stroke and forcibly drive them into collective farms. Stalin, a man with no vision, could not foresee the horrors of the primitive capital accumulation carried out on an unprecedented scale and in a very short time. He could not visualise the radical changes in the whole system of economy, society and politics following the 'great leap forward'.

The events of the first half of 1928 shook the foundations of the existing social and economic order, and raised the bureaucracy even higher above the rest of society. However, neither Stalin nor anyone else in the leadership, was clear what alternative strategies existed, nor what would be the outcome of the course pursued. Stalin was

still a prisoner of the views he expressed in polemics against Trotsky in the years 1923-28. He still believed that the emergency measures the government took were only temporary. Thus on 13 February 1928 he wrote in his article *First Results of the Procurement Campaign and the Further Tasks of the Party*:

The talk to the effect that we are abolishing NEP, that we are introducing the surplus-appropriation system, dekulakisation, etc., is counter-revolutionary chatter that must be most vigorously combated. NEP is the basis of our economic policy and will remain so for a long historical period. NEP means trade and tolerating capitalism, on condition that the state retains the right and the possibility of regulating trade in the interest of the dictatorship of the proletariat. [17]

Again on 13 April at a Plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission, Stalin stated:

I only want to say something about certain emergency measures which were taken because of the emergency circumstances, and which, of course, will lapse when these emergency circumstances cease to exist.

It would be stupid on these grounds to say that NEP is being 'abolished', that there is a 'reversion' to the surplus-appropriation system, and so on. Only enemies of the Soviet regime can now think of abolishing NEP. [18]

In a talk to a group of students on 28 May 1928, Stalin reiterated the strategy of reliance on peasant farming.

... the way out lies in systematically increasing the yield of the individual small- and middle-peasant farms. We cannot and should not lend any support to the individual large kulak farms. [19]

In an article written on 12 June 1928 entitled 'Lenin and the Question of the Alliance with the Middle Peasant' Stalin attacked dekulakisation as a deviation. In some cases, he wrote,

... attempts are made to transform the fight against the kulaks into dekulakisation, and the work of grain procurement into appropriation of surpluses, forgetting that under present conditions dekulakisation is folly and the surplus-appropriation system means not an alliance with, but a fight against, the middle peasant. [20]

At this time he saw the collective and state farms as only a supplement to the private farms:

... the task of improving individual small- and middle-peasant farms must be supplemented in practice by the task of expanding the construction of collective and state farms. [21]

On 15 June Stalin reiterated the need for the same mix of private farming and collective and state farming.

At the present stage, the principal stress must still be laid on raising the level of individual small- and middle-peasant farming. But ... this task alone is no longer enough ... the time has come when this task must be practically supplemented by two new tasks – the development of collective farms and the development of state farms. [22]

### **The July 1928 Plenum of the Central Committee**

THE GENERAL discontent of peasants and workers following the extraordinary measures to procure grain supplies, together with a split at the top of the party and state leadership – between those who supported Stalin and those who supported Bukharin – forced a pause, even a retreat. This took place at the July 1928 plenum of the Central Committee.

Bukharin and the Right reflected clearly the pressure of the resentful masses. Thus, the following exchange took place at the plenum:

*BUKHARIN:* The situation is that when the poor peasants held demonstrations [on 1 May] in the towns, it was not as supporters of Soviet power ... [and] We had speeches by old partisans – revolutionaries, who came to the Soviet power, to the military committee and said: how are we going to get bread? ...

*KAGANOVICH:* There were such speeches, but do you need to quote them?

*BUKHARIN:* ... Vladimir Il'ich would never have tolerated keeping quiet about facts. Facts must be foreseen, and such things must be taken care of.

*VOROSHILOV:* Who is denying them, who are you trying to convince?

*BUKHARIN:* I don't know who denies them, but I only knew about all this yesterday ... after two days spent at the GPU.

And Bukharin concluded his speech with these words:

... our economy makes my hair stand on end, when there are horses eating only grain but in some places people eat chaff, when peasants have to buy bread in neighbouring towns, when an agrarian country imports grain but exports the products of industry. This alarming economic state will lead to crisis and arguments. It has to be sorted out. [23]

N.A. Uglanov, Secretary of the Moscow Party and supporter of Bukharin, said:

We cannot address the peasant question separately from the working class. After all, the consumers' point of view speaks

inside me, and we are such consumers as represent the proletariat of the city of Moscow, millions strong. We know that a great number of cities have cards or surrogate cards or some restrictive, regulatory measures. Herein lies the whole point. Let us honestly answer the question. Does such a situation in the eleventh year of the revolution not cause doubt and alarm in the working class? I'll frankly tell you, comrades: this squarely puts the masses of workers on the alert. It is necessary to see this in every factory. It goes without saying that if this situation – any kind of interruption in [food] supply, a shortage of foodstuffs, surrogate measures of our [price] regulations, etc. – persists, it cannot be supported by the working class. This is clear. Such a situation cannot go on for very long ... We all know quite well the very nature of the Russian proletariat: a large percentage of it is tied to the countryside, and the degree of vacillation there is transferred to the working class. [24]

Stalin gave way to the pressure. The plenum decided to lift the extraordinary measures for the procurement of grain, to cancel the restrictions on markets and trade within the villages, to raise the price of cereal grains and forage crops as well as fodder, and to take measures to increase the provision of industrial goods to the countryside.

### **But Still Failure ...**

THE TWIST of July 1928 did not stop the peasants' further resistance to the government, which took the form of cutting the sowing area. In 1928 the area under wheat went down by 11.2 percent and under rye by 9.1 percent. [25] The grain collection in 1928-9 was only 8,302,000 tons, as against 10,382,000 tons collected in 1927-8, that is, a decline of 20 percent; the collection of wheat and rye was 5,300,000 tons in 1928-9 as against 8,207,000 in 1927-8 – a decline of 35.6 percent. [26]



The economic results of the year 1928/29 were much worse than had been expected ... The better-off peasants had cut down their sowing and the authorities struggled to make good the loss by increasing the areas sown by the rest of the peasants. The results thus obtained were not encouraging. Worse still, the numbers of livestock began to decline for the peasants were short of fodder and food. The towns too were short of food. Ration cards were introduced in February 1929 ... The rise in the price of bread grains and other agricultural products caused a rise in prices throughout the economy. Speculation was rife; bread tended to disappear from the towns into regions which had none, especially those which did not produce bread grains, or into provincial towns which the government was not supplying. Living standards dropped, and all the time administrative pressure and state tyranny were growing. Grain procurements, as we know, had been very inadequate, whereas private middlemen had succeeded in buying more that year from the peasants than in previous years. [27]

Reiman writes:

Destitute villages were left to their fate. In some areas, the peasants had nowhere to turn. They ate whatever they found. Cattle were slaughtered, since no feed remained for them. Reports of incipient famine came from a growing number of villages. Again, the rural poor were hardest hit. In the spring, rumours reached the foreign press of peasants starving to death in north east Russia and the southern Ukraine. Similar rumours came even from the well-to-do farm communities of German settlers in the Volga region. How things stood in other famine-struck regions is not known; no foreigners chanced to visit them. The fact remains that because of Stalin's policies, the Russian muzhik, the Ukrainian peasant, and the German colonist were all starving long before the tragic famine of 1932-1933. [28]

In the middle of 1929, at the end of the agricultural year 1928-9, it was clear that the situation could not go on. Stalin came to the conclusion that since it was impossible to control the supplies from 25 million individual farms, the only way to guarantee the grain supplies was to bring the peasants into large farms (*kolkhozes* – collective farms) that would be under tight centralised authority. ‘Fulfilling the plan for grain procurement [is] the first commandment’ of the *kolkhozes*, declared Stalin [29] It was in desperation that the fateful decision was taken in the last months of 1929. Suddenly and with little preparation it was resolved to both forcibly collectivise the peasantry and liquidate the kulaks as a class.

As late as April 1929 the Sixteenth Party Conference, in its draft of the Five-Year Plan, still visualised agriculture as being dominated by private farming at the end of the five years. It stated as a target that in 1932/33 the collective and state farms should be responsible for 13 percent of sown area and 15 percent of all agricultural output (as against 2 percent in 1927/28). [30] The resolution on the Five-Year Plan also recognised ‘a possible further growth of private capitalist elements in town and country.’ [31]

However, on 5 January 1930, the Central Committee issued a resolution ‘on the tempo of collectivisation and on state assistance for *kolkhoz* construction’:

It can be established without doubt that within the five-year period instead of the collectivisation of 20 percent of the sown area proposed in the five-year plan we will be able to resolve the task of collectivising the overwhelming majority of peasant households, and the collectivisation of such major grain areas as the Lower Volga, Central Volga and North Caucasus can in the main be completed in the autumn of 1930 or in any case in the spring of 1931; the collectivisation of other grain areas can in the main be completed in the autumn of 1931 or in any case in the spring of 1932. [32]

So between the end of 1927 and beginning of 1930 Stalin groped towards turning the emergency expedient of forced grain requisitions

into a general policy of forcing the peasants into the collective farms.  
After this the advance of collectivisation was very swift:

Percentage of Peasant Households Collectivised[33]	
1 Jun. 1928	1.7
1 Jun. 1929	3.9
1 Oct. 1929	7.5
1 Jan. 1930	18.1
1 Feb. 1930	31.7
1 Mar. 1930	57.2

The number of households recorded as collectivised rose from about 5 million on 1 January 1930 to 8.1 million on 1 February, 14.3 or 14.6 million on 1 March and a peak of 15.0 million on 10 March. [34]

The excesses were such that a massive hue and cry rose everywhere.

... in the first half of February 1930 [there] was the considerable increase in discontent among the peasantry. Peasant unrest on a wide scale, frequently attributed to the kulaks, had been reported since the autumn of 1929, first in Connection with the grain collections ... and then from those areas, such as *Khoper okrug*, in which collectivisation was particularly far advanced ... Early in January it was reported from the Lower Volga region, then the most advanced in collectivisation, that 'anti-kolkhoz agitation has never been on so broad a scale as now.' [35]

Stalin was forced to distance himself from the excesses of collectivisation, to temporize. On 2 March *Pravda* published his article, *Dizzy with Success. Concerning Questions of the Collective-Farm Movement*. The article insists that the voluntary principle should be restored.

Collective farms must not be established by force. That would be foolish and reactionary. The collective-farm movement must

rest on the active support of the main mass of the peasantry.

It followed from this that collectivisation in grain-deficit and backward national areas should take place at a slower rate. But in a number of northern districts collective farms on paper, which do not exist in reality' had been set up and 'in a number of districts of Turkestan attempts have already been made to overtake and surpass the advanced districts of the USSR by threats of armed force, and by threats to deprive those peasants who do not yet wish to join the collective farms of irrigation water and consumer goods.'

What can there be in common between this Sergeant Proshibeyev 'policy' and the Party's policy of relying on the voluntary principle and of taking local peculiarities into account in collective-farm development? Clearly, there is not and cannot be anything in common between them.

Who benefits by these distortions, this bureaucratic decreeing of the collective-farm movement, these unworthy threats against the peasants? Nobody, except our enemies! What may these distortions lead to? To strengthening our enemies and to discrediting the idea of the collective-farm movement.

Is it not clear that the authors of these distortions, who imagine themselves to be 'Letts', are in reality bringing grist to the mill of Right opportunism?

Secondly, the article condemned the tendency to impose communes and to socialise all milk cows and poultry, adding for good measure a condemnation of 'so-called revolutionaries' who began organising a collective farm by removing the church bells. Thirdly, it was concerned to blame those whose heads were turned by success.

... successes have their seamy side, especially when they are attained with comparative 'ease' – 'unexpectedly,' so to speak. Such successes sometimes induce a spirit of vanity and conceit:

‘We can achieve anything!’, ‘There’s nothing we can’t do!’ People not infrequently become intoxicated by such successes; they become dizzy with success, lose all sense of proportion and the capacity to understand realities; they show a tendency to overrate their own strength and to underrate the strength of the enemy; adventurist attempts are made to solve all questions of socialist construction ‘in a trice’. In such a case, there is no room for concern to *consolidate* the successes achieved and to *utilise* them systematically for further advancement. Why should we consolidate the successes achieved when, as it is, we can dash to the full victory of socialism ‘in a trice’: ‘We can achieve anything ‘There’s nothing we can’t do!’ [36]

Stalin’s article was followed by a decision of the Central Committee on 14 March, *On Struggle Against Distortion of Party Line with Reference to the Collectivisation Movement*, which said: ‘In some *raions* the percentage of dekulakised peasants [i.e., peasants deprived of their property] reached 15, the percentage of those deprived of their suffrage rights 15-20’. ‘Marauding, dividing of property, arrests of middle peasants and even poor peasants’ ... ‘There were absurd facts of compulsory collectivisation of dwelling houses, small livestock and milk cattle not producing for the market’. [37]

Now there was a swift move of the peasants away from the collective farms. The percentage of peasant households in the collective farms went down from 57.2 on 1 March 1930 to 38.6 on 1 April, 28.0 on 1 May, 24.8 on 1 June, 22.5 on 1 July and 21.5 on 1 September. [38]

But this retreat was only temporary. After a while the pressure on the peasantry to join the collective farms returned. In 1930 the percentage of peasants in the collective farms was 23.6, in 1931 52.7, and in 1932 61.5. [39]

The continuous struggle between the peasants who were forced into the collective farms and the government took a very much sharpened form in 1931-2. Mass pillages of ‘socialist’ property by

hungry and angry peasants became widespread. In reply draconian legislation was introduced to protect this property.

Under a law of 7 August 1932, ‘On the Protection of the Property of State Enterprises, Collective Farms and Cooperatives and Institutions of Socialist Property’, the theft of property belonging to the state, *kolkhozes* and co-operatives and theft on the railways or waterways, became punishable by death by shooting, accompanied by the confiscation of all property. If there were extenuating circumstances, the penalty incurred was imprisonment for not less than ten years and confiscation of all property. Stalin christened this law ‘the foundation of revolutionary legality.’ [40]

Unceasing mass peasant resistance showed itself clearly in the widespread slaughter of livestock.

	Horses	Cattle	Hogs	Sheep & goats
1928	33,537	70,541	25,989	146,699
1933	16,575	38,380	12,068	50,206
% Decline	50.6	45.6	53.6	65.8

If, in terms of output, collectivisation was far from a success, in terms of the procurement of grain it was a triumph.

Year	Production	Procurement	Procurement as % of Production
1927-28	71.7	11.0	15.3
1928-29	73.3	10.8	14.8
1929-30	71.7	16.1	22.4
1930-31	83.5	22.1	26.5
1931-32	66.0	22.8	34.5

Thus, between 1927-28 and 1931-32 grain output went down by 8 percent while the amount procured went up by 173 percent. So the proportion of grain output taken by the government rose from 15.3 percent to 34.5 percent.

Collectivisation made possible speedy industrialisation not only because the towns were fed, but also because a considerable amount of grain was available for export, to pay for imports of machinery. Between 1928 and 1933 the export of grain rose 56fold. [43]

The other side of the coin of squeezing grain 'surpluses' from the peasantry was the terrible famine of 1932-33. There are various estimates of the number of people who died of hunger. Frank Lorimer, the population expert, estimated that some four million people died of this famine. [44]

A historian who studied the famine in the Ukraine writes as follows:

We will probably never know the exact number of deaths attributable to the famine. But most specialists, including those among dissident circles in the Soviet Union, such as M. Maksudov, are of the opinion that between 4.5 and 6 million Ukrainians perished during the famine. [45]

### **Forced Labour**

ONE BY-PRODUCT of the collectivisation was the appearance of slave labour – the gulag. Until the first Five-Year Plan, prison labour was on far too small a scale to have any real significance in the Russian economy. In 1928 there were only 30,000 prisoners in camps, and the authorities were opposed to compelling them to work. In 1927 the official in charge of prison administration wrote that: 'The exploitation of prison labour, the system of squeezing "golden sweat" from them, the organisation of production in places of confinement, which, while profitable from a commercial point of view is fundamentally lacking in corrective significance – these are

entirely inadmissible in Soviet places of confinement.’ [46] At that time the value of the total production of all prisoners equalled only a small percentage of the cost of their upkeep.

With the inauguration of the Five-Year Plan, however, the situation changed radically. ‘Kiseliov-Gromov, himself a former GPU official in the northern labour camps, states that in 1928 only 30,000 men were detained in the camps ... The total number of prisoners in the entire network of camps in 1930 he gives as 662,257.’ [47] On the evidence available, Dallin concludes that by 1931 there were nearly two million people in labour camps, and by 1933-35 about five million. [48]

There are other estimates of the population of the gulags. Naum Jasny estimates the total gulag labour force in 1941 at 2.9 million. [49] N. Khrushchev speaks about ‘millions’ – but does not tell us how many millions – in labour camps. [50] Another authority states: ‘According to our calculations there were 5.1 million prisoners in the gulag on average during the eleven years 1929-39 inclusive.’ [51]

### **In Conclusion**

IN 1942 Stalin admitted how horrific the collectivisation process had been in a conversation with Churchill. The latter reported the following exchange:

‘Tell me,’ I asked, ‘have the stresses of this war been as bad to you personally as carrying through the policy of the Collective Farms?’

This subject immediately roused the Marshal.

‘Oh, no,’ he said, the Collective Farm policy was a terrible struggle.’

‘I thought you would have found it bad,’ said I, ‘because you were not dealing with a few score thousands of aristocrats or big



landowners, but with millions of small men.'

'Ten million,' he said, holding up his hands. 'It was fearful. Four years it lasted.' [52]

Collectivisation did facilitate the primitive accumulation of capital as Stalin wished. It not only expanded the labour force for industry but also transformed those who remained in agriculture into proletarians. Today the overwhelming majority of agriculturists are in reality, if not in theory, people who do not own means of production; indeed, there is less justification in calling the present Russian agriculturists owners of means of production, than nineteenth century serfs.

Collectivisation resulted in the freeing of agricultural products for the needs of industrial development, the 'freeing' of the peasantry from its means of production, the transformation of a section of them into reserves of labour power for industry, and the transformation of the rest into part-workers, part-peasants, part-serfs in the *kolkhozes*.

Similar general results, although different in some important particulars, were achieved by the English bourgeoisie in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through the eviction of the peasantry from the land. Marx wrote of this process: 'The history of this ... is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.' [53]

While the enclosures in England took three centuries, the expropriation of the peasants in Russia took three years.

## Notes

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2. Quoted in E.H. Carr and R.W. Davies, *Foundations of Planned Economy*, Vol.1, London 1974, p.12.
3. L. Trotsky, *Counter thesis of the Opposition to the Five-Year Plan*, in L. Trotsky, *Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926-27)* (hereafter referred to as *Challenge, 1926-27*), New York 1980, p.458.

4. Carr and Davies, *Foundations of Planned Economy*, Vol.1, p.1000.
5. M. Reiman, *The Birth of Stalinism*, London 1987, pp.43-4.
6. *Ibid.*, p.39.
7. R.W. Davies, *The Socialist Offensive. Collectivisation of Soviet Agriculture, 1929-1930*, London 1980, pp.27, 39.
8. Reiman, p.44-5.
9. *Ibid.*, p.52.
10. *Ibid.*, p.49-50.
11. *Pravda*, 16 May 1928.
12. Reiman, p.51.
13. *Ibid.*, p.53.
14. *Ibid.*, p.53-4.
15. *Ibid.*, p.54.
16. *Ibid.*, p.55.
17. J.V. Stalin, *Works*, XI, p.18.
18. Stalin, *Works*, XI, pp.49-50.
19. *Ibid.*, p.95.
20. *Ibid.*, p.111.
21. *Ibid.*, p.113.
22. *Ibid.*, p.129.
23. Trotsky's Archive, T1901.
24. T1835.
25. Carr and Davies, p.75.
26. *Ibid.*, p.1000.
27. M. Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System*, London 1985, p.108.
28. Reiman, p.109.
29. Stalin, *Works*, Vol.XIII, p.224.
30. *KPSS y rezoliutsiakh i resheniakh sez dov, Konferentsii i plenumov TsK* (hereafter referred to as *KPSS y rez.*), Vol.2, p.451.
31. *Ibid.*, p.454.
32. *Ibid.*, p.545.
33. Davies, p.442.
34. *Ibid.*, p.203.
35. *Ibid.*, p.255-6.

36. Stalin, *Works*, Vol.XII, pp.197-205.
37. *KPSS y rez.*, Vol.2, pp.548-51.
38. Davies, pp.442-3.
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41. N. Jasny, *The Socialized Agriculture of the USSR*, Stanford 1949, p.634.
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46. D.J. Dallin and B.I. Nicolaevsky, *Forced Labour in Soviet Russia*, London 1948, p.153.
47. *Ibid.*, p.52.
48. *Ibid.*, pp.54-62.
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## 2. The Forced March of Industrialisation

IN 1927-9 AGRICULTURE was not alone in experiencing crisis; industry suffered too. Trotsky's judgment that the slow development of industry would cause a rift between town and country proved correct. Now Stalin decided radically to accelerate industrial growth. The industrialisation was largely concentrated in heavy industry while consumer industries were neglected. This meant that industry could not induce the peasantry to supply food to the towns. Thus to implement its programme of industrialisation, the government had to ensure food supplies whether the peasants were willing to provide them or not. Forced collectivisation became a necessary concomitant for speedy industrialisation. The vicious circle of backward industry holding back agriculture, and vice versa, was broken by the brutal power of the state.

Collectivisation had another effect. It was connected with the raising of state power to great heights, through smashing the opposition of the peasantry. In a country where four-fifths of the population was in the countryside, the shaping of a totalitarian regime through confrontation with this section of the population could not fail to have an impact on the rest of society.

Against workers Stalin used a series of barbarous emergency measures similar to those he used against the peasantry. As Reiman puts it:

In a situation of very severe economic and social crisis, which had already brought unbelievable deprivation to broad layers of the population, his program inevitably showed a total disregard for the human factor and human needs; it did not hesitate to

accept any moral, material, or human loss regardless of its extent. Stalin's economic and social concepts ... sank to a level of thinking common to any exploitative system that is not forced to allow for the corrective effect of public resistance to government action. [1]

When the Five-Year Plan was drawn up, it was based not on any assessment of the real resources available in the Soviet economy, but on what was needed speedily to build up the country's heavy industry and defence capacity.

The implications of such planning were clear. The fulfilment of the plan depended directly on a very brutal attack on the living and working conditions of industrial workers and the rural population ... This was a plan of organized poverty and famine. [2]

One should not imagine that Stalin was clear about where he was going in this area, as in others. Acting entirely pragmatically, he simply drifted towards a cataclysmic solution of the general crisis of the economy and society. It was not until the summer of 1929, as we have seen, that a moderately coherent policy for the rural front was to take shape. It was at the same time that Stalin came to a clear decision on the industrial front.

In 1926/27 Stalin was far from any thought of a 'great leap forward' in industry. It was in 1927 that industrial production was first restored to its pre-war level. This restoration meant that much of industry was old, and due for total replacement. Thus half of the steam boilers and one third of the other sources of mechanical power had exceeded their normal service life of 20-25 years. 'New' equipment, that is under ten years old, formed just 4 percent and 9 percent respectively, of the total at work. [3] Hence the Fifteenth Party Conference (26 October-3 November 1926) came to the conclusion that the prospect was that 'the rate of growth in industry will be considerably less than in previous years', although this backsliding would be only temporary, to be followed by a significant

increase in tempo. It was in April 1926 that Stalin, at a Central Committee meeting, opposed Trotsky's *Dneprostroi* project. Stalin said:

*Dneprostroi* would have to be financed with our own resources, and would cost a great deal – some hundreds of millions. We must beware of acting like the peasant who acquired some extra cash and, instead of repairing his plough or improving his farm bought himself a gramophone and was ruined. Are we justified in ignoring the resolutions of the Fourteenth Congress, which stated that our plants must be in keeping with our resources? Clearly, comrade Trotsky has not taken these decisions into account. [4]

A completely different tune was sung at the Sixteenth Party Conference (23-29 April 1929), which announced the First Five-Year Plan. Investment in industry would rise from 9.2 billion roubles in 1927/28 to 23.1 billion in 1932/33, a rise of 251 percent. Industrial output would rise in the same period from 18.3 billion roubles to 43.2 billion, a rise of 236 percent. [5] This was an historically unprecedented tempo. But even these fantastic targets were overshoot by the decree of 1 December 1929. Then on 5-10 December 1929 a congress of 'shock-brigades' adopted a call to fulfil the Five-Year Plan in four years. This became official policy. Capital investment in industry, which was 1,800 billion roubles in 1928/29, would rise to 4,800 billion roubles in 1929/30. The basic capital in industry would rise over two years by 52 percent, and in heavy industry by 75 percent. [6] This target meant an investment in 1931 of 5,500 billion roubles. [7]

The astronomical targets of industrial output for the First Five-Year Plan were insufficient for Stalin. His ambition had no limit. At the Sixteenth Party Congress (26 June-13 July 1930) it was announced that in the first eight months of the economic year 1929-30, i.e., between October 1929 and May 1930, production of large-scale industry was 28.5 percent higher than in the same period the year before, itself a substantially greater increase than in the

previous year. Now it was announced that a further campaign in the summer of 1930 would enable output to be raised by 32.1 percent above the year before. The 1931 Plan proposed a further annual increase of industrial production by 45 percent [8]

<i>Targets of Production (million tons)[9]</i>			
	1927-28	1932-33	1932
	16th Conf. Target (amended)		
Coal	35.0	75.0	95-105
Oil	11.7	21.7	40-55
Iron ore	6.7	20.2	24-32
Pig iron	3.2	10.0	15-16

What crazy targets!

The emphasis in the Plan, and even more in its execution, was on heavy industry: during the Plan period six sevenths of total investment in industry went into heavy industry. [10]

The subordination of consumption to accumulation expressed itself in the relative decline in consumer goods industrial production vis-a-vis the output of means of production:

In 1932 the output of a number of producer goods was in the region of 50 percent to 100 percent larger than in 1913. For instance, the output of steel was 40 percent larger, of coal 121 percent larger. Items whose growth had been emphasized had, of course, expanded much more: thus the output of metal-cutting machine tools was 13 times larger, and of electric power 7 times. The output of textiles was about on the 1913 level, but of other consumer goods produced by large-scale industry was slightly higher. [11]

The subordination of consumption to accumulation during the Five-Year Plan stood in contrast to the period 1921-28, when despite the bureaucratic deformation, there was more or less balanced growth of production, accumulation and consumption. [12]

Military-economic competition with the Western capitalist world was the spur for the industrialisation drive in the USSR. By

November 1929 Stalin had already issued his watchword: 'Catch up and overtake' (*dognat i peregnat*), calling upon the party and people to mobilise their forces for the urgent task of speedy industrialisation. [13]

In a speech to the First All-Union Conference of Leading Personnel of Soviet Industry of 4 February 1931, Stalin said:

To slacken the tempo would mean falling behind. And those who fall behind get beaten. No, we refuse to be beaten! One feature of the history of old Russia was the continual beatings she suffered because of her backwardness. She was beaten by the Mongol Khans. She was beaten by the Turkish beys. She was beaten by the Swedish feudal lords. She was beaten by the Polish and Lithuanian gentry. She was beaten by the British and French capitalists. She was beaten by the Japanese barons. All beat her – because of her backwardness, because of her military backwardness, cultural backwardness, political backwardness, industrial backwardness, agricultural backwardness ...

We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or we shall go under. [14]

The drive towards speedy industrialisation was associated 40 Trotsky with the concentration of power in the factories in the hands of managers. Until 1928 party cells participated in the running of industry together with the workers' plant committees. Together with these, and under their control, worked the technical manager: the combination of these three formed the Troika. In February 1928, the Supreme Economic Council issued a document entitled *Fundamental Regulations Regarding the Rights and Duties of the Administrative, Technical and Maintenance Staffs of Industrial Enterprises*, which aimed at putting an end to the Troika and at establishing complete and unfettered control by the manager. In September 1929, the party Central Committee resolved that the



workers' committees 'may not intervene directly in the running of the plant or endeavour in any way to replace plant administration; they shall by all means help to secure one-man management, increase production, plant development, and, thereby, improvement of the material conditions of the working class.' The manager was placed in full and sole charge of the plant. All his economic orders were now to be 'unconditionally binding on his subordinate administrative staff and on all workers.' L.M. Kaganovich, the well-known trouble-shooter in the economic field, stated: 'The foreman is the authoritative leader of the shop, the factory director is the authoritative leader of the factory, and each has all the rights, duties, and responsibilities that accompany these positions.' His brother, M.M. Kaganovich, a senior official of the Commissariat of Heavy Industry, stated: 'It is necessary to proceed from the basic assumption that the director is the supreme chief in the factory. All the employees in the factory must be completely subordinated to him,' 'The earth should tremble when the Director enters the factory.'

One textbook on Soviet economic law, published in 1935, even went as far as to state: 'One-man management [is] the most important principle of the organisation of socialist economy.' [15]

The industrial drive was accompanied by a sharp decline in workers' living standards. Donald Filtzer writes in *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialisation*:

Western estimates of the fall in the standard of living vary slightly, but all show a catastrophic decline between 1928 and 1932. Solomon Schwarz and Naum Jasny calculate real wages in 1932 at about 50 percent of their 1928 level. Eugene Zaleski puts the figure lower, at 43 percent. [16]

In reaction to the drop in living standards, accompanied by an increase in production norms and deterioration of the supply system, workers moved from one workplace to another.

<i>Labour Turnover, all large-scale industry</i> (per 100 employees)				
	1929	1930	1931	1932
Entered employment	122.4	176.4	151.2	121.1
Left employment	115.2	152.4	136.8	135.3

<i>Labour Turnover, coal industry</i> (per 100 employees)				
	1929	1930	1931	1932
Entered employment	201.6	307.2	232.8	185.4
Left employment	192.0	295.2	205.2	187.9

These figures mean that the average worker in the coal industry, to take the worst example, left his employment almost three times during 1930. [17]

New measures were taken by the government to restrict this movement of labour. Until the First Five-Year Plan workers were free to change their places of work at their own discretion. Their right to work where they pleased was, in fact, guaranteed by Article 37 of the Labour Code of 1922: 'The transfer of a hired person from one enterprise to another or his shipment from one locality to another, even when the enterprise or institution moves, can take place only with the consent of the worker or employee concerned.' Workers could also migrate, unhindered, from one part of the country to another. Even as late as 1930, it was stated in the *Small Soviet Encyclopaedia* that 'the custom of internal passports, instituted by the autocracy as an instrument of police oppression of the toiling masses, was suppressed by the October Revolution.'

Nevertheless, by 1931 no worker was allowed to leave Leningrad without special permission. From 27 December 1932, this system was applied to all parts of Russia, and an internal passport system, much more oppressive than the Tsar's, was introduced to prevent anyone changing his or her place of residence without permission.

As early as 15 December 1930, all industrial enterprises were forbidden to employ people who had left their former place of work without permission, and Article 37 of the 1922 Labour Code was

abolished on 1 July 1932. Labour Books were introduced for industrial and transport workers on 11 February 1931. [18]

To break down working class resistance, to undermine its cohesion, to destroy its ability to act collectively, the regime used a gamut of weapons: repression, flooding the working class with new rural recruits lacking any traditions of industrial militancy and solidarity, using 'socialist competition' which meant individualisation of work incentives, and finally, encouraging a section of the workers – of course a minority – to climb up the social ladder by becoming foremen and factory managers. As Donald Filtzer writes:

... between 1930 and 1933 some 600,000 'worker communists' rose into the administrative and educational apparatus. This amounted to between 10 and 15 percent of the industrial workers in 1930. Thus for a large number of workers the way out of the material hardships of industrialization was not to protest but to try and get out of the working class and move up into the bureaucracy, and for many into the ruling elite itself. The 'promotees' in this way became a major base of support for the Stalinist elite, if not actually joining it. [19]

Neither the forced collectivisation nor the mad rush of industrialisation would have worked without mass terror. As Michal Reiman puts it:

While political terror played an important role, the real core of Stalinism ... was social terror, the most brutal and violent treatment of very wide sections of the population, the subjection of millions to exploitation and oppression of an absolutely exceptional magnitude and intensity.

The social function of terror and repression explains the apparent irrationality, senselessness, and obscure motivation of Stalin's penal system. As a social instrument, terror could not be aimed narrowly, at particular persons. It was an instrument of violent change, affecting the living and working conditions of

millions, imposing the very worst forms of social oppression, up to and including the slave labor of millions of prisoners. [20]

Trotsky thought that the fate of Soviet society would, in the final analysis, be decided by the struggle between the working class on the one side and the kulaks and NEPmen on the other, while the bureaucracy would play only a secondary, mediating role. The mutual paralysis of the contending social forces enabled the Stalinist bureaucracy to muddle through the crisis. By using brute force, to impose a series of *ad hoc* measures, it found a state capitalist way out of the crisis. The bureaucracy was able to raise itself even further above the rest of society and to establish the most vicious mechanism of exploitation, at the cost of both the working class and the peasantry.

Stalin, the man who balanced between the classes before 1928/29 was very different to the man who now represented the new ruling class, the bureaucracy. As Reiman put it:

the Stalin of 1926 was not the Stalin of 1929, neither in the general nature of his politics – above all, his conception of social and economic relations – nor in the type of practical solutions he proposed. [21]

Trotsky criticised Stalin for years for being under the influence of the kulaks and NEPmen. He could no more grasp the radical change in the functions of Stalin and the bureaucracy with the introduction of the Five-Year Plan than Stalin himself. Stalin responded pragmatically to the crisis, and it was the logic of the situation far more than his own logic that led him when he leapt into the unknown.

## Notes

1. Reiman, p.86.

2. *Ibid.*, p.89.

3. A. Ehrlich, *The Soviet Industrialisation Debate, 1924-1928*, Cambridge, Mass. 1960, p.106.
4. *Ibid.*, p.94.
5. *KPSS v rez.*, Vol.2, p.449.
6. *Ibid.*, p.581.
7. *Ibid.*, p.620.
8. *Sobranie zakonov*, 1931, Art.60.
9. *Nove*, p.189.
10. R. Hutchings, *Soviet Economic Development*, London 1982, p.57.
11. *Ibid.*, p.60.
12. See Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, pp.34-44.
13. *KPSS y rez*, vol. 2, p.510.
14. Stalin, *Works*, XIII, 40-1.
15. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, p.25.
16. Filtzer, p.91.
17. *Nove*, p.198.
18. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, pp.34-35.
19. Filtzer, p.48.
20. Reiman, p.49.
21. *Ibid.*, p.119.

### **3. Trotsky's Reaction to the Five-Year Plan**

#### **Trotsky on the Triangle of Party Forces: Left, Centre and Right**

SINCE 1923 Trotsky had brilliantly analysed the prospects of development in Russia. His predictions were completely confirmed by events. He was able to achieve this because he possessed a clear class analysis of the three key groups in society – workers, peasants and bureaucrats. Already in the autumn of 1926 he had foreseen that as soon as the Left was smashed there would be a differentiation in the Stalin camp between a Centre and a Right. He even named names, placing Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky in a right wing group, struggling with the Stalin faction including Molotov, Kaganovich, Mikoyan and Kirov (though he was wrong to include Uglanov).

Trotsky predicted correctly that the NEP would lead to an economic, social and political impasse, that the lag of industry and strengthening of the kulaks and NEPmen would endanger the survival of the Soviet regime. He was also right when he predicted that this would lead to a sharpening conflict between the Right and the Centre in the leadership.

However, we shall show that from 1928 onwards Trotsky's predictions proved wrong almost without exception. We shall also try to explain why this was so.

Trotsky argued repeatedly that in the conflict between the Centre (Stalin) and the Right (Bukharin) Stalin was bound to lose.

Thus in his article, *At a New Stage*, written in late December 1927, Trotsky wrote about what he called Stalin's 'Left manoeuvre'.

The Fourteenth Congress was the apogee of the party apparatus and, along with it, of Stalin. The Fifteenth Congress revealed an already substantial rightward shift of forces ...

The most likely thing is that in the event of a further aggravation of the economic situation, the line taken by the right, which was foreseen quite correctly in the Platform of the Opposition, will triumph

Even a left manoeuvre would not save Stalin.

On matters of tax policy, the rights of factory administrators, credit policy, especially in the village, etc., etc., pressure will ... be exerted from the right. The Stalin apparatus will run up against this pressure very soon and will reveal its impotence in the face of it ...

*The left manoeuvres will not save Stalin's policy; the tail will hit the head. [1]*

On 23 May 1928, in a letter to Aleksandr Belobrodov in Ust-Kulon, Trotsky explained why his prediction in the article *At a New Stage* of a move to the right did not take place.

*At a New Stage* speaks of a rather imminent economic shift to the right under the pressure of aggravated difficulties. It turned out that the next shift was to the left. This means that we ourselves underestimated the good, strong wedge we had driven in. Yes, it was precisely our wedge that has made it impossible for them, at this particular time, to seek a way out of the contradictions on the right path. There can be no doubt (only a blockhead could doubt this now) that if all our previous work had not existed – our analyses, predictions, criticism, exposés,

and ever newer predictions – a sharp turn to the right would have occurred under the pressure of the grain collections crisis.

[2]

In a circular letter of 26 May 1928, directed against those Oppositionists who capitulated to Stalin, believing that the left turn made the Opposition superfluous, Trotsky dealt with their anxiety thus:

Without the preceding work of criticism and warnings, which have now been tested against the facts, the blow of the tail to the head – the grain collections, etc. – would have produced an inevitable shift to the right. We averted this at very great cost. For long? That is entirely unclear. The main difficulties, both foreign and domestic, are ahead.

... the party will still have need of us, and very great need at that. Don't be nervous that 'everything will be done without us'.

[3]

Trotsky advocated support for the left turn, arguing that this would open the sluices for the reform of the party.

Are we ready to support the present official turn? We are, unconditionally, and with all our forces and resources. Do we think that this turn increases the chances of reforming the party without great upheavals? We do. Are we ready to assist in precisely this process? We are, completely and to the utmost of our ability. [4]

But the Opposition had to keep its independence.

While supporting against the right every step of the center toward the left, the Opposition should (and will) criticize the complete insufficiency of such steps and the lack of guarantees in the entire present turn, since it continues to be carried out on the basis of orders from on high and does not really emanate



from the party. The Opposition will uncompromisingly continue to reveal to the party the immense dangers resulting from the inconsistency, the lack of theoretical reflection, and the political contradictoriness of the present course, which is still based on the bloc of the center with the right against the left wing.

*... A continued fight for the ideas and proposals expressed in the Platform is the only correct, serious, and honest way to support every step by the center that is at all progressive. [5]*

This was a source of optimism for the victory of the Opposition.

... the right-centrist policies have reached an impasse; ... the soil will become more and more receptive to our seed. Of course, this process will still have its ups and downs. But one thing is clear: even a few cadres – if they are armed with a clear understanding of the situation in its entirety, if they are imbued with an understanding of their historical mission, and if, at the same time, they know how or are able to learn how to march in step with the progressive movements in the party masses and the working class – given the inevitable future crises of the situation, such cadres can play a decisive role. [6]

After the July 1928 Plenum of the Central Committee, in which Stalin made concessions to the Right, to Bukharin, Trotsky's optimism about the imminence of the victory of the Left increased.

On 19 October Stalin delivered a speech to the Moscow Committee and the Moscow Control Commission entitled *The Right Danger in the CPSU(b)*. [7] Trotsky's comment on the speech was that Stalin's campaign against the Right was half-hearted and sham. Its inconsistency would allow great opportunities to the Bolshevik-Leninists. On 25 February 1929, just weeks before Stalin crushed the Rights and finally consolidated his dictatorial power over all wings of the party, Trotsky wrote: 'Thus Stalin's half-hearted policies have developed in a series of zigzags, with the consequence that the

two wings of the party, left and right, have grown stronger – at the expense of the centre faction.’ [8]

Trotsky fundamentally misread the situation regarding what he called the Right (Bukharin) and Centre (Stalin) when he declared on 24 April 1929 that Stalin was fighting the Right under the whip of the Left Opposition, and that Stalin was inherently incapable of smashing the Right.

... under the Opposition’s lash the Stalinist apparatus is tossing from side to side and thus making the party think and make comparisons. Never has policy in the USSR turned to such an extent round the ideas of the Opposition as now, when the leaders of the Opposition are in jail or exiled ... Stalin is fighting the Right under the lash of the Opposition. He is fighting that fight as a centrist, compelled by means of splits on the right and left to ensure his intermediate position both from the proletarian line and from the openly opportunist. This zigzag fight of Stalin in the last analysis only strengthens the Right. The party can be protected from shocks and splits only by a revolutionary position. [9]

Eight months later, on 4 January 1930, Trotsky argued that the moment of victory of the Left Opposition was near, as Stalin would need it to rebut the threat from Bukharin and Co.

... at the moment of danger the Oppositionists would be in the foremost positions ... in the hour of Stalin’s difficulty, the latter would call on them as Tseretelli had called on the Bolsheviks for aid against Kornilov. [10]

### **Why Trotsky’s Predictions Proved Wrong**

IT WAS not Bukharin or Trotsky who came out victorious, but Stalin; the ‘Centre’ did not collapse under the pressure of the Left or the

Right. History did not choose between the proletariat on the one hand and the kulaks and NEPmen on the other.

Trotsky did not make a mistake in his characterisation of the politics of the Right nor of the Left, but he completely misunderstood the third element, the Stalinist bureaucracy. Trotsky extrapolated from the experience of the bureaucracy which he well knew – that of the trade unions and Social Democratic parties – to the Stalinist bureaucracy in Russia.

The Stalinist bureaucracy was very different from the trade union bureaucracy in the West. The latter mediates between the ruling class – those who own the means of production – and the workers who are ‘free’ of means of production. The trade union bureaucracy cannot become a class for itself because it lacks that which defines classes – a relation to the means of production. So it does follow a zigzag, ‘Centrist’ path. However, the Soviet bureaucracy was in direct control of considerable means of production, and now, in 1928-29, a section of it was prepared to act independently, not only of the workers, but also of the kulaks and NEPmen who also owned means of production. Once the Stalinist bureaucracy smashed the Left Opposition, the proletarian vanguard, it was not going to give up the fruits of victory to the kulaks and NEPmen. Brutally suppressing the working class and peasantry, the bureaucracy refused to give up its economic, social and political power.

As I wrote elsewhere:

... when Trotsky wrote about the bureaucracy his terms of reference were the bureaucracy of the trade unions; and Social Democratic parties. This labour movement bureaucracy balances between the two main classes in capitalist society – the employers and the workers. Its behaviour is characterised above all by vacillation; moving, now to the left under pressure from the working class, now to the right under pressure from the capitalists. Similarly Trotsky characterised the Stalinist bureaucracy as ‘centrist’, vacillating between the pressure of the Russian working class and the aspirant bourgeoisie of NEPmen and kulaks. His expectation and fear was that Stalin would

capitulate to the right. His hope, and all his efforts, were directed to this end, that pressure from the working class and the left could prevent this capitulation. In the event neither Trotsky's fear nor his hope materialised. Instead the Stalinist bureaucracy moved against both the left (Trotsky, the 'United Opposition', etc.) and the right (Bukharin, Rykov, Tomsky, etc.) in quick succession. In the space of a couple of years the bureaucracy completely crushed the workers, the kulaks and the peasantry as a whole, and emerged as the sole political power in Russia with Stalin at its head as personal dictator.

The Stalin faction was able to do this because it was fundamentally different from the trade union bureaucracy under capitalism. In a society where the state is already the principal repository of the means of production and the bourgeoisie has been decisively smashed and expropriated (as the Russian bourgeoisie was in 1917-18) a state bureaucracy which frees itself completely from control by the working class (as the Stalinist bureaucracy did in the years 1923-28) becomes the *de facto* owner and controller of those means of production and the employer of the workers. In short it becomes a new exploiting class. [11]

It was with the inauguration of the Five-Year Plan that the Stalinist bureaucracy was transformed from a stratum mediating between the proletariat and the peasantry into a ruling class. [12]

Trotsky did not foresee the possibility that Stalin could both 'send NEP to hell' – liquidating the kulaks and peasant farming in general – while at the same time strangling the proletariat. To Trotsky the two actions looked irreconcilable. Trotsky again and again warned that the Stalinist clique would follow in the footsteps of the Thermidorean Jacobins. He overlooked the fact that the Stalinist bureaucracy had a weapon at its disposal that the Jacobins did not have: the entire economy of the country. Master of all the key means of production, the bureaucracy was becoming the ruling class, the master of society. Trotsky's assumption that the Stalinist bureaucracy could be

defeated by the kulaks – that ‘the tall will hit the head’ – completely contradicted Trotsky’s own long head view on the nature of the peasantry. In 1906 Trotsky wrote: ‘Historical experience shows that the peasantry are absolutely incapable of taking up an independent political role ... The history of capitalism is the history of the subordination of the country to the town.’ [13] How could the atomised, dispersed peasantry beat the highly centralised state bureaucracy? In a conflict between the two, the peasantry was bound to lose.

Trotsky’s scheme, Bukharin = Right, Stalin = Centre, Trotsky = Left, seemed to fit the years 1923-28, but was completely out of joint afterwards. If by Left one means nearer to the working class, its needs and aspirations – then Stalin was to the Left of Bukharin in the mid-1920s, but was far to the right after 1928. It was not that Bukharin had changed, but that Stalin had – because of his new social position. This is brought out by a comparison with another right-winger – Tomsy. As the leader of the trade unions he was still dependent on the existence of unions. Stalin, by contrast, completely integrated the unions into the state, and abolished every vestige of their independence after 1928/29. The attitude of the Bukharin-Tomsy Right to the workers was very much like that of the Labour bureaucracy towards workers in the West. With the Five-Year Plan Stalin’s treatment of Russian workers was closer to that pursued by Hitler against the German proletariat.

Stalin’s policies had undergone a qualitative transformation which in class terms put him far to the right of both Trotsky and Bukharin, neither of whom had fundamentally changed their positions.

The Left Opposition was a wing of Bolshevism; Bukharin and Co. were also a wing of Bolshevism – a most conservative wing. Stalin was the gravedigger of Bolshevism. His position contrasted with that of even the most prominent ‘Right’ – Bukharin, who, as Donny Gluckstein writes, stopped short of counter-revolution:

As the revolution became distorted, Bukharin, who had excellently expressed the finest traditions of that revolution, continued to be a mouthpiece, but this time for its degeneration.

He became an active factor in rationalising and furthering that process, both in the USSR itself and through the Comintern. But, unlike Stalin, he stopped short of the final step of betraying and destroying the revolution, and for this he paid the ultimate penalty. [14]

### **Trotsky's Attitude to Collectivisation and the Industrialisation Drive**

TROTSKY'S FALSE estimate of collectivisation and industrialisation under the Five-Year Plan followed from an underestimation of the Stalinist bureaucracy's independence *vis-à-vis* both the proletariat and the peasantry.

Trotsky argued that the Left Opposition played a crucial role in the turn towards collectivisation and industrialisation. Thus in a pamphlet, *Problems of the Development of the USSR* (4 April 1931) he wrote:

The experience of the whole post-Lenin period bears testimony to the incontestable influence of the Left Opposition upon the course of development of the USSR. All that was creative in the official course – and has remained creative – was a belated echo of the ideas and slogans of the Left Opposition ...

The power of this criticism, despite the numerical weakness of the left wing, lies in general here the power of Marxism lies: in the ability to analyse, to foresee ...

The faction of the Bolshevik-Leninists is consequently even now one of the most important factors in the development of the theory and practice of socialist construction in the USSR and of the international proletarian revolution. [15]

In January 1932 Trotsky wrote with great enthusiasm about the Five-Year Plan:

The development of the productive forces of the Soviet Union is the most colossal phenomenon of contemporary history. The gigantic advantage of a planned leadership has been demonstrated with a force which nothing can ever refute. [16]

This major economic development weakened the base of the bureaucracy, Trotsky argued in an interview with the *New York Times* on 15 February 1932:

The economic successes, it is needless to say, have greatly strengthened the Soviet Union. At the same time they have greatly weakened the position of Stalin's official apparatus ... [An] ... important cause of the weakening of the Soviet bureaucracy lies in the fact that the economic successes have greatly elevated not only the number of Russian workers, but also their cultural level, their confidence in their own powers, and their feeling of independence. All these traits are hard to reconcile with bureaucratic guardianship. [17]

In an interview with Associated Press on 26 February 1932 Trotsky said:

In spite of everything that many newspapers write, the personal position of Stalin and his limited group is tottering precariously. The economic and cultural successes of the Soviet Union have considerably aroused the self-confidence of the working class and, at the same time, its criticism of the bureaucratic regime which Stalin personifies. [18]

This was written at a time that the working class of the USSR had been massively weakened by repression, by being flooded with rural recruits lacking traditions of working class struggle, and atomised by 'socialist competition'!

Trotsky was full of praise for the collectivisation and industrialisation drive, although very critical of the methods Stalin used to carry it out. However much one can, and should, criticise

Stalin's policy, Trotsky argued, one had to make it clear that the workers and peasants were doing far better under him than they would under capitalism. In a letter of 28 January 1928, Trotsky wrote:

Even with an opportunist leadership, the Soviet state gives the workers and peasants immeasurably more than a bourgeois state would at the same level of development of the productive forces. [19]

Trotsky repeated this in a letter to Lev Sosnovsky of 5 March 1928:

... the Soviet government is doing immeasurably more for the working class than any bourgeois government could or would do, given the same general level of wealth of the country ...

The workers of a bourgeois Russia, with productive forces at the same level, would never have had a living standard as high as they have now, despite all the mistakes, miscalculations, and departures from the correct line. [20]

In an article entitled *Towards Capitalism or Socialism?* of 25 April 1930, Trotsky wrote:

... at the head of the country is a government that, whatever its faults, is trying by all means to raise the material and cultural level of the peasants. The interests of the working class – still the ruling class of the country whatever the changes that have taken place in the structure of the revolutionary society – lie in the same direction. [21]

This was written at a time when real wages in Russia were cut by half!

At the same time Trotsky was arguing that Stalin was going to encourage the rise of the kulaks in the future. Collectivisation would not eliminate this, but, on the contrary, would give the kulaks a new social base. Thus, in an article entitled *The New Course in the Soviet Economy* (13 February 1930), he wrote:



... the day after the official liquidation of the kulaks as a class,' i.e., after the confiscation of the property of 'named kulaks' and their deportation, the Stalinist bureaucracy will declare the kulaks within the collective farms to be progressive or 'civilised cooperators' ... The collectives may become, in this case, only a *new form of social and political disguise for the kulaks*. [22]

Two years later Trotsky repeated the same argument about the kulaks being restored.

The newspapers are continuing to bluster about the liquidation of the kulaks as a class, but the practical measures of the economic policy are unavoidably preparing the conditions for the restorations of the kulaks as a class. [23]

Now, not only will the kulaks in the village accumulate capital but the Nepman in the city will also, and a new process of social differentiation will arise. [24]

### **Trotsky's Sharp Criticism of Stalin's Management of the Economy**

HOWEVER, despite these errors and illusions, Trotsky never ceased to criticise, in sharp terms, the bureaucratic mismanagement of the Soviet economy. The art of planning, he stressed, demands first of all, harmonious development of all elements in the economy. Workers' democracy is crucial to it. The arbitrariness of the Stalinist bureaucracy brought about massive disproportions between different branches of the economy, different enterprises that depended on one another, and so on. In an article entitled *The Soviet Economy in Danger* (22 October 1932), Trotsky wrote:

Centralized management implies not only great advantages but also the danger of centralizing mistakes, that is, of elevating them to an excessively high degree. Only continuous regulation

of the plan in the process of its fulfilment, its reconstruction in part and as a whole, can guarantee its economic effectiveness.

The art of socialist planning does not drop from heaven nor is it presented full-blown into one's hands with the conquest of power. This art may be mastered only by struggle, step by step, not by a few but by millions, as a component part of the new economy and culture. [25]

Democracy is not an extra for real economic planning, but its alpha and omega.

The innumerable living participants in the economy, state and private, collective and individual, must serve notice of their needs and of their relative strength not only through the statistical determination of plan commissions but by the direct pressure of supply and demand. The plan is checked and, to a considerable degree, realized through the market. The regulation of the market itself must depend upon the tendencies that are brought out through its mechanism. The blueprints produced by the departments must demonstrate their economic efficacy through commercial calculation.

... The struggle between living interests, as the fundamental factor of planning, leads us into the domain of politics, which is concentrated economics. The instruments of the social groups of Soviet society are – should be: the Soviets, the trade unions, the cooperatives, and in the first place the ruling party. Only through the inter-reaction of these three elements, state planning, the market, and Soviet democracy, can the correct direction of the economy of the transitional epoch be attained. [26]

Trotsky also opposed the policy of economic national self-sufficiency, of autarky, arguing that it much more fitted Hitlerism than socialism.

As a matter of fact, the Soviet economy under Stalin became more and more autarkic, as is clear from the following table:

<i>USSR: Share of Exports in National Income, 1913-37[27]</i>	
Year	Percent
1913	10.4
1929	3.1
1930	3.5
1931	3.0
1932	2.6
1933	2.3
1934	1.8
1935	1.3
1936	0.8
1937	0.5

Trotsky made it clear in all his writings that for him the working class should not be the object of economic planning but its subject. The improvement of workers' living standards and their role in the economy, society and state, were the criteria for advance. In the thesis, *Problems of the Development of the USSR* (4 April 1931), Trotsky wrote: 'The living standard of the workers and their role in the state are the highest criteria of socialist successes.'

The problem of raising the political independence of the proletariat and its initiative in all fields must be put in the foreground of the whole policy. The genuine attainment of this aim is inconceivable without a struggle against the excessive privileges of individual groups and strata, against the extreme inequality of living conditions, and, above all, against the enormous prerogatives and favoured position of the uncontrolled bureaucracy. [28]

Thus there is no similarity at all between Trotsky's concept of socialist planning and the actual bureaucratic command economy of Stalin that passed under the title of Plan.

## **The Shakhty Trial, the 'Industrial Party' Trial and the 'Menshevik Centre' Trial**

IN MAY 1928, a trial was staged of a number of mining engineers of the administrative district of the town of Shakhty, with a big fanfare. They were accused of industrial sabotage. Reiman explains the background:

The equipment in the working mines was very old and worn out, the influx of new equipment totally inadequate. The Donbass had one of the highest accident rates in the USSR, including fatalities. The organization of production was grossly inadequate. Labour turnover was extremely high in the Donbass, and the skills of those working in the mines was correspondingly low. Alcoholism, fights, and knifings were very common. Because of the shortage of trained personnel, engineers and technicians were overburdened.

At the end of 1927, the Donbass was in a state of severe and nearly constant unrest. Labour disputes and wildcat strikes broke out again and again. [29]

Stalin wanted to direct workers' discontent away from party and state leadership, towards a scapegoat, the engineers.

He undoubtedly understood that a major case involving 'wrecking activity' would reinforce an atmosphere supportive of the extraordinary measures and the use of force to overcome the economic crisis. [30]

Mass meetings to express public indignation occurred at virtually every factory, office, or other workplace. Much of this anger was genuine, reflecting the strained relations between workers and specialists ...

A lynch mob atmosphere directed against the technical intelligentsia had been created. Engineers and technicians in

factories were called 'Shakhtintsy' or 'Donbassovtsy' (Shakhtyites or Donbass types). Their situation became extremely difficult, if not dangerous. The technique of solving social problems by repression had won new ground. Stalin now implied that 'wrecking' by old specialists was a major problem affecting the entire country; it was no longer just a regional matter. And, he argued, solving this problem was crucial to finding a fundamental solution to the economic difficulties. [31]

The trial opened on 18 May in the Hall of Columns of Moscow's House of Trade Unions. It lasted about six weeks, until the beginning of July 1928. The special session of the Supreme Court of the RSFSR was chaired by Andrei Vyshinsky, rector of the First Moscow State University, a former Menshevik. This was the same Andrei Vyshinsky who would preside over the frame-up trials of the Old Bolsheviks later on in the 1930s.

There were 53 people in the dock. The court handed down eleven death sentences, six of which were 'provisional' and were later reduced by the Central Executive Committee. The five sentenced to death were executed immediately. Reiman comments:

The economic and social crisis in the USSR had borne its fruit. In addition to the use of force and administrative measures to solve social problems, methods that made their appearance very quickly from the beginning of 1928 on, a new element entered Soviet history; the public show trial ... The discontent of broad layers of the working class over the general situation in the country was now directed against the lower ranks of management. The centers of political power were raised above society and above their own apparatus, gaining greater room for maneuver and greater possibilities for arbitrary and oppressive rule. [32]

The Shakhty trial was followed by that of the 'Industrial Party' in November-December 1930, and the 'Menshevik Centre' trial in

March 1931. All three were of the same type: frame-up trials in which the accused 'confessed' to heinous crimes.

In the case of the 'Industrial Party' trial there were eight defendants, all of whom had held responsible posts in Soviet economic and planning institutions during the 1920s. They were accused of having organised a 'Council of the Allied Engineers' Organisation', which, according to the indictment, had 'united in a single organisation all the different wrecking organisations in the various branches of industry, and acted not only in accordance with the orders of the international organisations of former Russian and foreign capitalists, but also in contact with, and upon direct instructions of the ruling circles and the general staff of France in preparing armed intervention and armed overthrow of the Soviet power'. They were also accused of having ties with the British General Staff. The defendants confessed to everything in the indictment, including sabotage in the principal industries, treasonable activities in the Red Army, espionage, etc. No evidence was introduced except the confessions. Five defendants were sentenced to death, the other three to ten years' imprisonment. The death penalties were commuted to imprisonment.

In the trial of the 'Menshevik Centre' there were 14 defendants, among them N.N. Sukhanov and V. Groman. They were accused of economic sabotage and conspiracy with their emigré comrades. The charge was based on confessions. The Prosecutor alleged that the defendants had taken orders from R. Abramovich, the Menshevik émigré leader, and that the latter had come clandestinely to Russia to inspect the conspiratorial organisation. Abramovich was able to prove that at the time when, according to the Prosecutor, he was supposed to have travelled to Russia, he was present at sessions of the Executive of the Second International in Brussels, and spoke with Leon Blum, Vandervelde and other Social Democratic leaders on public platforms. Groman, former adviser to the State Planning Commission, confessed that it was he who had sought to subvert the First Five-Year Plan.

Underestimating the strength of the Stalinist bureaucracy and its independence from all sections of society, including bourgeois

technicians. Trotsky justified all three trials. On 23 May 1928, in a letter to Aleksandr Belobrodov, he criticised the 'bureaucracy who had organised or slept through the Shakhty affair'. [33] In November 1928, in an article, *Crisis in the Right-Centre Bloc* Trotsky wrote:

The Shakhty affair is eloquent not only of the incompetence and the bureaucratic spirit of the leadership, but also of the weak cultural and technical level of the workers of Shakhty, as well as their lack of socialist interest. Has anyone ever calculated what 'socialist construction' Shakhty cost? ... the Shakhty affair is not an exceptional one. It is only the most flagrant expression of bureaucratic irresponsibility above, and material and cultural backwardness and passivity below. [34]

What about the 'Industrial Party' trial? Trotsky writes:

... the indictment itself demonstrates without any doubt that in the period of its economic slowdown – up to 1928 – as well as in the period of its economic adventurism – beginning with the second half of 1928 – the Stalinist economic leadership acted under the dictation of the saboteurs' center, that is, a gang of agents of international capital. [35]

Trotsky took the same position as regards the Menshevik trial. He wrote:

The Ramzins, the Osadchys and the Mensheviks have confessed. The question of knowing to what extent these confessions are sincere is not of great interest to us. It is, however, beyond doubt that the next trial will reveal the transgressions of the saboteurs guilty of the disruptive acceleration of disproportionate rates in the complete collectivization, in the administrative dekulakization; the trial will show that if the Menshevik economists in the years 1923-28 saw, and with reason, the path to the bourgeois degeneration of the Soviet system in the retardation of industrialization, many of

them beginning in 1928 became veritable super-industrializers so as to prepare, by means of economic adventurism, the political downfall of the dictatorship of the proletariat. [36]

Eighteen months later Trotsky still drew the same conclusions from the trials:

The saboteurs of the last few years have ... occupied responsible posts of leadership in the economic apparatus. Their sabotage consisted in openly and publicly – with the approval of the Politburo – putting through programs which in essence were directed against socialist construction and the proletarian dictatorship ... The artificial speed-up of the rates of industrialization and collectivization can be just as much an act of sabotage as their artificial slowing-down. Symptoms of this are plain to be seen. [37]

Not until five years after the Mensheviks' trial did Trotsky recognise that he had taken the wrong position regarding it. Now he wrote:

The editors of the *Bulletin* must acknowledge that at the time of the Menshevik trial they greatly underestimated the degree of shamelessness of Stalinist 'justice' and in light of this took too seriously the confessions of the former Mensheviks. [38]

### **Entangled in Contradictions**

AS WE have shown, Trotsky saw the Left Opposition as representing the interests of the proletariat, and the Right representing the kulaks and NEPmen. The Centre – Stalin – was viewed as hanging in mid-air, its apparent strength an illusion. The Centre was doomed to vacillate between the two basic class forces. Trotsky thought its vacillations, its zigzags, were bound to be in general far more to the right: one step to the left to be followed by two to the right. In the long term the centrist bureaucracy would be crushed by the proletariat or else by the kulaks and NEPmen.



Although these forecasts were not confirmed by actual developments, once the basic analysis was faulty, the explanation of actual developments was driven into greater and greater contradictions. One is reminded how the astronomers of the Ptolemaic school, assuming that the earth is the centre of the universe, were forced with every new discovery of the movement of planets into a more and more complicated explanation. Things became much simpler once the assumption about the centrality of the earth was removed. As we shall see – in the following seven pages – Trotsky's theory about the developments in the USSR in the late 1920s and early 1930s is very messy and riddled with contradictions. To follow it is a very difficult task. The reader's patience and forgiveness will be asked for in reading these pages.

To follow Trotsky's analysis of the Stalinist reaction in the years after 1928 is painful, but it is necessary. It shows that even the greatest genius becomes entangled in contradictions if the basic assumptions are wrong.

For a long time Trotsky defined the Soviet state as a workers' state. The proletariat could seize power from the hands of the Stalinist bureaucracy by way of reform and without a revolution because the bureaucracy was inherently weak and lacked a real independent basis. Thus in a letter of 11 November 1928 to V.G. Borodai, a member of the Democratic Centralist group, exiled to Timmen, Trotsky wrote:

... as the situation is now, the bourgeoisie could seize power only by the road *of counter-revolutionary upheaval*. As for the proletariat, it can regain full power, overhaul the bureaucracy, and put it under its control by *the road of reform of the party and the soviets*. These are the fundamental characteristics of the situation ...

Is the proletarian core of the party, assisted by the working class, capable of triumphing over the autocracy of the party apparatus, which is fusing with the state apparatus? Whoever replies in advance that it is incapable thereby speaks not only of the necessity

of a new party on a new foundation but also of the necessity of a second and new proletarian revolution. [39]

If the proletariat was unable to seize power from the bureaucracy along the path of reform, it meant that the revolution had been liquidated, that the victory of Thermidor had been completed, and a new proletarian revolution was needed.

If the party is a corpse, a new party must be built on a new spot, and the working class must be told about it openly. If Thermidor is completed, and if the dictatorship of the proletariat is liquidated, the banner of the second proletarian revolution must be unfurled. That is how we would act if the road of reform, for which we stand, proved hopeless.

And Trotsky defined Thermidor as bourgeois restoration. Thus he wrote on 24 August 1929: 'If Thermidor "has been completed", this means that development in Russia has definitely taken the capitalist road.' [40]

And on 7 September 1929, Trotsky elaborated further his views on the essence of Thermidor:

Thermidor signalizes the first victorious stage of the counter-revolution, that is, the direct transfer of power from the hands of one class into the hands of another, whereby this transfer, although necessarily accompanied by civil war, is nevertheless masked politically by the fact that the struggle occurs between the factions of a party that was yesterday united ... Thermidor ... indicates the direct transfer of power into the hands of a different class, after which the revolutionary class cannot regain power except through an armed uprising. [41]

Thermidor had not yet been victorious in Russia.

Thermidor signifies the transfer of power from the hands of the proletariat into the hands of the bourgeoisie. It can signify

nothing else. If Thermidor has been accomplished, it means that Russia is a bourgeois state. [42]

The belief that Thermidor had not won, and the state apparatus was still dependent on the proletariat, was crucial to Trotsky's definition of the Soviet regime as a workers' state.

... despite everything the proletariat still possesses powers to exert pressure and ... the state apparatus still remains dependent on it. Upon this cardinal fact the Russian Opposition must continue to base its own policy, which is the *policy of reform and not of revolution*. [43]

What Trotsky wrote to Borodai he reiterated in his theses *Problems of the Development of the USSR* (4 April 1931):

The recognition of the present Soviet state as a workers' state not only signifies that the bourgeoisie can conquer power only by means of an armed uprising but also that the proletariat of the USSR has not forfeited the possibility of subordinating the bureaucracy to it, of reviving the party again, and of regenerating the regime of the dictatorship without a new revolution, with the methods and on the road of reform. [44]

The reaction of the Stalinist leadership to the victory of Hitler in Germany demonstrated to Trotsky that it was not amenable to gradual reform. He came to a new view of the Soviet regime and the struggle against it. In an article entitled *The Class Nature of the Soviet State* (1 October 1933), he wrote:

After the experiences of the last few years, it would be childish to suppose that the Stalinist bureaucracy can be removed by means of a party or soviet congress. In reality, the last congress of the Bolshevik Party took place at the beginning of 1923, the Twelfth Party Congress. All subsequent congresses were bureaucratic parades. Today, even such congresses have been discarded. No normal 'constitutional' ways remain to remove the

ruling clique. The bureaucracy can be compelled to yield power into the hands of the proletarian vanguard only by *force*.

It would be necessary to apply force against the bureaucracy; however, not the measures of civil war, but rather 'measures of a police character.' [45]

Even if Trotsky still underestimated the resistance of the bureaucracy – hence limiting the measures necessary to remove it – it was clear that he no longer envisaged the possibility of reforming the Soviet regime.

Now Trotsky changed his mind on: 1. The ability of the proletariat to exert pressure on the state apparatus and the party leadership; 2. The possibility of reforming the regime, and 3. The question of whether Thermidor had occurred. Yet still he clung to the conclusion that the Stalinist state was a workers' state: hence he was constrained to change the definition of Thermidor and Bonapartism. In an article entitled *The Workers' State, Thermidor and Bonapartism* (1 February 1935), Trotsky argued that Thermidor had already won in Russia, but that this did not signify the transfer of power from one class, the proletariat, to another, the bourgeoisie, but only the transfer of power from one section of the proletariat to another.

In the internal controversies of the Russian and the International Opposition, we conditionally understood by Thermidor the first stage of the bourgeois counter-revolution, aimed against the social basis of the workers' state.

Now Trotsky argued that this definition of Thermidor should be corrected:

The overturn of the Ninth Thermidor did not liquidate the basic conquests of the bourgeois revolution, but it did transfer the power into the hands of the more moderate and conservative Jacobins, the better-to-do elements of bourgeois society. Today it is impossible to overlook that in the Soviet revolution also a shift to the right took place a long time ago, a shift entirely

analogous to Thermidor, although much slower in tempo and more masked in form ...

The smashing of the Left Opposition implied in the most direct and immediate sense the transfer of power from the hands of the revolutionary vanguard into the hands of the more conservative elements among the bureaucracy and the upper crust of the working class. The year 1924 – that was the beginning of the Soviet Thermidor ...

The Thermidor of the Great Russian Revolution is not before us but already far behind. The Thermidoreans can celebrate, approximately, the tenth anniversary of their victory.

Thermidor and Bonapartism had won in the USSR, but still the working class was the ruling class, we are told.

Carrying the policies of Thermidor further, Napoleon waged a struggle not only against the feudal world but also against the 'rabble' and the democratic circles of the petty and middle bourgeoisie; in this way he concentrated the fruits of the regime born out of the revolution in the hands of the new bourgeois aristocracy. Stalin guards the conquests of the October Revolution not only against the feudal-bourgeois counter-revolution but also against the claims of the toilers, their impatience and their dissatisfaction; he crushes the left wing that expresses the ordered historical and progressive tendencies of the unprivileged working masses; he creates a new aristocracy by means of an extreme differentiation in wages, privileges, ranks, etc. Leaning for support upon the topmost layer of the new social hierarchy against the lowest – sometimes vice versa – Stalin has attained the complete concentration of power in his own hands. What else should this regime be called if not Soviet Bonapartism?

Bonapartism, by its very essence, cannot long maintain itself; a sphere balanced on the point of a pyramid must invariably roll down on one side or the other. [46]

The Stalinist regime, 'a sphere balancing on the point of a pyramid', maintained itself for over half a century! [1\*]

Trotsky had seen the Stalinist bureaucracy as Centrist, as balancing between the proletariat on the one hand, and the kulaks and NEPmen on the other. But with one side disarmed and suppressed and the other liquidated, the whole idea of a centrist bureaucracy balancing between social forces was blown apart.

Trotsky often used the concept of Thermidor in his discussion of Stalin's regime but there is a difficulty with it. Trotsky's post-1933 version of the analogy, while being in some respects a step backwards, in that it compromises the criteria for a workers' state in Russia, did fit the French Revolution well. After 1793 there was a period of reaction, but neither the Thermidorians, nor the Directorate, nor Napoleon, carried out a full counter-revolution by restoring the *Ancien Régime*. Beheading of the popular forces without counter-revolution was possible. However, there is a difference between the bourgeois and the proletarian revolution. In bourgeois revolutions it is the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie rather than the bourgeoisie proper that drives the process forward. This makes possible (and probably, inevitable) a bourgeois reaction within and on the foundations of the bourgeois revolution. In a socialist revolution the proletariat itself makes the revolution. Any reaction, especially in conditions of capitalist encirclement, is therefore bound to head in the direction of capitalist restoration. Thus in the proletarian revolution there can be no exact repetition of Thermidor.

As with the problems surrounding the concept of Thermidor, Trotsky ran into problems with the concept of Bonapartism. Marx had developed the concept of Bonapartism to describe the regime of Louis Bonaparte as a force balancing between the two main contending classes – the proletariat and the bourgeoisie seemingly independent of both, but in essence defending the interests of the latter. Subsequently Marx and Engels characterised various regimes,

including that of Bismarck in Germany as Bonapartist. Thus Bonapartism is a regime in which the state apparatus assumes a high degree of independence from the economically dominant class, while defending and supporting this class. Now, to use the same concept in relation to the Soviet regime, one has to ask a number of questions: above which classes did the Stalinist bureaucracy rise; was it the proletariat and petty bourgeoisie; and in whose interests was it acting? Trotsky's use of Bonapartism led to extreme theoretical tangles.

These stemmed from his attempt to insert within his theory of a workers' state a term borrowed from the analysis of bourgeois states.

The bourgeoisie normally owns the means of production as private property and therefore can lose or surrender a measure of political power without losing its position as the ruling class. There are many examples of this happening, most notably in Nazi Germany.

The working class, by contrast, can only take possession of the means of production collectively, by means of its own state. Consequently the loss of political power immediately threatens the working class with loss of its control of the means of production and its position as ruling class.

For Soviet Bonapartism to have been a reality it would have been necessary for the Stalinist bureaucracy to control the party, the government, the army, the police, the courts, etc, while the working class retained control of the factories, mines, transport, etc., along with state economic planning. This was manifestly not the case.

Thus we see that throughout the period of the Five-Year Plan Trotsky, normally such a superb analyst of social and political forces, was repeatedly disoriented and wrong-footed. That this was not due to any decline in his powers is proved by the fact that during this same period he produced his master work, *The History of the Russian Revolution* and his no less impressive writings on the rise of fascism in Germany. Rather the fault lay in his underlying theoretical framework – his failure to grasp the state capitalist nature of the

Stalinist regime and his persistence in viewing the Soviet Union as a workers' state.

Having said this, however, it is also important to stress that, despite his mistakes in these years, Trotsky did not weaken or dilute his opposition to Stalinism, rather he deepened and intensified it, as his shift from a reformist to a revolutionary perspective in 1933 testifies. This shows that for all his confusion he remained loyal to revolutionary Marxism and the working class.

### Footnote

1\*. The article *The Workers' State, Thermidor and Bonapartism*, contains in essence the arguments of Trotsky's book, *The Revolution Betrayed*, (1936). We shall deal with this further in chapter thirteen.

### Notes

1. Trotsky, *Challenge*, 1926-27, pp.497-500.

2. Trotsky, *Challenge*, 1928-29, p.98.

3. *Ibid.*, pp.106, 108.

4. *Ibid.*, p.80.

5. *Ibid.*, p.143.

6. *Ibid.*, pp.155-6.

7. Stalin, *Works*, Vol.XI, pp.231-48.

8. Trotsky, *WLT*, 1929, p.48.

9. *Ibid.*, pp.109-10.

10. Trotsky, *WLT*, 1930, p.24.

11. Cliff, *Trotsky*, Vol.3, London 1991, pp.15-16.

12. See further, Chapter 12.

13. L. Trotsky, *Results and Prospects*, London 1971, pp.204-5.

14. D. Gluckstein, *The Tragedy of Nikolai Bukharin* (forthcoming).

15. *WLT*, 1930-1, pp.227-8.

16. *WLT*, 1932, p.42.



17. *Ibid.*, pp.47-8.
18. *Ibid.*, pp.53-4.
19. Trotsky, *Challenge*, 1928-29, pp.44-5.
20. *Ibid.*, p.55.
21. *WLT*, 1930, p.198.
22. *Ibid.*, p.114.
23. *WLT*, 1929-33, p.121.
24. *Ibid.*, p.139.
25. *WLT*, 1932, p.260.
26. *Ibid.*, pp.274-5.
27. F.D. Holzman, *Foreign Trade*, in A. Bergson and S. Kuznets, editors, *Economic Trends in the Soviet Union*, Cambridge, Mass. 1963, p.290.
28. *WLT*, 1930-31, pp.228-9.
29. Reiman, p.58.
30. *Ibid.*, p.59.
31. *Ibid.*, pp.60-1.
32. *Ibid.*, pp.65-66.
33. Trotsky, *Challenge*, 1928-29, p.96.
34. *Ibid.*, p.330.
35. *WLT*, 1930-31, p.68.
36. *Ibid.*, p.201.
37. *Ibid.*, pp.306-7.
38. *Biulleten Oppozitsii*, No.10, April 1930, p.2.
39. Trotsky, *Challenge*, 1928-29, pp.293-5.
40. *WLT*, 1929, p.248.
41. *Ibid.*, pp.278-9.
42. *Ibid.*, p.288.
43. *Ibid.*, p.280.
44. *WLT*, 1930-31, p.225.
45. *WLT*, 1933-34, pp.117-8.
46. *WLT*, 1934-35, pp.173-4, 181-2.

## 4. Trotskyists in the USSR

### Trotskyists Active Among the Workers

THE ECONOMIC and political crisis of 1927 boosted the influence of the Left Opposition. Reiman records that:

... opposition activity was spreading like a river in flood. The opposition organized mass meetings of industrial workers in Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Leningrad, and Moscow; at a chemical plant in Moscow shouts were heard: 'Down with Stalin's dictatorship! Down with the Politburo!'

There were rumors of underground strike committees, in which oppositionists were said to be participating, in the Urals, the Donbass, the Moscow textile region and in Moscow proper – and of funds being raised for striking workers. The GPU reported to the leadership that it could not guarantee 'order' nor prevent the 'demoralization of the workers' if it was not given the right to arrest oppositionist party members.

In the last couple of months of 1927

Reports of heightened opposition activity came one after the other from various cities and from entire provinces – Leningrad, the Ukraine, Transcaucasia, Siberia, the Urals, and of course, Moscow, where the greater number of opposition political leaders were working. There was a steadily growing number of

illegal and semi-legal meetings attended by industrial workers and young people [1]

As we have already described [2], in the Leningrad celebration of the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, Trotsky, Zinoviev and other oppositionists were the objects of demonstrative greetings and cheers from the crowd of 100,000 on the official demonstration.

With the worsening of conditions for workers in 1929 shortage of food, rising prices, accelerated speed-up at work, three-shift working in the factories, the influence of Trotskyism increased further. Isabelle Longuet, in her dissertation, *L'URSS: La Crise de l'opposition de gauche en 1928-1929* [3] delved deep into Trotsky's archives, and gives a fascinating picture of the activities of the Trotskyists at the time.

Here we give a few examples from a letter sent by Oppositionists to Trotsky in Alma Ata. In June 1928, in the town of Kremenchuk the workers in the factory making wagons, whether members of the party or not, rejected the wage reform by a majority in the general assemblies. [4] In Dnepropetrovsk the tramway repair workers threatened to strike in order to reverse the decision taken by the leadership to eliminate free transport for their families, which they had obtained, as they recalled, in 1905. They pointed out that 'the Tsarist authorities had not dared to take away this right. It was now being done by Soviet bureaucrats after eleven years of revolution'. [5]

There was other evidence. In Moscow riots of unemployed led to the ransacking of food shops and were suppressed by the militia. [6] Other reports say that in the main centres of the country, workers were starting to discuss, to make their voices heard after a long silence. Many texts in the Trotsky archives in Harvard give examples of interventions and quote workers' remarks. In certain factory assemblies workers rejected the resolutions put forward by the party leadership. This was the case in the Vek factory in Kharkov, the Spartak factory in Kazan ,and elsewhere. [7]

During a stormy meeting of the textile workers of Ivanovo-Voznesensk a woman pointed out that her daughter had been fired

for voicing criticism: 'Self-criticism is a good thing, comrade Reporter, but sometimes people can get fired because of it.' The interventions were sometimes bitter, like one of a Moscow worker: 'Those who criticise have been deported.' [8]

Strikes erupted everywhere: at the Konomensky factory in Moscow at the beginning of September [9], in the textile factory Khalturinskaia, a 5,000-strong workplace where there was a solid one-day strike. Again in Moscow workers started to demand real elections, a wage rise, etc. [10] There were numerous reports of Trotskyist intervention in workers' struggles. In May and June 1928 leaflets were issued dealing with the grain requisitions, the self-criticism campaign, the question of inner-party democracy, and demanding the reintegration of the Bolshevik-Leninists into the party and an end to repression. They called: 'Communist workers ... take matters into your own hands ... Fight for decent living conditions ... Intervene in the meetings ... Proletarians of Moscow, we have always been at the forefront of the revolutionary struggle, we must not wait any longer.' [11]

The reports, which the Moscow Oppositionist group regularly sent to Trotsky, are full of workers' remarks such as: 'Was the Opposition not right to suggest an obligatory tax on rich peasants?', 'Was the expulsion from the party of thousands of devoted comrades just, while today we see that they were mostly right?'

In the face of the campaign of the party leadership against the Left Opposition whom they accused of wanting to form a parallel organisation, some even said: 'Let it organise – then we will see which party is really on the side of the working class, for the existing party is starting to have a policy which is not ours.' In Krasnaia Presnia many remarked that the Left Opposition was right in its criticism. [12]

After the July Plenum of the Central Committee the activity of the Left Opposition accelerated. This activity took many shapes. It was above all open intervention. In the factories Oppositionists spoke at open assemblies. According to an incomplete report, they did this in twelve Moscow factories during the report of the Moscow Soviet on its activities in August and September (notably in the Hammer,

Morze and Krasnikavchuk factories). They campaigned against the repression of the Left Opposition, submitting resolutions demanding the return of those deported. During a meeting of the party in the Zamorskozhe neighbourhood in Moscow they obtained 170 votes for their motion, while 270 voted against. [13]

The Left Oppositionists intervened in the self-criticism campaign which they denounced as 'a smokescreen to detract the attention of the workers away from the essential issues,' and put a proposal for genuine criticism. They also made concrete proposals, demanding the rescinding of the government decision to increase vodka production and authorise its sale in working class areas. They participated actively in the campaign to re-elect factory committees, and to reintroduce collective bargaining. During the report of the Moscow Soviet at the Krasnaia Obrona factory, Nefel, an expelled Oppositionist, intervened as follows: 'It is the incompetence of the leadership which is at the root of the difficulties. The effective people have been deported.' He submitted a resolution in which he condemned the work of the Moscow Soviet as unsatisfactory and its policy as 'anti-working class'. This resolution gained 72 votes out of 256 present. [14]

In some meetings workers demanded that the speaking time for Oppositionists should be prolonged and voted against their expulsion from the party. The bureaucrats could no longer systematically stop them from speaking as they had done in 1927. At the Pervii Mai tea-making factory, which the authorities had decided to close down, the workers elected a committee led by an Oppositionist to conduct an examination of the situation. The workers of this factory, which employed 800 people, thought there had been mismanagement, and the party officials were incapable of answering their questions. At the Tihnsk factory, two Oppositionists were elected to union office by the day team. At the Bogorod tannery, a Bolshevik-Leninist was elected to the factory committee and quickly relieved of his functions by management. At the Lenin factory at Ekaterinoslav, an Oppositionist was elected to the union bureau of a workshop employing 1000 workers. [15]

Apart from this open intervention by Oppositionists – whether already expelled from the party or not – the Opposition also launched ‘clandestine’ operations in public meetings. It published and distributed ‘information bulletins’. Three can be found in the Harvard archives dating from June to October, each of many pages, despite the material difficulties of publication. Circulars for party members, and leaflets directed at the whole of the working class were widely distributed. These leaflets were either printed or typed on a typewriter and roneographed. In Kharkov the GPU seized eight pounds of documents and three pounds of typographical material in a dwelling which the Left Opposition used as a printshop. The documents were distributed in very different ways: for instance, an Oppositionist tells of how, on the evening of an official demonstration of 120,000 people, in the Park of Culture, near the stage where many people had gathered, the light suddenly went off and leaflets started flying. They were signed ‘The Bolshevik-Leninist Opposition of the VKP’ and addressed to all members of the party, workers and youth, demanding the release and return of the deported comrades. The leaflets were immediately snatched up. On 9 September the Left Opposition produced a leaflet announcing that Trotsky was ill and demanding his return to Moscow. This leaflet caused a lot of commotion. In Moscow it was distributed in workplaces, on the streets, in cinemas, in workplace canteens. It was pasted on the walls of workers’ quarters, and even distributed in local meetings held by the party. At the Krasnaya Presnya factory it was workers – whether party members or not – who organised its distribution; they asked for large quantities. The leaflet was received everywhere with great emotion. Workers would meet in small groups to discuss it, asking Oppositionists for more details and protesting when members of the party tore them up. Worried Communist officials seized the leaflets and expelled Oppositionists. In the AMO, Armatura and Kauchuk factories, it was again non-Oppositionist workers who distributed the leaflets, handing them out or posting them. At the No. 6 Bread Factory, the party branch asked a worker to hand them the leaflets he was distributing. The GPU searched his house, to no

avail. The other workers replied: 'We will give them to you after we have read them'. [16]

The Left Opposition was sufficiently well organised to be in a position to act quickly. In Kiev, for example, a leaflet was distributed on 20 October, in protest at the arrests that had occurred only a few hours earlier. Two more leaflets were later issued, one reporting a workers' demonstration which followed the announcement of the arrests, the other reproducing the addresses of those imprisoned and their threat to go on hunger strike. We can find another example at the Aviakhima No.1 Factory in Moscow, where the Left Opposition managed to inform the workers of the sacking of Novikov, 'one of the organisers of the struggle of the party members against Kolchak', a Bolshevik-Leninist employed in that factory who was held in high esteem by the workers.

Another leaflet was particularly important – the one the Left Opposition published on the occasion of the anniversary of the October Revolution. This leaflet, of which 10,000 were produced, bore the words, 'Composed and printed by Bolshevik-Leninist printers'. It was distributed on 7 November on the route of the demonstration and near the official platform in Red Square. It was also posted on factory walls. [17]

A report sent to Trotsky gives us a glimpse of the state of his forces in October 1928: in the Ukraine, there were groups in Kharkov, Kiev, Ekaterinoslav, Zaporozhze, Odessa, Nikolaev, Kremenchuk. In Krasnoiarsk, it had links with all three factories. It had dug roots also in the Donbass, a region of massive industrialisation, in which there were no Oppositionists prior to the Fifteenth Party Congress (December 1927). In Ekaterinoslav the Left Opposition grew from 100 to 220 members. 99 percent of the Oppositionists there were workers, most working in large factories. [18]

The Left Opposition made a breakthrough also in the industrial belt of the centre of Russia (Tula, Ivanovo-Voznessensk), as well as in Dnepropetrovsk and Saratov.

There were groups re-emerging in the Caucasus. For instance in Tiflis the group managed to keep in contact with the rest of the Left

Opposition, even after a new wave of arrests in June deprived it of all the Old Bolsheviks and of the person in charge of contacts. Baku saw similar developments. There was also an important group in Leningrad, which notably included Aleksandr Lvovna Sokolovskaya, Trotsky's first wife. [19]

### **Deep Crisis in the Left Opposition**

A NUMBER of factors brought about a deep crisis in the Left Opposition in 1929. First there was a decline in the combativity and consciousness of the working class. As we have mentioned, the composition of the working class changed radically during the massive industrialisation drive of the First Five-Year Plan. As Donald Filtzer explains:

... the old, inherited proletariat, a genuine working class formed under Russian capitalism and still intact at the beginning of Stalinist industrialisation, found itself swamped by millions of new workers, largely ex-peasants, with little tradition of industrial life and no experience or self-consciousness of themselves as a working class. [20]

In the 'thirties workers from time to time defended themselves by

collective action: strikes, demonstrations, industrial slow-downs. But at no time did there involve the large mass of workers or pose a serious political threat to the regime, which reacted sharply to any challenge from below. Thus for the mass of workers individual responses were the only avenues open, namely high labour turnover, absenteeism, insubordination, alcoholism, damage to machinery, physical attacks on lower-level management and shock workers, defective output and an indifferent attitude towards work. [21]

In addition to the objective, economic and social factors that weakened the power of the Left Opposition, there was another, far



more immediate and direct factor: a deep ideological crisis brought about by Stalin's 'move to the left' – towards collectivisation and massive industrialisation. We shall deal with this now.

### **Trotskyists in Prisons and Isolators**

AFTER THE Fifteenth Party Congress in December 1927, when Trotsky was expelled from the party and deported to Alma Ata, a great number of his supporters were imprisoned and deported. Trotsky estimated the number of those in prison and deported at the time to be 11,000. [22] Another estimate was given by Natalia Sedova. She wrote:

From figures published by the Central Control Commission of the Party and from our own inquiries we were able to put the number of Opposition supporters arrested, deported or imprisoned in 1928 at a minimum of eight thousand. [23]

The leading Oppositionists in exile were engaged in very intensive intellectual activity. Trotsky, in his memorial article to his son, 'Leon (Lyova) Sedov', written on 20 February 1938, described the ideological life of the Opposition in prisons and places of exile ten years earlier:

The ideological life of the Opposition seethed like a cauldron at the time. It was the year of the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International. The Moscow packets arrived with scores of letters, articles, theses, from comrades known and unknown. During the first few months, before the sharp change in the conduct of the GPU, we even received a great many letters by the official mail service from different places of exile ...

Between April and October we received approximately 1,000 political letters and documents and about 700 telegrams. In this same period we sent out 550 telegrams and not fewer than 800

political letters, including a number of substantial works, such as the *Criticism of the Draft Programme of the Communist International* and others. [24]

Into this dynamic political life came the shock of the Stalin turn. It brought an unease into the ranks of the Opposition. To begin with, the Oppositionists congratulated themselves on the change, in which they saw a vindication of their own policies; but at the same time some of them felt that they were robbed of their ideas and slogans and deprived of their political *raison d'être*. At the beginning, the impact of the Stalin turn on the Oppositionists was limited. They, following Trotsky, believed that the change in Stalin's policy was a 'temporary manoeuvre'. And so long as Stalin was still hesitating – as for example with his retreat under pressure at the July 1928 Plenum of the Central Committee – they could hold to this position. Therefore the capitulation of Oppositionists was on a very small scale. This changed after April 1929, when it became clear that Stalin's change of policy was not short-term, was not a manoeuvre.

Shortly after 15 February 1928, when the Central Committee introduced emergency measures against the kulaks, the first group of Opposition leaders capitulated. It was made up of Iu.L. Piatakov, V.A. Antonov-Ovseenko, N.N. Krestinsky and a few others.

These defections by and large met with contempt among the Oppositionists, but seeds of doubt were already being sown.

Already in March, E.A. Preobrazhensky, in exile in the Urals, made a conciliatory statement towards Stalin. It was quite cautious. In a document of 23 April 1928, entitled, *The Left Turn in the Countryside and its Prospects*, Preobrazhensky stated that the emergency measures of 15 February were the 'response to the offensive launched by the kulaks and to the rise in the class struggle in Europe.' At this stage, Preobrazhensky argued, there were two alternatives: the possibility of a right-wing policy being re-established – 'quickly striking down the left-wing current', backing down in the face of the 'grain strikers', which would lead to a rise in cereal prices at the expense of the workers' living conditions. This possibility was quite distant. The measures which had already been taken, which

already terrorized the kulaks, would make this improbable: it would be very difficult, even impossible, to restore the kulaks' confidence without a 'brutal turn to the right', to which even 'the most right-wing among the right-wingers ... could not resolve themselves.' The other possible alternative, and the most likely, was that of a deepening of the left wing course, started with the emergency measures, which were a first step towards 'a return to Leninist agrarian policy', which would lean on 'an upsurge of the poor and middle peasants against the capitalist elements.'

In the second case, Preobrazhensky argued, the Left Opposition would have to 'put itself collectively at the head of the majority of the party, no matter which idiocies and insults are heaped on it.' The Opposition had displayed superior foresight: its ideas were 'reflected in Stalin's new policy as in a distorting minor.' The present crisis would not have been as grave had the party acted on the Opposition's advice earlier. The Opposition must still go on advocating accelerated industrialisation; and it must call as insistently as ever for proletarian democracy. However, continue Preobrazhensky, although the Opposition had correctly interpreted the needs of the time, it was unable to meet those needs in practice. Stalin and his supporters were taking charge of the practical tasks; they were the agents of historic necessity. The Opposition had exaggerated the danger from Stalinist connivance with the kulaks. It was therefore the duty of the Opposition to modify its attitude and to contribute to a rapprochement with the Stalinist faction.

Preobrazhensky suggested that the Left Opposition should draw up a statement to this effect. This document, moreover, should 'neither demand the reintegration of the Bolshevik-Leninists', nor mention the repressions. The right to meet would be requested from the Central Committee for the purpose of finalising the document. He also suggested that Rakovsky or Trotsky should put forward the request for the meeting. [25]

Similar ideas came from another Left Oppositionist, Aleksandr G. Ishchenko, who in a letter to Trotsky in April 1928 wrote that Stalin's left turn opened the door for the Opposition to play a decisive role: 'The situation opens up the possibility of a concrete action for

reinstatement in the Party and to avoid reinstatement being put off indefinitely. A prolonged stay of the Opposition outside the Party would be dangerous for the dictatorship of the proletariat.' [26]

Not everyone in the Left Opposition agreed. On the contrary, the overwhelming majority rejected Preobrazhensky's approach. Thus on 4 April I.T. Smilga wrote to Trotsky: 'The present twist cannot be thought of as a consistent left turn. The terror that the leadership has unleashed on the Left Opposition cannot seriously bring about a solution that will correct the party's line.' [27]

The pressure, or rather inducement, for Preobrazhensky to capitulate received a new boost on 15 May. The Central Committee issued an appeal to local party organisations to intensify the work of 'socialist construction' in the countryside, the goal being the liquidation of the kulaks. [28] This spurred Preobrazhensky to move closer to Stalin. At the end of May he wrote to Trotsky that the Left Opposition had overestimated the retrogression of Stalin's policy:

We based our tactics in 1927 on the worst case variant. We gambled on pessimism. We must now have a different tactic, we must take a chance on optimism. If Thermidor has not yet occurred, we should rejoice at that and seek a rapprochement with the Party. Otherwise the Left Opposition will turn into a little 'sect of true Leninists'. [29]

A few days later Preobrazhensky asserted that it was wrong to claim, as Trotsky did, that it was the activity of the Opposition that had brought about the turn. Every shred of evidence showed that it was the result of what the kulaks had set in motion. The core of Preobrazhensky's thinking was revealed in his belief that 'the capacity of the leadership majority to find a way back to Leninist politics has been factually proved by its struggle against the kulaks.' [30]

In May the Trotskyists in the exile colonies discussed Preobrazhensky's proposal as embodied in his *The Left Turn in the Countryside and its Prospects* and overwhelmingly rejected it. The great majority was in very irreconcilable mood and sceptical of the

'left turn'. They saw Stalin as the defender of the kulaks and agreed with Trotsky that the 'left turn' was a short-term event. Stalin was bound to open the door to the Right.

On 16 May 1928, V.B. Eltsin wrote to Trotsky from Koma whence he had been deported, that 'centrism is twice as dangerous when it plays at left politics.' [31] In June, in a circular letter, Eltsin criticised Preobrazhensky and Radek sharply, the latter having come under the former's influence. He accused them, because of their 'high functionary's' nature, of seeing only 'the struggles at the top'; of forgetting that which is the foundation of the 'degeneration of the Party and its slide to the right' – the ebbing of the activity of the working masses. Only a powerful upsurge of the international workers' movement and an increase in the activity and defensive capacity of Russian workers could breathe fresh life into the politics of the proletariat and the Russian party.

According to Eltsin, it was a mistake to isolate 'the economic measures from more general conditions', as did Preobrazhensky, and to 'judge in terms of what is written in *Pravda* and not in terms of objective results.' Eltsin rejected 'conciliation and combinations at the top which can only sow illusions'. Eltsin concludes: 'Our task is to combat the danger from the right and unmask centrism today so that tomorrow we have the awakened working masses behind us.' [32]

Rakovsky, like Eltsin, also repudiated Preobrazhensky. He argued that the Opposition should lean on the left zigzag and on workers' activity so as to transform the zigzag into a real 'left policy.' But this could not be done through an alliance with the leadership, only through 'working with the rank and file.' He criticized Preobrazhensky's practical proposals with the retort that 'reinstatement today can only be accomplished at the cost of capitulation': the required declaration should be addressed to the workers and not to the leaders. [33]

Trotsky found it necessary to clarify his position *vis-à-vis* Stalin's 'left turn'. In a circular letter of 9 May 1928 he wrote:

The decisions on domestic matters (in regard to the kulak, etc.) and the decisions of the recent ECCI represent an inconsistent

and contradictory step; but all the same they are unquestionably a step in our direction, that is, toward the correct path. This must be stated plainly and distinctly. But, in the first place, we must not overstate the size of this step. After the experiences we have gone through, we must be more cautious than ever when a turn comes, giving no unnecessary credit in advance. In the second place, we must briefly explain the causes, the mechanics, and the ideology behind this turn.

As to the question of the origin of the turn,

who created it? Surely we did, as 'the only conscious expression of the unconscious process'. [34]

Trotsky cautioned against the tendency to think that the kulak question could be settled just in the countryside, instead of through industrialisation, correct leadership of the International, and training of cadres. His practical conclusions were clear:

Are we ready to support the present official turn? We are, unconditionally, and with all our forces and resources. Do we think that this turn increases the chances of reforming the party without great upheavals? We do. Are we ready to assist in precisely this process? We are, completely and to the utmost of our ability.

... In our letter to the Comintern, do we demand our reinstatement in the Party? Absolutely. Do we promise to observe discipline and not form a faction? We do. Now, with the indicated official change of policy, one we helped bring about, we have many more possibilities and chances of keeping our promise than we had half a year or a year ago. [35]

In letters to the deportees Aleksandr Belobrodov (23 May) and Rafail Yudin (25 May) Trotsky repeated that the Left Opposition was absolutely correct about the perspectives of development of the

USSR. The fact that Stalin was stealing the Opposition's clothes should not dishonour the Oppositionists, but on the contrary should hearten them: Stalin would not be able to carry a consistent policy against the Right. Consequently,

... the party will still have need of us, and very great need at that. Don't be nervous that 'everything will be done without us'; don't tear at yourself and others for nothing; study, wait, watch closely, and don't let your political line get covered with the rust of personal irritation at the slanderers and tricksters. [36]

In July 1928 it looked as if the old perspectives had proved correct. The Centre (Stalin) capitulated to the Right (Bukharin). Stalin's ascendancy appeared to have been only a fleeting one: the fundamental struggle was going to be between the Trotskyists and the Bukharinists. And so on 22 July Trotsky wrote in an article entitled *The July Plenum and the Right Danger*:

The July plenum of the Central Committee marks Rykov's first victory over Stalin, gained to be sure with the assistance of Stalin himself. The essential idea of Rykov's report is that the shift to the left that occurred in February was only an episode due to extraordinary circumstances, that this episode ought to be buried and forgotten ...

... The policy of raising the price of grain ... constitutes, and can only constitute, the beginning of a deep and perhaps decisive turn to the right. Legal barriers along the road to the right, such as the restrictions on renting out land and hiring farm labor, will be abolished with a stroke of the bureaucratic pen, along with the monopoly of foreign trade – unless the rights run up against the iron wall of resistance by the proletarian vanguard ...

... the right wing has thrown down the gauntlet to the October Revolution. We must understand that. We must take up the

gauntlet. We must immediately and with all our might strike the first blow against the right.

... Our main task now is to prevent the triumph of the right wing  
...

We say to our party and to the Communist International: Rykov is openly beginning to surrender the October Revolution to the enemy classes. Stalin is standing now on one foot, now on the other. He is beating a retreat before Rykov and firing at the left ... The party needs the reinstatement of the Opposition in its ranks. [37]

Oblivious to the qualitatively different role Stalin played in 1928 to that he played in 1923-27, the Left Opposition could not but underestimate the independence of the state and party bureaucracy not only from the proletariat, but also from the kulaks and NEPmen.

Trotsky was still convinced that the Stalinist faction would not be able to extricate itself and would be compelled to beg the Left Opposition to come to its rescue. In a letter of 30 August 1928 to S.A. Ashkenazy, a member of the Democratic Centralist Group and now a deportee in Samarkand, Trotsky wrote:

... these comrades are wrong who ... think ... that the July plenum has put the finishing touches on the relationship between the center and the right. No, the important disputes are still ahead, and they are bound to come to the surface. The law of zigzags to the right and to the left remains in force, but the pace of these zigzags is more likely to speed up than slow down ... The party should know that, as before, we are ready to support every step, even an irresolute, half-hearted one, in the direction of the proletarian line, while of course maintaining our full ideological independence and critical ruthlessness in relation to all half-heartedness and flabbiness, not to mention bureaucratic-apparatus-type trickery. [38]



In a letter to Trotsky on 2 June Preobrazhensky suggested that the Left Opposition should appeal to the forthcoming Sixth Congress of the Comintern, explaining that many of the differences between the Opposition and the party majority were outlived as a result of the left turn. This appeal should end with the following words: 'We wish to make peace with the party majority on the basis of the new course. We ask the conference to reinstate us in the party so that we can fulfil our duties loyally, without factional activity.' [39]

Let us now turn to Radek, who shortly would join Preobrazhensky on the road to capitulation. At first he was a vociferous opponent. On 10 May 1928 Radek wrote to Preobrazhensky from Tobolsk: 'I reject Zinovievism and Piatakovism, as I reject Dostoievskyism. Doing violence to their consciousness, they recant. *It is impossible to help the working class by falsehood.* Those who remain must speak the truth.' On 24 June Radek wrote to Trotsky: 'Nobody can propose we deny our views. Such a denial is most laughable, when the historical progress demonstrated brilliantly their correctness.'

On 3 July Radek wrote to the capitulator Vardin: '*Zinoviev and Kamenev have recanted, if you please, in order to help the party, but the only thing they dare to do is to write articles against the Opposition. This is the logic of their position, as the penitent must prove his repentance.*'

At the time of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, Radek and Smilga elaborated their own theses in which they stated: 'Gravely mistaken are those, who like Piatakov, hurry *on the path of burying their past through betrayal.*'

On 16 September Radek wrote to the exiles in Kolpashev: 'When Stalin demands from us that we acknowledge our "mistakes" and forget his mistakes – this is a formula demanding our capitulation as a special tendency and our subordination to the centre. On such terms he is ready to pardon us. We cannot accept this condition.' [40]

But suddenly, in October 1928, Radek suggested an appeal to the Congress of the Comintern, arguing that in practice there was very little distance between the Left Opposition and the Stalinist leadership in the USSR. The Left Opposition 'has always said that

the Party has enough proletarian forces to correct its mistakes', and 'fights to reform it'. It believes that the risk of Thermidor has been exaggerated. The campaign of self-criticism was proof of this. Radek therefore considered that 'the movement started by the Party must be supported by the Left Opposition', and that in order to achieve this, the Left Opposition should be reintegrated into the party; the Left Opposition would submit to its discipline.

If history shows that some of the Party leaders with whom yesterday we clashed swords are better than the viewpoints they defended, nobody would find greater satisfaction in this than we shall. [41]

To distance himself from Trotsky, Radek, in an essay written at the same time, entitled *Development and Significance of the Slogan 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat'* concentrated his attack on Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution: in particular this theory did not fit China and India. [42] (It was in answer to Radek's essay that Trotsky began to write the little book that was finally published under the title *The Permanent Revolution*).

Trotsky, in a circular letter of 24 June, vigorously attacked Preobrazhensky's move towards capitulation. Quoting Sosnovsky and Rakovsky, Trotsky wrote:

Sosnovsky approaches all these questions from the point of view of the party regime. Rakovsky insists on this most tirelessly. And right now this is the only correct and reliable criterion. Not because the party regime is the independent source of all other phenomena and processes. No, to a large degree the party regime is a derivative factor. But at the same time it has a huge – and at certain moments, decisive – *independent* significance. Here, as everywhere, are dialectics ... since the party is the *sole instrument* by which we can consciously affect social processes, for us the criterion of the seriousness and depth of the turn is first of all the refraction of this turn within the party. [43]

The July plenum stopped the slide to capitulation of Preobrazhensky and Radek in its tracks. It looked as if the Right, Bukharin, had won. We have already quoted what Trotsky wrote of the July plenum. I shall repeat one point:

The right has issued entirely victorious from its first skirmish with the center, after four or five months of left' politics.

The July plenum of the Central Committee marks Rykov's first victory over Stalin, gained to be sure with the assistance of Stalin himself.

The 'shift to the left that occurred in February was only an episode due to extraordinary circumstances,' and now the episode has been 'buried' [44] 'Stalin, the vanquished' made an 'impotent speech'!

Similar arguments were made by other leaders of the Opposition. Thus L.S. Sosnovsky, in a letter to Trotsky, declared that the turn to the left was at an end: 'The anti-kulak course was a disagreeable outburst which they tried to forget'. [45] And F.N. Dingelstedt wrote on 8 August: 'The illusions of the left course have long dissipated. Is there a 180 degree turn?' [46]

### **An Interesting Episode**

ON 11 JULY 1928 Bukharin secretly met Kamenev. Bukharin was very nervous; he was terrified of Stalin. Together with Sokolnikov he arrived stealthily at Kamenev's house. Kamenev recounts:

[Bukharin's] look was extremely troubled and tormented. With great agitation, talking for an hour without any interruption on my part, he recounted the following. (This record is as accurate as possible).

Bukharin said:

The differences between us and Stalin are many times more serious than all the differences we had with you ... for several weeks I have not spoken with Stalin. He is an unprincipled intriguer who subordinates everything to the preservation of his own power. He changes his theories depending on whom he wants to get rid of at the moment ... He will cut our throats.

Bukharin begged Kamenev to tell no one of the meeting.

There is no reason anyone should know of our meeting. Don't talk with me by phone, because my phones are tapped. The GPU follows me and the GPU is watching you. I would like us to keep each other informed, but not through secretaries or intermediaries ...

Kamenev's general impression was:

He [Bukharin] is extremely upset. At times his lips twitch from nervousness. Sometimes he gives the impression of a man who knows he is doomed ...

General impression, more than anything, is a sense of doom. His phrase: I wonder if all our 'fuss' is just masturbation. Sometimes I say to Yefim [Tseitlin, Bukharin's secretary], Aren't things hopeless for us? (1) If the country perishes, we perish. (2) If the country pulls through, Stalin will make a quick about-face and we will still perish. What to do? What can you do when you are dealing with such an opponent: a Genghis Khan; the low cultural level of the Central Committee. [47]

Trotsky responded favourably to Bukharin's appeal. In a circular letter entitled *A heart-to-heart Talk with a Well-Meaning Party Member*, written on 12 September (the 'well-meaning party member' was a Bukharinist who had written to Trotsky), Trotsky wrote that on major issues of policy the gulf between the Left Opposition and the

Bukharinists was as wide as ever, but, in the interests of restoring party democracy, Trotsky was ready to cooperate with the Right.

Preparations for the Sixteenth Congress should be organized in such a way that, unlike the Fifteenth, Fourteenth, and Thirteenth, it would be a congress of the party and not of the factional apparatus. Before the congress, the party should hear all the factions into which it has been splintered by the regime of the last few years ... Since there is still a good way to go before achieving a true liberation of the party, it is necessary to introduce the secret ballot into all elections leading up to the Sixteenth Congress.

These are strictly practical proposals. On the basis of these proposals we would even be willing to negotiate with the rights, because the implementation of these elementary preconditions of party principle would give the proletarian core the opportunity to really call to account not only the rights but also the centrists, i.e., the main support and protection for opportunism in the party. [48]

This statement of Trotsky caused astonishment among the Trotskyists who for a long time had been arguing that a bloc with the Stalinist Centre – under certain conditions – was allowed, but with the Bukharinist right – never. To allay his adherents' unease Trotsky wrote another article *On the Topics of the Day* (December 1928). He repeated that he still viewed the Bukharinist Right rather than the Stalinist Centre as the chief political antagonist. He did not propose any bloc with Bukharin on issues of policy. He was ready to 'negotiate with Bukharin in the same way that duellists parley through their seconds over the rules and regulations by which they will abide.'

We are prepared to conclude an 'agreement' with any section of the party in any place, on any particular matter, for even a partial restoration of the party statutes. In relation to the rights and

centrists as political factions, this means that we are ready to conclude an agreement with them about the conditions for an irreconcilable struggle. That's all. [49]

Nothing came of the idea of collaboration between Trotskyists and Bukharinists in the interests of restoring party democracy. [1\*]

Although nothing came of the idea of common action between the Trotskyists and Bukharinists, the episode itself throws a very searching light on Trotsky's whole analysis of Stalin's centrism. As we have previously explained, the concept of Stalin's centrism fitted the period 1923-27, but no later. Now Stalin was far to the right of Bukharin. Bukharin was a right-wing Bolshevik, Stalin the annihilator of Bolshevism.

### **Galloping Capitulation**

AS ALREADY mentioned, at the end of 1928 and beginning of 1929, Stalin relaunched the drive toward collectivisation and industrialisation, formalised at the Sixteenth Party Conference (April 1929) which launched the Five-Year Plan. This accelerated the capitulations among the Oppositionists.

In April, Aleksandr G. Ishchenko, together with another 37 Oppositionists addressed the party conference, stating that the measures taken by the party leadership proved that it remained Leninist and undermined the predictions of the Left Opposition about its slide to the right. Thermidor had not happened, and the Left Opposition had been wrong. Ishchenko considered that the Bolshevik-Leninists 'can get out of the impasse by addressing themselves to the Party, by going back into the Party and helping it to construct socialism.' [51] The 38 Oppositionists were followed by a series of others: *Pravda* enumerated some additional sixty during the month of April.

On 5 April 1929 Preobrazhensky issued a statement *To All Comrades of the Opposition*. He recalled how formerly two variants for the evolution of the regime had been anticipated, and that in 1927

the Opposition had bet on the worse. But it was wrong. The present policies of the party and government leadership regarding industrialisation and collectivisation were the same as those advocated by the Opposition. For Preobrazhensky these measures in the decisive domain of the economy marked a real turn to the left which would swing the party and the leadership onto the socialist path. There were therefore practically no more differences between the Centre and the Left Opposition. The other issues – bureaucratisation, absence of democracy, pressure on the workers, repression against the Bolshevik-Leninists – all this was from now on secondary. Alas, Preobrazhensky complained, the comrades in the Opposition still behaved as though their forecasts about the drift to the right had come true. They were also not conscious of the immediate threat facing the Soviet regime: the tensions of spring 1929 could be compared with those which led to the Kronstadt uprising, when the regime was within a hair's breadth of extinction.

Preobrazhensky was not under the illusion that the reinstatement of members of the Opposition in the party was anything other than virtual surrender. He concluded that

Those of us who have fought in the ranks of the party for ten, twenty years or more, will return to it with very different feelings from those they had when they first joined. They will come back without their former enthusiasm, like men with broken hearts. They will not even possess the assurance that the Central Committee has agreed to reinstate them, no matter what the terms proposed ... Even if we are reinstated, we shall have to carry the responsibility for matters we have warned against and submit to methods we would not approve of ... If we are all reinstated, just as we are, we shall have to take our party card as we would a heavy cross. [52]

In May Preobrazhensky was allowed to travel to Moscow in order to try and make peace with the party leadership. At first he sought to obtain favourable terms for the Opposition as a whole – including the cessation of persecutions, a halt to deportations, rehabilitation of

party members victimised on charges of counter-revolutionary activity, and – last but not least – the rescinding of Trotsky's banishment. In June Radek and Smilga also obtained permission to return to Moscow to take part in the discussion.

It was during the long journey, when they stopped at the station at Ishin, that Radek made clear to a couple of Oppositionists he bumped into, how far he had moved towards Stalin.

Radek described the situation in apocalyptic terms:

The country is passing through another 1919. The situation in the Central Committee is catastrophic. Rightists and Centrists are getting ready to arrest one another. The Centre-Right bloc has broken up and there is a savage struggle against the Rightists. Their sixteen votes can double, triple ... There is no bread in Moscow. The discontent of the masses is growing and may degenerate into an uprising against Soviet power. We are on the eve of peasant insurrections. The situation obliges us to return to the party at all costs! The decision we make will flow from an appreciation of the general state of the party and the split in the Opposition, the objective of which is to be readmitted to the party.

Asked about his attitude to Trotsky, Radek replied that he had broken off all relations with him, and that he considered him a 'political enemy'.

When asked: 'Will you call for the repeal of Article 58?' of the Soviet Penal Code (providing for punishment of those engaged in counter-revolutionary activity against the Soviet state) Radek answered:

Under no circumstances. For those who will march with us it will be repealed in fact. But we will not repeal it for those who carry out destructive work in the party and organise the rising of the masses. We sent ourselves to jail and exile. The youth which has now joined the Opposition has nothing in common with the party and Bolshevism. It is no more than an anti-Soviet youth.



We must fight these people with all means. A third of the members will come with us, and those who will stay have nothing in common with Bolshevism.

With one phrase he swept away the objections of those astonished that he could consider denying the *Platform* of 1927.

Our platform has stood the test magnificently, and from being a document of struggle it has become the platform of the party. What have you to say against Kalinin's Thesis? Against the Five-Year Plan? [53]

As early as May 1929 Trotsky realised that a new wave of capitulations and vacillations had started. On 22 May he wrote a letter entitled *The Capitulators of the Third Wave*. (The first wave of capitulators was that of Zinoviev and Kamenev at the end of 1927, the second that of Piatakov, Antonov-Ovseenko and Krestinsky).

A revolution is a mighty devourer of people. Of the older generation there is an enormous percentage of desolate souls among the ruling majority – and no small percentage among the Oppositionists. The reaction is in full swing in the party and the Comintern, reflecting the general shift of class forces on a world scale. In such circumstances, withdrawals and capitulations inevitably become the norm. Bolshevism, from 1907 to 1910 and again from 1914 to 1917, experienced a whole series of such departures, splits, group and individual capitulations. Only by way of such self-cleansing and self-clarification was it able to grow and strengthen itself for the October victory. We are not in the least frightened by the withdrawal of comrades, even those with the most 'respected' names. By the example of their waverings we will teach steadfastness to the youth. [54]

On 14 June Trotsky wrote an article, *Tenacity! Tenacity! Tenacity!* in which he reiterated his argument that Stalin's 'left turn' was a shallow move resulting from the pressure of the Left Opposition.

The present crushing of the Right, sharp in form but superficial in content, in its turn is only a by-product of the policy of the Opposition. Bukharin is completely correct when he accuses Stalin of not having thought up a single word, but just used bits of the Opposition platform. What has produced the left twitch of the apparatus? Our attack, our irreconcilability, the growth of our influence, the courage of our cadres. If at the Fifteenth Congress we had committed harakiri along with Zinoviev, Stalin would have had no convincing reason to deny his own past and adorn himself with feathers plucked from the Opposition.

Trotsky ends the article with these words: 'Tenacity, tenacity, tenacity! – that is the slogan for the current period. And let the dead bury their dead.' [55]

Alas, Trotsky's courage and tenacity was not able to dam the massive wave of capitulations. Confidence in the ideas of the Opposition was undermined when it became clear that Stalin's course of collectivisation and industrialisation was not temporary. On 14 July *Pravda* published the capitulation statement of Radek, Preobrazhensky and Smilga:

We, the undersigned, declare our agreement with the political general line of the Party and our break with the Opposition ...

We believe that the policy of industrialisation of the country, translated into the concrete figures of the Five-Year Plan, is the programme for the construction of socialism and the consolidation of the class position of the proletariat. The carrying out of the Five-Year Plan solves the fundamental questions of the revolution in the present period, and that is why we believe it to be our Bolshevik duty to take an active part in the struggle for the implementation of the Plan.

We support the struggle against the kulaks, who over the last few years have carried out obstinate attacks against the economic position of the dictatorship of the proletariat. We

salute the policy of the large construction of state farms and collective farms, these levers for the economic transformation of agriculture.

... We support the fight against the Right which objectively reflects the discontent of the capitalists and petty bourgeois elements of the country against the offensive socialist policy carried by the party.

... We believe Leninism is the ideological basis for communism. We have nothing in common with the theory of permanent revolution of L.D. Trotsky. The development of the Russian and Chinese revolutions have demonstrated its inaptitude and inexactitude. To defend this theory is nothing other than to revise Leninism. Its practical application would lead the proletariat into isolating itself from its class allies and to defeat. [56]

To prove his loyalty, Preobrazhensky, in his first article published in *Pravda*, waxed lyrical about collectivisation.

The working masses in the countryside have been exploited for centuries. Now, after a chain of bloody defeats beginning with the peasant uprisings of the Middle Ages, their powerful movement for the first time in human history has a chance of victory.

... I said to myself, looking at this new village cemented together by the kolkhoz, 'they will not desert the kolkhoz; a year or two of economic success on the basis of the new system and this welding together of the village economy from below will compel the collective farmers to fight with machine guns like lions against all the forces of world imperialism.' [57]

Preobrazhensky went even further in prostrating himself before Stalin at the Seventeenth Party Congress (January-February 1934):

Did I anticipate collectivization? I did not ... Collectivization of the peasants is the greatest of our conquests ... You know that neither Marx nor Engels, who wrote a great deal about problems of socialism in the village, had any definite idea how the transformation would come about. You know that Engels thought that this would be a fairly lengthy evolutionary process. In this question, what was needed was the greater far-sightedness of Comrade Stalin, his great courage in the formulation of new tasks, the greatest hardness in carrying them out, the deepest understanding of the epoch and of the relationship of class forces ... This was the greatest of the overturns (*perevorotov*) known to history. [58]

The impact of the capitulation of Radek, Preobrazhensky and Smilga on the other Oppositionists was very serious indeed. E.B. Solntsev wrote to Rakovsky:

What I was writing to you a month ago as a possible perspective has today become reality. Catastrophe befell. Panic and confusion rule. People are searching for individual solutions to the situation. Internal reports which already then were far from being good, have now become truly insufferable everywhere ... Complete ideological and moral degeneration: no one trusts anyone, no one believes anyone. An atmosphere of mutual suspicion has been created ... a distancing and isolation from each other. Everyone fears being betrayed ... Thus each tries to slide themselves into the party on the backs of others. *The dam is open ...*

In addition to the 400 Oppositionists who joined Radek, Preobrazhensky and Smilga in the act of capitulation, another 612 left the Opposition individually or in small groups. [59]

To stop the haemorrhage from the Opposition, on 22 August 1929, Kh. Rakovsky, V. Kossior and M. Okhudzhava issued a *Declaration* to the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission. This *Declaration* in a way revealed the real dilemma

facing the Left Opposition in relation to Stalin's Five-Year Plan, industrialisation and collectivisation. It was against capitulation to Stalin, but it used arguments which were very consonant with his policies. The *Declaration* stated:

We consider the fight to implement the five-year plan as the most serious conflict to take place since the Civil War ... Fulfilment of the targets set will significantly strengthen the position of the proletariat in its struggle with the internal and external hostile environments.

While practical implementation of the Five-Year Plan was criticised, basic support was given to the main thrust of the policy.

The proletariat and broad working masses can be *genuinely* involved in the five-year plan for industrialization *only if there is continuous improvement in their material position.*

Together with the party, we recognize the necessity of the struggle to increase labour discipline and against workshop, localist and inward-looking moods among the workers ...

Together with the majority of the party, we recognize that the development of collective and state farms is an effective means of overcoming agrarian capitalism and introducing into agriculture the socialist form of production.

But the collective farms would not guarantee the weakening of the power of the kulaks. On the contrary:

We consider that admitting the rich peasants to the collective farms brings into them a disruptive element and constitutes an attempt to apply the false theory of the kulak 'growing into' socialism.

The rich peasants are again trying to do what they failed at during the Civil War – to bring down the proletarian dictatorship. This time they are trying to do so in conditions that are much more favourable for them ...

We consider that the task set by the Sixteenth Party Conference of *struggle with the domination of the rich peasants can be fulfilled in practice only through the organization of local unions of poor peasants.*

Inner-party democracy was crucial.

In conditions of capitalist encirclement the dictatorship of the proletariat is exercised through the Communist Party with the aid of the trade unions. For a long time to come a significant proportion of power will necessarily be concentrated in the hands of the party and its leadership. The party must be an *elected power and a power whose officials can be replaced and must be under the vigilant control and free criticism of the entire party.*

Further, the incompatibility of ‘Socialism in one country’ with a consistent carrying through of revolutionary policy was underlined.

We consider ... *that the complete organization of socialist production is possible only on an international scale.*

Finally, the *Declaration* stated:

We have set out in this declaration all the important questions on which the opinion of the opposition coincides with the opinion of the majority of the party and at the same time have not concealed from the latter and its leadership the disagreements that remain. It is the direct duty of every Bolshevik-Leninist to give the party and the Central Committee full and unconditional assistance in carrying out the plans for socialist construction by

participating directly in the construction and by helping the party organs to overcome the difficulties that stand in the way.

... The new circumstances must lead to a softening of the bitterness that has arisen in relations between the Leninist opposition and the party leadership. This bitterness arose as a result of our own actions in the period when the policy of new socialist construction was only in formation and as a result of the repression launched against the opposition by the leadership.

This bitterness was particularly strengthened by the expulsion from the Soviet Union of L.D. Trotsky, an act which we consider to be the greatest political mistake of the party leadership. We declare that from our side we will strive to eliminate bitterness in relations with the party leadership, and will appeal to the Central Committee, Central Control Committee and the party as a whole to make it easy for us to return to the party by freeing the Bolshevik-Leninists, removing Article 58 from the exiles and bringing L.D. Trotsky back from exile ...

We consider that the existence of factions among communists, irrespective of whether they are inside the party or outside its legal boundaries, is always harmful. It threatens the party with splits, injures its authority in the eyes of the working masses and weakens the foundations of the proletarian dictatorship ... We declare that we are entirely prepared to repudiate factional methods of struggle and to submit completely to the party constitution and to party discipline, which guarantees every member of the party the right to defend his communist views.

[60]

When the editors of *Biulleten Oppozitsii* published the *Declaration*, they added a note stating that by mid-September some 500 Oppositionists, scattered through 75 exile colonies and special prisons, had declared support for it. [61]

When the *Declaration* reached Trotsky on 22 September 1929, he reacted by writing a comment on it, that while supporting it, still recorded a certain unease. [2\*] He appended his signature to the *Declaration* because it was 'in no way equivocal', although it was 'moderate'.

... it is absolutely clear that ... we thought it possible and obligatory for us to maintain our position inside the framework of a united party ... our fidelity to Lenin's party and to the October Revolution remained unshakable.

Trotsky still argued that to refuse to sign the Declaration meant wrongly admitting:

that Thermidor is an accomplished fact, the party is a corpse, and the road to the dictatorship of the proletariat lies through a new revolution. Although this opinion has been attributed to us dozens of times, we have nothing in common with it. That is why the declaration of August 22 shows itself to be a natural stage on the political road of the Opposition.

Trotsky acknowledged that with the 'left turn' a new situation had arisen:

... the formal break between the Right and the center, the shift of the official leadership to the left, and the extensive use of the ideas and slogans of our platform in the struggle against the Right should – arguing purely theoretically – facilitate immensely the reconstitution of the unity of the party on a Leninist foundation.

However Stalin's adoption of the Opposition's policy was fortuitous, or merely tactical.

The fact that many of the slogans, ideas, and formulations of our platform have now officially become party property in no way



prevents the authors and defenders of that same platform from being in prison and exile ...

The leadership maintains and even reinforces repression because the coincidence of the many extremely important practical measures it has taken in its present policy with the slogans and formulations of our platform in no way removes for it the dissimilarity in the theoretical principles from which the leadership and the Opposition set off in examining the problems of the day. To put it in other words, the leadership, even after having absorbed officially a good number of our tactical deductions, still maintains the strategic principles from which yesterday's right-center tactic emerged.

Stalin carried out the Five-Year Plan within the framework of 'Socialism in One Country', while the Opposition viewed the building of socialism in the context of international revolution. In a letter to leading Oppositionists in the USSR Trotsky wrote:

You are absolutely correct to point out that the five-year plan of socialist construction can become a very important stage in the development of the October Revolution. In terms that are measured but not equivocal, you point out the conditions that would be needed for it but which do not exist as yet. Rejecting, further, the theory of socialism in one country, you say in the same connection that, even if the indispensable internal conditions existed and the five-year plan were realised in fact, the fundamental problem of the October Revolution – *the transformation of bourgeois society into a socialist society* – cannot in any case be fully resolved without a parallel development of the international revolution, and without its victories in the advanced capitalist countries. [62]

In another comment on the Declaration, written on 25 September, Trotsky again showed his unease.

Certainly a number of critical observations could be made concerning the text of the declaration. I have presented some of these, in *positive and constructive form*, in my open letter. It cannot be forgotten that the document was formulated through correspondence between exiled and imprisoned persons and constitutes, as always in such cases, compromise among various shades of opinion. There will be dissatisfaction with it both from the left and from the right ...

The declaration is written in a very cautious tone, which is consistent with its purpose. This purpose is indicated quite clearly in the last two lines: The signers do not of course hope for immediate practical results but wish '*to win the sympathy and support of the overwhelming majority of the ranks of the party and of the working class.*' What is involved here is the use of a united-front policy toward the official Communist parties. Some of those who signed the declaration may still go off to the right, that is, toward the capitulators, when they receive the Stalinists' answer, the nature of which is obvious beforehand. But it is likewise to be expected that there will be wide discussion in party cells about the very existence of the declaration, that it will attract the attention of many revolutionary-minded workers and increase the Opposition's contacts and influence within the ranks of the party.

Some ultra-lefts will perhaps see the declaration as a capitulationist move. But if we gave in to such ultra-lefts, we would inevitably turn into a sect [63]

Rakovsky, Kossior and Okudjhava, as well as Trotsky, still clung to the reasoning of the years 1923-27: the Stalinist faction was centrist, balancing between the Right and the Left, and was bound in the final analysis to strengthen the Right. Thus Rakovsky, Okudjhava and Kossior, in an article entitled *On Capitulation and Capitulators*, written after the surrender of Radek, Preobrazhensky and Smilga, said: 'No one can guarantee that Centrism will not do an about turn

in the event of a new grain strike; on the contrary, this is most probable: from using Article 107 against the kulak they will turn to a neo-NEP.' [64]

In another article the same authors state:

The move by the Centre to the left (industrialisation and collectivisation) was forced on it – on the one hand by the pressure of the Right, which wished to remove the Centre with the help of the kulaks' grain strike, and on the other hand by the pressure of the working class, in the interests of whom the grain strike was beaten, and finally, by the pressure of the Leninist opposition. The elimination of the action of the last two factors would quickly create the conditions for a new right turn of the Centre, either in alliance with the Right's leaders, or by the elimination of today's leaders by those of the Right. [65]

Again the collectivisation did not and would not weaken the power of the kulaks. 'In conclusion: the relative weight of the prosperous section of the rural population in the overall economy *will grow* even further despite talk of struggle against agrarian capitalism.' [66]

Neither Rakovsky, Kossior or Okudjhava imagined that within a couple of years Stalin would wipe out 25 million private peasant smallholdings, including the kulaks!

How was the 22 August *Declaration* received by the deportees? Isabelle Longuet writes:

The left wing of the Left Opposition criticised it strongly for its overtly conciliatory character, its ambiguity on international policy, its concession on the question of factional work. Stolovsky, the spokesman of the Kamen colony, wrote characteristically: 'The so-called left-wing policy of the leadership is the worst of bureaucratic adventures. Each one of these steps, whether to the left or to the right, leads to catastrophe.' Some refused to support the 22 August Declaration, as was the case of a faction of the Rubkovsk colony, which addressed an open letter to Rakovsky explaining

its disagreement: the *Declaration* did not have the unifying effect anticipated, because some used its overtly conciliatory aspect to capitulate. (Two Rubkovsk Bolshevik-Leninists had already done so.) Wanting to keep those whose hostility to Centrism was fading risked a slide of the whole Left Opposition ... As to the content of the *Declaration*, they attacked it for not being critical enough of the capitulators and for overestimating the shift to the left. For them, the way in which economic measures were applied were as decisive as the measures themselves. It was on the question of democracy and that of the evaluation of 'Centrism' that disagreement was most marked: 'There is nothing to be expected from Centrists,' they wrote. It was to the masses themselves (party members and non-party) to conquer party democracy and working class democracy. Centrism would not 'agree to commit suicide' in according it. They proposed addressing the working class in its entirety at the same time as the Party, without mentioning the demand for reintegration 'as long as the Party keeps the same leadership'. [67]

To accelerate the disintegration of the Left Opposition, Stalin used his control of the postal services. As Rakovsky, Okudjhava and Kossior explained: repression did not express itself only

in the use of open force, but also in depriving the opposition of its elementary rights of correspondence and in the singular 'technical aid' afforded to the capitulationists by the GPU, which reached a point where the apparatus itself, in some places at least, disseminated the documents of the capitulationists. Some capitulationists, remaining in the opposition, acted according to the instructions of the apparatus (Ishchenko) or by prior agreement with it (the negotiations of Preobrazhensky with Yaroslavsky and Ordzhonikidze concerning the fact that the 'bombardment' of the opposition would come from two sides: the centrists and the capitulationists). The opposition was caught between two lines of fire. The celebrated 'freedom of correspondence' was reduced in actual fact to real freedom for

the capitulationists alone, and the removal of the 'freedom' for the Leninist opposition. But it should be noted that here also a peculiar and discriminatory postal policy is employed: the documents of the capitulationists were not allowed through to those comrades from whom a decisive rebuff could have been expected. Replies to the capitulationist documents were withdrawn from circulation completely. [68]

Trotsky was very cut off from his supporters even before he was exiled from the USSR. As has already been mentioned, in October 1928 Trotsky ceased to receive letters from friends and followers; the only communication he received was from those who were ready to desert the Opposition. His own letters failed to reach their destination.

And the stream of capitulations did not stop. On 27 October 1929 Ivan N. Smirnov, the victor over Kolchak, and one of Trotsky's closest associates, together with M.S. Boguslavsky, the veteran Bolshevik, capitulated. [69] Victor Serge writes:

Ivan Nikitich Smirnov told one of my friends something like this: 'I can't stand inactivity. I want to build! In its own barbaric and sometimes stupid way, the Central Committee is building for the future. Our ideological differences are of small importance before the construction of great new industries.' [70]

Straight after Smirnov's capitulation came that of S.V. Mrachkovsky, a legendary figure from the period of the civil war, A.G. Beloborodov, the old Bolshevik and Commissar of the Interior of RSFSR. V.A. Ter-Vaganian, the old Bolshevik theoretician, and hundreds of other deportees.

On 16 October 1929, the Oppositionist Iasha A. Kievlesko wrote to Sedov:

Almost the entire historical leadership has deserted the battleground, taking with them many good comrades. And those of us who are left are far from being united. Firstly it is very

difficult to evaluate our numbers, for comrades are leaving in droves. Today they pose as intransigent accusers of the 'opportunists', tomorrow they hurry to send a rallying telegram to the group of three [Radek, Preobrazhensky, Smilga]. [71]

On 12 November 1929 the Oppositionist B.N. Viaznikovets wrote to Sedov:

We must realise that the most resolute Oppositionists have become undecided. Numerous desertions are to be anticipated.

I.N. [Smirnov] believes he will take with him about 500 people, which is very probable. On the side of KhG [Rakovsky] are 300-500 people ...

The situation is extremely tense. I think that, in order to get out of it, L.D. [Trotsky] must propose talks with the Central Committee, otherwise he loses all his followers. Perhaps he must give up his *amour propre* ...

I do not think I am being pessimistic, but if we look the truth in the face, we must realise that our situation is very bad. Our cadres have rallied around the 16 October Declaration [of I.N. Smirnov]. In the factories and plants all activity has completely ceased.

What can explain this? Not personal interest or fatigue. The reason is that the Centrists have broken the alliance with the Right and have been forced to follow the path that we are indicating. [72]

On 14 January 1930 Ia.A. Kievlesko wrote to Sedov:

There are seven comrades in this colony [Petropavlovsk]. Their morale is very low. G. writes: 'The more we think about our situation, the more we conclude that the steps taken by an important part of the Opposition were inevitable.' And Frid adds:

‘The economic policy of the Party was globally correct; we decided to suspend our factional activity.’ [73]

At the end of 1929, according to Rakovsky, the number of Bolshevik-Leninists in places of exile and prison was around 800. [74] Some two years earlier the number estimated, as we mentioned earlier, was between 8,000 and 11,000. On 31 October 1930, Trotsky wrote to Max Shachtman, the American Trotskyist that the Opposition as an organisation did not exist any longer. [75] [3\*]

Trotsky was unbending. His moral courage was dauntless. On 26 November 1929 he wrote in a letter to friends in the USSR:

Let there remain in exile not three hundred and fifty who are true to our banner, but thirty-five or even three; the banner will remain, the strategic line will remain, and the future will remain. [78]

Of the veterans, Old Bolsheviks, and especially the leading personnel of the Trotskyist movement, very few remained steadfast: the great honourable exception was old Khristian Rakovsky. But even he finally surrendered. In February 1934 the news reached Trotsky who at that time was in France, that Rakovsky had capitulated. On 23 February 1934 *Izvestia* published a telegram from Rakovsky, addressed to the Central Committee, which said:

Confronted with the rise of international reaction, directed in the last analysis against the revolution of October, my old disagreements with the party have lost their significance. I consider it the duty of a Bolshevik Communist to submit completely and without hesitation to the general line of the party.

L.S. Sosnovsky’s capitulation came a few days later. [79]

The news of Rakovsky’s capitulation must have had a shattering effect on Trotsky. Rakovsky had been closer to him as ‘friend, fighter and thinker’ than any other associate. Despite his age – 61 years old at the time – he stood out against Stalin after nearly all the other

leaders of the Opposition had surrendered. In the places of exile and imprisonment he had a moral authority second only to Trotsky's. In almost every issue of *Biulleten Oppozitsii* Trotsky had published something by or about Rakovsky. After every defeat of the Opposition, and after every series of capitulations, he had pointed to Rakovsky as a shining example. In his diary, on 25 March, 1935, Trotsky wrote of what the break with Rakovsky had meant to him personally:

Rakovsky was virtually my last contact with the old revolutionary generation. After his capitulation there is nobody left. Even though my correspondence with Rakovsky stopped, for reasons of censorship, at the time of my deportation, nevertheless the image of Rakovsky has remained a symbolic link with my old comrades-in-arms. Now nobody remains. For a long time now I have not been able to satisfy my need to exchange ideas and discuss problems with someone else. [80]

But Trotsky's moral courage and intransigence had no bounds. And so he broke off publicly all personal and political relations with Rakovsky. On receiving the news of Rakovsky's capitulation he made the following statement:

We register the purely formal declaration of the old warrior, who by his whole life has demonstrated his unshakable devotion to the revolutionary cause; we register it with sadness and pass on to the order of the day. [81]

Three weeks later, in an article entitled *The Meaning of Rakovsky's surrender*, Trotsky wrote:

We have no time to weep long over lost friends – be it even comrades of thirty years of struggle. Let every Bolshevik say to himself: 'A sixty-year-old fighter with experience and prestige left our ranks. In his place I must win three twenty-year-old ones,



new Rakovskys will be found who, with us or after us, will carry forward our work.' [82]

In his declaration of surrender, Rakovsky did not recant his past ideas, and made it clear that it was the threat of international reaction – the rise of Fascism – which made him give up the struggle against Stalin and submit to discipline. To recapitulate Trotsky's words: Without exaggerating by a hair's breadth, we can say that Stalin got Rakovsky with the aid of Hitler.' [83]

This was also the conclusion of Louis Fischer who visited Rakovsky in 1935 and recorded his impressions:

I visited him twice in his apartment in Moscow in 1935 and Madame Rakovsky served me tea as she had in Saratov. I also saw him three or four times in his office in the Commissariat of Health, where he had taken over the direction of all the Commissariat's scientific research institutions (he was a physician by profession). What I heard from him in Moscow confirmed what I had written in Madrid. Exile had not broken him. But he looked out on Europe from Barnaul and found no revolution ... Fascism creeps from country to country. The intensity of human distress is equalled only by the ferocity of political reaction ... Hitler brought him back to Stalin. [84]

Police persecutions could not by themselves explain the capitulation of thousands of Oppositionists. After all many of the Old Bolsheviks stood the test of years of prison in Siberia under Tsarism and did not give way. People like Rakovsky, who had four decades of struggle behind them would not give way just to persecution. Capitulations were far more the outcome of conviction, that Stalin's policies of collectivisation and speedy industrialisation were socialist policies, and that there were no realistic alternatives to them.

It was the ideological crisis of the Trotskyist movement that disarmed the Oppositionists and tempted them to surrender to Stalin. This, far more than the police persecution, broke the spirit of the prisoners and deportees. As Rakovsky, Okudjhava and Kossior

explained: Without brutal repressions the left course would have shoved into the ranks of the Opposition new adherents, because the left course marked the bankruptcy of the Stalinist policy. But it would be also true to say, that without the new course, repression would not have had the effect it achieved.' [85]

The Oppositionists who remained in prison and exile ceased to constitute a cohesive group. They became a loose collection of splinter groups, isolated from the working class of the country.

Lacking any contact with Trotsky, fragmentation and despair were all-pervasive in their ranks.

In later years tens of thousands of people were imprisoned and exiled by Stalin as Trotskyists, and many of them, being opponents of the regime, showed allegiance to Trotsky, even if they were not very clear what his policies at the time were.

One impressive demonstration of the new wave of Trotskyism was the hunger strike and work stoppage throughout the entire Vorkuta system of camps, which started on 27 October 1936, and continued for 132 days, a strike described as 'heroic' by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in his *Gulag Archipelago*. [86]

Another report by a Menshevik prisoner who did not agree with the Vorkuta Trotskyists, but could not fail to be moved by their courage, stated that there were several thousand Trotskyists around the Patchora district.

In addition to these genuine Trotskyists, there were in the camps of Vorkuta and elsewhere more than 100,000 prisoners who, members of the party and the youth, had adhered to the Trotskyist Opposition and then at different times and for diverse reasons (of which the principal were, evidently, the repressions, unemployment, persecutions, exclusion from schools and university faculties, etc.) were forced to 'recant their errors' and withdraw from the Opposition ... The Trotskyists formed the only group of political prisoners who openly criticized the Stalinist 'general line' and offered organized resistance to the jailers. [87]

Some idea of the harsh conditions the political prisoners lived under can be gleaned from the dramatic description of Maria Joffe, who was in prisons and labour camps for 28 years, from 1929 to 1957. She was the widow of Adolf Ioffe, an old comrade-in-arms of Trotsky, who committed suicide on 10 November 1927. [88] She was a woman of magnificent courage. She describes life in the gulag, where conditions were as horrific as in Nazi concentration camps. We give only a snippet, a description of the penalty cell in which she was incarcerated for many days and nights.

... a tiny privy, less than one metre in width and less than two in length ... The stench in that place was such that it seemed to billow out and hit me in the face with such force that, with a gasp, my whole body jerked back. However, I was pushed in and the door locked behind me.

An enormous latrine bucket without a cover ... and almost overflowing even before my arrival stood in front of me, with strings of wood lice over it and all over the walls. The floor was covered in human excrement ... with white maggots crawling out of it ... there was no air whatsoever, none ... only unbearable stench, stifling my throat ... I felt I was suffocating ... I thought I was dying! Suddenly, the light was switched off and I was left in total darkness ... in total darkness with the wood lice, which would no doubt crawl all over me, and the fat, white maggots ready to devour me ... as corpses are devoured. I wanted to shout, to scream but a husky rattle was all my throat could produce. I would be devoured like a corpse ... no air ... no light ... only worms ... what a terrifying, horrible way to die ... I felt them coming nearer ... crawling up to me ... and put up my hands to guard my eyes ... mouth ... nose from those loathsome maggots and wood lice ...

... A human being was confined to a privy. To breathe in unbearable stench for many, many days and with open, sleepless eyes, see nothing whether it be day or night, but pools

of urine, trampled on heaps of excrement with their mass of continually wriggling maggots, whole long chains of wood lice.  
[89]

### **Ideological Split in the Trotskyist Camp**

ONE RESULT of the crisis of Trotskyism under the impact of the Five-Year Plan was a radical split among those who remained in exile and prisons.

One of the best witnesses for this was Ante Ciliga. He was a leading Yugoslav Communist who spent ten years in the USSR (1926-1935), the last six of them in prisons and exile colonies. He wrote:

From May 21st, 1930, until December 3rd, 1935, the day on which I crossed the Polish border, I was deprived of liberty. I spent more than three years in the soviet prisons of Leningrad, Chelyabinsk, Verkhne-Uralsk, then again at Chelyabinsk, finally at Irkutsk and at Krasnoyarsk. As for the last two years, I spent them in exile in Siberia, first at Krasnoyarsk, later at Yeniseisk.  
[90]

He writes about the Verkhne-Uralsk camp.

When I arrived at the isolator in November 1930, the era of capitulations, which had for the last eighteen months been demoralizing and disorganizing the Russian Opposition, was drawing to a close. But echoes were still to be heard of the storm that had carried before it four-fifths of the Opposition ...

The vast majority of the Communist prisoners were Trotskyists: 120 out of 140. [91]

The Verkhne-Uralsk isolator sheltered nearly all the most active members of the Trotskyist section.

The organization of the Trotskyist prisoners called itself the 'Collective of the Verkhne-Uralsk Leninist Bolsheviks'. It was divided into Left-wing, Centre and Right-wing. This division into three sections persisted during the three years of my stay, although the composition of the sections and even their ideologies were subject to certain fluctuations. Upon my arrival at Verkhne-Uralsk I found three programmes and two Trotskyist newspapers.

1. The *Programme of the Three*, drawn up by three Red professors, namely, E. Solntsev, G. Yakovin and G. Stopalov. It expressed the opinions of the Right-wing section, which at that time was the strongest.

2. The *Programme of the Two*, written by Trotsky's son-in-law, Man-Nivelson, and by Aron Papermeister, was the credo of the small Centre group.

3. The *Theses of Militant Bolsheviks* emanated from the Left-wing: Puchas, Kamenetsky, Kvatchadze, Bielenky. [92]

The three groups were very committed.

Right-wing and Centre, between them, published *Pravda in Prison (Truth in Prison)*, the Left-wing *The Militant Bolshevik*. These newspapers appeared either once a month or every two months. Each copy contained ten to twenty articles in the form of separate writing books. The 'copy', i.e. the packet of ten to twenty writing books, circulated from ward to ward and the prisoners read the notebooks in turn. The papers appeared in three copies, one copy for each prison-wing. [93]

When the horrors of famine resulting from the forced collectivisation and the misery associated with the forced industrialisation became all too clear in 1932, the debate between the three Trotskyist groups became far sharper. Its central theme was the class nature of the Stalinist regime.

In the end, three distinct resolutions were put to the vote. The first one recognized, in spite of the many 'bureaucratic deviations', the proletarian character of the State, for there remained 'vestiges of the dictatorship of the proletariat' such as nationalization of private property and repression of the bourgeoisie. From this it followed that it was considered possible to re-establish the authentic dictatorship of the proletariat by a thorough reform of the system.

Those who denied the existence of a dictatorship of the proletariat in the USSR could not agree among themselves, and put forward two distinct resolutions. The one ... found that there was no longer a dictatorship of the proletariat in the USSR, but that 'the economic foundations of the October revolution persisted'. They concluded that it was necessary to have a 'political revolution' backed up by a 'thorough economic reform' ...

The other 'negators', who included myself, believed that not only the political order but also the social and economic orders were foreign and hostile to the proletariat. We therefore envisaged not only a political but also a social revolution that should open up a road to the development of socialism. According to us, the bureaucracy was a real class, a class hostile to the proletariat.  
[94]

### **Flying the Flag of Revolution**

ALTHOUGH Trotskyism as an organised movement ceased to exist in the USSR in the early 1930s, and what remained was fragmented, still many tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, identified with Trotsky. This demonstrates the heroic role of Trotsky as the symbol and banner of resistance to Stalinism. Amidst the terrible conditions that broke the bodies and spirits of millions a bacchanalian cult developed around Stalin to which many Old

Bolsheviks succumbed. Those whose spirits were not broken were eliminated in secret. Amidst all this human destruction Trotsky stood as a giant of rebellion.

## Footnotes

1\*. The Left Opposition distributed leaflets in Moscow with the text of the Bukharin-Kamenev conversation. [50] Bukharin and Kamenev were immediately summoned to appear before Ordzhonikidze at the Central Control Commission. Following that new, strong measures of suppression were taken against the Opposition. This was a crippling blow.

2\*. One sign of Trotsky's uneasiness with the *Declaration* was that in the same issue of *Biulleten Oppozitsii* that it appeared, Trotsky published a letter from an anonymous correspondent criticising Rakovsky for pandering to the capitulators.

3\*. For a time Trotsky himself had a very exaggerated impression of the number of Left Oppositionists in places of exile and prison who remained steadfast. Thus, in a discussion with Albert Glotzer, a leading American Trotskyist, in October-November 1931, he said: 'There are in exile today between three and five thousand young Oppositionists, as well as a few thousand Old Bolsheviks'. [76] Actually Trotsky had hardly any connection with any of his supporters in the USSR after 1931, as he told the Dewey Commission. [77]

## Notes

1. Reiman, pp.22, 27-8.

2. T. Cliff, *Trotsky*, Vol.3, pp.259-61.

3. Isabelle Longuet, *La Crise de L'Opposition de gauche en 1928-1929*, Paris. Univ. de Saint Denis 1987, Mémoire de Maitrise, Université de Paris VIII.

4. T1586, Longuet, p.51.
5. T2439, Longuet, pp.51-2.
6. T1780, Longuet, p.52.
7. T1795, T1464, Longuet, p.52.
8. T2560, Longuet, p.53.
9. T2502, Longuet, p.53.
10. A letter from Moscow, in *Biulleten Oppozitsii*, May 1930, No.11, pp.31-2.
11. T1392, T1617, T1745, T2698, T2829, Longuet, pp.54-5.
12. T2066, T1586, Longuet, pp.55-6.
13. T2535, T2066, Longuet, pp.56-7.
14. T2066, T2436, T2752, T2854, Longuet, pp.57-8.
15. T2533, T2560, Longuet, pp.58-9.
16. T2851, T2560, T2533, T2535, Longuet, pp.60-1.
17. T2849, T2875, T2865, Longuet, pp.61-2.
18. T2851, T2898, Longuet, pp.64-5.
19. Longuet, p.65.
20. Filtzer, pp.7-8.
21. *Ibid.*, pp.255-6.
22. *The Case of Leon Trotsky*, London 1937, pp.331-2.
23. V. Serge and N.S. Trotsky, *The Life and Death of Leon Trotsky*, London 1975, p.158.
24. *WLT*, 1937-38, pp.168-9.
25. T1262.
26. T1254.
27. T1273.
28. *Pravda*, 16 May 1928.
29. T1497.
30. T1593.
31. T1464.
32. T1587.
33. T1309.
34. *Challenge*, 1928-29, pp.77-8.
35. *Ibid.*, p.80.
36. *Ibid.*, p.108.
37. *Ibid.*, pp.168, 173, 175.



38. *Ibid.*, pp.180.
39. T1606.
40. *Biulleten Oppozitsii*, No.3-4, September 1929, pp.35-7.
41. T1780a.
42. T2324.
43. *Challenge*, 1928-29, p.128.
44. *Ibid.*, pp.168, 172.
45. T2071.
46. T2218.
47. *Challenge*, 1928-29, pp.379-83.
48. *Ibid.*, p.249.
49. *Ibid.*, p.342.
50. *Inside the Right-Centre Bloc, Biulleten Oppozitsii*, No.1-2, July 1929, pp.15-17.
51. *Pravda*, 9 June 1929.
52. T15264.
53. *Biulleten Oppozitsii*, Oct. 1929, No.6, p.25.
54. *WLT*, 1929, p.136.
55. *Ibid.*, pp.162, 164.
56. *Pravda*, 14 July 1929.
57. *Ibid.*, 16 March 1930; Davies, pp.274-5.
58. *Nove*, p.221.
59. *Correspondance internationale*, No.102, 9 October 1929, p.1415; *Cahiers Léon Trotsky*, No.7/8.
60. C. Rakovsky, *Selected Writings on Opposition in the USSR, 1923-30*, London 1980, pp.138-44.
61. *Biulleten Oppozitsii*, October 1929, No.6, p.3.
62. *WLT*, 1929, pp.325-8.
63. *Ibid.*, pp.329-30.
64. *Biulleten Oppozitsii*, Nov.-Dec. 1929, No.7, p.6.
65. *Ibid.*, p.8.
66. *Ibid.*, p.9.
67. Longuet, p.194.
68. Rakovsky, pp.151-2.
69. *Pravda*, 27 October 1929.
70. V. Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, London 1984, pp.252-3.

71. *Cahiers Léon Trotsky*, No.7/8, p.108.
72. *Ibid.*, pp.124-5.
73. *Ibid.*, p.139.
74. T3491.
75. T1082, P Broué, in *Cahiers Léon Trotsky*, No.6, p.43.
76. *WLT*, 1929-33, pp.97-8.
77. *The Case of Leon Trotsky*, pp.124, 128.
78. *WLT*, 1929, p.398.
79. *Pravda*, 27 February 1934.
80. *Trotsky's Diary in Exile*, p.53.
81. *WLT*, 1933-34, p.245.
82. *Ibid.*, p.278.
83. *Ibid.*, p.277.
84. L. Fischer, *Men and Politics*, New York 1946, pp.293-4.
85. Kh. Rakovsky, M. Okudjhava and V. Kossior, *On Capitulation and Capitulationists*, *Biulleten Oppozitsii*, November-December 1929, No.7, p.4.
86. See A. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 2, 1918-1956*, Parts iii-iv, London 1976, pp.303-7, 372-6.
87. 'MB', *The Trotskyists in Vorkuta Prison Camp*, *Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik*, 1961, in T. Ali, editor, *The Stalinist Legacy*, London 1984, pp.187-8.
88. See Cliff, *Trotsky*, Vol.3, pp.262-3.
89. M. Joffe, *One Long Night. A Tale of Truth*, London 1978, pp.104, 116.
90. A. Ciliga, *The Russian Enigma*, London 1979, p.135.
91. *Ibid.*, p.209.
92. *Ibid.*, pp.210-11.
93. *Ibid.*, p.211.
94. *Ibid.*, pp.264-5.

## 5. The Struggle Against the Nazis

ON TROTSKY'S exile from the USSR in February 1929 he was faced with the task of building the international Left Opposition. From being a leader of millions, as organiser of the October revolution, the Red Army, and the International Communist movement, he now became a persecuted émigré on a 'planet without a visa', a leader of tiny groups of adherents. But he did not find this task of less importance than the previous ones which were more dramatic and grand. Trotsky believed that this work, maintaining the tradition of revolutionary Marxism, was the most important task of his life. On 25 March 1935, he wrote in his *Diary in Exile*:

I think that the work in which I am engaged now, despite its extremely insufficient and fragmentary nature, is the most important work of my life – more important than 1917, more important than the period of the Civil War or any other.

... Had I not been present in 1917 in Petersburg, the October Revolution would still have taken place – *on the condition that Lenin was present and in command*. If neither Lenin nor I had been present in Petersburg, there would have been no October Revolution: the leadership of the Bolshevik Party would have prevented it from occurring – of this I have not the slightest doubt! If Lenin had not been in Petersburg, I doubt whether I could have managed to conquer the resistance of the Bolshevik leaders ... I repeat, granted the presence of Lenin the October Revolution would have been victorious anyway ...

Thus I cannot speak of the 'indispensability' of my work, even about the period from 1917 to 1921. But now my work is 'indispensable' in the full sense of the word ... There is now no one except me to carry out the mission of arming a new generation with the revolutionary method over the heads of the leaders of the Second and Third International. [1]

Germany was the country with the most important working class movement in the world at the time It was entering a deep slump and social crisis, which was the background to rapid growth of the Nazi movement. Faced with this, Trotsky brought to bear all his energy and knowledge. In this period he wrote innumerable short books, pamphlets and articles analysing the German situation. They are among the most brilliant pieces of writing he penned. Such prescience on the course of events is found nowhere else. He warned of the catastrophe threatening not only the German, but also the international working class that would follow the rise of the Nazis. His call for action to stop them, the call for a united front of all labour movement organisations, became more and more urgent. Tragically his prophetic warning and urgent calls were not heeded. His voice was a cry in the wilderness. Neither the Communist Party (KPD) nor the Social Democratic Party (SPD) paid any heed. If Trotsky's analysis and proposals for action had been accepted, the subsequent history of the century would have been completely different. Trotsky's analysis of German events was particularly impressive in view of the fact that the author was removed from the scene of the events by a considerable distance. Still he managed to follow the day-to-day twists and turns. Reading Trotsky's writings of the years 1930-33, their concreteness gives the clear impression that the author must have been living in Germany, not far away on the island of Prinkipo in Turkey.

### **Trotsky on the 'Third Period'**

IN THE YEARS 1923-27, when the kulaks were appeased in the USSR, the Kuomintang appeased in China and trade union leaders appeased in Britain, the Social Democrats were being appeased in Germany. In 1928, with the sharp turn against the kulaks, Stalin made a turn in the politics of the Comintern also. We must be clear that Stalin's ultra-leftism was qualitatively different from what is usually regarded in the Marxist movement as ultra-leftism, that is, the extremism of newly radicalised and impatient workers who lacked training in revolutionary strategy and tactics. Stalinist ultra-leftism was a manipulation of the party and the workers by the leadership, and recurred repeatedly whenever the leadership felt the need for a left lurch in the general rightward course.

In 1928 the Comintern, now completely under Stalin's control, promulgated the ultra-left dogma of the 'Third Period' and 'Social Fascism', policies which it was to follow until Hitler came to power. According to this 'theory', the political history of the post-war era fell into three distinct chapters. The first was one of capitalist crisis and revolutionary upsurge (1917-1923). During the second – capitalist stabilisation – bourgeois nationalists like the Kuomintang and Social Democrats (as with the Anglo-Russian Committee of 1925-27) had to be wooed. This period came to an end in 1928. The Third Period, now opening, was to bring the death agony of capitalism.

On the basis of this periodisation the Communist Parties were instructed to reject any united front with Social Democrats, to develop independent trade unions (that is, to organise breakaway unions) and to concentrate their fire on Social Democracy, now dubbed 'social fascists', as the main enemy.

The father of the theory of social fascism was Zinoviev, the extreme representative of crude bureaucratic practices and radical demagoguery. Thus in January 1924 he wrote.

What is Pilsudski and the others? Fascist Social Democrats. Were they this ten years ago? No. Of course at that time they were potential Fascists, but it is precisely during the epoch of revolution that they have become Fascists. What is Italian Social Democracy? It is a wing of the Fascists. Turati is a Fascist

Social Democrat. Could we have said this five years ago? ... Ten years ago we had opportunists, but could we say that they were Fascist Social Democrats? No. It would have been absurd to say it then. Now, however, they are Fascists ... The international Social Democracy has now become a wing of Fascism. [2]

In July 1924, the Fifth Congress of the Comintern followed in Zinoviev's footsteps and declared:

As bourgeois society decays, all bourgeois parties, particularly social democracy, take on a more or less Fascist character ... Fascism and social democracy are two sides of the same instrument of big capitalist dictatorship. [3]

In September 1924 Stalin paraphrased Zinoviev's statement:

Social-Democracy is objectively the moderate wing of fascism. There is no ground for assuming that the fighting organisation of the bourgeoisie can achieve decisive successes in banks, or in governing the country, without the active support of Social-Democracy. There is just as little ground for thinking that Social-Democracy can achieve decisive successes in battles, or in governing the country, without the active support of the fighting organisation of the bourgeoisie. These organisations do not negate, but supplement each other. They are not antipodes, they are twins. [4]

In July 1929 the Tenth Plenum of the ECCI declared: 'In countries where there are strong Social-Democratic parties, Fascism assumes the particular form of Social Fascism'. [5]

In 1930 Ernst Thälmann, the General Secretary of the KPD, asserted that 'the German bourgeoisie, like the bourgeoisie in all other countries, is trying to utilise two methods, the method of social-Fascism and the method of Fascism', and that the latest

developments in Germany demonstrated the progressive growing together of social-Fascism with national Fascism'. [6]

The Stalinists kept to the same line even after the great advance of the Nazis. In the elections held on 14 September 1930, the Nazis, who had polled only 800,000 votes in 1928, won six and a half million votes; from being the smallest party in the Reichstag they became its second largest. How did the KPD react to this ominous development?

They saw in it no significant change in the situation. It was only a 'regrouping of the bourgeois class forces'. As Julian Braunthal explains:

The only thing that mattered to them was their own success in winning one and a quarter million votes while the Social Democrats had lost more than half a million. Thus Hermann Remmele, a member of the ruling triumvirate in the party, drew the following somewhat amazing conclusion from the elections: 'The only victor in the September elections is the Communist party.' [7]

On 15 September, one day after the elections, *Die Rote Fahne*, the central organ of the KPD, wrote:

Hitler's electoral success carries the seeds of his future defeat. The 14th September was the climax of the National Socialist movement in Germany. After this can come only defeat and decline ... Yesterday evening was Mr. Hitler's greatest hour, but their so-called election victory is the beginning of their end ... [8]

The Stalinists judged all government in Germany to be Fascist. Thus Thälmann, in his speech to the Reichstag on 11 February 1930, described the government headed by the Social Democrat Hermann Müller as 'a social-Fascist gang ... the rule of Fascism has already been established in Germany.' [9]

The complacency of the KPD leaders towards the rise of Nazism was extraordinary. On 14 October 1931, Remmele, one of the three

top leaders of the KPD, announced in the Reichstag:

Herr Brüning has put it very plainly; once they (the Fascists) are in power, then the united front of the proletariat will be established and it will make a clean sweep of everything. (*Violent applause from the Communists*) ... We are the victors of the coming day; and the question is no longer one of who shall vanquish whom. This question is already answered. (*Applause from the Communists*). The question now reads only, 'At what moment shall we overthrow the bourgeoisie?' ... We are not afraid of the Fascist gentlemen. They will shoot their bolt quicker than any other government. (*Right you are! from the Communists*).

The speech was printed with a form attached asking for membership of the party attached and distributed in great numbers all over Germany. [10]

In November 1931, Rudolf Breitscheid, leader of the Social Democratic group in the Reichstag, declared the need for a united front of the SPD and KPD to resist the Nazis. However, Thälmann rejected the offer with scorn. To those who suggested that the Braun-Severing government was better than a Hitler-Goebbels government, he said:

This influence exercised over revolutionary workers by the treacherous ideology of the lying Social Democrats, these relics of Social Democratic thought in our ranks, is, we declare, in full agreement with the decisions of the Eleventh Plenum, *the most serious danger that confronts the Communist Party*. How great that danger is, is shown at the present time, among other things, by the latest manoeuvres of Social fascism ... It is therefore undertaking a new demagogic manoeuvre. It is 'threatening' to form a united front with the Communist party ... [11]

When Trotsky approved Breitscheid's call for a united front, the KPD press described this as 'Trotsky's fascist proposal for a KPD-SPD



bloc'. It was a 'criminal idea'.

The logic of the 'Third Period' was also to call on workers to leave the trade unions controlled by Social Democrats, and to build Revolutionary Trade Unions. The result was to prevent the Communists from influencing the mass of trade unionists. This splitting tactic of the unions fitted with Stalin's argument, made in a speech on 19 December 1928, that the Communists should concentrate on those sections of the working class that were unorganised, that is, immune from the influence of the bacillus of reformism. [12] At the end of 1930, when the General German Trade Union Federation (ADGB) had almost five million members, the KPD-led Revolutionary Trade Union Opposition (RGO) had fewer than 150,000.

### **Trotsky and the 'Third Period'**

TROTSKY'S FIRST broadside, which dealt with the question of the Third Period, although not directly with Germany, was an article entitled *The 'Third Period' of the Comintern's Errors*. It occupied the whole issue of *Biulleten Oppozitsii* of January 1930. Trotsky did not accept the hypothesis of the 'final end of capitalism'; he rejected the idea that the decay of the system was a linear one, that economic collapse was a single uninterrupted process, or that a revolution situation could continue indefinitely.

The political mood of the proletariat does not change automatically in one and the same direction. The upturns in the class struggle are followed by downturns, the floodtides by ebbs, depending upon complicated combinations of material and ideological conditions, national and international. An upsurge of the masses, if not utilized at the right moment or misused, reverses itself and ends in a period of decline, from which the masses recover, faster or slower, under the influence of new objective stimuli. Our epoch is characterized by exceptionally sharp periodic fluctuations, by extraordinarily

abrupt turns in the situation, and this places on the leadership unusual obligations in the matter of a correct orientation. [13]

Trotsky saw no evidence of the alleged radicalisation of the masses or a mounting wave of revolution. Strike statistics of the time did not support the Stalin-Molotov description of a rising tide of the revolution. Thus the number of strike days in Germany was as follows: [14]

1924	36,360,134
1925	17,113,886
1926	1,325,309
1927	6,043,698
1928	20,288,211
1929	4,489,870
1930	3,935,977
1931	2,001,976
1932	1,137,890

Trotsky argued that the forecast of an 'uninterruptedly mounting tide of revolution', the discovery of 'elements of civil war' in almost every strike, the claim that the movement was passing from defensive to offensive action and armed insurrection, misled the working class and courted disaster.

It would be a grave error to draw the conclusion that the depth of the economic slump would guarantee the radicalisation of the proletariat:

The trouble is that increasing exploitation does not always raise the fighting spirit of the proletariat. Thus, in a conjunctural decline accompanied by growing unemployment, particularly after defeats, increased exploitation does not breed a radicalisation of the masses but, quite the contrary, demoralization, atomization, and disintegration. We saw that, for example, in the British coal mines right after the 1926 strike. We saw it on a still larger scale in Russia, when the 1907 industrial crisis coincided with the wrecking of the 1905 revolution. [15]

In the class struggle, as in war, defensive and offensive forms of action cannot be separated from one another completely. The most effective offensive usually grows out of successful defence. During the slump workers have to defend themselves against attacks on their standard of living and against the rise of fascism. To tell them that the time for such defence has passed and that they must go on the offensive was to lead to passivity and defeat.

To put forward today the slogan of a general political strike on the basis of a future crisis that will push the masses onto the road of revolutionary struggle is to try to appease the hunger of today with the dinner of tomorrow. [16]

The rejection by the Comintern leadership of the need for a united front with the Social Democrats was a crime.

How is it possible to refuse practical alliances with the reformists in those cases where, for example, they are leading strikes? If there are very few of such cases now, it is because the strike movement itself is very weak as yet and the reformists can ignore and sabotage. But with mass participation in the struggle, alliances will become unavoidable for both sides. It will be just as impossible to block the road to practical alliances with the reformists – not only with the social democratic masses, but in many instances also with their leaders or more likely with a section of the leaders – in the struggle against fascism. [17]

Trotsky continued these early criticisms of Third Period Stalinism with increasing intensity over the months of Hitler's forward march.

In March 1930 Hermann Müller, the Social Democratic Chancellor, was forced to resign; his coalition partners could not agree whether, or by how much, the government should cut the dole to the unemployed. The number of registered unemployed was nearly six million, but the actual number nearly eight million. [18] Now Field Marshal Hindenburg, President of the Republic, dissolved parliament, and appointed Heinrich Brüning as Chancellor. Brüning

ruled by decree, cutting the dole, dismissing government employees, reducing wages and salaries, crushing small businesses with taxes. This led to the great success of the Nazis in the elections of 14 September 1930, referred to above, in which they won six and a half million votes.

Already in March 1930, six months before these momentous elections, Trotsky, in an Open Letter to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) rang the alarm bells about the threat of fascism all over Europe, and especially in Germany. He stressed the need for a united front of Communists and Socialist parties to fight fascism. [19]

No sooner had the results of the September elections become known than Trotsky commented on them in a special pamphlet entitled *The Turn in the Communist International and the Situation in Germany* (26 September 1930). He described the 'Third Period' as 'a putschist policy during a period of retreat ... Revolutionary policy based on the real state of the class struggle gives way to a policy of fireworks.'

The official press of the Comintern is now depicting the results of the German elections as a prodigious victory of Communism, which places the slogan of a Soviet Germany on the order of the day.

Alas,

The bureaucratic optimists do not want to reflect upon the meaning of the relationship of forces which is disclosed by the election statistics. [20]

... the first characteristic of a real revolutionary party – is to be able to look reality in the face. [21]

The so-called 'radicalisation of the masses' which the Comintern claimed to identify was a mobilisation of counter-revolution rather than revolution. The gigantic upsurge of Nazism was due to the

profound social crisis that struck the petty bourgeoisie and which the proletariat showed itself unable to attract. Nazism voiced the counter-revolutionary despair of the petty bourgeoisie.

the gigantic growth of National Socialism is an expression of two factors: a deep social crisis, throwing the petty-bourgeois masses off balance, and the lack of a revolutionary party that would today be regarded by the popular masses as the acknowledged revolutionary leader. If the Communist Party is the *party of revolutionary hope*, then fascism, as a mass movement, is the *party of counter-revolutionary despair*. When revolutionary hope embraces the whole proletarian mass, it inevitably pulls behind it on the road of revolution considerable and growing sections of the petty bourgeoisie. Precisely in this sphere, the election revealed the opposite picture: counter-revolutionary despair embraced the petty-bourgeois mass with such force that it drew behind it many sections of the proletariat. [22]

*Fascism in Germany has become a real danger*, as an acute expression of the helpless position of the bourgeois regime, the conservative role of Social Democracy in this regime, and the accumulated powerlessness of the Communist Party to abolish it. Whoever denies this is either blind or a braggart. [23]

What was needed above all to stop the Nazis was a policy of united front between the Communist parties and Social Democratic parties:

... let us pose the question thus: Must the tactics of the German Communist Party in the immediate period follow an *offensive or defensive* line? We answer: defensive.

Assuming a defensive position means a policy of closing ranks with the majority of the German working class and forming a united front with the Social Democratic and non-party workers against the fascist threat.

... The Communist Party must call for the defence of those material and moral positions which the working class has managed to win in the German state. This most directly concerns the fate of the workers' political organizations, trade unions, newspapers, printing plants, clubs, libraries, etc. Communist workers must say to their Social Democratic counterparts: 'The policies of our parties are irreconcilably opposed; but if the fascists come tonight to wreck your organization's hall, we will come running, arms in hand, to help you. Will you promise us that if our organization is threatened you will rush to our aid?' This is the quintessence of our policy in the present period. All agitation must be pitched in this key. [24]

### **The 'Red Referendum'**

UNABLE TO remove Brüning from office, the Nazis turned their attention to the Prussian government which was a coalition headed by the Social Democrats, Otto Braun and Carl Severing. Believing that new Landtag elections would enable them to take over the government and police forces of Prussia, the Nazis got together with right wing nationalists, and, utilising a clause in the Weimar Constitution, launched a referendum to oust the coalition government. Almost without interruption, from 1920 to 1932, the SPD had run the government of Prussia, the state containing two thirds of the German population, including Berlin.

At first the KPD refused to take part in this 'swindle'. Instead it would take 'a clear offensive against Fascism' and refuse to play the Nazi's game. [25] As late as mid-July, the majority of the Central Committee of the KPD rejected suggestions that the party should take part in the referendum campaign alongside the Nazis and against the Social Democrats. However, on 22 July, under pressure from the ECCI and Stalin himself, the KPD joined the anti-Social Democratic front. The KPD said it would transform the campaign into a 'Red Plebiscite'. [26]

O.A. Piatnitsky, Secretary of the Comintern, explained:

You know ... that the leadership of the party opposed taking part in the referendum on the dissolution of the Prussian Landtag. A number of party newspapers published leading articles opposing participation in that referendum. But when the Central Committee of the party jointly with the Comintern arrived at the conclusion that it was necessary to take an active part in the referendum, the German comrades, in the course of a few days, roused the whole party. Not a single party, except the CPSU, could do that.. . [27]

Following the change of line of the Comintern, *Die Rote Fahne* reported that at all meetings of the party participation in the referendum was adopted 'unanimously'.

The result of the vote (9.8 million votes for the dissolution of the Landtag, out of an electorate of 26.4 million) was claimed by the KPD to be a victory. All those who voted 'Yes', under whatever misleading slogan, were held to have objectively strengthened its revolutionary front. *Pravda* argued: 'The result of the voting signified ... the greatest blow of all that the working class has yet dealt Social Democracy.' [28]

Workers' instincts, however, were better than those of the Stalinist leadership:

Rank-and-file Communists, confused at the Party's last minute decision to support [the referendum], had failed to campaign actively. In Berlin, the party proved unable to bring as many of its own voters to the polls as it had in the previous Reichstag election ... [29]

Trotsky was absolutely scathing about the KPD's policy regarding the 'Red Referendum'.

... the Stalinist bureaucracy involved the revolutionary workers in a united front with the National Socialists against the Social

democracy. [30]

... the policy of the German Communist Party leadership on the question of the referendum has an especially criminal character. The most rabid foe could not have thought up a surer way of inciting the Social Democratic workers against the Communist Party and of holding up the development of the policy of the revolutionary united front. [31]

For three years Trotsky struggled with all his passion and intellectual power to alert the German Communists and workers to the terrible danger of Fascism facing them, and to point the way to stop it.

On 26 November 1931 Trotsky wrote a pamphlet entitled *Germany, the Key to the International Situation*. He wrote:

On the direction in which the solution of the German crisis develops will depend not only the fate of Germany herself (and that is already a great deal), but also the fate of Europe, the destiny of the entire world, for many years to come. ... The coming to power of the National Socialists would mean first of all the extermination of the flower of the German proletariat, the destruction of its organizations, the eradication of its belief in itself and in its future. Considering the far greater maturity and acuteness of the social contradictions in Germany, the hellish work of Italian fascism would probably appear as a pale and almost humane experiment in comparison with the work of the German National Socialists ... Ten proletarian insurrections, ten defeats, one on top of the other, could not debilitate and enfeeble the German working class as much as a retreat before fascism would weaken it at the very moment when the decision is still impending on the question of who is to become master in the German household ...

... the key to the world situation lies in Germany. [32]



Trotsky hastened to say that the situation was not hopeless – the Nazis could still be stopped.

... the main strength of the fascists is their strength in numbers. Yes, they have received many votes. But in the social struggle, votes are not decisive. The main army of fascism still consists of the petty bourgeoisie and the new middle class: the small artisans and shopkeepers of the cities, the petty officials, the employees, the technical personnel, the intelligentsia, the impoverished peasantry. On the scales of election statistics, a thousand fascist votes weigh as much as a thousand Communist votes. But on the scales of the revolutionary struggle, a thousand workers in one big factory represent a force a hundred times greater than a thousand petty officials, clerks, their wives, and their mothers-in-law. The great bulk of the fascists consists of human dust ...

At present the strength of the National Socialists lies not so much in their own army as in the schism within the army of their mortal enemy. [33]

The Communists by themselves could not beat the Nazis, not only because in terms of numbers the supporters of the KPD were only half those of the Nazis, but also because in terms of implantation in the factories the KPD was very weak indeed. By the end of 1931 78 percent of KPD members were unemployed, and in April 1932 the number rose to 85 percent. [34] The SPD dominated the factory proletariat. In 1930, 89.9 percent of factory committee members (roughly corresponding to shop stewards) were Social Democrats. [35] Trotsky was absolutely right when he stated:

Naturally, the unemployed form a powerful revolutionary factor, particularly so in Germany. But not as an independent proletarian army; rather as the left wing of such an army. The chief kernel of the workers is always to be sought in the factory. [36]

Three days after Trotsky wrote *Germany, the Key to the International Situation*, he wrote another strong appeal and warning to German workers entitled, *For a Workers' United Front Against Fascism*:

Germany is now passing through one of those great historic hours upon which the fate of the German people, the fate of Europe, and in significant measure the fate of all humanity, will depend for decades. If you place a ball on top of a pyramid, the slightest impact can cause it to roll down either to the left or to the right. That is the situation approaching with every hour in Germany today. There are forces which would like the ball to roll down towards the right and break the back of the working class. There are forces which would like the ball to remain at the top. That is utopia. The ball cannot remain at the top of the pyramid. The Communists want the ball to roll down toward the left and break the back of capitalism. But it is not enough to want; one must know how ...

The fascists are growing very rapidly. The Communists are also growing but much more slowly. The growth at the extreme poles shows that the ball cannot maintain itself at the top of the pyramid. The rapid growth of the fascists signifies the danger that the ball may roll down toward the right. Therein lies an enormous danger. [37]

It is necessary, without any delay, finally to elaborate a practical system of measures ... with the aim of actual struggle against fascism. The question of factory defence organizations, of unhampered activity on the part of the factory councils, the inviolability of the workers' organizations and institutions, the question of arsenals that may be seized by the fascists, the question of measures in the case of an emergency, that is, of the coordination of the actions of the Communists and the Social Democratic divisions in the struggle, etc., etc., must be dealt with in this program. In the struggle against fascism, the factory councils occupy a tremendously important position. Here

a particularly precise program of action is necessary. Every factory must become an anti-fascist bulwark, with its own commandants and its own battalions. It is necessary to have a map of the fascist barracks and all other fascist strongholds, in every city and in every district. The fascists are attempting to encircle the revolutionary strongholds. The encirclers must be encircled. [38]

The Stalinists did everything to sabotage the united front against Fascism, by adopting the theory of 'Social Fascism'. At the same time they helped the Social Democratic leaders to consolidate their influence over their followers.

In identifying the democratic servants of capital with capital's fascist bodyguards, the Comintern has rendered social democracy the greatest service. In the countries where fascism is demonstrating strength, that is, first of all in Italy and then in Austria and Germany, the social democracy has little difficulty in showing the masses not only the differences but also the antagonism between it and fascism. By the same token, it absolves itself of having to show that it is not the democratic servant of capitalism. The whole political struggle is thus transposed to an artificial plane, to the greatest benefit of the social democracy. [39]

And Trotsky ended his article with the following urgent words:

Worker-Communists, you are hundreds of thousands, millions; you cannot leave for any place; there are not enough passports for you. Should fascism come to power, it will ride over your skulls and spines like a terrific tank. Your salvation lies in merciless struggle. And only a fighting unity with the Social Democratic workers can bring victory. Make haste, worker-Communists, you have very little time left! [40]

A united front with Social Democracy should not be a diplomatic game among leaders. The Communists should never forget the reformist nature of the SPD and hence the half-hearted nature of its resistance to fascism. The fundamental differences between Communism and Social Democracy should never be obscured.

The Communist Party is a proletarian, anti-bourgeois party, even if erroneously led. The Social Democracy, though composed of workers, is entirely a bourgeois party, which under 'normal conditions' is led quite expertly from the point of view of bourgeois aims, but which is good for nothing at all under the conditions of a social crisis. [41]

One should never forget that the Social Democratic leaders do not want to carry a real fight against the Nazis – they have to be forced to fight.

... the Social Democratic leaders do not want to fight. They cherished the hope that Hindenburg would save them from Hitler. Now they are waiting for some other miracle. They do not want to fight. They lost the habit of fighting long ago. The struggle frightens them.

... In the entire Social Democratic press it is impossible to find a single line indicating genuine preparation for the struggle. There is not a single thing, merely some general phrases, postponements to some indefinite future, nebulous consolations. 'Only let the Nazis start something, and then ...' And the Nazis started something. They marched forward step by step, they tranquilly take over one position after another. [42]

The involvement of the KPD in the united front should in no way suspend its political independence from the SPD and its criticism of it. The Communists should carry out a two-edged policy: first, to secure success in fighting the Nazis, secondly, to win workers away from Social Democracy, as the latter is unable to fight the Nazis

consistently. The KPD should march separately from the SPD but they should strike together.

No common platform with the Social Democracy, or with the leaders of the German trade unions, no common publications, banners, placards! March separately, but strike together! Agree only how to strike, whom to strike, and when to strike! Such an agreement can be concluded even with the devil himself, with his grandmother, and even with Noske and Grzesinsky [the Social Democratic police chief of Berlin]. On one condition, not to bind one's hands. [43]

Communists should never drop their guard against their temporary Social Democratic allies.

... even in Germany we in no way advocate lapsing into a united-front fetishism. An agreement is an agreement. It remains in effect so long as it serves the practical goal for which it was concluded. If the reformists begin to curb or to sabotage the movement, the Communists must always put to themselves the question: is it not time to tear up the agreement and to lead the masses further under our own banner? [44]

The KPD leaders argued repeatedly that 'without a prior victory over social fascism we cannot vanquish fascism'. Again and again Trotsky argued that the order of the links in historical development was exactly the opposite. It was not the victory of Communism over Social Democracy that would precede the victory over fascism. On the contrary: in the struggle against fascism the Communists would increase their influence *vis-à-vis* Social Democracy. The proletarian revolution could develop only out of successful resistance to Nazism.

The principal political responsibility for the growth of fascism rests, of course, on the shoulders of the Social Democracy. Ever since the imperialist war, the labors of this party have been reduced to uprooting from the consciousness of the proletariat

the idea of an independent policy, to implanting within it the belief in the eternity of capitalism, and to forcing it to its knees time and again before the decadent bourgeoisie. The petty bourgeoisie can follow the worker only when it sees in him the new chief. The Social Democracy teaches the worker to be a lackey. The petty bourgeoisie will not follow a lackey. The policy of reformism deprives the proletariat of the possibility of leading the plebeian masses of the petty bourgeoisie and thereby converts the latter into cannon fodder for fascism. [45]

In the face of the menace of Nazism the SPD relied on the German state and its police to defend democracy.

In case of actual danger, the Social Democracy banks ... on the Prussian police. It is reckoning without its host! The fact that the police was originally recruited in large numbers from among Social Democratic workers is absolutely meaningless. Consciousness is determined by environment even in this instance. The worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state, is a bourgeois cop, not a worker. Of late years these policemen have had to do much more fighting with revolutionary workers than with Nazi students. Such training does not fail to leave its effects. And above all: every policeman knows that though governments may change, the police remain.

The Social Democratic leaders argued:

Hitler ... can never come into power against the police and the Reichswehr. Now, according to the Constitution, the Reichswehr is under the command of the president of the Republic. Therefore fascism, it follows, is not dangerous so long as a president faithful to the Constitution remains at the head of the government. Brüning's regime must be supported until the presidential elections, so that a constitutional president may then be elected through an alliance with the parliamentary bourgeoisie, and thus Hitler's rise to power will be blocked for

another seven years ... A mass party, leading millions (towards socialism!) holds that the question as to which class will come to power in present-day Germany, which is shaken to its very foundations, depends not on the fighting strength of the German proletariat, not on the shock troops of fascism, not even on the personnel of the Reichswehr, but on whether the pure spirit of the Weimar Constitution (along with the required quantity of camphor and naphthalene) shall be installed in the presidential palace. [46]

Trotsky knew that, *notwithstanding* the treacherous, cowardly nature of the Social Democratic leaders, there was a need for a united front of the KPD and SPD to fight fascism. This was necessary, and possible, because the existence of the SPD was incompatible with Nazism in power.

Fascism is not merely a system of reprisals, of brutal force, and of police terror. Fascism is a particular governmental system based on the uprooting of all elements of proletarian democracy within bourgeois society ... To this end ... it is ... necessary to smash all independent and voluntary organizations, to demolish all the defensive bulwarks of the proletariat, and to uproot whatever has been achieved during three-quarters of a century by the Social Democracy and the trade unions. [47]

... The Social Democracy without the mass organizations of the workers can have no influence. Fascism cannot entrench itself in power without annihilating the workers' organizations. Parliament is the main arena of the Social Democracy. The system of fascism is based upon the destruction of parliamentarism. For the monopolistic bourgeoisie, the parliamentary and fascist regimes represent only different vehicles of dominion; it has recourse to one or the other, depending upon the historical conditions. But for both the Social Democracy and fascism, the choice of one or the other vehicle

has an independent significance; more than that, for them it is a question of political life or death. [48]

In the life and death conflict between Social Democracy and fascism lay the possibility, and necessity, for the Communist Party to call on the Social Democratic Party to unite in action against the Nazis. It was the duty of the Communists to put the maximum pressure on the Social Democrats to push them into action.

The need for a united front between the Communist Party and Social Democracy does not follow from the closeness between the parties, nor from the reliability and consistency of Social Democracy in fighting fascism.

Here Trotsky drew on the experience of the united front of the Bolsheviks with their foes, the Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries and Kerensky, against the common enemy, General Kornilov and his coup of August 1917. The Bolsheviks did not dream of behaving like the KPD leaders in the face of the threat of Hitler. The Bolsheviks,

had a right to say: 'In order to defeat the Korniloviad – we must first defeat the Kerenskiad.' They said this more than once, for it was correct and necessary for all the subsequent propaganda. But that was entirely inadequate for offering resistance to Kornilov on August 16, and on the days that followed, and for preventing him from butchering the Petrograd proletariat. That is why the Bolsheviks did not content themselves with a general appeal to the workers and soldiers to break with the conciliators and to support the red united front of the Bolsheviks. No, the Bolsheviks proposed the united front struggle to the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries and created together with them joint organizations of struggle. Was this correct or incorrect? Let Thälmann answer that. In order to show even more vividly how matters stood with the united front, I will cite the following incident: immediately upon my release after the trade unions had put up bail for me, I went directly to the Committee for National Defence, where I discussed and adopted decisions regarding the struggle against Kornilov with the Menshevik Dan



and the Social Revolutionary Gotz, allies of Kerensky who had kept me in prison. Was this right or wrong? ... [49]

Trotsky concluded:

A cattle dealer once drove some bulls to the slaughterhouse. And the butcher came nigh with his sharp knife. 'Let us close ranks and jack up this executioner on our horns,' suggested one of the bulls.

'If you please, in what way is the butcher any worse than the dealer who drove us hither with his cudgel?' replied the bulls, who had received their political education in Manuilsky's institute.

'But we shall be able to attend to the dealer as well afterwards!'

'Nothing doing,' replied the bulls, firm in their principles, to the counsellor. 'You are trying to shield our enemies from the left; you are a social-butcher yourself.'

And they refused to close ranks.

– from *Aesop's Fables* [50]

### **What is National Socialism?**

TROTSKY MADE a brilliant and original analysis of National Socialism. To use Deutscher's words: 'In the main, his view of Nazism has retained freshness and originality; it still remains the only coherent and realistic analysis of National Socialism (or of fascism at large) that can be found in Marxist literature.' [51]

Let us summarise his views.

The crux of Trotsky's conception lies in his description of National Socialism as 'the party of counter-revolutionary despair'. It is a

populist counter-revolutionary movement. Unlike traditional reaction which works from above, from the top of the social pyramid, National Socialism was a counter-revolution from below.

Through the fascist agency, capitalism sets in motion the masses of the crazed petty bourgeoisie, and bands of the declassed and demoralized lumpenproletariat; all the countless human beings whom finance capital itself has brought to desperation and frenzy. [52]

... It raises to their feet those classes that are immediately above the proletariat and that are ever in dread of being forced down into its ranks [53]

... In the atmosphere brought to white heat by war, defeat, reparations, inflation, occupation of the Ruhr, crisis, need, and despair, the petty bourgeoisie rose up against all the old parties that had bamboozled it. The sharp grievances of small proprietors never out of bankruptcy, of their university sons without posts and clients, of their daughters without dowries and suitors, demanded order and an iron hand. [54]

The ruined petty bourgeois blamed the Weimar Republic, at the head of which Social Democracy had stood for years, for their agony. What united the crazed petty bourgeoisie was hatred for the proletariat. Hitler's

political art consisted in fusing the petty bourgeoisie into oneness through its common hostility to the proletariat. What must be done in order to improve things? First of all, throttle those who are underneath. Impotent before big capital, the petty bourgeoisie hopes in the future to regain its social dignity through the ruin of the workers. [55]

What was the role of Hitler's personality in creating and shaping the Nazi movement? He was the embodiment of the frenzied petty

bourgeoisie.

The controversy over Hitler's personality becomes the sharper the more the secret of his success is sought in himself. In the meantime, another political figure would be difficult to find that is in the same measure the focus of anonymous historic forces. Not every exasperated petty bourgeois could have become Hitler, but a particle of Hitler is lodged in every exasperated petty bourgeois. [56]

The petty bourgeoisie, isolated and impotent, resented its social position: it looked up with envy and hatred at the big bourgeoisie and looked down, again with hatred and envy, at the proletariat, which showed a capacity for political and trade union organisation. In the eyes of this crazed petty bourgeoisie, big business, Jewish finance, parliamentary democracy, Social Democratic governments, Communism and Marxism, were amalgamated into one enemy. The small businessman shook his fist at big business and claimed to be a socialist. Before the workers he stridently declared his opposition to the class struggle, his detestation of Marxist internationalism, his chauvinism.

All progress undermined the petty bourgeoisie. Hence, down with progress.

The petty bourgeois is hostile to the idea of development, for development goes immutably against him; progress has brought him nothing except irredeemable debts. National Socialism rejects not only Marxism but Darwinism. The Nazis curse materialism because the victories of technology over nature have signalled the triumph of large capital over small ...

The petty bourgeois needs a higher authority, which stands above matter and above history, and which is safeguarded from competition, inflation, crisis, and the auction block ... In order to raise it above history, the nation is given the support of the race. History is viewed as the emanation of the race. The qualities of

the race are construed without relation to changing social conditions. Rejecting 'economic thought' as base, National Socialism descends a stage lower; from economic materialism it appeals to zoologic materialism ...

As the ruined nobility sought solace in the gentility of its blood, so the pauperized petty bourgeoisie befuddles itself with fairy tales concerning the special superiorities of its race ...

Despair has raised them to their feet, fascism has given them a banner. Everything that should have been eliminated from the national organism in the form of cultural excrement in the course of the normal development of society has now come gushing out from the throat; capitalist society is puking up the undigested barbarism. Such is the physiology of National Socialism. [57]

The German Social Democratic leaders believed, in vain, that they would attract the petty bourgeoisie by carrying out a policy of moderation, by accommodating to the *status quo*. But this was the last thing that could attract the frenzied petty bourgeoisie in despair about the *status quo*. The Social Democrats continued to preach moderation, while the distressed petty bourgeois millions could not but be impatient. Thus the moderation of the SPD played into the hands of the Nazis.

The petty bourgeoisie cannot play an independent historical role. It follows either the proletariat or the bourgeoisie. The route it follows is determined by the strength and decisiveness of the proletariat.

In the epoch of the rise, the sprouting and blooming of capitalism, the petty bourgeoisie, despite acute outbreaks of discontent, generally marched obediently in the capitalist harness. Nor could it do anything else. But under the conditions of capitalist disintegration and the impasse in the economic situation, the petty bourgeoisie strives, seeks, and attempts to

tear itself loose from the fetters of the old masters and rulers of society. It is quite capable of linking its fate with that of the proletariat. For that, only one thing is needed: the petty bourgeoisie must acquire faith in the ability of the proletariat to lead society onto a new road. The proletariat can inspire this faith only by its strength, by the firmness of its actions, by a skilful offensive against the enemy, by the success of its revolutionary policy.

But, woe if the revolutionary party does not measure up to the situation! [58]

### **The Pause before the Deluge**

AS MENTIONED, in March 1930, Hermann Müller's Social Democratic government was forced to resign and was replaced by Heinrich Brüning. Lacking an effective majority he governed by emergency decree. The Brüning government survived 26 months. It was followed by the Von Papen government that had even less support. It too ruled by decree and survived for five and a half months. This was succeeded by a government with even less support, that of General Schleicher, which survived for 57 days. Finally came the government headed by Hitler.

Trotsky argued that the Brüning regime was not fascist – as workers' organisations were not destroyed. But neither was it a parliamentary democratic regime, as Brüning ruled by the power of decrees. Trotsky defined it as a transitional regime between parliamentary democracy and fascism. He called it a Bonapartist regime – an expression of the most extreme class antagonism, when this has not yet led to open struggle. The fact that democracy and fascism are not compatible does not exclude a combination of the two for a short time.

Under Brüning the Nazis marched ahead from one electoral victory to another. In the first Reichstag elections under Brüning on 14 September 1930, the Nazis won 6,409,600 votes. In the 13 March

1932 elections for President of the Republic Hitler got 11,339,400 votes, and a month later – on 10 April, the Nazi vote rose to 13,418,500. In 1928 the Nazis had 2.6 percent of the vote; in September 1930, 18.3 percent; in March 1932, 30.1 percent, and in April 1932, 36.8 percent.

Following the huge Nazi vote in the April 1932 presidential election Brüning decided to rein in the Nazis. He and the Reichswehr had been willing to play the Nazis and the working class parties off against each other, but they did not want the Nazis to become too strong. Brüning got Hindenburg to sign a decree banning the Nazi private armies, the SA and SS. This took effect on 14 April 1932. Yet, as Trotsky prophesied, the stronger the two extremes became, the more unstable would the Bonapartist regime become. Following a series of intrigues engineered from inside the military high command by the 'social General' Kurt von Schleicher, Hindenburg sacked Brüning, and on 31 May 1932 appointed a new Chancellor, Franz von Papen, heading a cabinet of Junkers.

Papen dissolved the Reichstag on 4 June, and fixed the new elections for the last day of July. On 14 June the ban on the SA and SS was lifted, and on 20 July, in violation of the Constitution, the Social Democratic government of Prussia was dismissed, a Reichskommissar appointed, and a state of emergency declared in Berlin and Brandenburg. Papen hoped in this way to conciliate the Nazis, while at the same stealing some of their thunder against 'Marxism'.

The Social Democrats, who again and again promised to defend the Constitution, were now put to the test. They had sworn they would defend the Republic against any *coup d'état*.

The trade unions and the Social Democratic Party, which had defeated the Kapp Putsch in 1920 by a general strike, discussed the possibility of another such strike, only to reject it ... the fact that the two largest working-class organizations in Germany, the Social Democratic Party and the trade unions, had not put up even a token resistance in face of Papen's *coup d'état*, was a

significant pointer to the opposition (or lack of it) which Hitler might expect to meet if he came to power. [59]

The KPD called for a general strike, but everyone remembered its 'Red Referendum' against the same Prussian government, and the strike call fell completely flat.

When Papen was in office, Trotsky's calls for a united front, for action to stop the Nazis, became even more urgent, more beseeching. But it was a call in the wilderness.

### **After 30 January 1933**

WHAT WAS the Social Democratic leaders' reaction to Hitler's becoming Chancellor?

The historian, Julian Braunthal, writes:

... during the party leaders' discussion on the night of 30 January arguments for prudence and hesitation overcame those in favour of going into battle immediately. The party leaders in no way regarded Hitler's nomination as Chancellor as being a seizure of power. The new Cabinet was not purely National Socialist, but a coalition of German Nationalists with National Socialists; only three of the twelve government members were Nazis, the other nine being Conservatives. Moreover, Hitler had promised the President on oath to uphold the Weimar Constitution, and Wilhelm Frick, the Nazi Minister for the Interior, had announced that the Cabinet had refused to ban the Communist party and would not interfere with the freedom of the press. Arguing in favour of the party's tactic, Rudolf Breitscheid declared that so long as Hitler kept to the 'path of the Constitution' he would be leading a lawful government', which, he said, 'we must and can oppose ... but which is still a lawful constitutional government ...

On Breitscheid's advice the party leaders postponed organized active resistance to the Fascist threat until such time as it was unanimously determined that there had been a clear breach of constitution. They hoped that such a moment would not come ...

... a few days later the government put the instruments of state power at the service of Nazi terrorism. Social Democratic and Communist newspapers were banned for periods of days or months or else completely; labour leaders were forbidden to speak and labour meetings were stopped by government officials immediately they began, or else simply broken up by Nazi storm-troopers; with police connivance. Republican policemen were dismissed en masse and replaced by Nazis. On 17 February, Nazi terrorism was given official sanction in a decree by Hermann Göring, Nazi Prussian Minister of the Interior, empowering the police to use fire-arms at their own discretion. The process of destroying the Socialist movement by terrorist violence had begun.

Even now the party leaders argued that this interference with constitutional rights still did not amount to a clear breach of the constitution which might justify risking the carnage of civil war. After all, Socialist newspapers could still appear and labour meetings were still somehow possible. In particular, the parliamentary institutions still remained untouched, and elections to the Reichstag, which had been dissolved on 1 February, had been fixed for 5 March. [60]

The cowardice of the Social Democratic leaders continued unabated. When, on 23 March 1933, an enabling law giving Hitler unlimited powers was moved at the Reichstag, Otto Wels, the leader of the SPD spoke against it, but he made it clear that the party, acting as a lawful opposition, would only offer non-violent, lawful opposition to the regime. Wels said:



The election of 5 March has given a majority to the government parties and thereby given them a chance to govern according to the text and spirit of the constitution ... We accept their present rule as a fact. However, the people's sense of justice is also a political force, and we shall not cease to appeal to this sense of justice.

The party leaders tried to adapt themselves somehow to the new situation so as to save the party's legal right to exist.

... At the end of March 1933 Otto Wels, the party chairman, resigned from his membership of the Bureau of the Labour and Socialist International so that the German Social Democrats could not be held responsible for the International's unremittingly hostile attitude towards the Third Reich. The party leadership expelled groups of the Berlin Socialist Youth who had already begun to work illegally. It disavowed a group of eminent members of the party executive – Breitscheid, Crispian, Hilferding, Dittmann, Stampfer and others – who had formed themselves in Prague as *Sopade* (abbreviation for Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) in order to organize the fight against Hitler's dictatorship from abroad. On 17 May, forty-eight of the sixty-five Social Democratic members present in the Reichstag – Frick had threatened them in the Upper House with murder – voted unconditionally for a declaration of peace with Hitler. On 22 June 1933 the Social Democratic party was ... banned. Its property was confiscated and its Members of Parliament were disqualified. [61]

The trade union leaders were not less servile. As Evelyn Anderson describes:

The most shameful attempt at a voluntary 'self-adaptation' to the régime was that of the Trade Union leadership. Still hoping that they might be able to save their organisations by a display of what they continued to call 'political neutrality', they even went

so far as to give their full support to the Nazi transformation of the First of May, the traditional day of international working-class solidarity, into a 'National Labour Day'. The *Gewerkschaftszeitung*, official organ of the ADGB (the German TUC), published for May 1st an article by Walter Pahl of which one paragraph read:

'We certainly need not strike our colours in order to recognise that the victory of National Socialism, though won in the struggle against a party which we used to consider as the embodiment (*Träger*) of the idea of Socialism (i.e., the Social Democrats), *is our victory as well*; because, today, the Socialist task is put to the whole nation.'

This declaration, which caused much indignation among the rank and file of the Trade Union and Socialist movement, failed to impress the Nazis. On May 2nd – that is, immediately after this moral surrender – all Trade Union buildings were occupied by detachments of the SA and SS. The most prominent Trade Union leaders, Leipart, Grassmann and Wissel, were arrested. On May 13th all Trade Union property was confiscated. The German working class had lost its industrial organisations. [62]

On May 17th Hitler made the first of his famous Reichstag speeches on foreign policy. That was the last Parliamentary session in which Socialists were to participate, although only about half the Parliamentary Party was represented ... in a last pathetic attempt 'to save the Party' the Social Democrats said 'Aye' to the National Socialist motion on foreign policy which was thus unanimously adopted. This was unconditional surrender. By it the leaders might conceivably have hoped to save their lives, but never their Party. The Nazis, naturally, showed nothing but contempt for their internal appeasers – and little leniency.

On June 23rd the Social Democratic Party was officially banned; the leader of the policy of appeasement, Paul Löbe, was arrested, together with many others. The Nazi regime had tolerated Löbe's line of compromise exactly as long as they considered it useful for their own ends – that is to say, until confusion and demoralisation had worked havoc amongst the members of the Labour movement and killed the last spark of self-confidence. [63]

The KPD leadership simply buried its head in the sand and denied that a mass defeat had occurred. On 30 January 1933, it proclaimed a general strike, but nobody came out on strike. Evelyn Anderson writes:

the Communist Party was not in the least perturbed by its failure to take action. According to its own subsequent verdict, the lack of resistance did not signify anything, for 'the strength of the Communist Party expressed itself in the fact that, at the critical moment, the Party remained homogeneous'. During the critical weeks there were no 'discussions' going on in the German Communist Party. [64]

At the time of the worst defeat, when everybody was wondering: 'How could this have happened? What was the cause? What are we to do now?' The Communists ... persisted in self-delusion:

'All signs point to one thing, namely, that in the very near future violent class struggles must be expected ... Will the Party (the CP) be able to give a sufficient lead to the *present revolutionary movement of the masses?*'

Blithely, the Communists went on to speak of the 'increasing revolutionary activities of the masses', etc., while at the same

time continuing to direct their main attacks against the Socialists ... 'the complete elimination of the Social Fascists (the Social Democracy) from the State apparatus and the brutal suppression of the Social Democratic organisation and of its press do not alter the fact that they represent now as before the main social buttress of the dictatorship of capital'. [65]

When, in the general election of November 1933, the Nazis won 92.2 percent of the total vote – it is true through terror and suppression – although 3.3 million ballot papers were spoilt and 2.1 million had the courage to abstain,

the exiled German Social Democrats in Prague celebrated the election results almost like a victory:

' ... these millions are not an "opposition" in the normal sense of the word; they are an army, hostile to the system, a nucleus battalion for the coming Socialist revolution.'

The Communists went even farther:

'The election results ... represents a great victory of Thälmann's Party ... This army of millions of brave anti-Fascists confines the correctness of the statement, made already in October by the Central Committee of the German Communist Party, that a new revolutionary upsurge has begun in Germany.' [66]

After Hitler's victory, the Comintern leadership confirmed the absolute correctness of KPD policy. On 1 April 1933, Fritz Heckert, representing the KPD, made his report to the Comintern. The Praesidium, having heard the report, declared:

the political line and the organisational policy pursued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany, led by Comrade Thälmann, before and at the time of the Hitler coup, was quite correct ... The revolutionary upsurge in Germany will

inevitably grow in spite of the Fascist terror. The resistance of the masses to Fascism is bound to increase. The establishment of an open Fascist dictatorship, by destroying all the democratic illusions among the masses and liberating them from the influence of Social Democracy, accelerates the rate of Germany's development towards proletarian revolution ... It is necessary to strengthen the Party and strengthen all the mass organisations of the proletariat, to prepare the masses for decisive revolutionary battles, for the overthrow of the Fascist dictatorship by an armed rebellion. [67]

### **Trotsky After the Victory of Hitler**

IN CONTRAST to the complacency of the KPD leadership which lulled workers into passivity, Trotsky still argued that it was not too late to prevent the consolidation of Nazi rule even after Hitler's accession to power:

The assumption of power by Hitler is indubitably a fearful blow for the working class. But this is still not a decisive or an irrevocable defeat. The enemy, who might have been crushed while he was only striving upwards, has occupied today an entire series of commanding posts. This allows his side a great advantage, but there has been no battle as yet. The occupation of advantageous positions decides nothing by itself – it is the living forces that decide.

... Two and a half years ago, the Left Opposition insistently proposed that all the institutions and organizations of the Communist Party from the Central Executive Committee to the smallest provincial unit should immediately turn to the parallel Social Democratic organizations with a concrete proposal for mutual action against the impending suppression of proletarian democracy. Had a struggle against the Nazis been built on this basis, Hitler would not be Chancellor today and the Communist

Party would be occupying the leading place within the working class. But there is no return to the past. The consequences of the mistakes that have been perpetrated have succeeded in becoming political facts and compose at present a part of the objective background. The situation must be taken as it is. It need never have been as bad as it is, but it is not hopeless. A political turn – but real one, a bold one, an open one, one that is thought out from all sides – can completely save the situation and open up the road to victory. [68]

And no doubt it was still possible, even after 30 January 1933, to carry out an effective struggle against the Nazis. A month later, on 5 March, after the Reichstag fire and banning of the Communist Party, notwithstanding the unleashing of Nazi terror, the Socialists and Communists polled 12 million votes between them. The rigged Nazi vote was 17 million.

When it became clear that neither the SPD nor the KPD were ready to fight and prevent Hitler from consolidating his power, Trotsky's writings were aimed to combat all illusions about the depth of the defeat and to bring home the dearly bought lessons of this horrific experience. Most important, in his view, was the bankruptcy of the KPD as a revolutionary party, and the need to build a new party. In an article of 14 March 1933, entitled 'The Tragedy of the German Proletariat: The German Workers Will Rise Again – Stalinism, Never!' Trotsky writes:

The most powerful proletariat of Europe, measured by its place in production, its social weight, and the strength of its organizations, has manifested no resistance since Hitler's coming to power and his first violent attacks against the workers' organizations. This is the fact from which to proceed in subsequent strategic calculations. [69]

The responsibility for the catastrophe lay at the feet of the leaders of the SPD and KPD. Trotsky draws the following conclusion regarding the role and future of the KPD:

[it] gave the proletariat nothing save confusion, zigzags, defeats, and calamities.

Yes, five million Communists still succeeded in reaching the ballot box, one by one. But in the factories and on the streets, there are none. They are disconcerted, dispersed, demoralized. They have been broken away from independence under the yoke of the apparatus. The bureaucratic terror of Stalinism paralysed their will power before the turn came for the terror of the fascist bands.

It must be said clearly, plainly, openly: Stalinism in Germany has had its August 4 [1914, when the German SPD voted for the defence budget]. Henceforth, the advanced workers will only speak of the period of the domination of the Stalinist bureaucracy with a burning sense of shame, with words of hatred and curses. The official German Communist Party is doomed. From now on it will only decompose, crumble, and melt into the void. German Communism can be reborn only on a new basis and with a new leadership ... Under the terrible blows of the enemy, the advanced German workers will have to build up a new party. The Bolshevik-Leninists will give all their forces to this work. [70]

On 28 May 1933, in an article entitled *The German Catastrophe: the Responsibilities of the Leadership*, Trotsky wrote:

The unparalleled defeat of the German proletariat is the most important event since the conquest of power by the Russian proletariat. [71]

And on 22 June 1933 he concluded: 'The present catastrophe in Germany is undoubtedly the greatest defeat of the working class in history'. [72]

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## 6. The Trotskyist Movement in Germany

WE HAVE seen the brilliance of Trotsky's writings on Germany, how clear his analysis, and how magnificent the strategy and tactics he put forward for the struggle against Fascism. But who was there in Germany to propagate Trotsky's ideas? This is the theme of the present chapter. As we shall see, tragically, there was a gaping abyss between Trotsky's grand ideas, and the actual means, the personnel, to carry out these ideas. In no way did this chasm separating ends and means belittle the significance of Trotsky's effort to bridge the gap. Prometheus chained is no less heroic for the failure of his effort to break the chain.

As Germany was the key to the international situation, building a Bolshevik-Leninist opposition organisation in Germany was the most urgent task facing Trotsky after he was exiled to Turkey. He had to start from a very weak position. Unlike France, where for a long time opposition groups sympathetic to Trotsky had existed, such as that of Alfred Rosmer and Boris Souvarine, or in Spain with Andrés Nin, in Germany there was for a long time nothing similar. Instead there was the largest and most influential Communist Party in the world outside the USSR.

In addition there existed two quite significant opposition organisations, with a relatively large membership, with influence in sections of the working class, and led by people who were very well known as former leaders of the KPD. These were the Bukharinist Right Opposition KPO led by Heinrich Brandler and August Thalheimer, and the Zinovievist German Left led by Ruth Fischer and Arkady Maslow. Both opposition organisations had their genesis in the failed revolution of October 1923. In addition, to crowd the field, a

new party of some size rose in 1931 – the Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei (SAP, the Socialist Workers' Party). Very little space was left for the Trotskyists.

### **The Right Opposition: the KPO**

FOLLOWING THE removal by Stalin of Bukharin from the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, steps were taken to remove his supporters in the German Communist Party. Heinrich Brandler, who led the KPD between 1921 and 1923, and 6,000 of his supporters, were expelled at the end of 1928 and beginning of 1929. [1]

The expellees founded a new organisation, the Communist Party Opposition (KPO). In October 1929 its membership was claimed to be 5,100; three years later – in 1932 – Brandler reported that the membership was 3,500. [2]

In the first year of its existence the KPO had 60 to 70 local branches. In addition there were individual members in numerous localities who in the following years established new branches. In 1930 and 1931 the KPO had in addition 20-25 factory branches. [3]

KPO influence was significant, although very small compared with the KPD. In the local elections in 1930 the KPO stood candidates in 37 local authorities in Saxony, and collected a total vote equal to 14.1 percent of that achieved by the KPD. [4]

The KPO was quite well implanted in the proletariat. It controlled majorities on various trade union branch committees. This was the case, for example, in the metal union of Thuringia. It controlled the metal union committee in Stuttgart. At the union congress of the metal workers of Berlin the KPO had eight delegates, while the KPD was not represented at all. [5]

The KPO had an impressive number of newspapers. Besides the national political-theoretical organ, *Gegen den Strom*, it had another eight papers, mainly weeklies. From 1 January 1930, the KPO published a daily paper, *Arbeiterpolitik*. This appeared in three

separate editions: one for Greater Berlin, another for Saxony-Thuringia, a third for the rest of Germany.

The KPO's youth organisation, Kommunistische Jugend-Verband Deutschlands (Opposition), had some thousand members and published a monthly with a circulation of about 2,000. [6] Of course there was a political abyss between the Bulcharinist KPO and the Trotskyists. In international affairs Brandler was very far from Trotsky. He declared his solidarity with Stalin and Bukharin on the policies of the Comintern and the CPSU outside Germany. Brandler opposed the latest, ultra-left zigzag of the Comintern; Trotsky attacked its entire post-Leninist record. Brandler criticised the policies of the KPD, but refrained from contradicting the Soviet leadership. In internal Soviet conflicts Brandler sided with Stalin, endorsing 'Socialism in one country', exonerating the bureaucratic regime as conforming to Russia's national conditions, and regularly denouncing Trotskyism.

In 1936 the Brandler leadership justified the Zinoviev trial as an 'act of legitimate defence against a counter-revolutionary plot'. In February 1937 the verdict of the trial of Radek and Piatakov was also justified – albeit hesitantly – with some criticism of the conduct of the trial. In a general statement the Moscow trials were justified as 'a sign of the strength of the Soviet system ... that does not lead to disruption of the proletarian dictatorship as such when leading officials in almost all parts of the state apparatus are accused of sabotage, espionage, corruption and other crimes.' [7]

Brandler however changed his tune with the trial of Bukharin. This trial was described as a 'stage of wild frenzy' of the 'counter-revolutionary terror' which showed 'the growing decay of the Stalin regime' – totally unlike the cynical justification of the trials of the previous year – which showed the 'strength of the Soviet system'. [8]

Some eighteen years later Brandler justified the Soviet troops' suppression of the Hungarian workers' revolution of 1956: without the Soviet intervention Hungary would have left the Soviet camp. [9]

THE DEFEAT of the October 1923 revolution in Germany, as we have seen, led Zinoviev to replace Brandler and Thalheimer with Ruth Fischer and Arkady Maslow.

Fischer and Maslow, the most extreme of the international Zinovievist faction, hunted down the least support for Trotskyism in the party. Their situation became complicated when, in the middle of 1925 Zinoviev broke with Stalin [10] and moved towards a bloc with Trotsky. In Byzantine fashion Zinoviev now distanced himself from his own adherents, Fischer, Maslow, Urbahns and Scholem. Stalin, who had pushed Zinoviev out of the Comintern leadership, went even further in attacking the Fischer and Maslow for their past. They were removed from the leadership of the KPD, accused of being Zinoviev's agents (November 1925).

On 19 August 1926, the Central Committee of the KPD expelled Fischer and Maslow from the party. Two weeks later the two drafted a declaration of support for the Leningrad Opposition – the Zinoviev group which had allied with Trotsky in the United Opposition. While it mentioned Zinoviev, Kamenev and Krupskaya, the reference to Trotsky merely declared he had 'rallied to Zinoviev'. This declaration under the slogan 'Back to Lenin, to real, genuine, non-falsified Leninism', received a great number of signatures of support. It was published on 11 September with 700 signatures, among them 50 well-known leading people, several members of the Central Committee, five deputies in the Reichstag, eight members of the Prussian Landtag, and a number of other party officials. [11]

The Central Committee took disciplinary action against the 700, demanding a loyalty declaration from each one. Most refused to sign and were expelled on 5 November. [12]

On 8-9 April 1928, the supporters of Fischer and Maslow held a conference in Berlin. The Leninbund was born. Among its founders were six former members of the Central Committee of the KPD and 11 MPs. On the face of it the Leninbund seemed quite a strong organisation well implanted in the proletariat. Its principal strongholds were in Berlin, where it had members in every district, in the region of Dortmund, especially in Mannheim, Bruchsal and Karlsruhe, in Cologne, Suhl in Thuringia, Halle and Magdeburg. At

the founding conference it was reported that the Leninbund influenced some 80-100,000 Communist workers inside and outside the party. [13] This figure is no doubt exaggerated, though the fact that the Leninbund had a daily paper, the *Suhl Volkswille*, suggests it had an influence many times its membership. However, the Leninbund was built on sand. As we have seen, it was shaped as a Left opposition to the Right-wing Brandlerite leadership of 1923. Now, in 1928, with Stalin's 'Third Period' and accusations of Social Democracy being Social Fascism, the Leninbund members were completely disoriented. After all, it was Zinoviev, the original patron of Fischer and Maslow, who was the author of the theory of Social Fascism. A whole number of Leninbund groups returned to the KPD. [14] The Leninbund disintegrated very quickly, especially after it decided to put candidates in the Reichstag elections of 1928. Suhl, the most important district of the Leninbund, split away and joined the SPD. The membership of the Leninbund, some 11,000 the previous year, went down to 1,000. [15] The haemorrhage of members continued. In 1932, on the eve of Hitler's victory, its membership stood at some 500. [16]

When Trotsky first intervened in Germany, he expected to get some support from the Leninbund, but in reality he received little. It is interesting to note that of the 700 signatures to the foundation document of the Leninbund, only nine later became Trotskyists. [17] Zinoviev's friends in Germany thus provided very unreliable allies.

The Leninbund, at one time a sizeable current with deep roots in the proletariat and representing an authentic 'workers' leftism', was a serious obstacle in the path of the International Left Opposition. The Zinovievist current, which was basically soft, centrist, was both near and different to the Trotskyist current – a rival and a handicap to it.

### **A Third Obstacle to Trotskyism: the SAP**

THE SOZIALISTISCHE Arbeiterpartei (SAP), which broke from the SPD at the end of 1931 was another obstacle. The SAP was a muddled, centrist, semi-Social Democratic organisation. Its founding

programme made big concessions to pacifism – advocating the League of Nations, the international court of arbitration, etc. [18] Regarding the USSR it argued, in Otto Bauer's footsteps, that with an improvement in economic conditions there would be a withering away of terror and the growth of democratisation. [19] In its statutes the SAP aimed at a loose federation. [20] Regarding relations with existing internationals, one of its leaders, Ernst Eckstein, declared that under no conditions would it join the Comintern; its task was to strengthen the left wing of the Second International. [21] In March 1932 the SAP gained an important addition of 1,000 members of the KPO, led by Paul Frölich and Jacob Walcher. [22]

The SAP was a fairly large organisation. Its leadership claimed a membership of 57,000 in February 1932; in fact the paid-up membership was at most 25,000. [23] In addition there was a youth organisation. At the end of 1932 its membership was 810,000. [24]

The SAP published quite a number of newspapers. Besides the national daily, *SAZ (Sozialistische Arbeiterzeitung)*, a number of national weeklies – *Die Fackel*, *Klassenkampf*, *SWZ (Sozialistische Wochenzeitung)*, *Kampfsignal*, and *Volksrecht*. There were in addition a number of local weeklies; *Badisch-Pfälzische Arbeiter-Tribüne*, *Kurier für Vogtland und Erzgebirge*, *Mitteldeutsches Kampfsignal*, *Norddeutsches Kampfsignal*, *Rhein-Ruhr-Fackel*, *Saar-Fackel*, *Südwestdeutsche Arbeitertribüne*, and *Weser-Ems-Fackel*. [25]

The SAP was a very heterogeneous organisation. Its majority, following Max Seydewitz and Kurt Rosenfeld, wanted to orientate the organisation towards the SPD, and argued for 'radical reformism'. [26] A minority, led by Paul Frölich, Jacob Walcher and Fritz Sternberg, were under the influence of Trotsky. Another group among the leaders was soft on Stalin. Throughout 1932 the SAP was completely paralysed by factional strife. [27]

The factionalism and demoralisation of the SAP increased also as a result of its electoral failures. The SAP inherited three seats in the Prussian Landtag when it broke from the SPD. In the elections of 24 April 1932 to the Prussian Landtag it lost all these seats. The greater the Nazi menace, the nearer Hitler's approach to power, the



more workers thought it was foolish to support small organisations. The SAP's vote thus continued to decline. [28]

	Landtag elections 24 Apr. 1932	Reichstag elections 31 Jul .1932	Reichstag elections 6 Nov. 1932
Breslau	14,355	7,718	5,852
Westfalen Süd	7,717	3,176	1,648
Hessen- Nassau	7,532	2,925	1,779
Bayern	13,437	4,400	1,955
Hamburg	2,302	959	715

The election results to the Landtag in Hessen were particularly revealing. In the elections of 15 November 1931 the SAP got 23,108 votes; on 19 June 1932 its vote went down to 11,689; in the Reichstag elections of 31 July 1932 this fell to 3,008, reaching 1,813 on 6 November. [29] Thus in one year the SAP lost more than 90 percent of its support. It was difficult for it to convince workers who supported the SPD or KPD that the SAP, while calling for unity, was not simply a party of splitters.

The KPO, the Leninbund and the SAP, were small compared to the SPD and KPD which in early 1932 had 1,008,953 and 287,180 members respectively. [30] Their youth movements were also significant: The SPD's had 50,465 members, the KPD's 60,000. [31] Nevertheless as immediate rivals on the left the KPO, Leninbund and SAP represented great hurdles for the German Trotskyists to overcome.

As we shall see, the German Trotskyist organisation never managed to have more than 600 members. All the three organisations – KPO, Leninbund and SAP – had daily papers. What did the Trotskyists have? For a time, from April 1930, they published a small fortnightly, *Der Kommunist*. But after a split with Kurt Landau (see below) they had to stop publishing any open journal. Instead they maintained contact between the members by means of a duplicated *Information Bulletin*. In July 1931 they started to publish a new magazine, *Permanente Revolution*. This appeared monthly until the end of 1931. From January 1932 it appeared fortnightly, and

finally, from the end of July 1932, appeared as a weekly in a newspaper format (of only four pages). In all, 47 issues were published from July 1931 to February 1933. The number produced, which had doubled since it was first produced, was given in August 1932 as 5,000. [32]

Compare this puny publication with the output of KPD propaganda. In 1927 the KPD had 36 dailies [33] and the SPD had 188 dailies, reaching a total of 1,188,401 regular subscribers. [34]

A small cogwheel can turn a larger cogwheel, but not when the disproportions are astronomic: a cogwheel weighing a pound will not be able to turn a cogwheel weighing a ton. If this were tried the only result would be that the teeth of the small cogwheel would break.

All the three organisations we have described, the KPO, Leninbund and SAP advocated, as did the Trotskyists, the establishment of a united front of the KPD and SPD against the Nazis. The similarity of position of the three organisations with that of the Trotskyists on this crucial issue facing German workers made it very difficult indeed for the Trotskyists to pull workers towards them. If a similar song is sung by different people the one with the strongest voice will be heard.

The fact that the Brandlerites did not see the policy of the KPD as derived from the policy of the CPSU, that they supported Stalin's policy both in the USSR and its foreign policy in China during its revolution (1925-27) or in Britain during 1926, would condemn Brandlerism to bankruptcy in the long run, leaving no inheritance. But in the short run, in Germany, it could not bring about a move away from Brandler to Trotsky on any scale. And time was short ... Hitler was knocking at the door.

The fact that the Leninbund, because of its basically Zinovievist nature, was vacillating and unstable, again led to its quick disintegration, but in the meantime it did act as an obstacle on the road of Trotskyism. And ... time was short.

The fact that the SAP, as a centrist organisation, vacillated between reform and revolution, led many of its members to slide back towards the SPD or to drift towards the KPD, while the party as a whole joined the Popular Front in the mid-thirties. Again this meant

that in the historical scale of events, it proved itself to be bankrupt and sterile, but again it was an added obstacle in the path of building a strong, effective Trotskyist organisation in Germany.

However, the greatest obstacle was the resistance of the KPD itself to Trotskyist influence.

### **KKPD Immune to Trotskyism**

WHEN TROTSKY wanted to use his organisation in Germany as a lever to move the KPD, as a weapon to influence its rank and file, he was impeded not only by the disproportionality between the two organisations but also by the qualitative features of the KPD that made it immune to Trotskyist influence.

First of all, the social composition of the KPD. As previously noted, many KPD members were unemployed. By the end of 1931 the figure was 78 percent, and in April 1932 reached 85 percent. [35] The composition of the KPD stood in sharp contrast to that of the SPD. This was made up, in 1930, of: workers, 59.5 percent; teachers, salaried employees and civil servants, 14.8 percent; free professions, 0.6 percent; housewives, 17.1 percent and pensioners, 4.6 percent. [36]

Being overwhelmingly unemployed, the Communists were largely distant from the Social Democratic workers employed in the factories, railways, etc. This facilitated the KPD leadership's effort to prevent a united front between the two parties.

Unemployment conditioned Communists to accept 'Third Period' policies – ultra-leftism, 'social fascism', etc. – and militated against the success of a policy that relied on mass action and the exercise of economic pressure. The alternative was a resort to more and more individual violence.

The Communists also found themselves unable to maintain a stable unemployed movement, as the historian Eve Rosenhaft noted:

In the uncertain and erratic development of the unemployed movement it is possible to see a reflection of the ambiguous psychological cast of the unemployed themselves. It was in the nature of the situation of the unemployed that neither their allegiance nor even their volatility could be depended upon. Depending on the circumstances, being out of work for an extended period of time could result in passivity and resignation, just as easily as it could foster impatience and rebellion. [37]

The tactics of small-scale street fighting and attacks by small bands ('squaddism' as it is sometimes called) in which the KPD indulged fitted the bitterness, impatience, and social isolation of the unemployed.

In the late 1920s a number of paramilitary organisations arose: the most important of these were the Stahlhelm of the right-wing nationalists, the Sturmabteilung (the SA, the Nazi stormtroops), the Reichsbanner Schwarz-rot-gold of the SPD, and the Rote Frontkämpferbund (RFB – Red Front fighters of the KPD). The RFB acted as a weapon against the Nazis and self-defence against the SA. However, being based on the unemployed, it was highly unstable. In December 1930 its membership was some 95,000.

During the second half of 1931, however, the movement began to stagnate, and numbers continued to fall through 1932; at times fewer than one in five of the registered members were paid-up. The situation in Berlin-Brandenburg was particularly unsatisfactory; the number of registered Kampfbund members fell from between ten and twelve thousand in May 1931 to 5,000 in June of 1932. One Berlin local, with a total Party membership of 5,000, had no more than thirty-five detachments.

The Kampfbund also suffered, if anything to a greater extent than the Party, from a familiar complex of problems: high unemployment, unsatisfactory basis in the factories, and rapid fluctuation of membership. In December of 1931, Berlin-Brandenburg had only four Factory Detachments. [38]

Unable to carry mass action in industry, unable to carry out mass strikes on its own, the KPD naturally saw in individual terror an easy way out. This rose out of desperation.

In the view of the leadership, individual terror was the easy way out: it arose not from disappointment with methods tried and found wanting, but from despair of the possibility of success. It was thus distinct from the ideal in character and origins as in form. The absolute incompatibility of the two, so often asserted in principle, was very neatly exemplified by cases where a planned mass-action was wilfully disrupted by individual terrorists. Herbert Wehner reports an incident of 1932 'in the neighbourhood of the Stettin Station': a carefully organised protest movement involving both Communists and Social Democrats broke up after a group of RFB men took it upon themselves to carry out a raid on the SA-tavern in question. [39]

Weakness in the field of mass action, especially industrial action, led the KPD to squaddism – and thus further weakened the party's ability to carry mass action.

The KPD paramilitary organisation was involved in physical attacks on SA taverns. (Control of the tavern was very important because it constituted a centre for organising and controlling the locality).

The campaign against the SA-taverns, or barracks (*Kasernen*), as they were commonly known, began in principle in April of 1931. *Die Rote Fahne* of 23 April published a list of known SA quarters, giving addresses and telephone numbers and ending: 'Self-defence is the right of all who are attacked.' ... It was not until the end of August, however, that the Party began to call directly for action against the taverns.

The long campaign ended with the defeat of the KPD. The Nazis had the money to buy the tavern owners.

It was common knowledge within the labour movement that the SA's 'conquests' during these months depended on direct approaches to individual landlords backed up with the promise of financial advantage – in Friedrichshain and Neukölln people talked about guaranteed sales of thirty barrels of beer a month – and as such the Nazi campaign underlined the desperate situation of the Communist rank and file. Not only were the Nazis fed and clothed by their leaders; they were able to buy the workers' institutions out from under them. [40]

The campaign against the SA-taverns developed into a series of isolated raids, which came to be seen as more trouble than they were worth to the Party ... [41]

It is difficult to draw any firm conclusions about the wider consequences of the street-fighting, but we know that it ended in anger and disillusionment for some rank and file members before 1933, and it is possible that wider circles of the working class drew from it the lesson that the battle for the streets could not be won ... the functions of SA terror may be said to have been ... to draw the fighting energies of the militants away from the traditional foci of working-class action and onto the terrain on which the proletariat was at its weakest. [42]

The KPD faced a dilemma:

the conditions of political activity in Depression Berlin and the character of the Party itself and its auxiliary organizations militated against mass action and encouraged the development of an atmosphere of panic conspiracy ... At the end of November 1931 Paul Jahnke [Secretary and political leader of Neukölln KPD] told his colleagues: 'In my opinion, mass terror is a sheer impossibility ... Fascism can only be held down by terror now, and if that fails, in the long run everything will be lost.' [43]

This squaddist practice closed the minds of KPD members to the arguments of the Trotskyists and reinforced the theory of 'Social Fascism'.

Frequently, as in Prussia, which contained two thirds of the German population, the police who protected the fascists in the street fights were backed by a Social Democratic administration. The idea of a single fascist front – Nazi–police state administration–SDP – thus appeared to be confirmed.

Another characteristic of the KPD membership was the extremely rapid turnover of members. Of the 180,000 dues-paying Communists at the end of 1930, only 20.5 percent had more than a year's standing; 143,000 had entered the party during the year, but 95,000 had left it. [44]

The composition of the KPD delegate conference in the workplace cells of the Ruhr mines in 1932 is highly instructive. About three-quarters of all the delegates had been in the KPD for only a few months, or a little over a year. [45] The instability of the KPD membership stands in sharp contrast to the stability of the membership of the SPD. A 1930 SPD survey revealed that 21 percent of the members had been in the party more than fifteen years; 27 percent more than ten years; 53 percent more than five years. Thus a quarter of the 1930 membership had been paying dues during the entire Weimar period, a fifth since before the war. Only 8 percent were members of a single year's standing. [46]

The theoretical level of the KPD members was very low miseducated by the Stalinist leadership, and being only a very short time in the party, it could not but be very weak intellectually. One clear expression of the members' lack of interest in theory was the tiny circulation of the KPD theoretical monthly, *Die Internationale*. In 1929 only 1,200 copies of it were sold inside the party; the party membership was then 135,160. Even the daily paper, *Die Rote Fahne*, had quite a small circulation some 25,000. [47]

The character of the KPD's membership – unemployed, with very little political experience, and of brief duration helped the KPD leadership not only to promote the theory of social fascism, but to isolate and beat any serious opposition. The ultra-left policy of the

‘Third Period’ fitted the psychological needs of these impatient young unemployed. It was much easier for the Stalinist leadership to manipulate the rootless mass of the members than it would have been if they were employed, experienced workers, schooled in the practice of trade union organisation in the workplace and educated in the party over a number of years.

### **German Trotskyist Organisation in Permanent Crisis**

PIERRE BROUÉ was right when, after studying the Trotsky archives in Harvard, he came to the conclusion that the ‘only real Trotskyists in Germany at that time [around 1927] were Soviet comrades in diplomatic exile’. [48] It was not that the Leninbund was unfriendly to Trotsky. Between 1927 and 1929 its press published articles and communications by Trotsky every week. Its paper, *Die Fahne des Kommunismus*, was at that time the only journal that offered Trotsky a platform. The Leninbund also distributed a significant number of Trotsky’s articles and pamphlets and those of the Russian Opposition. Again, the Leninbund, together with another small group – the Wedding opposition, were the only organisations in Germany that campaigned against Trotsky’s deportation to Alma Ata, and then his exile to Turkey.

After his exile, the Leninbund called a ‘conference for defence of the banned Bolsheviks’, which was held in Aix-la-Chappelle with the participation of German, French, Belgian and Dutch Opposition groups. The conference decided to create a Committee to aid Trotsky and his comrades. Its president was Hugo Urbahns. However, there were from the beginning disagreements between Urbahns and Trotsky: on the class nature of the USSR, on the question of splitting from the KPD and building a new Communist party, and on other issues. In the ensuing polemics between Trotsky and Urbahns, two members of the leadership of the Leninbund Anton Grylewicz and Joko (Josef Kohn) sided with Trotsky.

Trotsky asked Kurt Landau, the Austrian Trotskyist, to go to Berlin to, in his words, ‘feel the ground’ – to intervene in the



Leninbund and to propagate the influence of Trotskyism in Germany.

Kurt Landau had been active in the Austrian Communist Party since the age of 18, becoming very quickly one of its leading members, a member of the Central Committee responsible for agitation and propaganda and editor of its central organ, *Die Rote Fahne*. He became a Trotskyist in 1925 and was one of the chief opponents of the 'Bolshevisation' of the Austrian Communist Party. In 1926 he was expelled from the party. He established his own group with a few tens of members around a journal *Der neue Mahnruf*. He came in touch with Trotsky after the latter's exile from Russia. In mid-August 1929 Kurt Landau went to Berlin and settled there.

On 25 October 1929, the Leninbund paper, *Die Fahne des Kommunismus*, reported the formation of a Trotskyist faction in the Leninbund. At the same time the two Trotskyists, Anton Grylewicz and Joko, were removed from the leadership of the Leninbund. On 23 February 1930 the conference of the Leninbund excluded the Trotskyists altogether.

On 30 March 1930 a unification of all Trotskyists in Germany took place in Berlin. The United Left Opposition was founded. This conference was, however, a very sorry affair, with bitter squabbling that practically tore the organisation to pieces even before it was formed. An historian of the German Trotskyist movement, Annergret Schüle, tells of comrades accusing one another of 'slanders and intrigues', of 'cliquishness', of 'factionalism'.

Trotsky was very disheartened by the state of the German organisation. Some three months after the conference, on 21 June 1930, Trotsky wrote:

Recently in the German section we have had sharp disputes that ended in the withdrawal of Comrades Neumann, Joko, and Grylewicz from the leadership. This action, like a number of actions that preceded it, really has the character of a genuine literary and bureaucratic intrigue of the classical type. The comrades mentioned above gave no hint of the principled reasons for their withdrawal. All efforts that were made to

correct their mistaken action came to naught. Naturally, these comrades will now set about finding 'principled' reasons for their action ...

... not only Marxist, revolutionary elements have come into the Opposition, for principled reasons, but also individualist, petty-bourgeois, and lumpen elements who cannot tolerate discipline and are incapable of carrying out collective work. One could list many examples. Moreover, given the fact that for a number of years the Opposition has led an exclusively literary existence, it has cultivated within its ranks closed circles and literary arrogance characterized by inattention of these elements to workers' organizations. A continual state of opposition can and does breed conceit and grand airs, and also breeds people who always use the terms 'masses', 'proletariat', 'masses', but pay no attention to the individual representatives of the masses, even those in their own ranks, and do not try to draw them in and work with them on the basis of real party democracy. [49]

In a letter to all sections of the International Left Opposition dated 17 February 1931, Trotsky wrote about the state of the German Trotskyists:

We must not shut our eyes to the facts. We must openly say: many opposition groups and groupings represent a caricature of the official party. They possess all its vices, often in an exaggerated form, but not its virtues, which are conditioned by the numerical strength of the workers within them alone, if by nothing else ...

I have been convinced that fundamentals which appeared to me elementary for a proletarian revolutionist have found no echo among some of the leaders of the Opposition, who have developed a definite conservative psychology. It can be characterized in the following manner: extreme, often sickly sensitivity in relation to everything that concerns their own circle,

and the greatest indifference in relation to everything that concerns the rest of the world ...

In the course of the last few years I have received from Saxony, Berlin and Hamburg a series of highly disturbing communications and documents, and also urgent demands that the International Opposition intervene in the German crisis. [50]

Trotsky suggested a number of measures to overcome the crisis in the German Left Opposition, including:

It is necessary to put a stop to all reprisals, expulsions, and removals in connection with the factional struggle in the German Opposition. Insofar as it is a question of purely individual cases, the questions must be examined on request, with the participation of representatives of the International Secretariat.

A special Control Commission, as authoritative as possible, must cooperate with the International Secretariat in examining the appeal made by the comrades (in Hamburg, etc.) who have already been expelled, and give its decision ...

In all cases where organizational conflicts and objections come to the fore, an examination must be referred to the International Secretariat, in cooperation with especially trustworthy and unprejudiced comrades from other sections. [51]

In a letter of 4 April 1931 to Oskar Seipold, a member of the leadership of the Trotskyist organisation in Germany, Trotsky stated that the 'German Opposition was the worst caricature of the disloyal habits and treacherous methods of the bureaucratic apparatus.' [52]

Trotsky did not cease complaining about the German Trotskyists even after Hitler became Chancellor of Germany on 30 January 1933. They had failed to rise to the occasion. On 22 February 1933 Trotsky wrote to Jan Frankel:

The surprising thing is that the Germans themselves are moving least of all. It is difficult to understand what is the matter here:

whether there is a general mood of depression and resignation in Germany, or whether our organization is totally lacking in initiative. I do not doubt that now, when our authority would be rising powerfully if our leadership were active and bold, that the size, at least, of *Permanente* could be significantly enlarged ... In *Permanente* there is not even a real appeal to all friends and sympathisers to now increase tenfold the newspaper sales, collection of money, agitation, and organizing ... what accounts for this catastrophic inertia: the generally depressed mood of the German proletariat or the specific conditions of our organisation? [53]

In June 1931 the German Trotskyist organisation split: Landau pulled 80 members out of a total membership of 230.

The official Left Opposition – i.e., those that did not go with Landau – had the support of groups in Bautzen (five members), Berlin (10 members), Bruchsal (45 members), Forst (five members), Goldap in East Prussia (five members), Hamborn (four members), Hamburg (five members), Heidelberg (ten members), Königsberg (ten members), Leipzig, (50 members) and Magdeburg (five members) – 150 in total. [54] The United Left Opposition was hardly stronger than at its foundation. From now on the organisation grew, but far too late. From June 1932 to the beginning of 1933 the membership of the local groups quadrupled. Probably, at the end of 1932 it had about 600 members in 44 local groups. [55] The local groups were disproportionately weak in the big town centres. How puny those groups were is clear from the following table on the size of branches in June 1932 [56]:

<i>No. of members</i>	<i>No. of branches</i>	
1–3	14	(including Erfurt and Köln)
4–15	15	(including Breslau, Dresden, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt and Stuttgart)
20+	5	(Berlin, Leipzig, Hamburg, Oranienburg, Bruchsal)

How could the Berlin branch of the Trotskyist organisation with its 50 members influence the KPD, which in November 1932 had 34,000 members in the Berlin-Brandenburg district alone? [57]

In two localities the Trotskyists did manage to establish a united front of workers' organisations against the Nazis – in Bruchsal and Klingenthal. Trotsky was very enthusiastic about the importance of this experience. In *Germany. What Next?* published one year before Hitler's accession to power, Trotsky wrote:

That which was accomplished by the local organizations in a provincial corner, in Bruchsal and Klingenthal, where the Communists together with the SAP and the trade unions, although boycotted by the upper crust of the reformist bureaucracy, have created the organization for defence – that, despite its modest scope, serves as a model for the whole country ... it is only necessary to spread throughout the country the experience of Bruchsal and Klingenthal and the entire outlook in Germany would be different. [58]

Unfortunately Bruchsal, in Baden, was a very small town. Its total population in 1970 was 27,100 (in the early 'thirties it was a little smaller). Klingenthal in Saxony had a population (in 1967) of 14,700.

In Bruchsal the Trotskyists were exceptionally strong, with 100 members, while the KPD was very weak indeed. In the local elections at the end of 1930, the Trotskyists in Bruchsal won 889 votes and nine seats on the council, the SPD five council seats, the KPD none. [59] In Bruchsal the Trotskyists managed to establish a 'proletarian united front.' [60] In December 1931 there was a report of an anti-fascist demonstration of 1,500 workers in Bruchsal. [61]

At the end of 1932 the German Trotskyist organisation faced a new and serious crisis. At this time it became clear that Adolf Senin and his brother using the alias Roman Well (later exposed as Stalinist agents), adopted a very conciliatory attitude toward Stalinism. Well was the leader of the relatively strong Leipzig branch of the United Left Opposition and Senin the leader in Saxony. They launched a faction fight that culminated in the publication of a false

issue of *Permanente Revolution*. This appeared on 20 January 1933 – ten days before Hitler became Chancellor. It claimed the majority of the Left Opposition had broken politically and organisationally with Trotskyism. Trotsky's perspectives for Germany and the Soviet Union were bankrupt, it said. His warnings of fascism and the threatening catastrophe, accompanied by sharp criticism of the KPD policies were groundless. The Stalinist press – the Berlin *Rote Fahne*, *Imprekor* and *L'Humanité* reported the 'collapse of the German Trotskyist group'.

In the next issue of the authentic *Permanente Revolution* it was made clear that of the list of 127 'capitulators' only 35 ever belonged to the United Left Opposition. [62] Still the split left a bitter after-taste.

### **The Role of Stalinist Plants in the Trotskyist Movement**

THUS STALINIST agents implanted in the Trotskyist movement did massive damage. Roman Well, leader of the Leipzig Trotskyists, was also circulation manager of *Biulleten Oppozitsii* in Germany. Sedov soon also came to rely on him for the circulation of the journal in Russia itself, and in the bordering countries, which was far more serious. [63]

Roman Well himself recommended another Stalinist plant, Jakob Frank, to Trotsky, to be co-opted into the national leadership of the German group. [64] So one Stalinist plant recommended another. Jakob Frank, visiting Trotsky in Prinkipo on 25 May 1929, immediately became active as Trotsky's German secretary, as he knew Russian. Two years later the Viennese Stalinist paper *Die Rote Fahne*, published a statement from Jakob Frank and twelve other members of the Trotskyist movement in Austria, denouncing Trotsky. [65] Another GPU agent in the ranks of the German Trotskyists was the Lett, Valentin P. Olberg.

Other sections of the Trotskyist movement were also infiltrated by Stalinist agents. Thus M. Mill, who also wrote under the name of J. Obin, was chosen by Sedov as a member of the administrative secretariat of the International Left Opposition. Active in the French

section, Mill played an important role in the faction fight that ended with Alfred Rosmer, the veteran revolutionary, leaving the International Left Opposition, and then with the split of Molinier from the International Left Opposition. When he was removed from his post in 1932 because of his personal intrigues, Mill came out openly as a Stalinist.

But by far the most important agent of Stalin in the Trotskyist movement was Marc Zborowski, who used the pseudonym Etienne. A member of the International Secretariat, he formed part of the little Russian language group around Sedov, which was responsible for publishing *Biulleten Oppozitsii*. He had a hand in the murder of Sedov.

These agents had ready access to high posts in the Trotskyist movement by virtue of their knowledge of the Russian language. As Trotsky explained in October 1932, after the removal of Mill:

To find a Russian Bolshevik-Leninist abroad, even for purely technical functions, is an extremely difficult task. This and only this explains the fact that Mill was able for a time to get into the Administrative Secretariat of the Left Opposition: there was a need for a person who knew Russian and was able to carry out secretarial duties. Mill had at one time been a member of the official party and in this sense could claim a certain personal confidence. [66]

The basic weakness of the Trotskyist movement explains why Stalinist agents managed to climb so rapidly to high positions in it, and also why they were able to do so much damage.

It is true that in the Bolshevik Party Roman Malinovsky, a police agent, was a member of the Central Committee and leader of the Bolshevik faction in the Tsarist Duma. But the damage he inflicted on the party was nothing compared to that brought about by Stalinist plants in the Trotskyist movement. Agent provocateurs are only effective if the situation lends itself to provocation.

The Bolshevik Party was much infiltrated by Okhrana agents prior to the revolution. At the beginning of 1910, after a number of well-

calculated arrests, the provocateur Kukushkin became head of the Moscow district organization. 'The ideal of the Okhrana is being realized,' wrote an activist. 'Secret agents are at the head of all the Moscow organizations.' The situation in Petersburg was not much better. Not a single conference was held abroad with representatives of the Russian party that was not attended by at least one okhrana agent. In 1912, when the legal Bolshevik daily *Pravda* was founded in Petersburg, two police agents, Miron Chernomazov and Roman Malinovsky, were on the editorial staff, the former as an editor and chairman of the editorial board, the latter as contributing editor and treasurer. From Malinovsky the police obtained a complete list of people who contributed donations to the paper and a complete list of subscribers. However, the damage brought about by Malinovsky and other Okhrana agents was very limited. The party's control over its Duma deputies was so strict that, even when the leadership of the Bolshevik group in the Duma fell into the hands of the police agent Roman Malinovsky, the party benefited from his activities in the Duma far more than the police. Lenin wrote many of the deputies' speeches. Malinovsky proved himself an extremely useful Bolshevik agitator! [67]

Stalinist plants played a very important role in fanning the faction fights inside the Trotskyist movement. The amount of damage they did was great. Other accidental persons also inflicted damage on the movement.

Take the case of Erich Kernmayer, who caused the first break between Trotsky and Kurt Landau. In September 1930, Landau's Trotskyist group in Austria, the Mahnruf group, accused Kernmayer, who left the group to join another Trotskyist group, of being a police spy. The International Secretariat sent Mill (the GPU agent) and Raymond Molinier to investigate. On their advice he was rehabilitated. Trotsky castigated the Landau group's suspicion of Kernmayer as foolish and cynical, and said these were 'features highly characteristic of half-Communist and quarter-Communist Bohemian circles'. [68] In 1933 Kernmayer joined the Nazis, and after the Anschluss wrote a number of openly Nazi books. [69]



## Basic Weaknesses of the Trotskyists in Germany

THE TRAGEDY of the German Trotskyists was not only that when they tried to get into action there were already many players in the field – (besides the First Division of KPD and SPD, there was also the Fourth Division of the KPO, Leninbund and SAP) – but that they never achieved the minimum critical mass required even to climb into the Fourth Division.

It was not just a question of numbers. Although, as we shall see, social composition in a small group is only one factor among many determining the potential of an organisation, nevertheless, the social composition of the Trotskyist groups was very poor. On 21 January 1930, Trotsky wrote:

In a number of countries ... side by side with the genuine revolutionaries, accidental elements have joined the party, i.e., those who are tired and disillusioned, or still worse, pretentious armchair communists who are unfit for any kind of serious revolutionary struggle and who by their entire conduct can only compromise the banner of the Opposition in the eyes of the workers. [70]

In an article entitled *Problems of the German Situation* written on 31 January 1931, Trotsky wrote:

In the European Opposition we have predominantly young comrades who joined the Opposition before they had the opportunity to participate seriously and for any length of time in the party and in mass struggles. In addition to that, the Opposition is developing under the conditions of a continuing revolutionary ebb that breeds sectarianism and 'circle' sentiments. [71]

Trotsky was very perturbed by the overwhelmingly petty bourgeois composition of the German section. Thus in a letter written on 6 March 1932 to Senin-Sobolevicius he remarked that the Trotskyist

Opposition had failed to recruit in Germany even 'ten native factory workers' (and had won over only a few intellectuals and immigrants). [72]

A few months later, in November, when Trotsky was in Copenhagen to deliver a speech on the Russian revolution, he had a chance to meet with several European leaders of the Left Opposition including a number of Germans. He came to the conclusion that the German section had far more workers in it than his letter to Sobolevicius assumed. In a letter written on 16 December 1932, Trotsky stated:

The reports of the German comrades, as well as the composition of the delegation, have proven beyond a doubt that in the ranks of the German section there exists a serious cadre of working-class Communists who are adequately qualified politically and at the same time are connected with mass organizations. That is a very great achievement from which we must start and build further. In the first place, we must assure a composition of the leadership which is more proletarian and more bound up with the masses. [73]

There were without doubt a number of workers in the German section, as one can see from the memoirs of Oskar Hippe [74] and Georg Jungclas. [75]

Nevertheless the petty-bourgeois elements, isolated from the working class, weighed down the German section. As we have seen, the other workers' parties in Germany, but also the KPO, the Leninbund and the SAP, were overwhelmingly proletarian in composition.

Trotsky as a writer had far greater appeal than the Trotskyist organisation. Thus, while at its height *Permanente Revolution* had a print order of 5,000, Trotsky's pamphlets and books sold far more widely. Trotsky's pamphlet, *Against National Communism* (September 1931) came out in three editions and sold 15,000 copies. The pamphlet that included two articles *Will Fascism be Victorious?* and *How will we Beat National Socialism?* came out in

three editions and sold 35,000 copies; *What Next* came out in two editions and sold 15,000 copies. [76]

### In Conclusion

THE GERMAN Left Opposition, Trotsky argued, should carry out a united front policy with the KPD. On 30 September 1929 he wrote:

The Communist Left Opposition in Germany must carry out a united front policy in relation to the official party. Otherwise the Opposition will remain a sect and fall into decay. [77]

But how could 50 members of the Left Opposition in Berlin pressurise the KPD with its 34,000 members?

The success of the Left Opposition in establishing a united front in Bruchsal and Klingenthal could not even impinge on the consciousness of the KPD or SPD members and supporters in the big cities. The very existence of a small organisation calling for a united front seemed a contradiction in terms. The Left Opposition could not succeed in overcoming the aversion of members of mass parties to joining or following a small group. The mere existence of the KPO, Leninbund, SAP and Left Opposition increased the number of political organisations of the labour movement and contributed to its fragmentation.

As we have seen, the greater the threat of a Nazi victory, the less inclined were people to vote for 'splinter parties' like the KPO or SAP. This resentment of 'splitters' inevitably encompassed the Trotskyists. Furthermore, the permanent squabbling in the Left Opposition ranks, the paralysis due to the factionalism of its leaders and recurring splits, could only reinforce this impression and put off serious workers. Trotsky again and again moved from optimism, when he exaggerated the success of the Left Opposition in Germany, to deep pessimism, when he grasped not only its numerical weakness but also its qualitative failings.

First, a couple of quotations to illustrate the optimism: on 17 September 1930, Trotsky wrote a letter to the conference of the German Left Opposition: 'Weak though we still are organizationally, we have nevertheless already become a serious factor in the internal life of the Communist Party' . [78]

On 22 December 1931, in a letter to the national sections, Trotsky repeated:

Within the revolutionary ranks in Germany there is a Marxist opposition, which leans upon the experience of the preceding decade. This opposition is weak numerically, but in the march of events adds extraordinary strength to its voice. Under certain conditions a slight shock may bring down an avalanche. The critical shock of the Left Opposition can aid in bringing about a timely change in the politics of the proletarian vanguard. In this lies our task at present! [79]

In his book *What Next?* published at the beginning of 1932 Trotsky writes:

Numerically the Left Opposition in Germany is weak. But its political influence may prove decisive on the given, sharp, historical turn. As the switchman, by the timely turn of the switch, shifts a heavily laden train onto different tracks, so the small Opposition, by a strong and sure turn of the ideological switch, can compel the train of the German Communist Party, and the still heavier train of the German proletariat, to go on in a different direction. [80]

Sadly, history proved that this was a completely unrealistic perspective.

In Russia Trotsky stood out as a giant amongst his adherents, but at least he was surrounded by people who distinguished themselves in the revolution and civil war, people of independent mind and strong character. There were hardly any of this calibre among his associates outside Russia. The German Trotskyists, a little circle,

small in number, with few openings for growth, of necessity turned in on themselves: internal discussion or dissension dominated the life of the sect, and made it impossible for the German Trotskyists to break out from their hermetic circle and connect with the masses. When one follows the interminable discussions, factional squabbles and splits among the Trotskyists in Germany, it reminds one of Lenin's comment on similar squabbles between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. But the end results were different. A story often cited by Lenin illustrates why: seeing a man in the street squatting and gesticulating strongly, Leo Tolstoy decided that he was looking at a madman; on coming closer he was satisfied that the man was attending to necessary work – sharpening a knife on a stone. Alas, unlike the Bolshevik-Menshevik split which helped form a genuine revolutionary mass party, in the case of the German Trotskyists it was a case of a man sharpening nothing on nothing.

To understand the failure of the German Trotskyists to achieve any serious success in influencing the working class, in affecting events, or even in building a sizeable, serious, stable party rooted in the proletariat, one has to take into account a whole number of factors.

Each concrete event in history is determined not only by the fundamental economic and social factors. A multiplicity of secondary factors also play a role. For a revolutionary organisation not only the general economic and social situation are objective factors; not only the material world, but also the state of consciousness of the working class. These are very much affected by the role of the traditional mass parties. Even when the old leadership of the SPD and KPD revealed their complete bankruptcy, this could not easily become obvious to the mass of the workers. This required a significant alternative organisation in the class, known to the masses, and in which a significant number of workers had confidence, based on the experience of the past. A new leadership could not simply be built without taking into account the mass parties who had won a deep loyalty among workers in the process of awakening them to conscious life, organising them and training them.

One must also not overlook the strength of centrism – the KPO, SAP, etc. – and its rightward movement. This centrism cannot be explained unless one takes into account Moscow's influence – enhanced by the prestige of October – and the impact of the many defeats culminating in the mass destruction brought on by the Nazis. Lastly, one should not overlook the subjective factor in its narrow meaning: the social composition, the experience, and the size of the Trotskyist organisation itself. Largely petty bourgeois in composition, isolated from the real working class, the German Trotskyists were by and large more dogmatic bookworms than real revolutionaries. If the pressure of the masses welds workers' parties together, the isolation of the German Trotskyist organisation opened it to squabbling and splitting.

Because it did not achieve the minimum critical mass required to at least close the gap between it and the centrist organisations, the Left Opposition could not move to the second link in the chain of establishing influence in the working class: the workers in the KPD and SPD. What we have here is a vicious circle: smallness and isolation leads to further smallness and isolation.

There was a wide chasm between Trotsky's ends and means. His strong grasp of the social and political forces wracking Germany in the early 'thirties and the tasks facing the proletariat on the one hand, was not matched by resources on the ground – the tiny Trotskyist organisation. Once, while talking about certain of his disciples, Marx quoted the words of Heine: 'I have sown dragons, and I have harvested fleas.' This tragically fits what happened to Trotskyism in Germany.

The tragedy of Trotsky in the case of Germany 1930-33, was in a way different from his tragedy in the USSR in the years 1928-33. In the latter case Trotsky's own analysis and his prognoses, however brilliant, were found by the test of history to be wanting. In the case of Germany his analysis stood the test of time perfectly. Alas, that in itself was not enough to build a significant revolutionary organisation, or what comes to the same thing – to have a real effect on the course of events.

## Notes

1. K.H. Tjaden, *Struktur und Funktion der KPD Opposition (KPO)*, Meisenheim am Glan 1964, p.100.
2. H. Drechsler, *Die Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SAPD)*, Hanover 1983, p.150.
3. Tjaden, p.114.
4. *Ibid.*, p.232.
5. *Ibid.*, pp.226-7.
6. *Ibid.*, p.144.
7. *Ibid.*, p.336.
8. *Ibid.*, p.337.
9. *Ibid.*, p.349.
10. Cliff, *Trotsky*, Vol.3, pp.130-5.
11. Zimmermann, pp.30-1.
12. H. Weber, *Die Wandlung des Deutschen Kommunismus*, Frankfurt 1969, p.164.
13. Zimmermann, p.102.
14. *Ibid.*, p.115.
15. *Ibid.*, p.177.
16. *Ibid.*, p.230.
17. A. Schüle, *Trotzkismus in Deutschland bis 1933*, Köln 1989, p.56.
18. Drechsler, p.109.
19. *Ibid.*, p.111.
20. *Ibid.*, p.117.
21. *Ibid.*.
22. Tjaden, p.293.
23. Drechsler, p.160.
24. *Ibid.*, p.164.
25. *Ibid.*, pp.169-71.
26. *Ibid.*, p.250.
27. *Ibid.*, pp.288-310.
28. *Ibid.*, p.282.
29. *Ibid.*.

30. Figures for the SPD are from 1 January and for the KPD March 1932, Rosenhaft, p.45.
31. *Ibid.*.
32. W. Alles, *Zur Politik und Geschichte der deutschen Trotskisten ab 1930*, Mannheim 1978, p.75.
33. Weber, p.36.
34. R.N. Hunt, *German Social Democracy. 1918-1933*, London 1964, p.50.
35. Weber, *Introduction* to O.K. Flechtheim, *Die KPD in der Weimarer Republik*, p.64.
36. Hunt, p.103.
37. Rosenhaft, p.51.
38. *Ibid.*, p.95.
39. *Ibid.*, p.112.
40. *Ibid.*, p.116.
41. *Ibid.*, p.127.
42. *Ibid.*, p.213.
43. *Ibid.*, p.127.
44. Hunt, p.102..
45. Zimmermann, p.284.
46. Hunt, p.101.
47. Weber, pp.316, 363.
48. Schüle, p.56.
49. *WLT*, 1930, pp.293-4.
50. *WLT*, 1930-31, pp.147, 152-3.
51. *Ibid.*, pp.169-70.
52. Quoted in Schüle, p.74.
53. *WLT*, 1929-33, p.190.
54. Alles, p.73.
55. *Ibid.*, p.77.
56. Schüle, p.84.
57. Weber, p.370.
58. Trotsky, *The struggle against Fascism in Germany*, p.240.
59. H. Schafranek, *Das Kurze Leben des Kurt Landau*, Vienna 1988, p.282.
60. *Permanente Revolution*, Oct.-Nov. 1931.



61. *Ibid.*, Dec. 1931.
62. *Ibid.*, January-February 1933.
63. J. van Heijenoort, *With Trotsky in Exile, From Prinkipo to Coyoacán*, Cambridge, Mass. 1978, p.97.
64. *Ibid.*, p.95.
65. Schafranek, pp.136-145.
66. *WLT*, 1932, p.237.
67. T. Cliff, *Lenin*, Vol.1, London 1986, pp.242, 324.
68. Zimmermann, p.237.
69. Schafranek, pp.252-7.
70. *WLT*, 1930, pp.77-8.
71. *WLT*, 1930-31, p.140.
72. Letter to Senin-Sobolevicius, 6 March 1932, Trotsky Archives, Closed Section, Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, p.206.
73. *WLT*, 1932-33, pp.32-33.
74. O. Hippe, *... und unsere Fahn' ist rot*, Hamburg 1979.
75. G. Jungclas, *Aus der Geschichte der deutschen Sektion der IV Internationale*, Hamburg 1972.
76. Schüle, p.86.
77. *WLT*, 1929, p.337.
78. *WLT*, 1930-31, p.26.
79. Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, p.193.
80. *Ibid.*, p.252.

## 7. Trotsky as Historian of the Russian Revolution

AFTER HE was exiled from Russia Trotsky decided to write a history of the revolution. He undertook this task while contributing to and editing *Biulleten Oppozitsii*, maintaining a copious correspondence with supporters in several countries, and receiving numerous visitors seeking his advice. Nevertheless, he wrote the half million words that make up the three large volumes of *The History of the Russian Revolution* in one year.

This monumental work was an outstanding achievement. No other revolution was as fortunate as the Russian in having an historian of genius as one of its key leaders. Trotsky was spurred on to write this history for two reasons. He not only had to defend the revolution from Stalinist distortions, but also his role in the revolution from Stalinist calumnies.

The book combines extreme partisanship with stringent objectivity. Trotsky scorned the position of 'impartiality' embraced by the reactionary French historian L. Madelin, who:

asserts that 'the historian ought to stand upon the wall of a threatened city and behold at the same time the besiegers and the besieged': only in this way, it seems, can he achieve a 'conciliatory justice'. However, the words of Madelin himself testify that if he climbs out on the wall dividing the two camps, it is only in the character of a reconnoitre for the reaction. [1]

In comparison with the *History* Marx's trilogy on nineteenth century revolutions in France – *The Class Struggle in France*, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and *The Civil War in France*

stand as minor historical works, miniatures compared with Trotsky's grand mural.

He introduces the reader to the drama of 1917 with a chapter, *Peculiarities of Russia's Development*. This serves as a brilliant elaboration of the theory of Permanent Revolution which he developed in 1906. [2] Russia's backwardness and belated development meant it entered the twentieth century without shaking off the middle ages, without passing through the stages that the West passed through like the Reformation and bourgeois revolution.

However, elements of bourgeois culture were grafted onto its archaic structure. It was forced to advance under pressure from the West. This had important consequences:

Although compelled to follow after the advanced countries, a backward country does not take things in the same order. The privilege of historic backwardness – and such a privilege exists – permits, or rather compels, the adoption of whatever is ready in advance of any specified date, skipping a whole series of intermediate stages. Savages throw away their bows and arrows for rifles all at once, without travelling the road which lay between those two weapons in the past ... The development of historically backward nations leads necessarily to a peculiar combination of different stages in the historic process. Their development as a whole acquires a planless, complex, combined character. [3]

In the revolutions of 1917 this would mean that the weak Russian bourgeoisie, unable to cut off the burden of semi-feudal Tsarism, could be pushed aside by the compact working class supported by the rebellious peasantry.

After this masterpiece of historical analysis, Trotsky goes on to give a superb analysis and description of the revolution. For him the crux of the revolution was the act of self-emancipation of the proletariat: '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'. [4]

The whole of the *History* is suffused with imagery of the revolution as 'the festival of the oppressed'. It is to a large extent a study of revolutionary mass psychology:

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. [5]

However the spontaneous activity of the masses is not sufficient for the victory of the revolution. Without a mass revolutionary party, victory for the proletariat is not possible.

Without a guiding organisation 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. [6]

The February revolution demonstrated this. It was the work of the masses who were not led by a revolutionary party. They were powerful enough to overthrow Tsarism and create the soviets, but not mature enough to prevent the coming to power of the Provisional Government headed by Prince Lvov. By contrast, the October Revolution was the act of the masses led by a party – the Bolsheviks.

The revolutionary party must not, indeed can not, substitute for the working class. The task of the party is to raise the level of self-activity of the masses, to sharpen its effectiveness. The secret of the revolutionary party's success is its ability to attune to the psychology of the masses: 'The art of revolutionary leadership in its most critical moments consists nine-tenths in knowing how to sense the mood of the masses ...' [7]

If the party is the teacher of the workers, who teaches the teacher? Trotsky answers: the workers.

The toilers are guided in their struggle not only by their demands, not only by their needs, but by their life experiences. Bolshevism had absolutely no taint of any aristocratic scorn for the independent experience of the masses. On the contrary, the Bolsheviks took this for their point of departure and built upon it. That was one of their great points of superiority. [8]

The *History* brilliantly describes the changes in the mood of the masses. Trotsky's ability as an historian to grasp these changes was nourished by his own experience of the revolution. In the heat of the battle he had had to accurately gauge the mood and thoughts of the millions and respond appropriately. This is what made Trotsky such a superb agitator. In the *History* Trotsky evinces a sublime gift for sensing the developing thoughts of the masses. To give one small example he describes a demonstration at the beginning of February of 2,500 Petrograd workers which in a narrow place ran into a detachment of Cossacks, those age-old suppressors of people's revolt.

Cutting their way with the breasts of their horses, the officers first charged through the crowd. Behind them, filling the whole width of the Prospect, galloped the Cossacks. Decisive moment! But the horsemen, cautiously, in a long ribbon, rode through the corridor just made by the officers. 'Some of them smiled,' Kayurov recalls, 'and one of them gave the workers a good wink.' This wink was not without meaning. The workers were emboldened with a friendly, not hostile, kind of assurance, and slightly infected the Cossacks with it. The one who winked found imitators. In spite of renewed efforts from the officers, the Cossacks, without openly breaking discipline, failed to force the crowd to disperse, but flowed through it in streams. This was repeated three or four times and brought the two sides even closer together. Individual Cossacks began to reply to the workers' questions and even to enter into momentary conversations with them. Of discipline there remained but a thin transparent shell that threatened to break through any second.

The officers hastened to separate their patrol from the workers, and, abandoning the idea of dispersing them, lined the Cossacks out across the street as a barrier to prevent the demonstrators from getting to the centre. But even this did not help: standing stock-still in perfect discipline, the Cossacks did not hinder the workers from 'diving' under their horses. The revolution does not choose its paths: it made its first steps toward victory under the belly a Cossack's horse. [9]

What a brilliantly graphic portrayal of the masses and individuals in action! However, no single passage of the *History* conveys its real strength. To cite but a single section is like using a torch to illuminate one tiny area in a large mural while the rest is enveloped in darkness. No excerpts can even remotely express the magnificence of the book and Trotsky's prose. The only way to do it justice is to read it from beginning to end.

Again and again Trotsky picks out of the crowd a few individuals who express the mood of the crowd in a phrase or gesture. Again and again he leads from the general to the particular, and back to the general.

If the Bolshevik Party was crucial for the leadership of the proletariat, Lenin was crucial for the leadership of the party. Throughout the *History* Trotsky shows the party not as the monolithic 'iron phalanx' which marched unhesitatingly towards October. He shows the crisis in the party between the February Revolution and Lenin's return. At this time the Bolshevik leadership, by and large, was conciliatory towards the Provisional Government and the war. When Lenin arrived from Switzerland he published his *April Theses* and had to fight very hard to overcome the previous weaknesses of the party leadership. Another major crisis occurred on the eve of October. Now Lenin had to struggle energetically against Bolshevik Central Committee opponents of the insurrection.

From the extraordinary significance which Lenin's arrival received, it should only be inferred that leaders are not accidentally created, that they are gradually chosen out and

trained up in the course of decades, that they cannot be replaced, that their mechanical exclusion from the struggle gives the party a living wound, and in many cases may paralyse it for a long period. [10]

And Trotsky asks:

How would the revolution have developed if Lenin had not reached Russia in April 1917? If our exposition demonstrates and proves anything at all, we hope it proves that Lenin was not a demiurge of the revolutionary process, that he merely entered into a chain of objective historic forces. But he was a great link in that chain. The dictatorship of the proletariat was to be inferred from the whole situation, but it had still to be established. It could not be established without a party. The party could fulfil its mission only after understanding it. For that Lenin was needed ... Is it possible, however, to say confidently that the party without him would have found its road? We would by -no means make bold to say that. The factor of time is decisive here, and it is difficult in retrospect to tell time historically. Dialectic materialism at any rate has nothing in common with fatalism. Without Lenin the crisis, which the opportunist leadership was inevitably bound to produce, would have assumed an extraordinarily sharp and protracted character. The conditions of war and revolution, however, would not allow the party a long period for fulfilling its mission. Thus it is by no means excluded that a disoriented and split party might have let slip the revolutionary opportunity for many years. The role of personality arises before us here on a truly gigantic scale. It is necessary only to understand that role correctly, taking personality as a link in the historic chain. [11]

In masterly fashion Trotsky gives character sketches of numerous prominent people in that year of revolution, from the Tsar and Tsarina to the ministers, the leaders of the Cadets, the Mensheviks and

Social Revolutionaries. In all the portraits Trotsky is careful to point out

where in a personality the strictly personal ends – often much sooner than we think – and how frequently the ‘distinguishing traits’ of a person are merely individual scratches made by a higher law of development. [12]

He drew a memorable analogy between Nicholas II and Louis XVI, and also between their Queens.

Nicholas II inherited from his ancestors not only a giant empire, but also a revolution. And they did not bequeath him one quality which would have made him capable of governing an empire or even a province or a county. To that historic flood which was rolling its billows each one closer to the gates of his palace, the last Romanov opposed only a dumb indifference. It seemed as though between his consciousness and his epoch there stood some transparent but absolutely impenetrable medium. [13]

Through quotations from the Tsar’s diary we are provided with evidence of his cruelty, stupidity and, above all, blindness. This explains why he collected around him incompetent people.

Nicholas recoiled in hostility before everything gifted and significant. He felt at ease only among completely mediocre and brainless people, saintly fakirs, holy men, to whom he did not have to look up ... He selected his ministers on a principle of continual deterioration. [14]

A medieval fog befuddled Nicholas’s brain.

The more isolated the dynasty became, and the more unsheltered the autocrat felt, the more he needed some help from the other world. Certain savages, in order to bring good weather, wave in the air a shingle on a string. The czar and



czarina used shingles for the greatest variety of purposes. In the czar's train there was a whole chapel full of large and small images, and all sort of fetishes, which were brought to bear, first against the Japanese, then against the German artillery. [15]

Both Nicholas II and Louis XVI

make the impression of people who are overburdened by their job, but at the same time unwilling to give up even a part of those rights of which they are unable to make any use. [16]

They both go toward the abyss 'with the crown pushed down over their eyes.' But would it after all be easier to go to an abyss, which you cannot escape anyway, with your eyes open? What difference would it have made, as a matter of fact, if they had pushed the crown way back on their heads? [17]

Trotsky shows that at the decisive moment, when the revolution sealed their fate, Nicholas II and Louis XVI looked so like each other that their distinctive features seemed to vanish.

To a tickle, people react differently, but to a red-hot iron, alike. As a steam hammer converts a sphere and a cube alike into sheet metal, so under the blow of too great and inexorable events resistances are smashed and the boundaries of 'individuality' lost. [18]

As for the Tsarina and Marie Antoinette, both were 'enterprising but chicken-headed'.

When Alexandra Feodorovna, three months before the fall of the monarchy, prophesies: 'All is coming out for the best, the dreams of our Friend [Rasputin] mean so much!' she merely repeats Marie Antoinette, who one month before the overthrow of the royal power wrote: 'I feel a liveliness of spirit, and something tells me that we shall soon be happy and safe.' They both see rainbow dreams as they drown. [19]

The character sketches of the leaders of the Cadets, the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries are absolutely superb. The temptation is too great not to quote at least one vignette – a description of the Social Revolutionary Party which enjoyed by far the largest following among the people and which set itself in place of the class struggle at the centre of history.

The power of this party seemed unlimited. In reality it was a political aberration. A party for whom everybody votes except that minority who know what they are voting for, is no more a party, than the tongue in which babies of all countries babble is a national language. [20]

The leader to whom such a party inevitably turned was Alexander Kerensky, a man who made no secret of his contempt for all parties and who viewed himself as the direct choice of the nation.

This idea of a master of destiny rising above all classes, is nothing but Bonapartism. If you stick two forks into a cork symmetrically, it will, under very great oscillations from side to side, keep its balance even on a pin point: that is the mechanical model of the Bonapartist super-arbiter. The degree of solidity of such a power, setting aside international conditions, is determined by the stability of equilibrium of the two antagonistic classes within the country. [21]

In the midst of a revolution such stability is not possible. Kerensky was as doomed as Nicholas II. The similarity between the two was uncanny. In June 1917 the Provisional Government headed by Kerensky launched a calamitous new offensive at the front.

All was left to the will of Providence. Only the icons of the czarina were lacking. They tried to replace them with the icons of democracy. Kerensky travelled everywhere, appealing and pronouncing benedictions. [22]

*The History of the Russian Revolution* is a monument to a genius – a man of action and of letters.

## Notes

1. L. Trotsky, *Preface to History of the Russian Revolution*, London 1934, p.21.
2. See Cliff, *Trotsky*, Vol.1, London 1989, pp.123-39.
3. Trotsky, *History*, pp.26-7.
4. *Ibid.*, p.17.
5. *Ibid.*, p.18.
6. *Ibid.*, p.19.
7. *Ibid.*, p.138.
8. *Ibid.*, pp.809-10.
9. *Ibid.*, pp.124-5.
10. *Ibid.*, p.344.
11. *Ibid.*, p.343.
12. *Ibid.*, p.73.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, p.76.
15. *Ibid.*, p.81.
16. *Ibid.*, p.112.
17. *Ibid.*, p.113.
18. *Ibid.*, p.114.
19. *Ibid.*, p.113.
20. *Ibid.*, pp.239-40.
21. *Ibid.*, p.663.
22. *Ibid.*, p.395.

## 8. First Steps Towards a New International

IN MARCH 1933, after Hitler consolidated his power, Trotsky came to the conclusion that the bankruptcy of the KPD – the collapse of German Stalinism made it necessary to build a new party in Germany. Three months later, in June, Trotsky came to the conclusion that as the Comintern refused to criticise the policies that led to the victory of Hitler, a new international had to be built. In October Trotsky drew the conclusion that the CPSU also could not be reformed, and he now put forward the need for a political revolution in the USSR.

On 12 March 1933, in an article entitled *KPD or New Party?* Trotsky wrote:

German Stalinism is collapsing now, less from the blows of the fascists than from its internal rottenness. Just as a doctor does not leave a patient who still has a breath of life, we had for our task the reform of the party as long as there was the least hope. But it would be criminal to tie oneself to a corpse.

... The hour has struck! the question of preparing for the creation of a new party must be posed openly ... The official German party is politically liquidated, it cannot be reborn. The vanguard of the German workers must build a new party. [1]

Should a break with the Comintern and the CPSU be made as well?

Here is it natural to ask how we act toward the other sections of the Comintern and the Third International as a whole. Do we

break with them immediately? In my opinion, it would be incorrect to give a rigid answer – yes, we break with them. The collapse of the KPD diminishes the chances for the regeneration of the Comintern. But on the other hand the catastrophe itself could provoke healthy reaction in some of the sections. We must be ready to help this process. The question has not been settled for the USSR, where proclamation of the slogan of the second party would be incorrect. We are calling today for the creation of a new party in Germany, to seize the Comintern from the hands of the Stalinist bureaucracy. It is not a question of the creation of the Fourth International but of salvaging the Third. [2]

In June, however, Trotsky came to the conclusion that not only could the Germany party not be reformed, but also the Comintern, and that therefore a new international had to be built.

Everything that has taken place since March 5: the resolution of the Presidium of the ECCI on the situation in Germany, the silent submission of all the sections to this shameful resolution ... – all this testifies incontestably that the fate of not only the German Communist Party but also the entire Comintern was decided in Germany. [3]

The formation in several countries of strong revolutionary organisation, free of any responsibility for the crimes and mistakes of the reformist and centrist bureaucracies, armed with the Marxist programme and a clear revolutionary perspective, will open a new era in the development of the world proletariat. These organisations will attract all the genuine Communist elements who still cannot bring themselves today to break with the Stalinist bureaucracy, and, what is more important, they will gradually attract under their banner the young generation of workers. [4]

... under discussion now is not the immediate proclamation of new parties and of an independent International but of preparing

for them. [5]

### **Effort to Break Out of Isolation**

TROTSKY WELL understood the enormity of the task that his small, isolated movement was shouldering in trying to build a new international. He was looking for new allies to break from the isolation. In June 1933 he came to the conclusion that elements of the left of the Second International were so shattered by the German events as to be groping towards revolutionary regroupment and a new international.

In June 1933 Trotsky wrote an article entitled *The Left Socialist Organisations and our Tasks*:

At the present time the Social Democracy is everywhere experiencing an acute crisis. In a number of countries more or less important left wings have already separated themselves from the Social Democratic parties. This process flows from the whole situation. That it has not yet taken on a more developed character is due to the mistakes of the Stalinist bureaucracy, which puts a brake on the internal differentiation in the ranks of reformism and closes the door of communism to the revolutionary wing ...

The International Left Opposition faces a new task: to accelerate the evolution of the left socialist organisations toward communism by injecting its ideas and its experience into this process. There is no time to lose. If the independent socialist organisations remain in their present amorphous state for a long period of time, they will disintegrate. The political tasks of our epoch are so acute, the pressure of hostile classes so powerful – to this it is necessary to add the intrigues of the reformist bureaucracy on the one hand and the Stalinist bureaucracy on the other – that only a powerful ideological bond on the firm basis of Marxism can assure a revolutionary organisation the

ability to maintain itself against the hostile currents and to lead the proletarian vanguard to a new revolutionary epoch.

The new situation facing the Left Opposition, unfolding new opportunities, present it with new tasks. [6]

Trotsky was very clear that the left socialist organisations were not consistent, were not revolutionary, but centrist.

The independent socialist organisations and the left-oppositionist factions within the Social Democracy are either avowedly centrist organisations or they contain within their ranks strong centrist tendencies or survivals. Their positive side is that they develop in a revolutionary direction under the pressure of the historic blows received by them. For us to seriously approach these organisations on a clear principled basis will signify a new chapter in the development of the Left Opposition and thereby of the rebirth of revolutionary Marxism in the world workers' movement. A great international revolutionary organisation inspired by the ideas of the Left Opposition would become a center of attraction for the proletarian elements of the official Communist parties. [7]

Trotsky warned against a sectarian attitude toward the left socialist organisations. Some comrades,

... anxious about the purity of the principles of the Left Opposition regard all attempts to approach the larger mass organizations with distrust. 'What good can be expected from Nazareth?' How can one approach organisations at the head of which are centrists? We are quite ready, they say, to unite with the rank-and-file workers but we do not see any sense in approaching the centrist leaders, etc, etc. Such a purely formal manner of posing the question is erroneous. They are greatly affected by propagandist sectarianism ... The Third International was itself recruited nine-tenths from centrist elements who

evolved to the left. Not only individuals and groups but also entire organisations and even parties with their old leadership or a part of the old leadership placed themselves under the banner of Bolshevism. This was absolutely inevitable ... It is clear that the rebirth of the revolutionary workers' movement will take place at the expense of centrism. Moreover, not only individuals and groups but entire organisations will place themselves anew under the Communist banner. [8]

### ***Declaration of the Four***

ON 27-28 AUGUST 1933 an international conference was held in Paris of several independent socialist and Communist parties and groups. The main organisations standing outside the Second and Third Internationals assembled there. Chief among them were the Independent Labour Party of Britain and the SAP of Germany. In addition there were from Germany the Leninbund and the Left Opposition (Bolshevik-Leninists); from Italy the socialist Maximalists (PSI); from Holland the OSP and RSP; from Spain Maurín (representing the Iberian Communist Federation); from Rumania the Independent Socialist Party; from Norway the Norwegian Labour Party (NAP); and from Sweden the Communist Party of Sweden; from Russia the Left Social Revolutionaries; from France the Party of Proletarian Unity (PUP). There were also a number of observers. [9]

Trotsky saw in the conference the possibility of starting the building of the Fourth International. Of course Trotsky showed an interest in only a few of the organisations present. He did not care for the Norwegian Labour Party (the NAP), nor for the French Party of Proletarian Unity (PUP), nor the Italian Maximalists, nor the Russian Left Social Revolutionaries, nor Maurín's right wing Communists from Spain. The Norwegian Labour Party was a mass party, really a reformist, not even a centrist party. It was founded in 1887. In 1919 it broke with the Second International and affiliated to the Third, then in 1923 it left the Comintern. In the parliamentary elections of 1928 it gained 37.1 percent of the vote. In the parliamentary election of 1933



the NAP, which had about 87,000 members, won half a million votes, i.e., 40.1 percent of the total vote. [10] In 1935 it became the governing party of Norway, rejoining the Second International. It granted asylum to Trotsky in Norway, but a year later, under Soviet pressure, following the first Moscow trial, it interned Trotsky and silenced him for four months, after which it shipped him off to Mexico.

As with the NAP, Trotsky showed little interest in the Swedish Communist Party, an organisation very similar to that of the NAP. On 9 October 1929 the whole leadership of the Swedish Communist Party was expelled from the Comintern because of its opposition to the ultra-left line of that body. They took 7,000 of the 17,000 party members with them. In 1932 the Swedish CP moved towards the Brandlerite Internationale Vereinigung der Kommunistischen Opposition (IVKO). By the beginning of 1933 its membership reached 13,500, far surpassing the membership of the official section of the Comintern. In the parliamentary elections of 1932 it won 132,000 votes, many times more than the Comintern section. [11] In 1934 it fused with another organisation and changed its name to Socialist Party. It published one daily paper and two provincial weeklies. In the elections of 1934 the Swedish Socialist Party won 4 percent of the total vote and had 11 MPs. [12]

The ILP was a 'curate's egg', that is, good in parts. It was the main initiator of the International Labour Community – Internationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft (IAG), that loose association of centrist parties not affiliated either to the Second or Third internationals. It was the international conference of the IAG in February 1933 which decided to organise the August world conference of workers' organisations against fascism. The ILP leadership was pacifist, not Marxist. In 1933 it decided to seek closer relations with the Comintern: its criticism was only in details. It wished to bring about a world congress of revolutionary socialist organisations in which the Comintern would also participate. [13] Trotsky was not sure about the future of the ILP.

One organisation in which Trotsky did show great interest was the SAP. As we have mentioned, when Hitler came to power, the

right wing leaders of the SAP returned to the SPD, while the left wing group of Jakob Walcher and Paul Frölich took control of the remaining SAP. In face of the bankruptcy of both the SPD and KPD, the SAP leadership came to the conclusion that what was needed was a new party in Germany and a new International. For Trotsky the result was of the utmost importance. In the course of several days of discussion with Walcher in August, he proposed that the two organisations, the SAP and the German Left Opposition, should fuse and Walcher declared that he agreed in principle.

Two other organisations that participated in the Paris conference supported the call for a new International – the two Dutch parties, RSP and OSP. The Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) came to life in 1928 as a split from the Dutch Communist Party led by Henk Sneevliet, a veteran Dutch Communist and Comintern leader who rejected the ultra-left policy of the Third Period. The RSP had control over a trade union organisation – the National Labour Organisation (NAS). In September 1933 the RSP joined the International Communist League (the Trotskyists) and Sneevliet was brought onto the International Secretariat. The Independent Socialist Party (OSP), founded in 1932, was made up of left-wing elements in the Dutch Social Democratic Party under the leadership of Peter J. Schmidt, the Socialist veteran Frans van der Goes and the former Communist leader Jacques De Kadt who were in close touch with the ILP and SAP. The fusion of the RSP and OSP was very much on the cards.

Both the RSP and OSP were large compared with the organisations of the International Left Opposition. The RSP had 1,000 members, the OSP (in August 1932) some 7,200 members. [14] Both organisations had a not insignificant influence compared with the Dutch Communist Party. Thus, in the general election of 1933 the RSP won 48,405 votes, the OSP 27,476 votes, as against the CP vote of 118,326 (the Social Democratic Labour Party won 798,632 votes). [15]

In August Trotsky had a discussion at Saint-Palais with a number of people attending the Paris conference – Sneevliet, Walcher, De Kadt, P.J. Schmidt, and the ILP-ers John Paton and C.A. Smith. This led to the working out of a document entitled *The Declaration of the*

*Four On the Necessity and Principles of a New International*. It was an 11-point statement written by Trotsky. The last point was:

The undersigned created a permanent commission of delegated representatives and assigned the following to it:

a. to elaborate a programmatic manifesto as the charter of the new International;

b. to prepare a critical analysis of the organizations and tendencies of the present-day workers' movement (theoretic commentary to the manifesto);

c. to elaborate theses on all the fundamental questions of the revolutionary strategy of the proletariat;

d. to represent the undersigned organizations in the eyes of the whole world.

Signed:

*E. Bauer* – International Left Opposition (Bolshevik-Leninist)

*J. Schwab* – SAP (Socialist Workers Party of Germany)

*P.J. Schmidt* – OSP (Independent Socialist Party of Holland)

*H. Sneevliet* – RSP (Revolutionary Socialist Party of Holland)

[16]

Trotsky was very excited about the result. In an article entitled *The Paris Conference: Firm Nucleus for a New International* (1 September 1933) he wrote:

We obtained the four signatures ... under a document that is the only tangible result of the conference and that may and should become of historic importance.

We achieved this momentous result ... three organizations that lead a few tens of thousands of workers found no other path but

to unite with us on a common document that presupposes a long and stubborn struggle. A wide breach was made in the wall surrounding the Left Opposition. We can expect with certainty that additional new organizations and factions, which are being pushed to the revolutionary path by the whole situation, will with every passing month convince themselves that the only banner under which the proletarian vanguard can rally is the banner of Bolshevism-Leninism. [17]

A few days later, in a letter to Fritz Sternberg, a leading member of the SAP, Trotsky wrote:

... the *Declaration of Four*, despite its modest appearance, is in no way less important than the Zimmerwald and Kienthal documents. Viewed from within, the Zimmerwald and Kienthal documents also appeared extremely modest. Bolshevism then had ten years behind it as a faction and two years as an independent party, and in terms of numbers and cadres, during the war it was hardly stronger than the Left Opposition of the Soviet Union. The majority of the other participants stood on about the same level of confusion as the majority of the participants in the Paris conference. Numerically, however, they were far weaker. As far as the left wing was concerned, it was incomparably weaker than our Bloc of Four. We don't have Lenin with us, it is true, but we have had a great deal of experience since Zimmerwald – and that counts for much. [18]

On 1 September 1933, Trotsky wrote to the Czechoslovakian Communist Oppositionist Alois Neurath, regarding the *Declaration of the Four*:

The most decisive thing is that these organisations, which yesterday were strangers and hostile to us, see themselves obliged to come out in favour of our explanation of principles. This is decisive. Tomorrow others will come ... The *Declaration of the Four* imposes upon us the duty to draft a programmatic

manifesto, in a short time. When we bring this out, the whole political life of the workers' movement, in every organisation and tendency, will inevitably revolve round this document, because we are the only people who can say what is essential; not that we are any more 'intelligent' than the rest, but because we are not tied to the bankrupt apparatuses, and are not obliged to embellish things or to falsify them, that is, to deceive the workers. I look forward to the future with great confidence, even the more or less near future. [19]

At the same time Trotsky was quite worried that while the SAP and OSP signed the *Declaration of the Four*, they also associated with the committee of the majority at the Paris Conference – together with two representatives of the ILP and one representative of the NAP. [20]

### **Hopes Turn to Ashes**

WE HAVE already quoted Trotsky's reference to the experience of the Comintern built by attracting 'not only individuals and groups but also entire organisations and even parties with their old leadership or a part of the old leadership'. [21]

In Italy the Socialist Party had voted to affiliate to the Comintern at its conference in Bologna in September 1919, adding 300,000 members to the International. In Germany the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), with 800,000 members, had split from the German Social Democratic Party, (SPD) in April 1917 under pressure from the revolutionary mood among the masses. It veered markedly to the left in 1919 and 1920. At its congress in October 1920 in Halle, the USPD decided by 236 to 156 to join the Comintern. Of the USPD's 800,000 members, 300,000 joined the Communist Party at a unification conference in December 1920. In France the conference of the Socialist Party in Tours on 25 December 1920 decided to join the Comintern. Although a minority of 30,000 refused to follow, the Comintern still embraced a mass

party of 140,000 members. The Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party split in December 1920, the Communist Left taking over half the membership and establishing a Communist Party of 350,000 members. A separate split in the Social Democratic Party of the German speaking minority added further forces, and after their unification the Party claimed 400,000 members.

Similarly, mass Socialist Parties in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia had joined the Comintern. [22]

The leaderships of the parties that moved from the Second to the Third International in the years 1919-20 had often been far to the right of anyone at the August 1933 Paris conference. The social-patriotic Marcel Cachin and L.O. Frossard, the leaders of the French Communist Party, supported the First World War, and the latter ended his life as a minister in the Pétain government. However, the results of the regroupment in 1919-20 was completely different to the outcome of the realignment of 1933.

In the first case the revolutionary storm of the years after the First World War, coupled with the immediacy of world revolution and the victorious October revolution meant that revolutionary Marxism was a pole of attraction for reformists and centrists. Now, in 1933, the situation was reversed. After the catastrophic defeat of the proletariat in Germany, and with Trotsky representing not a victorious revolution and heading a party of hundreds of thousands, but a minute group of revolutionaries, the centrists were bound to move rightwards.

### **Rightward Moving Centrists**

NOTHING CAME of the alliance of the International Left Opposition and the SAP. Trotsky had great expectations of the SAP. On 22 September 1932, he wrote: 'We are ... having considerable success in Germany. Inside the SAP a considerable faction of ours is being created, which is on the eve of splitting and coming over to us.' [23]

In April 1933 Trotsky wrote:

The left wing of the SAP, in spite of the fact that the leaders have no organ of their own, has won over the majority of the party, removing the Seydewitz faction. This fact is the best demonstration of the general direction of development of the SAP, where we have already seen the beginning of a 'living current'. Nor can we be blind to the fact that the SAP represents even now the raw forces of communism ... The Left Opposition, there can be no doubt on this score, is ready to do everything in its power to facilitate a mutual understanding with the SAP. [24]

On 18 August 1933 Trotsky wrote to Walcher that the German Left Opposition and the SAP should fuse immediately. [25] Immediately after the Paris conference the prospects for such a development were good. In October the SAP and Left Opposition published joint theses on trade union work. In Paris and Strasbourg joint meetings were organised. In Denmark there was a group made up of the SAP, the Left Opposition and ex-officials of the Danish Communist Party. In Saarland the SAP and the Left Opposition were effectively merged. In Prague fusion was already being striven for. Negotiations between the national executive of the SAP youth and the Left Opposition youth had concluded 'that with total agreement on the most important questions of principle organisational unification on the basis of a common platform is imminent.' [26]

However, nothing came out of the alliance of the German Trotskyists with the SAP. Not only did a fusion fail to materialise, but the SAP developed into the major campaigner against the Left Opposition and Trotsky. It came to deploy an entire arsenal of anti-Trotskyist weapons.

Walcher stuck to the IAG [1\*], and refused to break with elements to the right of it such as the NAP. The SAP was worried that the break with the IAG would lead to adventurism and isolation.

The SAP in later years moved so much to the right that it participated in a Popular Front conference held in Paris, together with the KPD, SPD and a number of bourgeois intellectuals. [27] On 2 May 1937 the Executive Committee of POUM, who together with

the SAP were members of the London Bureau, accused the latter of capitulating to Stalin.

It is unquestionable that the leadership of the SAP is strongly influenced by Stalinism ... The present policies of the SAP, which is in effect adopting Stalinist and Social Democratic positions, are bringing its status as an independent party into serious danger. [28]

The ILP also moved massively to the right. When Italy invaded Abyssinia, one of the ILP leaders, John McGovern, argued that the Abyssinian Emperor was a worse dictator than Mussolini, and James Maxton called on the Abyssinian workers to overthrow the Emperor and carry on the war against Mussolini. Only then would the ILP declare solidarity with the Abyssinians, a position which was radical in words but in practice meant capitulation to imperialism. When Maxton was beaten on this issue at the annual conference of the ILP in 1936 he resigned from the leadership. What followed was a comedy: he withdrew his resignation when the conference retreated from its position. The ILP thus demonstrated that in reality it valued its parliamentary 'star' above its political principles. [29] When Chamberlain returned from signing the peace pact in Munich with Hitler, Maxton congratulated him for saving the peace of the world.

Together with its pacifism, the ILP adapted itself to Stalinism. In the early 1930s the ILP increasingly glorified conditions in the Soviet Union. This went so far that the ILP even participated in Stalin's personality cult. The famine of 1932, which was caused by forcible collectivisation, was simply denied. [30] The ILP even went so far as to justify the Moscow trials. [31] Hence it refused to join the Dewey Commission that investigated the Moscow trials, arguing that a truly independent commission could not assemble under the auspices of the defence of Trotsky. Brockway, the secretary of the ILP, proposed instead a commission to investigate Trotskyism!

The London Bureau never managed to become a stable organisation. Its different elements broke away and moved further and further to the right. In 1935 the NAP became the government



party in Norway and broke with the London Bureau. On 28 October 1938 the SAP declared its withdrawal from the London Bureau. [32] When the war broke out the PSOP – the French section of the London Bureau – disintegrated, its leader Marceau Pivert, became a supporter of de Gaulle, and after the war Pivert rejoined the Socialist Party.

On 27 April 1939 the London Bureau, at the POUM's suggestion, was disbanded.

### **Trotskyists Pulled Into the London Bureau**

WHILE THE international Trotskyist movement had very little influence on the centrists of the London Bureau, the London Bureau had quite an effect on the Trotskyist organisations. Practically all the relatively large sections of the Trotskyist movement were sucked into the London Bureau. There were three sections of the Trotskyist movement with over 1,000 members: the Dutch RSAP (with a membership of 4,200 in March 1935) [33], the Greek Archeo-Marxists (which, according to their claim in June 1932, had 1,600 members, though this figure is probably exaggerated) [34], and the Spanish Izquierda Comunista de España (ICE), claiming some 1,500 members at the end of 1932. [35] (This was certainly an exaggerated figure. According to Juan Andrade, one of its leaders, in mid-1935 it had 800 members.) [36]

Why were the Trotskyists more successful in building organisations in Holland, Greece and Spain (and later in Ceylon) than elsewhere? It was above all the weakness of the Communist Parties in these countries that left a space for the growth of Trotskyism.

About Holland Fritjof Tichelman writes:

The working class, which was late and slow in developing, was dominated by artisans and small workshops until well into the twentieth century. Furthermore the industrial proletariat was for a long time scattered over a range of isolated centres of

industry. What is more, the number of employees in the service sector was relatively high. It is thus not surprising that the labour movement never assumed significant proportions in the nineteenth century, and even in the twentieth century never reached the size typical of most other north west European countries. The great trade union confederation connected to the social democracy, the Nederlandsch Verbond van Vakverenigingen (Dutch Trade Union Association, NVV) never represented anything approaching half of all workers in unions before the Second World War, and the SDAP (Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiders Partij – Social-democratic Workers Party) could muster only a quarter of the electorate over the same period.

This situation prevented the development of a real mass movement of the working class. It also created favourable conditions for the rise of separate small anti-capitalist currents. As in other industrially under-developed countries ... the Netherlands provided fertile soil for anarchist and syndicalist currents. The variety of ideological impulses from the maturer foreign labour movement stimulated the creation and continued growth of small, mutually independent political organisations and ideological conflicts whose theory was never tested in confrontation with the mass movement and in struggle. [37]

The result was that the Communist Party of Holland did not dwarf the Trotskyist organisation of the RSP. Thus, in the general elections of 3 July 1929, the former won 37,622 votes, while the latter got 21,768. [38] In the 1933 general elections the Communist Party won 118,326 votes, while the combined vote for the RSP and OSP was 85,881. [39] In March 1935 the two organisations merged to make up the RSAP. This belonged to both the world Trotskyist organisation and the London Bureau. In November 1936 Sneevliet and the other leaders of the RSAP distanced themselves from Trotsky: they opposed his suggestion that Trotskyists should enter into Social Democratic parties for factional work – the ‘French turn’. (See

pp.211-12, 224-34) They also supported the POUM against Trotsky's criticism. [40] In June 1937 the RSAP broke off all relations with the Trotskyist movement. [41]

The Greek Trotskyists were also in the same league as the Greek Communist Party, which was quite a small organisation. In 1920 it had 1,320 members; in 1924, 2,200; in 1928, 2,000; and in 1930, 1,500. The circulation of its daily paper was also small: 1928-29, 4,250; July 1929, 3,000; March 1930, 1,666; and January 1933, 2,600. [42] The Archeo-Marxists claimed 1,600 members in 1932; this was probably exaggerated, but still they were not far behind the Communist Party. Like the Dutch, the Archeo-Marxists also rejected the 'French turn', and following this they broke with Trotsky and joined the London Bureau.

Now to the case of Spain. Because of the massive strength of the Anarchists in Spain, the Communist Party found the going tough, and for a long time it remained a tiny organisation. At the beginning of 1930 it had no more than 500 members. [43]

In these circumstances the Spanish Trotskyists believed they could establish a significant organisation of their own. Hence, like the Dutch and Greeks, they rejected the 'French turn', and this led to a break in relations between the ICE and Trotsky. They also joined the London Bureau.

So Trotsky's great dreams of realignment around the *Declaration of the Four* turned to ashes. [2\*]

These examples were exceptions. More striking was the inability of the Trotskyist movement to attract and retain any significant forces from the centrist milieu in the early 'thirties. This was neither a personal failing of Trotsky nor due to any weakness in his politics. It has sometimes been suggested that the fault lay in Trotsky's prickliness, his obsession with principles, his harsh criticism of other tendencies, etc. That this is false is shown by the subsequent evolution of the centrist organisations. Serious revolutionaries and, still more so, revolutionary organisations, do not change their basic political orientation and class position because they are offended by sharp words.

In reality centrism is always a political formation in motion – either to the left or the right, depending on the pressure of events. For a brief period (1932-33) events pushed the centrists to the left, and brought them into Trotsky's orbit. Subsequently the great weight of Stalinism, combined with the terrible defeats of the working class drew them ineluctably back to the right.

Trotsky, precisely because he was not a sectarian, had no choice but to attempt to influence the centrist tendencies, but objective circumstances precluded him from achieving more than the rescue of a few individuals.

### Footnotes

1\*. On 17 February 1935 the IAG changed its name to 'International Bureau of Revolutionary Socialist Unity'. In August its Secretariat moved to London and was henceforth known as the London Bureau.

2\*. In the case of Ceylon the Trotskyists succeeded in building a significant party because there was no prior Communist Party. The Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Ceylon Equality Party) was founded on 18 December 1935. To begin with it was not a Marxist party, and still less a Trotskyist one. It had some 20 members and grew within a year to 80. [44] In 1937 the editor of the party paper was B.J. Fernando, who considered himself a Trotskyist, while of the joint party secretaries one was a Trotskyist and the other a 'staunch Stalinist'. [45]

The party won a mass following: thus in the 1937 May Day demonstration it led 10,000 followers. [46] Its membership now reached 800. [47] One paper was edited by a Trotskyist and another, a Tamil mass circulation weekly, by a Stalinist. [48] The differences between the pro-Stalinists and pro-Trotskyists were kept hidden. As the historian of Ceylonese Trotskyism, George Jan Lerski explains:

Otherwise it would be hard to explain the outward coexistence in relative harmony of the Trotskyites and the pro-Moscow

Communists both in the rank and file and in the party leadership for a good five years after the organisation was formed. [49]

In December 1939 the executive committee of the LSSP adopted a thoroughly Trotskyist position by 29 votes to 5; the five Stalinists who opposed the policy were expelled. [50]

## Notes

1. *WLT*, 1932-33, pp.137-8.
2. *Ibid.*, p.138.
3. *Ibid.*, p.305.
4. *Ibid.*, p.308.
5. *Ibid.*, p.311.
6. *Ibid.*, pp.274-5.
7. *Ibid.*, p.275.
8. *Ibid.*, p.276.
9. W. Buschak, *Das Londoner Büro*, Amsterdam 1985, pp.84-5.
10. *Ibid.*, pp.86-7.
11. *Ibid.*, p.100.
12. *Ibid.*, p.159.
13. *Ibid.*, pp.90-1.
14. F. Tichelman, *Henk Sneevliet, 1883-1942*, Bochum 1978, p.90.
15. *Ibid.*, p.82.
16. *WLT*, 1933-34, p.52.
17. *Ibid.*, p.65.
18. *WLT, Supplement*, 1929-33, p.290.
19. T9397.
20. *WLT*, 1933-34, pp.67-8.
21. *WLT*, 1932-33, p.276.
22. Cliff, *Lenin*, Vol.3, pp.216-8.
23. *WLT*, 1932, p.202.
24. *WLT*, 1932-33, p.214.
25. *WLT*, 1933-34, pp.46-7.

26. Buschak, pp.112-3.
27. Drechsler, p.343.
28. *La Batalla*, 2 May 1937, Buschak, p.248.
29. Buschak, p.181.
30. *Ibid.*, p.267.
31. *Ibid.*, p.274.
32. *Ibid.*, pp.297-8.
33. Tichelman, p.90.
34. *WLT, Supplement, 1929-33*, p.133.
35. Introduction to L. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution 1931-39*, New York 1973, p.31.
36. P. Pagés, *El Movimiento Trotskista en España 1930-1935*, Barcelona 1977, p.94.
37. Tichelman, pp.7-8.
38. *Ibid.*, p.77.
39. *Ibid.*, p.82.
40. *Ibid.*, p.97.
41. *Ibid.*, p.99.
42. A. Elefantis, *The promise of the Impossible Revolution – the KKE and the Bourgeoisie between the World Wars* [in Greek], Athens 1976.
43. V. Alba, *Histoire du POUM*, Paris 1975, p.34.
44. G.J. Lerski, *Origins of Trotskyism in Ceylon*, Stanford 1968, p.110.
45. *Ibid.*, p.110.
46. *Ibid.*, p.126.
47. *Ibid.*, p.144.
48. *Ibid.*, p.149.
49. *Ibid.*, p.156.
50. *Ibid.*, p.211.

## 9. Trotsky on France

FOLLOWING THE defeat of the German proletariat, argued Trotsky, France became the key to the international situation. It was there that the fate of the world revolution for many years to come would be decided.

In 1934 French society was entering a period of general crisis. On 6 February the French extreme right – principally fascist and royalist – gathered in Place de la Concorde on the opposite bank of the river to the Palais Bourbon, the lower chamber of the French parliament. They were attempting to overthrow the government. Battles raged the whole evening on Place de la Concorde, leaving 15 dead and 1,435 wounded. Although the 6 February protest was unsuccessful as a coup, it managed to drive from office a government headed by the Radical, Edouard Daladier. It was replaced, to the applause of the previous day's rioters, by a Government of National Unity, headed by the right winger Gaston Doumergue. The response of the bourgeois liberal party of the Radicals was to rally round the Doumergue government, which presented itself as the last bulwark against anarchism. This began a train of events which would radicalise the French workers and prove a major focus of attention for Trotsky.

On the morning of the 7th, the CGT – the main French trade union federation decided to call a 24-hour general strike for Monday 12 February, 'against the fascist threat and in defence of civil liberties'. The Communist Party-controlled trade union federation, the CGT-U, joined the strike and its success exceeded the most optimistic expectations. An overall estimate of the number of workers on strike was 4½ million, with one million participating in

demonstrations. That afternoon the Socialist Party demonstration took place in Paris. The previous day the Communist Party had decided to take part. In one dramatic moment the two columns joined together to cries of 'Unity! Unity!' For the first time for years Socialist and Communist workers were marching side by side. [1] A historian of the event, Julian Jackson, writes: 'The spectacular and spontaneous manifestation of unity in Paris was duplicated in the provinces: there were demonstrations in 346 towns (19 of which contained more than 5,000 participants); 161 of these involved both Socialists and Communists.' [2]

Until then, and for some time even afterwards, the French Communist Party (PCF) continued with its sectarian attitude towards the Socialist Party (SFIO). The Communist Party's tactics were those set out by Maurice Thorez, General Secretary of the PCF, at the Central Committee in February 1933:

Our united front tactic assumes: 1) action; 2) proletarian democracy in struggle; 3) the leadership of the Communist Party; 4) attack on social-democracy (etc.). That means: no sharing of leadership between us and the Socialist Party. In short our tactic means: never any agreement at the top. [3]

In January 1934 the resolution from the Central Committee repeated the point:

The Central Committee resolutely rejects any tendency which proposes, at this point, a united front to the leadership of the SFIO.

On 24 January Maurice Thorez told the Central Committee of the PCF: 'We will in no circumstances pursue an agreement with the leadership of the Socialist Party which we consider ... as an enemy ... We want to organise a common struggle with the Socialist workers, in spite of and against, the Socialist leaders.' [4]

The fascist attack initially made no difference. On 7 February, *L'Humanité* wrote:



Fascists, rulers of 'democracy', which is rapidly turning fascist, manoeuvres ... by the Socialist Party in its interest – all these are going to increase.

The workers ... have no intention of submitting to the dictatorship of the cudgel and machine-gun ...

Against fascism, against the fascisation of the democratic state, against the treacherous manoeuvres of the Socialist Party and the CGT, we must move to action!

The following day *L'Humanité* continued to call for action ... against the socialists and the CGT as well as against the fascists. [5]

Even after the 12 February strikes and demonstrations, the PCF continued with the line of social-fascism, and the policy of 'united front from below'. Thus, a 19 April editorial in *L'Humanité* written by Thorez was entitled, *Against the Bloc with Social Fascism*. [6]

However the PCF could not stick to this position. As Jacques Danos and Marcel Gibelin, historians of the June 1936 mass strikes in France write:

... pressure from the working class was to prove irresistible. It would sweep away all hesitations, and force the two leaderships to accept unity in action ...

From June 1934 onwards the Communist Party executed a political turn involving both a reappraisal of the tactic of the united front, and a more moderate tone in polemics with the Socialist leaders. [7]

On 2 July the SFIO *Fédération de la Seine* held joint meetings with the local PCF federation. On 27 July a joint Socialist-Communist pact was signed, and two days later a joint demonstration of Socialists and Communists took place to commemorate the anniversary of the assassination of Jean Jaurès (the pre-war socialist leader). On 9 October Maurice Thorez proposed the extension of the Socialist-Communist pact to include the Radicals. Thus the Popular Front policy was ushered in.

In October Trotsky wrote his first great essay on developments in France: *Whither France?* He pointed out that sections of the French bourgeoisie had begun to give serious consideration to the fascist alternative. The threat of fascism is real and urgent, he argued:

Of course in France, as in certain other European countries (England, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, the Scandinavian countries), there still exist parliaments, elections, democratic liberties, or their remnants. But in all these countries the class struggle is sharpening, just as it did previously in Italy and Germany. Whoever consoles himself with the phrase 'France is not Germany' is hopeless. In all countries the same historical laws operate, the laws of capitalist decline ... In the various countries the decrepitude and disintegration of capitalism are expressed in diverse forms and at unequal rhythms. But the basic features of the process are the same everywhere. *The bourgeoisie is leading its society to complete bankruptcy.* It is capable of assuring the people neither bread nor peace. *This is precisely why it cannot any longer tolerate the democratic order.* It is forced to smash the workers by the use of physical violence. The discontent of the workers and peasants, however, cannot be brought to an end by the police alone ... That is why finance capital is obliged to create special armed hands trained to fight the workers, just as certain breeds of dogs are trained to hunt game. The historic function of fascism is to smash the working class, destroy its organizations, and stifle political liberties when the capitalists find themselves unable to govern and dominate with the help of democratic machinery.

The fascists find their human material mainly in the petty bourgeoisie. The latter has been entirely ruined by big capital. There is no way out for it in the present social order, but it knows of no other. Its dissatisfaction, indignation and despair are diverted by the fascists away from big capital and against the workers. It may be said that fascism is the act of placing the petty bourgeoisie at the disposal of its most bitter enemies. In

this way big capital ruins the middle classes and then with the help of hired fascist demagogues incites the despairing petty bourgeois against the worker. [8]

At present the Doumergue government represented an incipient Bonapartism.

The Doumergue government represents the first step of the passage from parliamentarism to Bonapartism. To keep his balance, Doumergue needs at his right hand the fascist and other bands which brought him to power. [9]

French fascism does not yet represent a mass force. On the other hand, Bonapartism finds support – neither sure nor very stable but nevertheless a mass support – in the Radicals. Between these two facts there is an inner link. By the social character of its base, Radicalism is the party of the petty bourgeoisie. Fascism can only become a mass force by conquering the petty bourgeoisie. In other words, *fascism can develop in France above all at the expense of the Radicals*. This process is already under way, although still in its early stages.

Now capitalism offers no future at all to the workers or the petty bourgeoisie.

Capitalism not only cannot give the toilers new social reforms, nor even petty alms. It is forced to take back what it once gave. All of Europe has entered an era of economic and political counterreforms. [10]

French society faces a stark choice:

Revolutionary socialism or fascist reaction – which will be first to boldly and broadly present to the middle classes the most convincing program and, what is most important, win their confidence by demonstrating in words and deeds its ability to smash every obstacle on the road to a better future? [11]

The last thing to prevent the petty bourgeoisie from moving towards fascism is to adopt a policy of moderation, to adapt to the policy of the bourgeois party of the Radicals. Hence the enormity of the crime inherent in the policies of the Popular Front. 'An alliance with the Radicals would be an alliance against the middle classes.' [12] The workers' united front should not accommodate to the Radicals, but he used to organise the struggle of the masses against fascism and capitalism. Very radical steps must be taken: a workers' militia must be built, the proletariat must be armed. The aim of the united front must be workers' power: 'If the revolutionary proletariat does not take power, fascism will inevitably take it!' [13]

### **The Rise of the Popular Front**

IN OCTOBER 1934, as we have mentioned, Maurice Thorez invited the Radicals to join the united front of the PCF and SFIO. This was the launching pad for the Popular Front, even though it was formally inaugurated only in July 1935. An event taking place in Moscow gave a fillip to the new policy: the Foreign Minister of France, Pierre Laval, was in Moscow for the signature of the Franco-Soviet mutual assistance pact. He had various political conversations with Stalin from 13 to 15 May. The official communiqué that followed declared that both countries had the duty 'to see that their national defensive capability was in no way weakened', and added: 'In this respect, Mr. Stalin understands and fully approves the French national defence policy which requires a level of armed force sufficient to meet the needs of her security.' Faced with this unexpected declaration, which stupefied a number of Communist Party members, the party immediately issued a poster bearing the motto 'Stalin is right'. [14] And Thorez explained in a speech on 17 May:

If war ... broke out against the Soviet Union, and an imperialist state, for the sake of some interests of its own, ranged itself on the side of the Soviet Union, the war would not be a war between two imperialist camps, for it would be monstrous to

treat as an imperialist camp the camp in which the country of socialism, the country of the working class, finds itself. [15]

On 14 July, Bastille Day, a massive joint demonstration of some 500,000 Communists, Socialists and Radicals took place in Paris, led by Blum, Daladier and Thorez. The tricolour flew alongside the Red Flag, and the *Marseillaise* was sung along with the *Internationale*. Throughout the rest of France, countless meetings and demonstrations took place. Following this a common committee of all three parties began the elaboration of a joint programme for the 1936 general elections. In January 1936 the Popular Front programme was agreed and published. In the following general election, the first round of voting on 26 April, the second on 3 May, the Popular Front came out victorious. The number of Communist MPs rose from 10 to 72, of Socialists from 97 to 147, while the number of Radicals went down from 159 to 106. Altogether the Popular Front had 376 MPs, a majority of 156. The Socialists were the largest group in parliament.

A new Popular Front Government, headed by the Socialist leader, Léon Blum, was established. It was made up of 18 Socialists, 13 Radicals and 4 Independent Socialists. The Communists did not take office; they realised they could better serve the new government by remaining outside.

Trotsky was very critical of the strategy of the Popular Front. It differed from the united front which he proposed in a number of crucial ways. The united front linked working class parties; the Popular Front included bourgeois parties. It was thus a class collaborationist policy. Whereas the united front constituted a practical agreement to fight for specific aims, the Popular Front involved a common electoral programme and support for a bourgeois government. Again, whereas in the united front complete ideological independence and freedom of criticism were to be preserved, in the Popular Front they were abandoned. Trotsky pointed out that the Popular Front policy was brought about by the PCF and the Comintern as part of Russia's foreign policy. Stalin wanted an alliance with France and Britain against Nazi Germany,

and the Popular Front was intended to aid this. The Popular Front would see to it that the Communist Parties would be reliable allies in a war of national defence.

On 28 March 1935, some three months before the Popular Front was declared, Trotsky was already warning against the dangers of such a policy:

The parliamentary bloc with the Radicals, which was a crime from the point of view of the historical interests of the proletariat, has at least a certain practical value in the restricted domain of parliamentarianism. The extra-parliamentary alliance with the Radicals against fascism is not only a crime but an idiocy. [16]

The argument that the Popular Front was an improvement on the united front because it added unity with the petty bourgeoisie to the unity of workers was completely false. The only way to win the petty bourgeoisie was through offering a decisive workers' leadership. Support for the bourgeois party of the Radicals was suicidal, as it would lead only to the growth of fascism in the conditions of the general crisis of the economy and society:

The 'People's Front' represents the coalition of the proletariat with the imperialist bourgeoisie, in the shape of the Radical Party and smaller tripe of the same sort. The coalition extends both to the parliamentary and to the extra-parliamentary spheres. In both spheres the Radical Party, preserving for itself complete freedom of action, savagely imposes restrictions upon the freedom of action of the proletariat. [17]

### **Revolutionary Strikes**

12 FEBRUARY 1934 saw, as we have noted, one million workers on strike in Paris. This was followed by a rising tide of strikes in 1934 and 1935. A renewed wave of mass strikes followed the election victory of the Popular Front in March-April 1936. According to official

statistics there were 12,142 strikes and 1,830,938 strikers in June 1936 alone. The previous highest annual total of strikes, in 1920, was 1,316,559.

There was a new quality to the strikes. Over three quarters of the June strikes (8,941), consisted of factory occupations. [18]

The strikes spared almost no section of industry from Renault's huge Billancourt plant with its 32,000 workers to tiny workshops ... from the relatively highly unionised coal mines and docks to the totally un-unionised employees of department stores. [19]

The first step of the Blum government was to stop the strike wave. On 7 June Blum called for 'public security' and invited union and employers' representatives to the Matignon Hotel, his official residence, for negotiations. This led to an agreement the terms of which were: wage increases ranging from 7 to 15 percent; a 40 hour work week (down from 48) with no loss of pay; two weeks paid vacations; *de facto* recognition of the principle of collective bargaining.

All the workers' organisations except the Trotskyists supported the Matignon Agreement – not only the PCF and SFIO, but even the Left of the Socialist Party, Gauche Revolutionnaire, led by Marceau Pivert. On the evening of 12 June the government seized at the printworks all copies of the Trotskyist newspaper, *La Lutte Ouvrière*, and announced legal proceedings against the leaders of the organisation. A few days later the Socialist Minister of the Interior, Roger Solengro, announced that the 'government would not tolerate further factory occupations'. [20] The historian Julian Jackson writes: 'Later Blum remarked of this period that the employers had viewed him as a "saviour" who had ended the largest strike movement in French history. This was probably true but in fact the Matignon Agreement had little impact on the strikes. The bourgeoisie's real saviour was the Communist Party leader, Maurice Thorez.' [21]

At a mass membership meeting of the Communist Party in the Paris region on 11 June, Thorez declared:

*So what next? ... So, we must know how to end a strike when satisfaction has been obtained. We must even know how to accept a compromise when all demands have not yet been met but victory on the essential points has been achieved. [22]*

A similar tune was played by the Radical leaders. One of them stated in October 1936: ' ... the occupation of factories, shops and firms was not in the programme of the Popular Front ... It is not only illegal, it is something worse: a humiliation for the *patron*. The occupations must cease ... ' [23] However it was the voice of the PCF that counted, far more effective than that of the SFIO or the Radicals.

### **Massive Growth of the Communist Party**

THE RISING industrial wave led to a massive growth of the PCF, as can be seen from the following membership figures:

1933		29,000	1936	June	141,000
1934		42,000		July	216,000
1935		87,000		Aug.	246,000
1936	Feb.	90,000		Sept.	260,000
	Mar.	101,000		Oct.	278,000
	Apr.	106,000		Nov.	284,000
	May	131,000		Dec.	288,000

The membership of the PCF more than trebled in 1936. The rise in membership of the Young Communists was even steeper:



1933		3,500	
1934	Dec.	10,000	
1935	Dec.	25,000	
1936	Jan.	25,000	
	Feb.	28,000	
	June	52,000	
	July	72,000	
	Aug.	86,000	
	Nov.	100,000	[24]

The Socialist Party also grew significantly but far less than the Communist Party. The membership of the SFIO, 131,000 in 1933, rose to 202,000 in 1936; and of the Young Socialists, 11,320 in 1934, rose to 54,640 in 1937. [25]

The power of the PCF increased massively, not only because of the increase in membership, but even more because it became the dominant force in the unions. The membership of the CGT grew from 785,700 in 1935 to about four million in 1937. [26] Although the explosion of union membership in 1936 took place in every section, the largest increase was in the manufacturing section, where the PCF was far better implanted than the SFIO. Among metal workers the proportion of trade unionists in the total workforce was 4 percent in 1935, and jumped to 71 percent in 1937; among railway workers the corresponding figures were 22 and 73.5 percent; among building workers 6 and 63.5; textile workers, 7 and 55; and in mining 13 and 81. [27]

With the Popular Front the PCF emerged as the decisive force because of its massively expanding working class base.

### **Trotsky's Reaction to the June events**

ON 5 JUNE Trotsky wrote an article entitled *The Decisive Stage*, analysing the strength and rhythm of the sharply accelerated class struggle in France. He ended the article with this conclusion about the immediate tasks ahead:

The French workers have once more shown that they are worthy of their historical reputation. We must have faith in them. The soviets have always been born out of strikes. The mass strike is the natural element of the proletarian revolution. The committees of action cannot be at present anything but the committees of those strikers who are seizing the enterprises. From one industry to another, from one factory to the next, from one working class district to another, from city to city, the committees of action must establish a close bond with each other. They must meet in each city, in each productive group in their regions, in order to end with a congress of all the committees of action in France. This will be the new order that must take the place of the reigning anarchy. [28]

Then on 9 June Trotsky wrote an article the title of which says everything: *The French Revolution has Begun!*

These are not just strikes. This is a *strike*. This is the open rallying of the oppressed against the oppressors. This is the classic beginning of revolution.

The entire past experience of the working class – the history of its exploitation, miseries, struggles, and defeats – comes to life under the impact of events, rises up in the consciousness of every proletarian (even the most backward), and drives him into the common ranks. The entire class has been set in motion. This colossal mass cannot be stopped by words. The struggle must be consummated either in the greatest of victories or the most ghastly of defeats. [29]

The gains of June 1936 were important, but the laws of capitalism dictated that they would soon be whittled away. The whip of reaction would force the workers to take a further step forward. A new wave, a struggle for power, would begin:

... one thing is clear in advance: the second wave will not have by far the peaceful, almost good-natured, spring-like character that the first has had. It will be more mature, more stubborn and harsh, for it will arise from the disillusionment of the masses in the practical results of the policies of the People's Front and their own initial venture. [30]

The June days, Trotsky maintained, gave us a glimpse of the future; completely new possibilities were laid on the historical agenda. France stood at the crossroads between revolution and catastrophe, Trotsky argued a month later in an article entitled *Before the Second Stage*:

The workers in June exerted colossal pressure upon the ruling classes, but they did not carry it to its conclusion. 'They evinced their revolutionary might but also their weakness: the lack of a program and of a leadership. All the props of capitalist society and all of its incurable ulcers remain intact. Now the period is unfolding of preparations for a counter-pressure: repressions against the left agitators, the increasingly envenomed agitation on the part of the right agitators; experimentation with rising prices; mobilisations of manufacturers for mass lockouts. [31]

The present pause, the beginning of the counter-attack by the employers, could lead to the following alternatives:

... either a rout for many years to come, with the inevitable triumph of fascist reaction, or only a severe lesson on strategy, as a result of which the working class will mature, renew its leadership, and prepare the conditions for future victory. [32]

Trotsky's words were prophetic. As events will show, his analysis brilliantly stood the test of time. No one among the great Marxist thinkers surpassed him in the ability to use the historical materialist method, to synthesise the economic, social and political factors, and to grasp their inter-relationship with the mass psychology of millions,

and the import of the subjective factor – the role of workers' parties and workers' leaders in the great events.

In the years 1937-38 the capitalists, in cahoots with the Popular Front Government, and assisted by the leaders of the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the trade unions, rolled back many of the workers' gains of June 1936.

### **The Wave Recedes**

FROM 13 JUNE the factory occupations started being given up. The Matignon Agreement was a very effective weapon to contain workers' struggle and then force a retreat on them. The new law on collective bargaining was effective in bring disputes rapidly under control. The average number of collective contracts signed annually between 1930 and 1935 was 22; between June and December 1936 the number rose to 2,336. [33]

As disputes often arose in the interpretation of the collective agreements, at the end of 1936 the government introduced a compulsory arbitration bill requiring all industrial disputes to go through newly created arbitration procedures: ' ... of 9,631 conflicts reported to prefects between January 1937 and March 1938, 6,199 were submitted to arbitration, and of these 2,610 (27 percent) were settled in four days by departmental arbitration commissions, and 3,589 (37 percent) by more lengthy conciliation procedures. The relative industrial peace of 1937 probably owed something to the working of the law.' [34]

The decline of workers' activity encouraged the employers' offensive. The CGT Congress recorded in 1938: 'From the summer of 1936 the employers began to organise resistance. It grew from month to month'. [35]

The employers opened up an offensive against the 40-hour week and were aided in this by the government. Shortly after the passing of the first orders bringing the 40 hour law into effect, the employers demanded the working of days in lieu of the Christmas and New Year holidays. There was also the imposition of extra hours in

industries where there was a fall-off in activity at certain times of the year. Following this there was the authorisation of overtime in key sectors of the economy.

The economic policy of the Popular Front government wiped out the gains of the workers in June 1936. In September 1936 a devaluation of the franc undermined workers' purchasing power. By May 1938 retail prices were 47 percent higher than in May 1936. [36] Inflation went so far that by May 1938 real wages were roughly at the pre-Matignon levels. [37]

In September 1936 Blum announced a rearmament programme on a larger scale than any previous government, and this undermined workers' living standards. As Blum put it in February 1937: 'It is difficult to combine a hold policy of social reform with an intense rearmament effort. We have attempted both at the same time', and the rearmament won. As Robert Frank, the historian of rearmament, comments: 'In terms of government spending, Blum did more for guns than butter'. [38]

Throughout the period of the Blum government the employers were on the offensive against the workers. Arthur Mitzman, in an article *The French working class and the Blum Government (1936-37)*, writes:

Through a resolute campaign of resistance to organized labor, the new *Confédération Général du Patronat Français*, was determined to prevent any new gains by labor and to take back as many of the concessions granted at Matignon as possible. [39]

Dismissals and lay-offs of workers were the order of the day. Those especially prone to dismissal were union members.

Blum went to extremes to appease the right in fields other than the economy. On 16 March 1937 a left wing demonstration took place in the Paris suburb of Clichy to protest against a meeting of fascists that the government refused to ban. Clashes took place between the demonstrators and the police. The police opened fire and killed six demonstrators. [40] Next day the metro and autobus

unions called a 24-hour strike for the 18th, and all the unions in the Paris area came out on a general strike, however of only half a day's duration. [41]

A fortnight after Blum became Prime Minister, Franco rebelled against the elected Popular Front Government of Spain (18 July). On 20 July Blum received an urgent request from the Spanish government for the delivery of planes and other war materials. Blum, and the Socialist ministers whom he consulted, at first made it clear that they intended to comply with the request, which would have been no more than fulfilling the terms of a commercial treaty concluded in 1935. Opposition was immediately expressed by the British government, with whom Blum had contact on 23 July. The French right, including right wing Radicals joined in and threatened to bring down the government. As they dominated the Senate the threat was not an empty one. By 2 August Blum had produced a plan for a Non-Intervention Pact. Hitler and Mussolini found no difficulty in signing this before the end of the month, yet continued more or less openly to supply arms and men to the Spanish fascists. Thus Blum abetted Franco's victory. Of course the Communists and Socialists could have organised workers in the arms industry and on the railways to ignore government policy and themselves ensure the delivery of needed supplies to Spain. But that would have meant an immediate break with the Radicals, and neither the Communist nor the Socialist leaders were ready for this.

The capitalists did not reciprocate Blum's aid to them. Blum had pledged to work within capitalism, later claiming that he offered himself as the 'loyal manager' of capitalism. In return he appealed at the outset for 'loyalty' from the capitalist class. It was not forthcoming. The country entered into a financial crisis, the money markets were seized by panic and the fight of capital intensified. On 22 June 1937 the first Popular Front government led by Blum resigned under pressure from the Senate.

When this happened the workers received the news with complete indifference. The best indication of their mood is contained in the following statement by a conservative opponent of the Popular Front:

It had been commonly admitted that the fall of the cabinet would have as an immediate consequence a general strike of the Parisian working class, indeed, large-scale riots. Some spoke of revolution. Now it is a fact that never has a ministerial fall left the street, the public square, so indifferent. Not a movement, not even a cry. No armed force employed. None of our fellow citizens, even among the most confident, could have hoped for such an easy, regular defeat of the cabinet. [42]

What a contrast with Blum's euphoria of a few months earlier, when he addressed the nation about the achievements of his government: 'Hope has returned; once again there is a zest for work, a zest for life. France has a new face, a new appearance. New social relations are being established. A new order is emerging.' [43]

The government that replaced the fallen Blum government was headed by the Radical Camille Chautemps. It was an even more right wing government than its predecessor. The Ministry of Finance was entrusted to Georges Bonnet, a Radical who had consistently opposed the Popular Front. To start off, in June 1937, the Chautemps government included some Socialist Ministers; but in June 1938 they were excluded. Finally, a government led by Blum, that survived just 26 days, was replaced on 21 April 1938, by a government that *was not* a Popular Front government, headed by the Radical Edouard Daladier, with no Socialists but with the participation of the right. This government was voted into office by a parliamentary vote of 572 to 5 – practically everybody from the extreme Right to the Communists voted for it.

Throughout the whole period of the Popular Front the workers' leaders, Communist and Socialist, opposed any fightback. The workers were ravaged by uncertainty and weariness. The hour of the final defeat was approaching.

Workers resisted the employers' offensive by striking. However, this time the strikes were defensive and fragmented. There were defeats not victories. The Right became more and more confident. On 12 November 1938, Paul Reynaud, Minister of Finance, declared:

We are living in a capitalist system. The capitalist system being what it is, if it is to function, its laws must be obeyed. These are the laws of profit, of individual risk, of a free market, of the incentive of competition ... Do you think, in today's Europe, that France can at the same time maintain her way of life, spend 25 billion francs on arms, and rest for two days out of seven?

Danos and Gibelin write:

This speech was the prologue to a series of anti-working class decrees. These included the re-establishment of the six-day week, the abolition of wage rate enhancement for the first 250 hours overtime, the abolition of the clauses in the collective agreements which forbade piecework, the imposition of penalties for refusing to work overtime in defence industries, the 'staggering' of paid holidays, the imposition of restrictions on foreign workers, and the formation of an auxiliary police force of 1,500 gendarmes ...

Indignant protests came from all sections of the working class ...

From the 21st, strikes broke out in the *Nord*, in the *Basse-Seine*, and in the Paris region. Factories were occupied, and then cleared by the police. Renault stopped work on the 23rd. The workers were confronted by a huge police mobilisation-100 squadrons of the *Garde Mobile* (1,500 men) attacked the plant, where battle raged for between 20 and 24 hours. Amid clouds of tear-gas, hundreds of workers were injured, and 300 imprisoned. [44]

The CGT leadership was forced to do something. On 25 November it called a 24-hour general strike to take place on the 30th, stating:

The CGT declares that the strike will take place without any occupation of any factory, office, or site. On Wednesday 30 November no demonstrations; and no meetings will be held. [45]



The strike was not a success. Danos and Gibelin write:

The strike was widely observed in the mines, in engineering, construction and printing, but by ten o'clock on the morning of the 30th the government was able to announce that 'the railways are working normally'. On the Paris Metro the strike had to be reduced to eight hours, and to fourteen hours in the Post Office. There was no response from office workers, and a partial strike, rapidly petering out, among taxi-drivers. In some provincial centres there was a good turn-out; but the general lack of response from civil servants, railwaymen and public services had a dampening effect everywhere. The attempted strike was a disastrous defeat. [46]

Renault workers suffered the worst humiliation. 'At the end of the Renault strike there was a sinister inversion of the celebration which had marked the end of the factory occupation in June 1936. The defeated workers were forced by the police to march out of the factory, making the fascist salute, to cries of, 'Long live the police', while a policeman banged an iron bar, shouting 'One for Blum, one for Timbaud, one for Jouhaux'. [47] [1\*]

Severe repression followed in the wake of the defeat. Thorez drew the balance sheet; 40,000 sacked in the aircraft industry; 32,000 locked out at Renault; tens of thousands in Levallois, Colombes, Argenteuil, Courbevoie, Clichy, St. Ouen; 100,000 in Marseilles (where 100 engineering factories were closed); 100,000 in textiles, 80,000 miners in the Nord and Pas-de-Calais.. [48]

Arthur Mitzman writes:

The failure of the general strike of November, 1938, undertaken at a time when union militants were no longer being followed by the rank and file, led to severe reprisals by employers and a mass exodus from the CGT. By the end of 1938, 3,000 of the

CGT's 18,000 local unions had disintegrated. Nine months later, at the beginning of the war, CGT membership had fallen back from its peak of five million in 1936-37, to what it had been in January 1936 one million. The great workers' movement that had been spawned by the Popular Front victory in 1936 was broken. [49]

Julian Jackson, writing the obituary of the Popular Front, said:

The Popular Front, born out of the general strike of 12 February 1934, finally died in that of 30 November 1938. Ironically, the 12 February strike had initially been conceived to protest against the forced resignation of Daladier, and the strike of 30 November was called to protest against the labour policy of the same Daladier. [50]

### **Trotsky Draws the Balance Sheet of the Popular Front**

A FORTNIGHT after this catastrophic failure Trotsky reminded the reader that on 9 June 1936 he had written: 'The French revolution has begun!'

It must seem that events have refuted this diagnosis. The question is in reality more complicated ... Recent history has furnished a series of tragic confirmations of the fact that it is not from every revolutionary situation that a revolution arises, but that a revolutionary situation becomes counter-revolutionary if the subjective factor, that is, the revolutionary offensive of the revolutionary class, does not come in time to aid the objective factor. [51]

The policy of the Popular Front sapped the energy of the workers, gave succour to the Right, and thus threw the country into a mood of fatigue and depression. The class collaboration embodied in the Popular Front ran its course. The Popular Front gave a new lease of life to the discredited Radical leaders. As Julian Jackson writes: 'The

political alignments of 1939 already prefigured those of Vichy much more than they carried those of 1936.' [52] '... the same parliament (minus the PCF which had been outlawed on the outbreak of war) which had voted confidence in Blum on 16 June 1936 to save the Republic, voted full powers to Marshal Pétain on 10 July 1940 to destroy it.' [53]

### Footnote

1\*. Jean-Pierre Timbaud, Communist leader of the metal-workers union, Leon Jouhaux, head of the CGT.

### Notes

1. J. Danos and M. Gibelin, *June '36, Class Struggle and the People's Front in France*, London 1986, pp.33-4.

2. J. Jackson, *The People's Front in France. Defending Democracy, 1934-38*, Cambridge 1988, p.29.

3. *L'Humanité*, 18 February 1933.

4. Jackson, p.22.

5. Y. Craipeau, *Le mouvement trotskyste en France*, Paris 1971, pp.96-7.

6. Jackson, p.29.

7. Danos and Gibelin, pp.35-6.

8. *Leon Trotsky on France*, New York 1979, pp.29-30.

9. *Ibid.*, p.31.

10. *Ibid.*, p.33-4.

11. *Ibid.*, p.35.

12. *Ibid.*, p.40.

13. *Ibid.*, p.60.

14. Danos and Gibelin, p.39.

15. Quoted in E.H. Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern, 1930-1935*, London 1986, p.204.

16. *Leon Trotsky on France*, p.75.
17. *Ibid.*, p.129.
18. Jackson, p.85.
19. *Ibid.*, pp.86-7.
20. *Ibid.*, p.272.
21. *Ibid.*, pp.9-10.
22. Danos and Gibelin, p.108..
23. Jackson, p.231.
24. *Ibid.*, pp.219-20.
25. *Ibid.*, p.220.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, p.222.
28. *Leon Trotsky on France*, p.161.
29. *Ibid.*, pp.163-4.
30. *Ibid.*, p.166.
31. *Ibid.*, p.171.
32. *Ibid.*, p.173.
33. Jackson, p.110.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Danos and Gibelin, p.181.
36. Jackson, p.184.
37. *Ibid.*, p.170.
38. *Ibid.*, p.180.
39. A. Mitzman, *The French Working Class and the Blum Government 1936-37*, *International Review of Social History*, Amsterdam 1964, p.375.
40. Jackson, p.11.
41. Mitzman, p.386.
42. Quoted in Mitzman, p.365.
43. Jackson, p.271.
44. Danos and Gibelin, pp.228-9.
45. *Ibid.*, p.229.
46. *Ibid.*, pp.229-30.
47. Jackson, pp.111-2.
48. Danos and Gibelin, p.230.
49. Mitzman, pp.388-9.

50. Jackson, p.13.

51. *Leon Trotsky on France*, p.200.

52. Jackson, p.248.

53. *Ibid.*, p.13.

## 10. The French Trotskyists

TROTSKY'S FIRST attempt to organise his followers in the West was concentrated on France, where he had had a more influential following than elsewhere in the mid-1920s. At that time there were a number of separate groups that claimed adherence to the Opposition, with a number of former prominent leaders of the PCF who had been expelled. The groups were far from being homogeneous.

The most important leading member of the PCF who identified himself with Trotsky was Alfred Rosmer. He was a friend and co-worker of Trotsky's during the First World War when the latter lived in France. Together they belonged to the Zimmerwald movement. Rosmer was a founder member of the PCF and later representative of the French party on the ECCI. He sided with Trotsky from the beginning of the latter's struggle against Stalin. Rosmer and his close collaborator in the trade union movement, Pierre Monatte, were expelled from the PCF in December 1924. They continued to collaborate around the syndicalist magazine, *La Révolution Prolétarienne*.

Another person belonging to the Opposition in the mid-1920s was Boris Souvarine, a founding member of the PCF and editor of *L'Humanité*. He participated at the Thirteenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (May 1924) as representative of the Central Committee of the PCF, and was the only foreign delegate to defend Trotsky against Stalinist slanders at the Congress. He was expelled from the party for supporting Trotsky, and founded a group around the publication *Bulletin Communiste*.

Another group in France which Trotsky now tried to pull towards the International Left Opposition was that of Albert Treint. Treint was a Zinovievist who, as general secretary of the PCF in 1924-5, implemented the 'Bolshevisation' of the party, and the persecution and expulsion of the Trotskyists. In 1927 he was himself expelled as a supporter of Zinoviev. His opposition group, *Comité de redressement communiste*, was shortlived. He collaborated with several organisations, including the Trotskyists, before he joined a syndicalist tendency.

Yet another early oppositionist who declared himself in solidarity with Trotsky was Maurice Paz, who headed a group called *Contre le Courant*. The magazine of this name published many of Trotsky's articles, but drifted towards Social Democracy and pure syndicalism. Maurice Paz visited Trotsky in Turkey in 1929, but a few months later broke with the Left Opposition.

Trotsky's efforts to bring together the Trotskyists, semi-Trotskyists and Zinovievists, and the circle of *Révolution Proletarienne*, failed completely. Already on 16 April 1929 Rosmer warned Trotsky that these groups of generals without soldiers were largely made up of burnt-out and demoralised people: 'The great misfortune of all these groups is that they find themselves outside all action; and this fatally accentuates their sectarian character.' [1]

The French nucleus of the International Left Opposition gathered at first around *La Vérité*, which appeared for the first time on 15 August 1929. In April 1930 they formed themselves into the Ligue Communiste. According to Yvan Craipeau, an historian of French Trotskyism, the total membership of the Ligue at its foundation was 100. [2]

Trotsky had no illusions but that the going would be tough, and great patience would be needed. In August 1929 he wrote:

In France the Communist left is divided into different groups. This is due to the fact ... that the French Opposition has spent too much time on the preparatory stage before beginning political action among the workers. We must clearly state that

should this situation persist, the Opposition would be threatened with becoming a sect, or, more precisely, several sects. [3]

On 11 August 1929 Trotsky wrote to the French Trotskyists:

The French Opposition has not up to the present time engaged in political work in the true sense of the word. As a consequence it has virtually remained in an embryonic condition. But it is impossible to long remain in such a condition with impunity. Right and left wings have crystallized within it almost without any connection with the struggle of the French proletariat, and therefore, not infrequently, along accidental lines. The fact that the French Opposition remained too long on the first stage of development has led to a proliferation of groups, each primarily concerned with its self-preservation. [4]

Among the Oppositionists

there are not a few elements willing to bear the title of the most extreme revolutionists so long as this does not impose upon them any serious obligations, i.e., so long as they are not obliged to sacrifice their time and money, submit to discipline, endanger their habits and their comforts ... Needless to say, such elements are ballast, and very dangerous ballast at that. They are one hundred percent prepared to adopt the most revolutionary program, but rabidly resist when it is necessary to take the first step toward its realization. [5]

These words of Trotsky are practically the same as the ones he used about the German Trotskyists whose organisation suffered from a dreadful social composition, minuscule size and poor quality.

Yvan Craipeau described the sorry situation of the Ligue Communiste:

... the organization was very weak. There were at most a hundred comrades throughout the country at the time of its founding conference. The League possessed very few provincial



connections ... In general, they consisted of a few communist workers who had enjoyed considerable authority but now felt isolated. [6]

The most important members were those of the Paris region, which effectively ran the League. But it was precisely here that the weaknesses of the League were most evident. The Paris region contained a high proportion of intellectuals, of former communists now cut off from their base. This predominance of intellectuals is not surprising: for a rank and file worker discussions about the Anglo-Russian Committee or the Kuomintang appeared completely abstract. Their concerns were elsewhere.

Intellectuals would come and raise endless debates, which either had no connections with the real problems affecting workers, or which they would approach abstractly. The weakness of its antennae in the working class and of its lack of real accountability in workers' struggles deeply affected the League. [7]

This lack of accountability in the working class also determined the nature of the crises in the organisation. Tendencies appeared and became fixed. This is a normal phenomenon in a democratic organisation. But debate became poisonous for several reasons: the abstract nature of a number of arguments, the impossibility of settling them through concrete experience and the tiny size of the organisation, in which personal antipathies and sympathies mingled constantly with political debate.

These crises often became splits – with the different splinter groups disappearing after a few months or at most after vegetating for a few years. [8]

These internal crises in the League absorbed an enormous amount of activity. They exercised a demoralising influence on the militants. The atmosphere at meetings in Paris was often unbreathable for a worker. [9]

One gains an even grimmer picture from Jean van Heijenoort, at the time a member of the Communist League, and later Trotsky's secretary: in 1932 'we were so few; hardly twenty or so were really active.' [10]

From reading Trotsky's correspondence in 1933 it seems that the state of the French section did not improve at all over the previous four years. Thus, in an article entitled, *It Is Time To Stop*, published on 18 September 1933, Trotsky writes:

... almost from the very beginning of the existence of the French League, its inner life represented a series of crises that never reached the level of principles but distinguished themselves by extreme bitterness and poisoned the atmosphere of the organization, repelling serious workers despite their sympathy for the ideas of the Opposition.

He complained about the French League:

Lifeless, sectarian elements of the French League ... The coming out on a wider arena frightens them, as their whole psychology is adapted to an atmosphere of closed circles. [11]

In contradiction to this description of the distressing state of the French Trotskyists, one finds in others of Trotsky's letters an extremely rosy picture of the state of affairs. 'Thus, for instance, on 23 March 1930, Trotsky wrote in a letter to Trotskyists in the USSR:

In the West we are meeting with real success, especially in France and Italy ... The French Opposition is taking part more and more effectively in the activities of the CP, making a record for itself in them and making a criticism of them, thus gradually

breaking down the wall between itself and the party. The Opposition has found support in the trade-union movement. [12]

One can understand the wish to encourage the Trotskyists in the USSR who found themselves in extremely harsh conditions in the prisons and places of exile. But what a symptom of desperation!

The real state of affairs of French Trotskyism is clear from the fact that in February 1934, at the time of the beginning of the massive rise of the working class struggle, the total membership of the Ligue Communiste was 150! [13]

### **The Rise of Mass Revolutionary Struggle**

FOR MONTHS, indeed years, the Communist League called for a united front of workers' organisations against fascism. Now, in July 1934, when the PCF and SFIO signed a formal united front pact, things did not become easier for the Trotskyists – but quite the contrary. Craipeau writes:

The Communist League already felt that it was in an impasse. Paradoxically, it was increasingly denied a future in so far as its slogans for action were put into practice.

Up till June or July 1934 its ideas gained ground. Its militants felt their influence grow in the mass organisations. The conspiracy of silence had lasted a long time. The League participated in many united front demonstrations with the Socialist Party, the PUP, the CGT and even with the Communist Party – in Paris, Lille, Montpellier and many other towns ... the Young Leninists [the Trotskyist youth] created the anti-fascist alliance of youth – with Socialist Youth, members of the PUP, anarchists and Communist Youth. Indeed on 29 July, when the Communist and Socialist Parties organised a joint demonstration against war at the Pantheon, in commemoration of the assassination of Jaurés, the Communist League was allowed to speak from the platform.

But the situation had already changed. The most pressing of the League's slogans – the united front – had been put into practice. As the Trotskyists had predicted, that had brought about a renewal of confidence of the working class masses in themselves. However, far from opening the road to the masses for the Trotskyists, this situation did the opposite and shut it off completely. Indeed, the masses turned with total confidence to the two workers' parties that had brought about unity of action. The leading militants focused their attention entirely on the united front; the Trotskyists seemed to them to be mere 'wise guys', outside the real struggle of the masses.

The consequences soon made themselves felt, even at the financial level. Life for the journal became more and more difficult ... On 10 August 1934, for the first time since its launch, the headline across the whole page was: 'Are you going to let *La Vérité* go under? ...'

After the intense effort and excitement which had lasted since February, the activists found themselves overcome by deep fatigue. The fact was that the Communist League had hardly developed, despite the correctness of its slogans (underlined by the volte-face of the Communist Party) and despite the much greater publicity for its ideas than it had received a short time before. Only the Young Leninists had seen their numbers grow in a few months. The fruition of the united front had become an obstacle to independent development. [14]

Similarly, Pierre Frank, one of the leading members of the French Trotskyists, many years later described the impact of the united front of the Communist and Socialist parties on the Trotskyist organisation:

At the very moment that our campaign for an SP-CP united front was to a certain extent successful, paradoxically enough the consequences of this victory were unfavourable for our

organisation. All the sympathetic response we had met with, partly in the CP and much more in the SFIO, which had recruited a substantial number of workers, often former CP members – all this sympathetic response was lost to us ... Our meetings were no longer attended; our organisation became very much isolated, as it had been before. Inevitably, a crisis developed. [15]

Facing the isolation of the French Trotskyists, Trotsky came to the conclusion that a radical new direction was necessary in the tactics of the Communist League. In July 1934, in an article entitled *The League Faced with a Decisive Turn*, Trotsky posed the question as to how the League could participate in the united front.

If the League remains on the outside and concentrates its efforts upon criticism from without, it risks the danger of creating anger among the workers instead of attention ... In the unity of the ranks, the masses now see their only means of salvation. Everyone who remains outside the common ranks, everyone who criticizes from the sidelines, the masses look upon as an obstacle. Not to take this mighty and, at bottom, healthy mood of the masses into consideration, to work against it, that would be death ...

The League must take an organic place in the ranks of the united front. It is too weak to claim an independent place. That is as much to say that it must immediately take a place in one of the two parties that have negotiated the agreement. For us there is no principled difference between the two parties, or almost none. Practically, however, only the entry into the Social Democratic party is possible. [16]

Trotsky took it as ABC that his followers would enter openly with banner flying as an organisation with its own press:

There is no question of dissolving ourselves. *We enter as the Bolshevik-Leninist faction, our organizational ties remain the same, our press continues to exist ...*

And he went on to say:

There are two things necessary for the success of this step, that can, within a short period of time, completely transform the whole political constellation in the labor movement: organizational cohesion (through the steadfastness of each member) and promptness of implementation. [17]

Trotsky was very optimistic about the results of entry into the SFIO. Thus he wrote on 12 July 1934 to Yvan Craipeau:

The course of events ... does not leave us very much time, perhaps only a few months more. The situation can be saved only through a sharp and vigorous reorientation of the proletarian vanguard. If that perspective is achieved, we will be borne aloft by the radicalization of the Socialist workers, and within a few months we will reap the fruit of the work of the previous years. If on the contrary the French proletariat is doomed to catastrophe (which I choose not to believe), the total decomposition of its two great parties is inevitable, but the most courageous nucleus of the SFIO will remain with us in illegality if we enter its ranks today. [18]

In an article entitled *The Way Out*, written for *La Vérité* of August 1934, Trotsky describes the prospects of entry into the SFIO in glowing terms. This step would greatly strengthen the left wing. The Trotskyists

will constitute a powerful center of attraction for the revolutionary elements in the 'Communist' Party and will thus immeasurably facilitate the emergence of the proletariat on the road of revolution. [19]

Trotsky's suggestion of entry into the SFIO met with strong opposition in the Communist League, especially among its youth. But little by little Trotsky won a majority. At a congress of the League on 29 August 1934 the vote was 66 for entry, 44 against; a similar resolution was passed by the youth organisation, the Young Leninists. [20]

In September the Trotskyists joined the SFIO, where they immediately established the Bolshevik-Leninist Group (GLB) as a faction with *La Vérité* as its paper. Pierre Naville, one of the most prominent members of the League, voted against entry, refused to abide by the conference decisions, and tried for a short time to speak publicly in the name of the dissolved League's Central Committee. For this the new Central Committee voted to expel him. The youth group also joined the SFIO's Young Socialists (JS), the SFIO youth affiliate. [21]

However, even among those who supported entry there were sharp differences about the perspectives. Craipeau writes:

The majority of the Youth (Craipeau, Rigal, Rousset) reckoned that the presence of the Trotskyists in the Socialist Party would only last a short time, that their task was to convince the revolutionary wing and together with it build the Marxist party needed to tackle the revolutionary crisis. From that they concluded that it was necessary to enter 'with flags flying', straight away exploiting all the possibilities that the liberalism of social-democracy presented before it put itself on guard against the revolutionaries. The adult 'entrists' (Molinier, Frank), on the other hand, thought that entry into the Socialist Party should be done quietly, if need be on an individual basis, each into their respective rank and file section. Theirs was a long-term perspective ...

The Bolshevik-Leninists reacted on the whole according to their inclinations and to the difference between the youth and the party, without bothering to concretise their perspectives and adapt their tactics to it. For example, the supporters of

'individual entry' neither explained nor justified their long-term perspective. If it was a question of remaining several years in the SFIO, there would have to be greater adaptation to the milieu. Appearing as a kind of independent army bivouacking on socialist hunting grounds would have to be given up. So too maybe would the complicated name of 'Bolshevik-Leninists', overly strange to the ears of militant socialists (in fact, the 'Trotskyists' in the Party were referred to by their mysterious initials: the BLs). For all that, these very comrades who used to bury themselves in leadership discussions with the groups on the left behaved in other respects in the SFIO like elephants in a display of china. [22]

These differences would bring about a major crisis among the Trotskyists less than a year after they joined the SFIO.

Trotsky, however, was very optimistic about the result of the 'French turn'. On 15 December 1934 he wrote to all sections:

... the French comrades have won the 6,000-member Federation of the Seine to our program of action and ... our youth are in the leadership of the Seine Alliance with its 1,450 members. We do not wish to exaggerate the revolutionary weight of this success. There is more to do than we have succeeded in doing in the three-and-a-half months that have passed since our entry. But really one would have to be deaf and blind to fail to grasp the radical change in the activity of our French section and the enormous possibilities that have opened before it. [23]

Then again on 28 February 1935 Trotsky wrote:

I maintain that none of our sections has as yet had the opportunity to formulate its ideas so sharply and to bring them so directly before the masses as our French section has done since it became a tendency in the Socialist Party. And if one is able to observe, then one must come to the conclusion that the



entire life of the Socialist as well as the Communist parties is now determined or at least influenced, directly or indirectly, positively or negatively, by the ideas and slogans of our small French section. [24]

On 12 August Trotsky again wrote:

From a propaganda group with some two hundred members, youth included, it has transformed itself into a revolutionary factor directly and indirectly exercising an influence upon the working class movement of the country. The situation has changed not only quantitatively but qualitatively. [25]

Alas, experience was to show that winning a vote in conferences of a reformist mass party is very different to winning real adherents.

As a matter of fact, during the year that the Trotskyists were inside the SFIO the total number of new members they won was 150. This was minuscule compared with the growth of the PCF, which rose from 42,000 in 1934 to 87,000 in 1935. In the Young Socialists the Bolshevik-Leninists made bigger gains. They co-operated in the left wing Revolutionary Socialist Youth (JSR) which dominated the Seine region. The Seine region of the Young Socialists began publishing a paper, *Révolution*, which claimed sales of 80,000 copies a month in August 1935, as against 30,000 for the official Young Socialist paper. [26] These figures, however, also give a very exaggerated impression of the number of youth actively involved with the paper *Révolution*. A realistic estimate of the size of the Seine Socialist Youth was given by Pierre Frank in a letter to Trotsky of 28 November 1935. It was not in the thousands, rather: '400-500 members participate in the activities of the Entente [the SFIO youth], of whom 150-200 are active members.' [27] He added: 'When we were looking at whether *Révolution* could be made a mass paper, I found out that there were 80 regular sellers.' [28]

Once the Stalin-Laval agreement of May 1935 was signed, it was obvious that the time the SFIO leaders would tolerate the presence of Trotskyists inside the party was hound to be short. On 9-12 June

1935 the congress of the SFIO took place in Mulhouse. All the tendencies present at the congress, with the exception of the Bolshevik-Leninists, supported the Popular Front. Even the tendency of *La Bataille* (a heterogeneous group of people, some under the influence of the crypto-Stalinist Jean Zyromsky, others under that of the centrist Marceau Pivert) called for a 'combative' Popular Front. On the other side the Bolshevik-Leninists called for a general strike, for the arming of the people, for a united front of workers' parties. The aim was the seizure of power from reaction and the bourgeoisie, for the construction of a workers' and peasants' government supported by democratic assemblies to carry out the wishes of the popular masses. [29]

On the face of it the Trotskyists had significant weight inside the party. The vote on the main political resolution was: supporting the Popular Front – 2,025; supporting *Bataille Socialiste* – 777; supporting the GBL – 105. The GBL won one seat on the SFIO's National Administrative Committee. The French Trotskyists, as well as Trotsky, drew from this an exaggerated estimate of the real strength of the Trotskyists in the SFIO. In retrospect Yvan Craipeau could correctly state: 'The relative success [of the Trotskyists] achieved at the congress was only "parliamentary". Their efforts to recruit workers in the local branches proved hardly successful. The only serious achievement was in the Seine region.' [30]

Among the youth the Trotskyists were more successful. At the national congress of the Young Socialists held in Lille, 28-29 July 1935, the Left represented a quarter of all delegates. It was even stronger in the Seine federation of Young Socialists where it received three quarters of the votes. However, the Seine was isolated; only a very few federations were touched by Trotskyist propaganda. Even the delegates of the Left in the Lille congress were not ready to carry the struggle to the end. [31] In addition Yvan Craipeau, one of its leaders argues many of the Young Socialists were really paper members. Officially the Young Socialists had 11,000 members. Only a small minority of them were working class, except for certain regions such as Nord and Pas-de-Calais, which were by far the most right wing. [32]

The Lille congress decided to dissolve the GBL as a tendency and to expel 13 of the leaders of the Left (of whom eight were Bolshevik-Leninists); the vote was 3,667 for, 1,534 against and 331 abstentions. [33]

On 28 August 1935 the SFIO's Permanent Administrative Commission (CAP) met and voted to outlaw *La Vérité* and ban party members from distributing this paper. It also asked the next National Council of the Party to take disciplinary measures against the publishers of the paper, who were guilty of 'outrageous attacks on fine Party comrades', and of associating themselves 'with an attempt to create a Fourth International'. [34]

Witnessing the increasing collaboration between the SFIO and the PCF leaderships, Trotsky came to the conclusion, even prior to the Mulhouse congress, that the days of toleration of Trotskyists inside the SFIO were coming to an end. In an article entitled *A New Turn is Necessary*, written on 10 June 1935, he argued for a shift away from the SFIO towards the construction of a new revolutionary party. He was very optimistic regarding the prospects:

The correctness of our entry into the SFIO is now proved by objective facts. Our section, thanks to the entry, has changed from a propaganda group into a revolutionary factor of the first order ... We are obviously entering a new period. Two events determine it: the development of our section in France and the definite turn of the Comintern ... The decisive betrayal of Stalin and his Comintern crew opens to us great possibilities not only within the Comintern but also within all the working-class organizations, especially in the trade unions. Up to quite recently, every stage of the radicalisation of the masses implied inevitably a new flow towards the Stalinists. This was precisely the cause for our isolation and for our weakness. Going to the left meant going to Moscow, and we were looked upon as an obstacle on this road. Today, Moscow has taken on an aspect which means the obligation to support the imperialism of France, Czechoslovakia, etc. ...

The masses have not had the necessary time to assimilate the Stalinist betrayal, even in its most general aspect. Yesterday's inertia is still in effect, but Stalinism today is corroding on all sides. It must fall to pieces. Tomorrow or the day after we will appear to the masses as the only revolutionary possibility. [35]

On 21 November 1935 Trotsky wrote a letter to the Political Bureau of the GBL entitled *Take to the Open Sea*.

To make concessions of principle to the reformist bureaucracy or to the narrow-minded Pivertists would only mean undermining our own future ...

Are there comrades among you who wish at all costs to remain cooped up in the SFIO? Doesn't the example of the youth show that remaining tied to the SFIO constitutes more of an obstacle than a springboard? If someone among you says, 'Outside the SFIO we will be isolated, we will sink into futility, etc. ... ', we should answer, 'Dear friend, your nerves are shot; take a four-week vacation, and then we'll see!' And at the same time we must engrave on our memory the attitude of these comrades in this moment of crisis: we will know more formidable crises in the future, and the same faint-heartedness can recur on a much vaster scale. [36]

The entry of the Bolshevik-Leninists into the SFIO thus came to an end, but not without difficulty. As Trotsky explained on 16 December 1935, if entry were not seen as a short-term tactic it must lead to opportunism.

... what ... was the meaning of our entering the SFIO, some sophists or naive persons will object? The temporary entry into the SFIO ... is not an evil in itself; however, it is necessary to know not only how to enter, but also how to leave. When you continue to hang onto an organisation that can no longer tolerate proletarian revolutionaries in its midst, you become of

necessity the wretched tool of reformism, patriotism, and capitalism. [37]

But Trotsky's views were not shared by many of his French followers. This, for example, is what one of the BL leaders of the Seine, Rigal, wrote in *La Vérité* the very day after the expulsions:

We must guard against any rash action: several of them [Socialist Youth], even entire federations, are talking about resignation, about regrouping independently. No, comrades! More than ever we cry: long live the revolutionary unity of socialist youth! More than ever we say: down with any criminal split in the workers' movement! Splitting is not what we wish. We demand the reinstatement of the thirteen expelled comrades.

Craipeau comments:

This was the official line of the BLs. It was firmly held to in the Seine where there was unity around the revolutionary leadership. But across the rest of the country it was to sow the most disastrous illusions. Indeed, the provinces, left to their own devices, did not go beyond wishes for reinstatement. [Illusions had been sown that reinstatement might be possible] ... [38]

This equivocal policy had catastrophic consequences, above all in the provinces. The expulsions had taken place in July 1935; in January 1936 the Paris groups had still to break with the SFIO. In the Seine-et-Oise, most of the groups had shown sympathy with the expelled comrades, but had remained with social-democracy, with the exception of a few. In January 1936 the Socialist Youth of the Paris region broke officially with the SFIO and set up the Revolutionary Socialist Youth. [39]

In November *La Vérité* was still focusing on preparing sections for the Seine federal SFIO conference. The following week the national committee expelled the BLs. But at the end of

December the BLs elected to the federal Executive Committee ... calmly continued to take their seats. Some were still there in January. [40]

The tardiness of the Trotskyist leadership's reaction to the expulsions from the SFIO is described as follows by Erwin Wolf, a member of the International Secretariat:

Instead of the alarm being sounded to all revolutionaries, with a special of *La Vérité*, no paper came out for an entire four weeks – so as not to 'provoke' the enemies. *La Vérité* appeared only at the end of September, *Révolution* at the beginning of October. Instead of going on the offensive, they retreated. [41]

The first issue of *La Vérité* published after the decision of the SFIO leadership to expel the 13 was exclusively devoted to ... the peasant question!

Among the strongest opponents of Trotsky's call for leaving the SFIO were Pierre Frank and Raymond Molinier, who had so vehemently opposed entry to start with. After Mulhouse Pierre Frank wrote in the GBL's June internal bulletin that it would be 'criminal' to think of leaving the SFIO. Of the Lille expulsions, which he called a 'provocation aimed at running us out of the SFIO', Frank wrote: 'On the whole, that changes nothing in the perspective.' [42] It was the same Pierre Frank who in August 1934 had declared: 'Decide what you wish, but as for me, I will not enter the SFIO.' [43]

Finding it difficult to build a strong revolutionary organisation, Molinier and Frank now looked for a new short cut – the production of a mass popular paper. This organ would not be published in the name of the Bolshevik-Leninists, but in the name of new bodies – the Revolutionary Action Groups – based on a minimum programme and with no obligation on its members to leave the SFIO. [44]

Molinier tried for several months to get GBL authorisation for the projected paper and indeed did so partially, at least for a time, as the Central Committee majority wavered back and forth. But he never got the complete authorization he needed to determine the character

of the paper. Finally, in November, his patience ran out and he decided to go ahead and present the GBL with an accomplished fact. On 20 November he began, with his friends in and out of the GBL, to make all the practical preparations for the publication of a new paper. At a meeting of the Central Committee on November 23 he announced to its startled members that a mass paper named *La Commune* was to appear the following week. To show that he meant business he displayed printed copies of a *Commune* poster, handbill and a list of sponsors of the paper. He also proposed a motion that the Central Committee support *La Commune* as ‘the mass paper for the creation of the Revolutionary Action Groups [1\*] (GARs) and communes’, to be controlled by the GBL. The motion was defeated 10-8, with 1 abstention. [45] This resolution did not stop Molinier from going ahead with publishing his new paper in December.

Molinier and his group threw all their energies and resources behind the GARs, but early on it became clear that they consisted of little more than members of the Molinier tendency in the GBL and their sympathisers. The first number of *La Commune* went on sale on 6 December at which point Molinier was suspended from the Central Committee and the GBL split. [46] The *La Commune* group attracted half the Bolshevik-Leninists and a significant minority of the youth. The Revolutionary Socialist Youth, the youth section of the Trotskyists, was very much weakened by this split. To start with, it was actually a Parisian organisation, and with the split many of its members simply left the Trotskyist movement altogether. [47]

The existence of two Trotskyist groups hostile to each other, with two competing weeklies, did massive damage to Trotskyism. ‘The workers did not understand the quarrels. Finally they remained in the Socialist Party or returned to it’, Craipeau writes. [48]

All the squabbling of the French Bolshevik-Leninists could not but depress Trotsky, in spite of his strong will and strong nerves. So, on 27 December 1935 he asked the International Secretariat for a month’s leave of absence. He wrote to his son Sedov.

It is absolutely necessary that I should get at least four weeks’ leave and should not be approached with any letters from the

sections ... Otherwise it will be impossible for me to recover my capacity for work. These disgusting trivia not only rob me of my ability to cope with more serious affairs, but give me insomnia, fever, etc. ... I request you to be quite ruthless about this. Then I may perhaps be at your disposal again, say, by February 1. [49]

‘These disgusting trivia’!

What was the balance sheet of the Trotskyists’ entry into the SFIO?

In an article entitled *Lessons of the SFIO Entry*, written on 30 December 1935, Trotsky wrote:

The first seven or eight months of the Bolshevik-Leninist activity within the SFIO was their best period. For the first time, they were able to present their analysis and their slogans before a larger audience, test their Marxist superiority over their opponents, and at the same time recognize their own tactical and organizational deficiencies and eliminate them by making changes in their practice. The culminating point was the Mulhouse congress (June 1935). For the youth, this period of ‘prosperity’ lasted much longer and gave much greater results.

But when the Bolshevik-Leninists were faced with expulsion from the SFIO, many of its leaders caught fright, refusing to grasp that the slogan must be:

*... Relentless revolutionary offensive against the apparatuses of treason, under the banner of the Fourth International.*

If this political line, the only correct one, had been applied six months ago without hesitation, consistently and courageously, the French section would be in an incomparably better position today than it now is. Unfortunately, this was not the case. It was precisely at this time that the opportunist group around R Molinier gained a thoroughly pernicious influence: leaning on the psychological inertia of the first period already past, advocating



and explaining adaptation and concessions, and sliding more and more toward the right, it finally openly betrayed. Only at this point did the majority of the group pull itself together ...

We are now at the end of this second period. It still is not possible to draw up an exact balance sheet. But one thing can be said with absolute certainty: In spite of the two splits, both at the time of the entry and the time of the exit, as well as big mistakes and hesitations, the group did conclude the SFIO chapter with a large and incontestable gain. The group has increased in size; it has a significant youth organization; it learned how to produce a mass weekly paper; and what is perhaps still more important, it has acquired precious practical experience.

Comrades can draw important lessons from the French experience:

Entry into a reformist centrist party in itself does not include a long perspective. It is only a stage which, under certain conditions, can be limited to an episode. [50]

A different, probably more realistic balance sheet of the entry experience was given many years after the event by Pierre Frank.

... our exit from the SFIO while the Popular Front was being organised took place under very unfortunate circumstances, and the split among the Bolshevik-Leninists occurring at that time caused us to lose part of the benefits obtained from our entry. [51],

To complete the picture it should be noted that the influence of the Trotskyists was even less impressive than the number of members would suggest. This can be gauged from their impact during the general elections of 26 April and 3 May 1936. Craipeau writes:

The general election results had indeed been disappointing. The Bolshevik-Leninist Group had held some 80 meetings but had obtained only a few hundred votes, between 20 and 50 in each constituency; only Fred Zeller had got 170 votes at Saint Denis. The [Molinierist] PCI's electoral results were of the same order, despite greater resources: 70 to 80 votes. Only in the second round had it gained a relative success at Puteaux (600 votes) and in the 18th District of Paris (180 votes). [52]

### **The Trotskyists During the June '36 days**

TROTSKY, AS we have mentioned, wrote an article on 9 June entitled *The French Revolution has Begun!*

How did the French Trotskyists measure up to the situation?

On 31 May the two Trotskyist organisations met and decided to merge as the International Workers' Party (POI). It was reported that the delegates represented 615 members. But differences remained unsettled – even undiscussed – so that solutions were postponed to a congress announced for 15 August.

The unification was doomed from the start, given the attitudes on both sides. Political differences, small or large, were obscured or submerged by organisational gripes and suspicions. The Central Committee majority acted as if it did not expect the unification to last and was only going through the motions before the minority inevitably stepped out of line. [53]

A few weeks later the Molinierists announced their boycott of the next CC meeting. Trotsky called for the expulsion of Molinier from the POI and the world movement. The Molinierists split from the POI and constituted themselves into The International Communist Party, resuming publication of *La Commune*. [54]

The split in the POI led to a decline in its membership. The report of the credentials committee of its first congress (October 1936) disclosed a 23 percent drop in membership since 1 June, that is,

during the four month period that witnessed the most massive workers' upsurge in French history. [55] By contrast, during the five months of June to October 1936 the membership of the PCF grew from 141,000 to 278,000! The factional fighting among the Trotskyists, carrying on during the most exciting days of 1936, exposed their impotence. Craipeau writes:

In such an atmosphere, the Party was far from being able to push all its forces into battle. It did not even manage to get together all those with responsibilities for tasks in the struggles. Its worker delegates did more or less what came into their heads. In their workplaces they were not known as Trotskyists. The POI therefore made very little impact. With one or two exceptions, it drew no practical benefits from the events. [56]

In one way the tragedy of Trotskyism in France was even more shattering than in Germany. In the case of Germany, the efforts of Trotsky to build an organisation took place in a period of continuous defeat of the working class-1929-1933. Thus Trotsky could write on 15 July 1933:

... how explain the fact that our grouping, whose analysis and prognosis has been verified by the entire course of events, is growing so slowly? The cause must be looked for in the general course of the class struggle. The victory of fascism seizes tens of millions. Political prognoses are accessible only to thousands or tens of thousands who, moreover, feel the pressure of millions. A revolutionary tendency cannot score stormy victories at a time when the proletariat as a whole is suffering the greatest defeats. [57]

Yet now in France the stagnation of the Trotskyist movement took place in the midst of the most enormous upsurge of working class struggle, with millions involved in strikes, in demonstrations and factory occupations – in fact in a pre-revolutionary period.

The assumption that a revolutionary party is bound to grow in a period of revolutionary advance by the working class is mechanical determinism. Green shoots do grow in fertile soil. But if the shoots are weak, they can still wither before maturing. The first Trotskyists in France were the children of long isolation and defeats; and the mighty Stalinist apparatus, waving the banner of the October revolution, managed to rally the masses, and isolate and persecute the Trotskyists. The past lay like a heavy stone on the weak shoots of Trotskyism.

#### Footnote to the 'French Turn'

WHEN THE attempt to create an international regrouping out of the August 1933 Paris conference had failed, Trotsky had adopted a new tactic to increase the Trotskyist International Communist League's size and influence. This had been the so-called 'French turn'. The idea was to get ICL sections to join Social-Democratic parties which were then experiencing a revival and radicalisation largely in response to the victory of fascism in Germany and Austria. In a number of countries the Trotskyists entered the Social Democratic parties, but the results were not impressive.

The most celebrated example was the United States. On 24 January 1936 Trotsky wrote to the leading American Trotskyists, James P. Cannon and Max Shachtman, arguing the case for entry into the Socialist Party, and he repeated the argument in a number of letters and articles. At its national conference held on 29 February-1 March, the American Trotskyist organisation, the Workers' Party of the United States (WPUS), decided to enter the Socialist Party. Without any public announcement members immediately began joining the Socialist Party branches in various cities. As a result the WPUS was formally dissolved in June.

Before the entry, the WPUS had 700 members. [58] However, the decision to enter the Socialist Party caused the split of a number of prominent members who opposed it, among them A.J. Muste and Hugo Oehler. On joining the Socialist Party, the *Militant* newspaper

and *New International*, the theoretical journal of the Trotskyists, suspended publication.

In the year or so that the Trotskyists were inside the Socialist Party they practically doubled their membership and took control of the Socialist Party youth movement, the Young People's Socialist League. The Trotskyists won a significant group of activists in the United Auto Workers and in the maritime unions in California. [59]

This gain, however, was counterposed by the curbs they experienced due to being in the Socialist Party. They came under attack from its leadership and were diverted from struggles in what turned out to be the crucial year of the mass unionisation movement around the Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO). Milton Fisk, in a pamphlet entitled *Socialism from Below in the United States* quite rightly says:

... the 1936-37 period was the hey-day of CIO organizing. By curbing their mass work, the Trotskyists were on the sidelines of the biggest upsurge in 20th century US labor. They adapted themselves to the SP leaders and missed the opportunity of the CIO, which the CP used to become an important influence in labor. [60]

Trotsky himself recognised that he had overestimated the possibilities. Writing on 6 October 1937, he said:

I personally believed the SP was stronger than it was in reality: I believed it had 20,000 members, but it was weaker. I believe we committed some tactical mistakes during our sojourn: we made some unnecessary concessions, such as giving up the *Socialist Appeal* and the practical mistake of giving up the printing press, possibly connected with a long-term perspective, but on the whole we gained ... [61]

As a matter of fact, the social composition of the Trotskyists worsened. Far less workers belonged to it after entry than before. But even in terms of the gain in numbers the achievement was not

very stable. In August 1937 the Trotskyists were expelled from the Socialist Party. Their membership had risen to 1,520 in 1938, but it then dropped to 1,095 in 1940 – on the eve of a split between Cannon and Shachtman. The Shachtmanite minority then pulled about 40 percent of the party with it, as well as virtually the entire youth group. In 1942 Cannon's Socialist Workers' Party was established with 645 members, while Shachtman's Workers' Party was a couple of hundred smaller. [62] Thus Cannon's SWP was marginally smaller than the WPUS had been on the eve of its entry into the Socialist Party.

In Belgium the entry into the Social Democratic Party was more successful. To start with the Trotskyists were more successful in building an organisation, the main reason being the relative weakness of the Communist Party. This weakness showed itself, for instance, in the general elections of 1929, when the Communist Party won only 1.94 percent of the total votes. [63]

On 27 November 1927 the Central Committee of the Belgian Communist Party voted by 15 to 13 to demand that the ECCI retract the expulsions and suspensions of the Left Opposition leaders of the Soviet Union, and convene a world congress immediately to judge the issues. After a couple of months of discussion on the substantial issue of Trotsky's policy versus that of Stalin, the Central Committee split down the middle, 13 votes to 13. At the following congress of the party, in March 1928, 34 delegates supported the Opposition, and 74 supported the Stalinists. Among the supporters of Trotsky was E. Van Overstraeten, the founder of the party, its first and only MP, and at the time its general secretary. [64]

The Trotskyist organisation started two weekly papers, one in French, one in Flemish. The first had a circulation of some 3,000, the second of 1,700. [65]

Alas, the curse of factionalism quickly ate into the organisation. As a result the number of members coming to meetings in Brussels, for example, very quickly declined from around 40-50 to around 20. [66] Only two branches had substantial numbers of workers: in Antwerp, dockworkers; in Charleroi, miners.

Because of the weakness of the Communist Party in Belgium (as well as in the United States) in 1929 Trotsky believed that the Trotskyists could work as an independent organisation and not as a faction of the Communist Party. [67] However, in 1930 he changed his mind, coming to the conclusion that he had exaggerated the strength of the Trotskyist organisation in Belgium.

As a result of the weakness and relative isolation of the Trotskyist organisation, splits started appearing within it. At the beginning of 1930 a group of Brussels supporters decided to leave and form the Marx-Engels Circle, aiming at 'clarification and deepening of knowledge of Marxist theory, without which agitation can have no sense.' [68] This group proved futile and disappeared.

A more serious split took place in October 1930 when the Charleroi organisation broke away. The reason was disagreement with Overstraeten and his supporters over whether to support the USSR or China in their conflict over control of the Chinese Eastern Railroad, the attitude to the Soviet Union in general, trade union policy and the question of 'faction or party'. On all these issues the Charleroi federation stood solidly with Trotsky and against Overstraeten. [69]

Overstraeten remained with a small group calling itself the League of Communist Internationalists, which continued to exist for a short while. Eventually Overstraeten withdrew from politics before it expired.

The Charleroi group now called itself Opposition Communiste de Gauche (OCG). To start with its total membership was 35. The circulation of its monthly, *La Voix Communiste*, was between 600 and 700. [70] However, things improved radically for the OCG when, in July-August 1932, a widespread unofficial miners' strike broke out. Despite its small size the OCG still played a significant role in the strike. The circulation of *La Voix Communiste* shot up to 5,000, and even after the end of the strike, it kept to 2,000. The membership doubled, to 80. [71] However, outside Charleroi the Trotskyists had no success at all.

When the 'French turn' was announced, Trotsky made it clear in a letter of 1 November 1934 to the International Secretariat and the

leadership of the Belgian section, that he believed it necessary for the Trotskyist youth immediately to join the Socialist Party youth, the Young Socialist Guard. Trotsky showed an even greater enthusiasm for entry in Belgium than in France. He wrote:

The SFIO is, in a certain sense, a petty-bourgeois organization not only because of its dominant tendency but also because of its social composition: the liberal professions, municipal functionaries, labor aristocracy, teachers, white-collar workers, etc. This fact naturally limits the possibilities created by the entry itself. The POB [Belgian Labour Party], on the other hand, embraces the working class, and the composition of the JGS [Young Socialist Guard] is proletarian in its overwhelming majority. That means that adherence to the JGS would open up even more favourable opportunities for us. [72]

A month after this letter was sent, the Trotskyist youth – the Young Leninists – joined the JGS.

When it came to joining the adult party, the POB, Trotsky had second thoughts and expressed reservations because of changes that had recently taken place in the political situation. The leaders of the POB had just entered into a coalition government of ‘national unity’ with capitalist parties. In addition the Trotskyists had to accept draconian political conditions and harsh vetting before they were allowed to join. A few of them, like Léon Lesoil, of Charleroi, one of the most important leaders, were not accepted, and in addition they had to give up their paper. In a letter to the Charleroi Federation, Trotsky wrote that he was inclined to think the Belgian comrades should wait for clearer, more positive results from the entry of the youth and the League in France, in order to carry out entry with the minimum of losses. ‘The need to give up *La Voix* in order to enter the POB seems to me to be a dangerous symptom’. [73]

At the beginning there was quite substantial opposition to entry in Belgium. A referendum among the members resulted in a vote of 55 against, 44 for and 5 abstentions. [74] But after further discussion the supporters of entry won the day. In March 1935 the Belgian



Bolshevik-Leninists, at a national conference, decided to enter the POB. Although Trotsky had questioned entering the POB, once the Belgian comrades decided to do it he supported them. A minority led by George Vereeken who opposed entry, split away.

The entry was quite successful, especially among the youth. The left of the POB – L'Action Socialiste – now split into two groups: one moved towards the Stalinists, the other toward the Trotskyists. The latter changed its name into Action Socialiste Révolutionnaire. Its paper had a circulation of some 5,000. [75]

Shortly afterwards the ASR were expelled from the POB (in April 1936). Its leader, Walter Dauge, stood as a parliamentary candidate in the Borinage, and got 7,050 votes (or 8.45 percent of the total vote); in Charleroi another ASR candidate won 2,082 votes, or 1.52 per cent of the total vote. [76]

The strike wave of 1935-36 gave further wind to the sails of Belgian Trotskyism. In October the ASR fused with the Trotskyist organisation to create the Parti Socialiste Révolutionnaire. The beneficial impact of the entry tactic in Belgium was shown by membership figures. While the total in November 1934 was about one hundred [77], in September 1938 it was 800. [78] [2\*]

In a number of Latin American countries too the Trotskyists joined the social democratic parties, but with very little success. Robert J Alexander in his book, *Trotskyism in Latin America*, writes about Argentina:

The new Liga Comunista Internacionalista, Sección Argentina, lasted little more than two years ...

Early in 1937, faced with the disintegration of their own organization, the Trotskyists split over the issue of whether they should follow the line which Leon Trotsky had generally recommended to his followers – to enter the Socialist parties and attempt to bore from within them. One group of Argentine Trotskyites ... took this line. They entered the Socialist Party and a left-wing group, the Partido Socialista Obrero, which had

recently separated from the Socialist Party, taking with them a fair proportion of the Socialists' more youthful element ...

This controversy over 'entrism' was the final blow to the Liga Comunista Internacionalista ...

The Trotskyists were not able to exert much influence in either the Partido Socialista or the Partido Socialista Obrero. Most of the top leaders of the latter ultimately joined the Communist Party, and many of the rank and file members and lower level leaders rejoined the Socialist Party. [80]

The strongest Trotskyist organisation in Latin America in the mid-1930s was the Izquierda Comunista in Chile. According to one well-informed author, it was 'more influential' than the Stalinist Communist Party. [81]

... in 1937, the majority of the Izquierda Comunista decided to dissolve their party and enter as a group into the Partido Socialista de Chile. There were undoubtedly several reasons for this decision ...

The ex-members of the Izquierda Comunista were generally integrated into the Socialist Party. Some of them became leading figures in the party's trade-union apparatus, while others assumed positions of importance in the general leadership of the party. Manuel Hidalgo himself became the Chilean Ambassador in Mexico, as a Socialist nominee, during the Popular Front government of President Pedro Aguirre Cerda, in 1939.

... the Izquierda Comunista was an important force in the Chilean left for some years, but after the entry of most members and leaders of the Izquierda into the Partido Socialista de Chile in 1937, the influence of Trotskyism in Chilean politics declined sharply. Those who entered the Socialist Party ranks lost all

identity as Trotskyists after a few years; those who chose to stay out of the Partido Socialista had relatively little influence in the labor movement and virtually none in national politics, and were plagued by a series of splits which did not serve to increase their general prestige or influence. [82]

In Mexico, in the early 1930s, a Trotskyist organisation existed, called Oposición Comunista de Izquierda (Communist Left Opposition) which in 1934 changed its name to Liga Comunista Internacional. Less than a year after its establishment it split over the issue of the 'French turn'. [83] After that the splits into quarrelling factions continued unabated. [84]

In Cuba the Trotskyists were quite successful in the early 1930s. They were lucky to have at their head Sandalio Junco. Alexander writes:

One name stands out particularly among the founders of Trotskyism in Cuba, that of Sandalio Junco. He was one of the major trade-union figures in the Communist Party in the late 1920s, and was the party's most important Negro leader at that time. A powerful orator with a magnetic personality, Junco had become the International Secretary of the Communist-controlled Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba (CNOOC). [85]

In 1932 Sandalio Junco founded the Trotskyist organisation which soon adopted the name Partido Bolchevique-Leninista.

By the time of the overthrow of the Machado dictatorship in August 1933, the Oposición Comunista was firmly established. Its trade-union influence was considerable, and it controlled the Federación Obrera de La Habaña, a major labor federation in the region of the national capital ...

By 1934 the Partido Bolchevique-Leninista (PBL), the name which the Oposición Comunista had by then assumed, had what was for a Latin American Trotskyist group a considerable

membership. A. González, the Mexican-American charged with maintaining relations between the United States Trotskyists and their Latin American counterparts, reported to a Mexican correspondent that in the middle of 1934 the Cuban party had over six hundred members. [86]

Sadly the fate of Trotskyism in Cuba changed radically when the Trotskyists decided to join Joven Cuba (Young Cuba), a petty bourgeois, nationalist organisation. The result

was that instead of the Bolshevik-Leninists taking over Joven Cuba and converting it into a vehicle for Trotskyism in the republic, most of the Trotskyist leaders joined Joven Cuba and themselves became lost to Trotskyism ...

Later the ex-Trotskyists of Joven Cuba became part of the Auténtico Party led by ex-President Ramón Grau San Martín. On August 15, 1937, a meeting was held in Havana ... a reconstituted Partido Revolucionario Cubano (Auténtico) was established. The ex-Trotskyists played a major role in the reorganized Partido Auténtico. Sandalio Junco and Eusebio Mujal established the Comisión Obrera (Labor Commission) of ex-President Grau San Martín's party ...

With the departure of Sandalio Junco and most of the other founders of Cuban Trotskyism, the PBL became a very minor factor in the organized labor movement and an element of absolutely no significance in the country's general politics. [87]

Robert J. Alexander sums up the history of Cuban Trotskyism thus:

Although Cuban Trotskyism had considerable influence in organised labor in the early 1930s, it declined sharply when its principal leaders withdrew to join what was for a quarter of a century the 'mainstream' of national politics. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the Trotskyists continued to be a very minor

factor in organized labor, and their main support was confined to the area of Guantánamo at the eastern tip of the island. [88]

In Panama the Trotskyists also entered the Socialist Party. Alexander writes:

By the early months of 1935, the Panamanian Trotskyists were firmly organized in the Partido Obrero Marxista-Leninista, which was putting out a newspaper, *Organización*. The leader of the new party was a young man named Diógenes de la Rosa, who was active in the country's trade union movement ...

However, the Partido Obrero Marxista-Leninista went out of existence in late 1935. Its members entered the Socialist Party of Panama ... It does not appear that the Trotskyites did any serious 'boring from within' in the Panamanian Socialist Party. Rather, Diógenes de la Rosa emerged as one of the principal Socialist leaders, served as a member of the National Legislative Assembly in the middle 1940s, and in 1948 left the Socialist Party in a struggle for power within it which had nothing to do with Trotskyism, which he regarded by then as a relic of the past. In the 1950s and 1960s, de la Rosa served for some years as one of his country's more distinguished diplomats. [89]

As mentioned above (see pp. 183-6) the 'French Turn' caused a number of Trotskyist organisations of some significance to break with Trotsky: the Spanish ICE, the Greek Archeo-Marxists, the Dutch RSAP. On balance, therefore, the 'French Turn' was far from a successful tactic in France, and was of doubtful help to Trotskyists elsewhere to increase membership or influence.

Had the brilliant strategist, tactician and organiser, who could organise the October insurrection, lead the Red Army and the Comintern, lost his touch? It seems, on the face of it, as if he committed one mistake after another – in August 1933 trying to pull the SAP and other centrist organisations towards Bolshevism-Leninism, and failing; then trying to break the isolation of the

Trotskyists by entering into Social Democratic parties, and again failing. The truth is that the individual, even a genius like Trotsky, cannot eliminate other factors which are far weightier. The captain of a liner has greater leeway than a fisherman to mistake weather conditions: if the former makes an error his ship is less likely to sink; the second will be more at risk. Thus Lenin and Trotsky made serious mistakes during the revolution and civil war. There was, for example, Lenin's insistence in 1920 on the march on Warsaw, or Trotsky's perseverance with the militarisation of labour that same year. But the strength of the Bolshevik Party made it possible for this mistake to be overcome. (Of course the power of the party to overcome errors is not absolute: the isolation of the Russian revolution finally did break the Bolshevik party).

Trotsky was right when he declared, on 9 June 1936: 'The French revolution has begun!' The tiny boat of the Trotskyists had to navigate the rapids. Alas, the current of revolution never flows uninterruptedly forwards. It can be diverted and counteracted by counter-revolution if the subject – the proletariat – does not match the needs of the objective situation. In such circumstances the frail craft of the revolutionaries could easily disintegrate under the pressure of such powerful forces.

Trotsky in 1936 was far more experienced than Trotsky in 1917. He was therefore bound to have better judgment on issues of strategy and tactics. But in 1917 mistakes could be corrected by the great march forward of the proletariat and its party. In France during 1936 correct tactics did not lead to success, while every weakness of the party – its puny size, its weak implantation in the proletariat – fed defeat. In 1917 successes of the proletariat and of the Bolshevik Party overcame failures; in 1936 any failure of the French Trotskyists fed further failures.

To accept that clarity of ideas is indispensable for the success of the proletarian revolution does not mean that ideas are self-sufficient. Nor are they omnipotent; they need a body, that of the party within the wider proletariat, to be transformed into a material force.

The real tragedy of French Trotskyism was that it was born when there was very little space to grow left by the mass Social-Democratic and Communist Parties. If the choice facing French workers confronted by the fascist threat was either a united front of workers' organisations or complete inactivity, then even the small voice of Trotskyism could have been heard. But the PCF and the SFIO did manage to deflect the call for unity into the Popular Front policy. The masses had great loyalty towards the two traditional mass parties, and so the realisation of the call for unity of action isolated the Trotskyists even more. Under the massive pressure of isolation, cracks inevitably appeared in the Trotskyist movement; squabbling and splitting followed. This again undermined any impact Trotskyism could have had.

The time factor is also decisive: in 'normal' times – i.e., when changes are relatively slow – if one misses an opportunity one can catch up. But not so in times of rapid change. If one misses a cart, one can run after it, catch up and jump on. One cannot do the same with a train, and to be one minute late is as bad as to be an hour late. If, in a revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situation, the subjective factor lags behind the needs of the time, the situation swiftly turns counter-revolutionary. We see how quickly the great days of May-June 1936 in France were followed, on 15 March 1937, by the killing of workers demonstrating against the fascists in Clichy, and the collapse of the Popular Front government on 22 June 1937.

## Footnotes

1\*. Amorphous bodies formed in October 1935, including Bolshevik-Leninists, Centrist Pivertists and other left wingers, seen variously as embryos of a new revolutionary party or of soviets.

2\*. Walter Dauge betrayed the movement during the war. When the Nazis occupied Belgium he adopted an equivocal attitude toward them. There is ground to the accusation that he collaborated with the

authorities. On 30 June 1944 he was assassinated by the partisans.  
[79]

## Notes

1. Quoted from Trotsky's archives by Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, p.45.
2. Craipeau, p.36.
3. *WLT*, 1929, pp.234-5.
4. *Ibid.*, p.236.
5. *Ibid.*, pp.237-8.
6. Craipeau, pp.38-9.
7. *Ibid.*, p.39.
8. *Ibid.*, p.40.
9. *Ibid.*, p.41.
10. Van Heijenoort, p.1.
11. *WLT*, 1933-4, pp.88-9.
12. *WLT*, 1930, p.231..
13. Craipeau, p.87.
14. *Ibid.*, p.107.
15. P. Frank, *The Fourth International: The Long March of the Trotskyists*, London 1979, p.51.
16. *WLT*, 1934-35, pp.41-2.
17. *WLT*, 1934-40, p.494.
18. *Ibid.*, pp.500-1.
19. *WLT*, 1934-35, pp.87-8.
20. Craipeau, pp.110-11.
21. L. Trotsky, *The Crisis of the French Section (1935-36)*. New York 1977, pp.20-21.
22. Craipeau, pp.119-20..
23. *WLT*, 1934-40, p.554.
24. *WLT*, 1934-35, p.202.
25. *WLT*, 1935-36, p.70.
26. Craipeau, p.129.



27. G. Vereeken, *The GPU in the Trotskyist Movement*, London 1976, p.90.
28. *Ibid.*.
29. Craipeau, pp.124-5.
30. *Ibid.*, p.141.
31. *Ibid.*, pp.131-2.
32. *Ibid.*, p.126.
33. *Ibid.*, p.132.
34. Trotsky, *The Crisis of the French Section*, p.31.
35. *WLT*, 1934-35, pp.315-6.
36. *Ibid.*, p.76.
37. Trotsky, *The Crisis of the French Section*, p.116.
38. Craipeau, p.133.
39. *Ibid.*, p.136.
40. *Ibid.*, p.143.
41. Trotsky, *The Crisis of the French Section*, p.186.
42. *Ibid.*, p.29.
43. *Ibid.*, p.183.
44. Craipeau, p.143.
45. Trotsky, *The Crisis of the French Section*, p.87.
46. Craipeau, p.144.
47. *Ibid.*, p.137.
48. *Ibid.*, p.144.
49. *WLT*, 1935-36, p.220.
50. Trotsky, *The Crisis of the French Section*, pp.124-5.
51. Frank, p.52.
52. Craipeau, p.157.
53. Trotsky, *The Crisis of the French Section*, p.137.
54. *Ibid.*, p.139.
55. *Ibid.*, p.165.
56. Craipeau, p.189.
57. Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, p.421.
58. George Breitman to A.M. Wald, 17 July 1985, in A.M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, University of North Carolina Press 1987, p.110.

59. James P. Cannon, *History of American Trotskyism*, New York 1972, pp.251-2.
60. M. Fisk, *Socialism from Below in the United States*, Cleveland 1977, p.10.
61. Trotsky *WLT*, 1936-37, p.483.
62. George Breitman to Wald, 17 July 1985, in Wald, p.165..
63. M. Staszewski, *L'Action Socialiste. 1933-1936*, thesis presented to gain a degree in history, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1974-1975, p.3.
64. N. de Beule, *Le Trotskyisme Belge*, Brussels 1985, pp.44-6, 70-2, 93.
65. *Ibid.*, p.93.
66. *Ibid.*, p.105.
67. *WLT*, 1929, p.316.
68. N. de Beule, p.119.
69. *Ibid.*, pp.119-23.
70. *Ibid.*, pp.130, 134.
71. *Ibid.*, p.139.
72. *WLT*, 1934-35, p.104.
73. Quoted in Vereeken, p.105.
74. *Ibid.*, p.101.
75. Staszewski, p.196.
76. *Ibid.*, p.199.
77. Vereeken, p.101.
78. W. Reisner, editor, *Documents of the Fourth International. The Formative Years 1933-40*, New York 1973, p.289.
79. R. Lefebvre, *Dauge et le Daugeisme*, thesis presented to gain a degree in social sciences, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1978-79, pp.78-83.
80. R.J. Alexander, *Trotskyism in Latin America*, Stanford 1973, pp.50-1.
81. *Ibid.*, pp.101-2.
82. *Ibid.*, pp.103, 104, 110.
83. *Ibid.*, p.184.
84. *Ibid.*, pp.184-198.
85. *Ibid.*, p.215.

86. *Ibid.*, pp.217, 219.

87. *Ibid.*, pp.222-4.

88. *Ibid.*, p.234.

89. *Ibid.*, pp.246.

## 11. Trotsky and the Spanish Revolution

THE FALL of the military dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in January 1930 and the subsequent ousting of King Alfonso in April 1931 were to mark the beginning of a period of sharpening class struggle in Spain, culminating in 1936 in civil war. From the start Trotsky grasped their importance and started writing profusely about them. With the establishment of the Republic, Trotsky saw the economic, social and political upheaval in Spain as presaging a revolutionary crisis that would develop over the following few years. These developments in Spain would be a classical demonstration of the Permanent Revolution.

The background was as follows: the Spanish economy, which underwent very advanced development under commercial capitalism during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, had lagged behind with the advent of industrial capitalism. Spain combined Western European advancement and agrarian backwardness: industry was located in a few centres, amidst a sea of peasantry under semi-feudal conditions. The rural population made up three quarters of the total population. Real unification into a national state had not been consummated in Spain since separatist tendencies dominated Spanish life. The country remained a loose federation of mutually antagonistic small national entities. The Castilian state bureaucracy was in alliance with an all-powerful church. The army, manned chiefly by officers who came from middle class landlords' families, was intertwined with the state bureaucracy and church. The bourgeoisie, closely linked to the big landlords, was incapable of carrying forward the bourgeois democratic revolution – unable to

break the agrarian, semi-feudal yoke, to solve the national question, or to break the power of the clergy.

Bourgeois democracy had never been fully established in Spain:

... the Spanish monarchy took shape under the conditions of the decline of the country and the decay of the ruling classes ... In short, the state system in Spain can be called 'degenerated absolutism, limited by periodic military coups'. [1]

It would be up to the revolutionary proletariat, at the head of the peasantry, to break the power of the landlords, church, army and state bureaucracy, and to free the oppressed nationalities from the yoke of the Castilians. The coming Spanish revolution would therefore combine bourgeois and proletarian tasks: it would be a permanent revolution.

On 25 May 1930, Trotsky wrote a letter to his Spanish followers entitled *Tasks of the Spanish Communists*. The first task of Communists was to participate fully in the struggle for democratic demands.

At the present stage of the revolution, the proletariat distinguishes itself in the field of political slogans from all the leftist' petty bourgeois groupings not by rejecting democracy (as the Anarchists and syndicalists do) but by struggling resolutely and openly for it, at the same time mercilessly denouncing the hesitations of the petty bourgeoisie.

By advancing democratic slogans, the proletariat is not in any way suggesting that Spain is heading towards a bourgeois revolution ...

If the revolutionary crisis is transformed into a revolution, it will inevitably pass beyond bourgeois limits, and in the event of victory the power will have to come into the hands of the proletariat. But in this epoch, the proletariat can lead the revolution – that is, group the broadest masses of the workers

and the oppressed around itself and become their leader – only on the condition that it now unreservedly puts forth all the democratic demands, in conjunction with its own class demands.

First of all, these slogans will be of decisive importance for the peasantry ... The peasantry will inevitably link the slogan of political democracy with the slogan of the radical redistribution of the land. The proletariat will openly support both demands ...

... on national questions, the proletariat defends the democratic slogans to the hilt, declaring that it is ready to support by revolutionary means the right of different national groups to self-determination, even to the point of separation. [2]

Thus, even before the fall of the monarchy, Trotsky was very clear that 'the revolutionary crisis will probably pass beyond bourgeois limits'.

Only the permanent revolution – the linking together of the struggles for democratic demands, for the solution of the agrarian question, for a solution of the national and colonial question, for the ending of the power of the church over state and civil life, for the ending of military tutelage – could overcome the general crisis of Spanish society.

To organise the workers in the struggle for democratic demands as well as for workers' power, a special organisation was necessary – the soviet. Trotsky wrote that the Stalinists had:

done immeasurable damage to the revolutionary movement of the whole world, fixing in many minds the prejudice that soviets can only be created by the needs of an armed insurrection and only on the brink of this insurrection. In reality, the soviets are created when the revolutionary movement of the working masses, even though still far from an armed insurrection, creates the need for a broad, authoritative organisation, capable of leading the economic and political struggles embracing

simultaneously the different enterprises and the different trades. Only if the soviets are rooted in the working class during the preparatory period of the revolution will they be able to play a leading role at the time of a direct struggle for power. It is true that the word 'soviet' after thirteen years of existence of the Soviet regime has now acquired a somewhat different meaning than it had in 1905 or at the beginning of 1917, when the soviets appeared not as organs of power but only as the militant organisations of the working class. The word 'junta' [1\*] directly tied to all of Spain's revolutionary history expresses this thought better than anything else. On the order of the day in Spain stands the creation of workers' juntas. [3]

Trotsky was very careful not to assume that the Spanish revolution would be a copy of the Russian. First of all its tempo would be much slower. In an article written on 28 May 1931, a month after the fall of the monarchy, entitled *The Spanish Revolution and the Dangers Threatening it*, Trotsky explained that in Russia the revolution of 1917 was prepared by the dress rehearsal of 1905. 'This hastened extraordinarily the period of the revolution's rise to its culmination.' [4]

Another factor hastening revolution in 1917 was the war:

The agrarian question might have been postponed for months, perhaps for a year or two, but the question of death in the trenches could bear no postponement. The soldiers were saying: 'What good is the land to me if I am not alive?' The pressure of twelve million soldiers was a factor in the extraordinary acceleration of the revolution. Without the war, in spite of the 'dress rehearsal' of 1905 and the presence of the Bolshevik Party, the pre-Bolshevik period of the revolution might have lasted not eight months, but perhaps a year or two or more.

These general considerations have an unmistakeable significance for determining the possible tempo of development

of the events in Spain. The present generation of Spaniards has known no revolution, has gone through no 'dress rehearsal' in the past. The Communist Party went into the events in an extremely weak condition. Spain is not carrying on any foreign war; the Spanish peasants are not concentrated by the millions in the barracks and trenches, and are not in immediate danger of extermination. All these circumstances compel us to expect a slower development of events and consequently permit us to hope for a lengthier period in which to prepare the party for the seizure of power. [5]

What prescience to write this as early as 1930!

Some 80 years before, Marx pointed out that Spanish revolutionary movements developed more slowly than those of other countries and usually took several years to reach their climax. He wrote:

Spain has never adopted the modern French fashion, so generally in vogue in 1848, of beginning and accomplishing a revolution in three days. Her efforts in that line are complex and more prolonged. Three years seems to be the shortest limit to which she restricts herself, while her revolutionary cycle sometimes expands to nine. [6]

Thus in 1930 Spain entered into a long period of revolution and counter-revolution. From the beginning of the Spanish revolution Trotsky was convinced that it would have historic international significance. And when the civil war started he saw this confirmed. In an interview with Havas, the French Newspaper Agency, on 10 February 1937, Trotsky said:

If fascism wins in Spain ... *Franco's dictatorship would mean the unavoidable acceleration of European war* ... On the other hand, the victory of the Spanish workers and peasants would undoubtedly shake the regimes of Mussolini and Hitler. Thanks to their hermetic totalitarian character, the fascist regimes



produce an impression of unshakeable firmness. Actually, *at the first serious test they will be the victims of internal explosions. The victorious Russian revolution sapped the strength of the Hohenzollern regime. The victorious Spanish revolution will undermine the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini. For that reason alone the victory of the Spanish workers and peasants will reveal itself at once as a powerful force for peace.* [7]

### **Trotsky Proved Right**

THE REPUBLIC established in 1931 was engulfed from the beginning in a general crisis and failed to solve any of the fundamental problems facing Spanish society. There were three in particular – agrarian reform, the nature of the military and the role of the Church.

In regard to the first, the capitalists proved incapable of dealing with the agrarian question because the rural bourgeoisie owned nine tenths of the land, having displaced the semi-feudal nobility: ‘However primitive, capitalism has been the dominant mode of production on the latifundia since the mid-nineteenth century’. [8] The industrial capitalists shared common interests and attitudes with the rural bourgeoisie. The Republic *did* introduce a type of agrarian reform, but it was largely a sham. ‘Its agrarian reform programme frightened the impotent rural bourgeoisie but did not in fact take its land – leaving the landless dissatisfied.’ [9] ‘After two and a half years ... only 45,000 hectares had changed hands to the benefit of some 6,000-7,000 peasants.’ [10] This left millions hungry for land. The land the peasants received had to be paid for, since the landlords were due compensation. Even these puny reforms were reversed in 1934. ‘Though the Agrarian Law remained on the statute book, its application was in many places tacitly abandoned.’ [11]

The bourgeoisie’s extensive stake in land meant that the ruling bloc of landowners, factory owners and merchants was dominated by the agrarian oligarchy. This was intertwined with the military. The

army drew its officers from the middle class landowners; and there was a preponderance of officers in the Spanish army:

In the last years of the monarchy, there were 17,000 officers (including 195 generals) for about 150,000 men – a proportion of one officer for every nine men, and one general for every 773 soldiers! It was commonplace to say that the large force was maintained not to fight Spain's enemies abroad, but to enforce order at home. [12]

The Republic's military reform was no more successful than the agrarian. This 'allowed many officers to leave the army on full pay but did not fundamentally affect the military hierarchy or the position of monarchists (and later Falangist) officers within it'. [13] 'The reform of the army merely led to the departure of the Republican officers, only too glad to leave the cadres on full pay; the Monarchist leaders remained in their jobs.' [14]

The army naturally collected round it the other conservative force in the country, the Church. 'The church in Spain in the 1930s included about 20,000 monks, 60,000 nuns and 35,000 priests.' [15] The church played a crucial ideological role.

The church's ideological dominance – in the 1930s as in the previous century – was the opposite face of the bourgeoisie's failure to make its ideological revolution. From the preceding period of absolutism, the church provided the 'ideological categories to justify the repression and intolerance necessary to maintain the system, and had transposed these on the religious plane: intolerance assumed the character of sanctity ... The immobilist defence of the system charged with heresy any reforming attitude'. [16]

The Republic introduced religious reforms which also failed:

Religious freedom was proclaimed by decree; the new constitution separated church and state and cleared the path for

abolishing state stipends for priests within two years, banning religious orders from engaging in any but religious teaching, making all education laic, dissolving the Jesuits, introducing divorce, civil marriage and burial. The reaction, as could be expected, was not long in coming. [17]

... before the war, and in particular in the first two years of the republic, defence of religion, defence of the family, defence of property, defence of the social order were the constituent parts of the overall bourgeois counter-offensive which was summed up in the phrase 'At the service of Spain'. [18]

When the new constitution drafted by the Republican government was discussed by the Cortes, the question of the church caused a serious crisis.

... the first twenty-five articles were passed after due discussion within three months. It was the twenty-sixth article, which dealt with the position of the Church in the new State, that provoked the first serious opposition and finally a crisis which brought down the Government. [19]

The Government split.

After prolonged discussion the Minister for War, Azaña, brought forward a modification of the project by which the monastic orders, with the exception of the Jesuits, were to be allowed to remain (though not to continue teaching) and the State grant to the Church was to be continued for two years. This, after further stormy discussion, was passed, but the Prime Minister, Alcalá Zamora and Miguel Maura, the Minister for Home Affairs (both Conservatives) resigned and the Basque deputies walked out of the Cortes and refused to return to it. [20]

The new government made a number of concessions to the Church.

In the new year of 1934, the government introduced a series of measures designed to halt the reforms of their predecessors. The substitution of lay for religious schools was indefinitely postponed. The Jesuits were shortly to be found teaching again. By a clever debating speech, Gil Robles secured that priests would be treated as if they were civil servants on pensions and they began to be paid two-thirds of their salary of 1931. [21]

The years of the Republic were years of general social upheaval. 1929-33 saw the world depression. Industrial production was cut sharply. There was a run on the peseta and a substantial export of currency throughout 1931. [22] The slump brought about terrible unemployment. At the same time the cost of living rose sharply. While the Socialist ministers – Prieto, Minister of Finance and Largo Caballero, Minister of Labour – proved impotent, the workers did not accept their fate passively. The summer of 1931 ‘saw therefore an interminable series of strikes with sabotage, violence and clashes with the police.’ [23]

The first days of 1932 saw a rising organised by Anarchists in Catalonia, in which the newly founded Izquierda Comunista, the Trotskyist organisation, took part.

Troops easily suppressed this rising, but not till there had been a certain amount of bloodshed. The Government thereupon arrested a hundred and twenty of the more prominent leaders of the CNT and FAI [2\*], among them Durruti and Ascaso, and deported them without trial to Spanish Guinea. But the violent agitation, coupled with threats, that followed, compelled it to release them soon afterwards.

A year later (January 1933) came a second armed rising in Barcelona, Lérida and Valencia.

The Government declared the CNT to be an illegal organization and closed its offices, but it was not strong enough to enforce this. Indeed, three months later the CNT in Barcelona launched

a formidable strike in the building trade which lasted eighteen weeks, whilst sympathetic general strikes took place at Saragossa, Corunna, Oviedo and Seville. [24]

Largo Caballero, leader of the Socialist Party and of the UGT [3\*], was the Minister of Labour, and he introduced a series of laws to restrict strikes. Thus, for instance, eight days notice had to be given before a strike. This legislation 'represented an immense increase in the power of the State in industrial matters'. [25]

Nevertheless a series of 'strikes, boycotts, acts of sabotage and armed revolts went on all over Spain without intermission.' [26] In September 1933, when the first government of the Republic

relinquished power, the tally of [Azaña's] struggle against worker and peasant agitation was a heavy one. The prisons were full of militant revolutionaries: 9,000, mostly Anarchists, according to official documents. It was this aspect of his government that enabled another Republican, even one as moderate as Martinez Barrio, to say that the regime drawing to a close was one of 'mud, blood and tears'. [27]

The conditions of workers and peasants, as well as the struggle, took a sharp turn downwards with the replacement of the centre left government by a right wing government in September 1933.

In the two years between late 1933 and early 1936, known as the *bienio negro*, the employers were on the offensive, with the civil government and the army backing them. Wages were lowered while prices were kept high.

The intentions of the Government were soon seen. Within a few weeks all the legislation fixing wages and conditions of employment that had been passed by the Constituent Cortes was either repealed or allowed to lapse: the tenants' guarantee against capricious eviction was thrown overboard: some 9,000 peasants who had been settled on the large estates in Extremadura were evicted: wages ... fell by 40 or 50 percent

and the landlords, to assist the process, began dismissing hands. [28]

The workers, largely led by the CNT, did not stay quiescent. A rising broke out on 8 December 1933 in many villages of Aragon. In other parts of Spain – Andalusia, Valencia and Corunna – there were strikes and church burnings. Only Catalonia, exhausted by the efforts of the previous year, kept quiet. But the insurrection did not last long. The government hurried fresh troops up and at the end of four days all was over. [29]

In March 1934 – only three months after the suppression of the uprising, a general strike took place at Saragossa in protest against the bad treatment of the prisoners taken the previous December. It lasted four weeks, and during that time Saragossa remained a dead city. [30]

The situation changed on 4 October 1934 with CEDA [4\*] joining the government. CEDA was similar to Dolfuss's clerical reactionary party in Austria, a proto-fascist organisation. The memory of Austrian workers' armed struggle in February was fresh and strong. 'Better Vienna than Berlin' was a widespread slogan among the workers.

When members of CEDA joined the government, the Socialist leadership called for a general strike and armed uprising for 5 October.

The revolutionary movement that followed broke out simultaneously in three different centres – Barcelona, Madrid, and the mining district of the Asturias. In the other provinces of Spain, wherever the UGT was sufficiently strong, there were general strikes in the towns but no violent action. The country districts kept quiet because the *campesinos*' [agricultural workers] strike in June had exhausted them. [31]

The CNT outside Asturias failed to respond to the call for action as this call followed three recent and abortive uprisings.

The rising 'of the Asturias miners ... terrified the bourgeoisie and fired all the working class of Spain.' [32] The revenge of the

bourgeoisie was bloody. There were massive losses: 3,000 dead and 7,000 wounded.

Thousands of arrests were made and the prisoners (except for those killed on the way) were brought to the Police barracks at Oviedo. Here they were taken out and shot without any trial at all in batches.

Still there were 40,000 prisoners taken alive. [33]

The historian Gerald Brenan writes:

The rebellion in Asturias, which from a military point of view had been such a fiasco, had, thanks to the stupidity of the Right, been turned into an enormous moral and political success. The entire proletariat and peasantry of Spain had been thrilled by the miners' heroism and roused to indignation by the vengeance against them. The Anarchists had been especially affected. [34]

The uprising in Asturias was a prologue to the defeat of the Right in the general elections of 16 February 1936. This gave a new impetus to the Spanish revolution.

### **The Trotskyist Organisation in Spain**

THE FIRST Trotskyist organisation in Spain was built by Francisco Garcia Lavid, known as Henri Lacroix, a house painter who lived in the USSR in the years 1925-27 where he worked on the Comintern paper *Inprekor* and collaborated with the Left Opposition. On leaving the USSR in 1928, he went to work in Luxemburg, which expelled him on 1 August 1929. He then travelled to Belgium where he made an effort to organise a Spanish section of the Opposition among the Spanish émigrés there and in Luxemburg. He also contacted the pioneers of the Spanish Left Opposition by letter. Among his correspondents was Juan Andrade in Madrid, a founding member of

the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) and editor of its paper *La Antrocha* until 1926.

On 28 February 1930, the first conference of the Spanish Left Opposition (OCE) was held in Liège with representatives from Luxemburg, France and Belgium. [35]

Following the fall of Primo de Rivera in January 1930, many political exiles, including the Trotskyists, returned to Spain. During 1930 OCE groups were established in a number of centres – Madrid, Bilbao, Asturias, the Basque country, Galicia and other places. [36]

The progress of OCE was spectacular. Its propaganda activity was very considerable. An assessment drawn up by its officials in February 1932 showed that in less than a year it achieved a distribution of 18,000 copies of its paper *El Soviet*, and published 33,000 pamphlets.

When the third OCE conference met in March 1932 its active membership was close to a thousand. [37]

OCE was strengthened by the return to Spain from the Soviet Union of the most prominent Communist leader, Andrés Nin. Nin had joined the Spanish Socialist Party in 1913 at the age of 21. In 1918, under the impact of the post-war revolutionary upsurge, both in Spain and the rest of Europe, he joined the anarcho-syndicalist trade union federation, the CNT, in its stronghold of Barcelona. Nin, a school teacher, together with his friend Joaquín Maurín, another teacher from Aragon, were in favour of closer association with the Bolsheviks. Nin and Maurín persuaded a local assembly of the CNT to send them to Russia. After attending the founding Congress of the Red International of Trade Unions (RILU) in 1921, as part of the CNT delegation, both Nin and Maurín were won over to Communism. However the CNT Congress held at Saragossa in June 1922 refused all connections with the Comintern and instead sent its delegates to Berlin to the Congress of the rival Syndicalist International.

Nin was unable to return to Spain because his name was linked, wrongly, with the assassination of the Prime Minister, Eduardo Dato. He therefore stayed in the Soviet Union. There he became assistant secretary of RILU, joined the Communist Party and was elected onto the Moscow Soviet. Nin sided publicly with the Left Opposition in



1926 and was removed from all official positions. He was expelled from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the PCE in 1928. After the fall of Primo de Rivera, Nin returned to Spain. Arriving in September 1930 he became the most important leader of OCE. Trotsky, at first, depended on him as his main source of information. For two and a half years a voluminous correspondence took place between Trotsky and Nin. '... it would make a large volume,' Trotsky wrote on 21 February 1933. The correspondence, however, 'was nothing else than a constant polemic, in spite of its most friendly form.' [38]

A central thread throughout Trotsky's writing to Nin was the question of the necessity for the Bolshevik-Leninists to work as a faction inside the Communist Party. Nin again and again rejected this: it was impossible to orientate on the PCE. On 23 October Nin wrote: '... the official party ... has no effective force and no authority among the masses.' [39] On 12 November Nin repeated that the PCE's authority 'is nil'. 'In Spain, I repeat, there is no party'. [40]

Nin drew the following conclusion in a letter to Trotsky of 3 December 1930: 'I am convinced that in Spain the proletariat will organise its party outside the official party (which does not exist in fact) and in spite of it ...' [41]

Instead of orientating on the PCE, Nin proposed that OCE should work inside the various Communist groups, in particular the Workers' and Peasants' Bloc (Bloque Obrero y Campesino, BOC) in Catalonia, led by Maurín.

Nin's views were based on the fact that the PCE was indeed a very small organisation. For a number of historical reasons the strongest tendency amongst Spanish workers was Anarchism, or more exactly anarcho-syndicalism, i.e., anarchism expressed not through a political organisation but through trade unions. It was the followers of Bakunin and not Marx who first arrived in Spain in 1868 as representatives of the International Workingmen's Association, the First International. They found an industrial base largely centred in the Catalonian city of Barcelona, which only expanded slowly until well into the twentieth century. Units of production were fairly small but the exploitation of the proletariat was extreme. This created that

anger and frustration that fed into anarcho-syndicalism. It was the anarcho-syndicalist CNT, with its 1.5 million members in 1931, that was the greatest impediment to the growth of the Communist Party. By and large the choice for the mass of the Spanish workers appeared to be between the reformism of the Socialist Party and the revolutionary anarcho-syndicalism of the CNT.

At the beginning of 1930 the PCE had no more than 500 members. [42] As against this, BOC in March 1931 had 700 members and in April 1932, 5,000. [43]

The influence of the PCE in Catalonia, the most important industrial and working class centre in Spain, was far smaller than that of BOC. In June 1931 elections to the Cortes BOC obtained 17,536 votes in Catalonia, while the PCE got only 2,320 votes. [44] In the elections to the Barcelona municipality in October 1931 Maurín received 8,326 votes as against the PCE candidate's 1,264. [45] In elections for deputies to the Catalan parliament in November 1932 BOC gained 12,000 votes with 3,565 in Barcelona, while the PCE received only 1,216. [46]

Even the OCE's size bore favourable comparison with that of the official Communist Party. By one estimate the OCE 'at the end of 1932 had some 1,500 members ... and it continued to grow thereafter'. [47] (However, other sources give lower figures. Thus, according to Andrade, in March 1935 the OCE was 800 strong.) [48]

The differences between Trotsky and Nin were not limited to the question of whether the OCE should orientate on the PCE or BOC. They also disputed the political role of Maurín and BOC. As a matter of fact BOC was far closer to the politics of Bukharin and Brandler than to Trotsky. BOC was in touch with Brandler's KPO and its international organisation IVKO. Maurín supported the Stalin-Bukharin policy in China, with its subordination of the Communist Party to the bourgeois Kuomintang. In issues of Soviet internal policy BOC supported Bukharin's struggle against Trotskyism. It was critical of the ultra-left policy of the Comintern after 1929, but it drew no conclusions about the connection between the policies of the Comintern and the internal policies of the Soviet Union.

BOC differed from Trotsky considerably on the national question in Spain. Trotsky argued for the right of national self-determination, but his approach was that of an internationalist. BOC's point of departure was completely different. Andy Durgan writes:

Rather than just defend the right to self-determination of existing national movements, the BOC went much further. In June 1931 Maurín declared himself in favour of 'separatism', albeit not from Spain but from the Spanish state, the disintegration of which could give way to genuine Iberian unity. It was not sufficient, the BOC argued, to win over the leadership of existing national liberation movements, it was actually necessary to participate in their formation. Thus, where national movements did not exist, be it in Andalusia, Aragon, Castille or elsewhere, it was necessary for Communists to help create them.

Maurín believed that 'the prospects for Socialist revolution were greatly favoured by the presence of a national problem', so much so that 'if it did not exist it would be necessary to create it.' Not surprisingly, the Trotskyists were scathing in their attacks on what they described as ... [BOC's] predilection for 'separatist rather than class politics', and even described it as 'more Catalanist than the Catalan Republican Left', the principal petty-bourgeois nationalist party in Catalonia. [49]

The Trotsky-Nin correspondence revealed sharp fluctuations in Nin's attitude to BOC and Maurín.

On 12 November 1930 Nin wrote: 'Maurín is very close to us and I am sure that he will end up in a short time declaring himself for the Opposition. That would be an acquisition of great value, for as I have told you he is very well thought of and honest.' [50] On 17 January 1931 Nin wrote:

Maurín is really with us ... Here is a striking example. Next month the unification congress is to take place. Maurín is charged with the task of drawing up the theses on the political

question and the tasks of the party. Well, taking advantage of the fact that we are 'neighbours' (he lives next door to me), we are drawing up the theses together. [51]

On 26 January 1931 Nin wrote: 'The Barcelona section and the provisory executive committee have accepted the theses presented by Maurín and me (I edited them almost in their entirety) ...' [52]

At that time Trotsky supported Nin's editing of the BOC's principal documents. However, he was anxious that Nin should not fudge the demarcation line separating the Left Opposition from Maurín, nor give up on the organisation of the Bolshevik-Leninist faction. On 13 February 1931 Trotsky wrote to Nin:

The fact that the Catalan Federation entrusts you with the editing of its principal documents, including therein the reply to the party's political declaration, is a very valuable conquest that holds much promise ...

But nevertheless I am renewing my proposal for publishing in Madrid (or in another city) a bulletin of the Spanish Left Opposition as a politically and theoretically solid monthly organ. [53]

Two days later, on 15 February, Trotsky again urged:

It is necessary to create immediately a well-organised faction of the Left Opposition, no matter how small it may be to begin with, which will publish its own bulletin and its own theoretical organ. Of course, this does not exclude the participation of the Left Communists in broader organisations; on the contrary, it assumes it, but at the same time, organising the Left Opposition is the indispensable condition for this participation. [54]

Trotsky repeated his concern about Nin's participation in BOC activity without clarity of principles on 15 March 1931:

How will your participation in the Bloc be defined and politically explained, as that of a representative of a communist faction or as that of a revolutionist known to be isolated? ... To exist without a political passport, especially during the revolution, is very dangerous. [55]

Two weeks later Trotsky added:

All eyes are turned toward Spain. And yet the Left Opposition as an official and active organisation does not exist in Spain. [56]

Suddenly the tone of Nin's letters changed radically. He appeared deeply antagonistic towards the BOC. On 4 April 1931 he wrote to Trotsky:

Open propaganda for the principles of the Opposition has provoked my rupture with the Catalan Federation, or to put it better, with its leaders. The workers hold a very different attitude and demonstrate obvious sympathy with me. [57]

In May 1931 Nin's formal request to join BOC was turned down, and mutual attacks soon began to appear in the press of both groups. A tiny group of some six to eight Trotskyists continued to try and defend their ideas inside BOC, but they were expelled in November 1931 for 'factional activity aimed at destroying the party'. [58] On 12 April 1931 Trotsky wrote to Nin:

I have just received your letter in which you inform me for the first time of your break with the Catalan Federation and the appearance in a short while of an organ of the Left Opposition, *Comunismo*. The latter news falls me with so much joy ... [59]

Unfortunately, as Trotsky was penning this letter, Nin was writing his own which revealed a new twist:

We must enter the Federation, carry on systematic work in it, and create our faction in it. That is quite possible. I am certain

that, if my entrance is not possible today, it soon will be, perhaps before a month.

By 15 April things had developed further. Nin wrote:

The Catalan Federation has come to ask my aid. I could not refuse it, so here I am, working in an immediate manner (actually in a large measure leading) in the Central Committee of the organisation ... We publish a daily sheet of which I am editor. [60]

This letter made Trotsky very uneasy. On 20 April he wrote to Nin:

In your second letter you show the necessity of influencing the Catalan Federation in a friendly manner and tactfully. I am in full agreement with you ...

But I cannot fail to emphasize from here, from far off, the second side of the matter. Two or three months ago you estimated that the organisation would be won over by you with no difficulties; together with Maurín you elaborated the theses, etc. A little while later it was asserted that the Federation, because of its equivocal relations with the Comintern, finds your direct entrance into its ranks inopportune. This record is, in my eyes, an argument against the attempt to influence the Federation only personally, individually, pedagogically – with the lack of an organised left faction acting everywhere with its own banner displayed. Work inside the Federation? Yes, certainly. Work patiently, in a friendly manner, without fear of being checked? Yes, yes, yes. But work openly as an accredited Left Oppositionist, as a Bolshevik-Leninist belonging to a faction, and as one who demands for it the freedom of criticism and of expounding his opinions. [61]

Two days later Trotsky expressed both enthusiasm for Nin's entry into the Central Committee of BOC and his misgivings:

The most important information in your letter is the fact of your entrance into the Central Committee of the Catalan Federation and your editing of the daily publication of the Federation. I cannot state what tremendous significance this fact has. However, the political premises are unfortunately not clear to me. Several weeks ago, you wrote that you were obliged to break with the Federation because its leaders consider your adherence to the Left Opposition incompatible with adherence to the Federation. In other words, the leaders showed themselves extremely hostile to us, and employed the methods and phraseology of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

After that, your entrance at the end of several weeks into the leading positions of the Federation, I assure you, disorients me to a large extent. What has happened to the Federation? On what condition did you enter the Federation? On all these questions I shall await your reply with great impatience ...

Trotsky ended his letter with these words:

A small but firm Marxist nucleus, understanding precisely what it wants, can save not only the Catalan Federation but also the Spanish revolution; but only on one condition: the small nucleus must march under its own clear programme and under its own banner.

I beg you to reply to me as quickly as you possibly can, precisely on these questions, conceding that in my eyes they have decisive importance.

Alas, Nin never replied to these questions, and never explained on what basis he had entered the Central Committee of the Federation.

[62]

Nin's vacillations continued. On 25 June he wrote to Trotsky that: 'I do not defend, and *have never defended*' the Catalan Federation. Four days later Nin described its stand in these words:

[The Catalan Federation's] orientation is, as always, variable, indefinite. My relations with its leaders have evolved through various stages: collaboration, rupture, new collaboration, new rupture. Right now we stand in the latter situation ...

On 13 July Nin again wrote to Trotsky:

For the third number of the review [*Comunismo*] I wrote an article against the mistakes of Maurín. We cannot maintain silence on them without the greatest danger for the movement. The electoral campaign that the Bloc has carried on these last few days has had little of a communist nature. [63]

On 25 August Nin, with heavy heart, suggested a new twist:

I have the opportunity to establish communist organisations here in several cities. To what organisation should they adhere? To the Bloc or to the official party [PCE]? I have a good deal of hesitation on this point. To make them adhere to the official party is quite difficult, for there is practically no organisation in Catalonia. On the other hand, the political position of the Bloc is at present so false that it is no less difficult to advise their adherence to this organisation. Still I am inclined in favour of this second solution ... [64]

On 18 September Nin wrote to Trotsky:

In the first place, it would be difficult to make the organisations adhere to the party (they would not want to go into it); in the second place because – do not forget this – in Catalonia the party actually does not exist. In all these groups the best elements are with us, and under our leadership they will be able to contribute actively to the decomposition of the Bloc. [65]

The whole of Nin's future policy towards Maurín, his adaptation to centrism, his conciliation not only towards the right wing of the



POUM but also towards the leadership of the CNT was found here in embryo.

In March 1932, at the third conference of OCE, Nin convinced it to become an independent organisation, not a faction of the Communist Party, by changing its name to 'Communist Left of Spain' (ICE). The conference also decided that in future it would put forward its own candidates in elections. [66]

As we have mentioned, a complete break in relations between Nin and OCE on the one hand and Maurín and BOC on the other, took place in the middle of 1931. How therefore can the amicable fusion of the two organisations some four years later be explained?

First, Nin and the ICE increasingly distanced themselves from Trotsky and the International Left Opposition.

Secondary events played a role here. One was the Lacroix case. At the third conference of OCE in March 1932, Lacroix resigned as general secretary of the Spanish organisation, supposedly for health reasons. In November a struggle broke out between Lacroix and Nin over issues that were very unclear to all observers. Lacroix began publishing a bulletin vindicating Trotsky's criticism of Nin. Trotsky's and the International Secretariat's writings at the time seemed to be far more friendly towards Lacroix than Nin. In April 1933 the Lacroix group dissolved and Lacroix himself was expelled from the Spanish section for 'misappropriation of funds'.

Subsequent events would shed more light on Lacroix, and thus seemingly vindicate the position of the ICE leadership. In September 1933 he joined the PSOE [Spanish Socialist Party], and in a letter to its daily, *El Socialista*, renounced his Communist past and recognised his mistaken role as a 'sniper against Socialism'. Prior to this, however, Lacroix had attempted to rejoin the PCE. His total lack of scruples are revealed in his letter of 15 July 1933 to the PCE Central Committee, which has recently been found in the party's archives in Madrid. According to this letter, only lack of money prevented Lacroix from returning to Madrid (he was in Tolosa at the time), as the PCE leadership had asked him to, in order to explain his recent

‘evolution back towards the party’. Lacroix concluded that ‘rapid action could put an end to the residues of Trotskyism in Spain, and win back the good, if mistaken, workers who still follow ... the masked counter-revolution of Trotskyism’. [67]

Then a tangle of factional conflicts in the French Trotskyist movement – between a group around Alfred Rosmer and another around Raymond Molinier (with which it is not useful to deal here) cut across the relations between Trotsky and Nin. Nin, as well as Kurt Landau who had been expelled from the German Trotskyist organisation in 1931, supported Rosmer against Trotsky.

A new dispute between the ICE and the world Trotskyist movement arose with the issue of entry into socialist parties – the ‘French turn’. Trotsky thought that these tactics were especially relevant to Spain, as in 1934, after the Socialist Party dissociated itself from the coalition government of 1931-33, and in the face of the rising threat of fascism, a massive swing to the left took place in the party. Ronald Fraser writes:

A month before the socialist ministers left the coalition government in 1933, Largo Caballero, the Labour Minister and UGT secretary-general, said that his conviction that it was impossible to ‘carry out socialist tasks within a bourgeois democracy’ had been confirmed. The defeat at the 1933 general elections doubtless further served to radicalise sectors of the party. The Landworkers’ Federation (now accounting for nearly half the UGT’s strength, which had quadrupled in eighteen months), was declaring that without revolution there could be no agrarian reform. The socialist youth declared for revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. [68]

The left wing of the Socialist Party controlled not only the socialist youth, but the trade union federation, the UGT, and many local and provincial sections of the party.

The Madrid Socialist youth newspaper *Renovación* appealed to the Trotskyists by name to join the SP and help to make it a Bolshevik party. Nin and Andrade [the leaders of the ICE] did not accept the invitation. This paved the way for the Stalinist merger with the SP youth at the beginning of 1936, providing the CP with its first mass base in Spain. [69]

In January 1934 the Socialist Party set up a committee to produce and distribute arms to its members. Its paper, *El Socialista*, wrote on the third anniversary of the Republic:

Another 14 April? Much better something else: a Spanish October. The difference is this: April, frustrated hope, lost illusion; October, firm eagerness, sure solution ... April, citizens with ballot-papers; October, workers with rifles. [70]

Given these developments, Trotsky wrote to the International Secretariat, a few days after the October 1934 armed uprising in Asturias:

our Spanish comrades should have joined the Socialist Party there at the very outset of the internal differentiation that began to prepare the party for the armed struggle. [71]

In a further letter to the International Secretariat on 13 December 1934, Trotsky emphasised the point:

The Spanish comrades have declared themselves frankly hostile to the French turn. A new confirmation that their 'intransigence' on this question is only the façade on a passivity that is purely propagandistic and journalistic. For our part, we will always repeat: of all the errors committed by all the sections, the greatest was committed by the Spanish section, which did not have the sense to join the Socialist Party in time at the beginning of the preparation of the armed struggle ... [72]

A national plenum of the ICE voted unanimously in September 1934 to reject the 'French Turn'. [73] Altogether very few of the ICE members supported the 'French Turn': 5 in Madrid and 6-8 in the provinces. [74] One leading comrade, Fersen, actually joined the PSOE, but without organising any faction. Another with the same view, Munis, went back to Mexico. Another, Jesús Blanco, was shortly to join the POUM. Another, Esteban Bilbao, was to stay isolated for many months, without even the shadow of an organisation. [75]

The loosening of relations between Nin and the ICE and the international Trotskyist movement gave free rein to the weakness, inconsistency and impressionism of the ICE leadership.

These conditions facilitated the move of ICE towards BOC. A number of factors reinforced the trend. On 16 December 1933, under the impact of the increasing threat of fascism internationally and in Spain, a Workers' Alliance was established in Catalonia. The Alliance united BOC, ICE, PSOE and CNT dissidents (Treintistas). Similar organisations spread to other areas of the country. Only the CNT, with the notable exception of Asturias, remained outside the Alliance. The Stalinists joined the Alliance in September 1934, after spending the previous nine months denouncing them as a 'counter-revolutionary manoeuvre'. The historian Pagés writes that in October 1934,

the BOC and the ICE had played a role, which in comparison with their membership figures was certainly disproportionately large. In Barcelona, and even in the rural parts of Catalonia, the BOC had been the core of the Workers' Alliance. But even a small group of the Izquierda Comunista [ICE] had taken an active part. Nin was, of course, a member of the leadership of the Catalan Workers' Alliance, and was thus involved in all decisions during the critical days. Members of the ICE joined an armed column of the BOC in Barcelona. Likewise, of course, in Asturias, the members of the BOC and of the ICE played a prominent role in the struggle. As could be expected from their personal prestige as long-standing activists in the workers'

movement, they occupied leading positions in the local and regional committees, as in Oviedo, Sama de Langreo, Mieres, etc.. [76]

Nin made one last turn against the BOC. On 14 September 1934 he could write in *Comunismo*:

Maurín, who tries to adopt a line somewhere in between Stalinism and the communist left opposition, speaks out neither in favour of the position of the first, nor of the attitude of the second. But ... politics hates vacuums and, later, having found himself forced to adopt a definite position, he takes the road of the radical petty bourgeoisie ... Maurín's point of view can lead to nothing else but steering the masses away from the real goals and reinforcing their illusions in the possibility of a deep democratic revolution carried out by the petty bourgeoisie. [77]

Yet a short time later Nin decided that the OCE should fuse with the BOC. On 25 September 1935 the two organisations fused to make up the POUM (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification). This left the Trotskyists without a section in Spain.

To start with, both Trotsky and the International Secretariat were quite optimistic that it would be possible to collaborate with POUM and influence it. Reiner Tosstorff, the historian of the POUM, delving widely into Trotsky's archives, tells a fascinating story. In August 1935, shortly before the founding of the POUM, Jean Rous, a member of the International Secretariat, went to Spain. He was concerned in the main with two points: 1. the possibility of making propaganda for the Fourth International within the new party; and 2. the continuation of relations between the former ICE and the International Secretariat after the fusion. Nin, among others, had assured him, even if factions were not to be allowed in the new party's statutes, there should be agitation for the Bolshevik-Leninist programme, organised as a tendency – as 'groups of friends'. Moreover, outside Catalonia and Valencia, the new party would consist of the ICE members anyway. Even Maurín supported the

idea of forming the Fourth International. Further, the International Secretariat (IS) and the ex-ICE members agreed that 'fraternal relations' would be guaranteed through personal contact with Nin. Trotsky made the following comment on this *modus vivendi*:

The new party has been proclaimed. So let us get to it. Insofar as that depends on international factors, we must do everything to help this party win influence and authority, which can only be done by following the road of consistent and intransigent Marxism. In following this road I am as willing as all the comrades in the IS – of this I am certain – to co-operate in any way that is requested of us.

Trotsky echoed these sentiments in the BOC's paper and later in the POUM's, *La Batalla*, and promised the editorial board some articles. At the same time he undertook to have writings by the POUM distributed in the International Communist League by the International Secretariat. Nevertheless, shortly afterwards – when the unification manifesto of the BOC and ICE was published – he wrote a letter to the Dutch Bolshevik-Leninists, sharply criticising the POUM's clinging to the London Bureau. He assumed nonetheless that it could be won to the Fourth International.

At the same time Rous informed Nin of the IS's views as soon as he returned. Rous assumed that the former ICE members would use the possibilities for internal discussion in the POUM to argue for the Fourth International, and to continue to seek contact with the IS. Rous's appraisal of the relations between the IS and the ex-ICE was implicitly confirmed by Nin in a letter he wrote to American Trotskyists.

The aim of the fusion was to hasten the movement of the BOC towards the Fourth International, which was implicit in the jointly drafted programme.

However, Maurín saw the fusion of BOC and ICE differently to Rous and Nin. Years later he wrote: 'The main topic was: international independence, no contacts with Trotsky. Nin agreed'.

He had broken officially with Trotsky; the question of the Fourth International had never been mentioned in the fusion talks. [78]

As events very early after the founding of POUM will show, Maurín must have been much nearer the truth than Rous in interpreting the fusion.

### **From Popular Front Election Victory to Fascist Uprising**

ON 15 JANUARY 1936 the two left Republican bourgeois parties of Azaña and Barrio, together with the PSOE, the PCE, the Treintista wing of the CNT, the UGT and the POUM signed a common Popular Front programme. Broué and Témime write about this programme:

... this 8-point pact-cum-program was not so much the result of a common accord as an acceptance of the Republican programme by the workers' parties. Along with some old Republican demands for agrarian reform and educational schemes, it came out in favour of reforms for the control of the Cortes, reforms for municipalities, the establishment of schemes for financial reorganisation, the protection of light industry, and the development of public works. It was a liberal programme set in a bourgeois framework and deliberately excluded Socialist demands for the nationalisation of land and banks and working-class control over industry. 'The republic that the Republicans have in mind', it stated, 'is not a republic inspired by social and economic class considerations but a system of democratic freedom prompted by motives of public interest and social progress.' [79]

The election campaign that followed took place against the background of the heroic uprising of the Asturian miners. The right was heavily defeated. A Popular Front government and a new President – Manuel Azaña – were elected.

Azaña personally did everything possible to reassure moderate opinion. 'We want no dangerous innovations', he said in an interview to *Paris Soir*. 'We want peace and order. We are moderate.' [80]

However, whatever the intentions of the Popular Front leaders, the election results became a signal for a massive and stormy rise of the class struggle. Broué and Témime write:

After the elections, impressive mass demonstrations had opened the prisons and released the workers detained since 1934, without waiting for the amnesty decree to be signed. On 17 February the opening of the prison in Valencia by CNT demonstrators and the release of those sentenced in 1934 was reported, along with several hundred released in Oviedo alone and several thousand throughout Spain. The following day strikes began throughout the country for the immediate reinstatement of those sentenced or out on bail, the payment of wages to all workers detained during the *bienio negro*, increases in wages, the dismissal of various employers' agents, and improvements in working conditions. In addition to these union strikes there were also some strikes of a more political nature, solidarity strikes and general, regional, and local strikes. Some of the conflicts dragged on and brought others in their wake. The employers replied with lockouts, and the struggle grew in bitterness. [81]

During the five months following the elections, 113 general strikes and 228 partial strikes took place. [82]

Every city of any importance had at least one general strike during five months. Nearly a million were on strike on June 10; a half million on June 20; a million on June 24; over a million during the first days of July. The strikes covered both the cities and the agricultural workers; the latter shattered the traditional village boundaries of struggle, waging, for example, a five-



weeks' strike covering Malaga province and 125,000 peasant families. [83]

In the countryside the situation was really revolutionary.

By the end of February, in the provinces of Badajoz and Cáceres, then, during the ensuing months, in Extremadura, Andalusia, Castile, and even Navarre, *asentamientos* [land occupations] were increased. Alcalá Zamora's lands were occupied in April; so were the Duke of Albuquerque's. The peasants settled on the big landowners' estates and began to cultivate them on their own account. Bloody incidents soon occurred between peasants and Civil Guards. The most serious was at Yeste, near Alicante, where the Civil Guard intervened and arrested six peasants who had begun to cut down the trees on the seigniorial estates. Exasperated, the peasants of Yeste, armed with pitchforks, cudgels, and stones, attacked the Civil Guards who were taking away their comrades. In the shooting that ensued, eighteen peasants were killed. [84]

Some 190,000 peasant families took over and settled on about 600,000 hectares. [85] Compare this with the land reform of the Republican government of 1931-33: after two and a half years only 45,000 hectares had changed hands, to the benefit of some 6,000-7,000 peasants [86] The events between February and July 1936 have been described correctly as the 'little civil war'. [87]

### **The Fascist Uprising**

THE FASCIST rising began on 17 July 1936 in Spanish Morocco. In the next three days almost all the 50 garrisons in Spain declared for fascism. The vast majority of the old ruling class joined the rebellion. What was the immediate reaction of the Popular Front government?

On the morning of July 17, General Franco, having seized Morocco, radioed his manifesto to the garrisons. It was received

at the naval stations near Madrid by a loyal operator and promptly revealed to the Minister of the Navy. But the government did not divulge the news until 9 o'clock of the 18th; and then it issued only a reassuring note that Spain was completely under government control. Two other notes were issued by the government later in the day, the last at 3:15 PM, when the government had full and positive information of the scope of the rising, including the seizure of Seville. Yet the final note said:

'The Government speaks again in order to confirm the absolute tranquillity of the whole Peninsula'. [88]

The workers demanded arms. The Prime Minister announced that anyone who gave arms to the workers would be shot. This guaranteed a fascist victory in scores of cities. The liberal historian Hugh Thomas writes:

The first news of the rising given by the government was when Madrid Radio announced that 'No one, absolutely no one, on the Spanish mainland, has taken part in this absurd plot', which would, it was promised, be quickly crushed even in Morocco. While these words were being heard without belief, risings were taking place throughout Andalusia, where there were eight cities which had garrisons of battalion strength or above. There were risings in other towns too, led by either local Falangists or the civil guard. Nearly everywhere on 18th July, the civil governors followed the example of the government in Madrid, and refused to cooperate with the working class organisations who were clamouring for arms. In many cases, this brought the success of the risings and signed the death warrants of the civil governors themselves, along with the local working-class leaders. Had the rebels risen in all the provinces in Spain on 18th July, they might have been everywhere triumphant by 22nd July. But had the government distributed arms, and ordered the civil governors to

do so too, thus using the working class to defend the republic at the earliest opportunity, the rising might have been crushed. [89]

However, the workers did not wait with folded arms. They acted for themselves, as Felix Morrow describes:

In Madrid itself the Socialist Youth militia was distributing its scant store of arms; was throwing up barricades on key streets and around the Montaña barracks; was organising its patrols for house to house seizures of reactionaries; at midnight had launched the first attack on the barracks. In Barcelona, remembering the treachery in October 1934 of this same President of Catalonia, Companys, the CNT and POUM ... militants had stormed several government arms depots on the afternoon of the 18th. By the time the garrison revolted, at one the next morning, the armed workers had surrounded the troops in an iron ring, arming eager recruits with equipment seized from the fascists, and with whatever could be confiscated from the department stores; later the militia seized the regular arsenals. The Asturian miners had outfitted a column of six thousand for a march on Madrid, before the ministerial crisis was well over. In Malaga, strategic port opposite Morocco, the ingenious workers, unarmed, had surrounded the reactionary garrison with a wall of gasoline-fired houses and barricades. In Valencia, refused arms by the Madrid governor, the workers prepared to face the troops with barricades, cobble-stones and kitchen knives – until their comrades within the garrison shot the officers and gave arms to the workers. In a word: without so much as a by your leave to the government, the proletariat had begun a war to the death against the fascists. [90]

### **The Birth of Dual Power**

THE OUTCOME of the workers' action was the rise of proletarian, unofficial power side by side with the formal power still held by the

government. Thus arose what Lenin called 'dual power'. One power, that of Azaña and company, was composed of a handful of liberal capitalist politicians cut off from their own social base and lacking a mass following. Trotsky was to call them the 'shadow bourgeoisie' – the class they represented had gone over to Franco. Their political survival depended on the support of the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. The other power was that of the armed proletariat. The government of Azaña and company was already too weak to challenge the power of the working class; yet the armed proletariat was not conscious enough to get rid of the Azaña government. The same phenomenon had arisen in Russia between February and October 1917, and tends to emerge in all proletarian revolutions. The historians Broué and Témime describe the dual power in Republican Spain thus:

... in between the streets and the government there gradually emerged new organs of power that enjoyed real authority, often claiming kinship with the former as much as with the latter. These were the countless local Committees, virtual governments on a regional and provincial scale. In them was invested the new power, the revolutionary power that was being organised at full speed to deal with the enormous tasks, one immediate and the other long-term, of pursuing the war and resuming production at the height of a social revolution. [91]

Barcelona was the symbol of the revolutionary change. It accounted for half the industrial working class of the country. Workers used their power to expropriate the capitalists. Franz Borkenau writes:

The amount of expropriation in the few days since 19th July is almost incredible. The largest hotels, with one or two exceptions, have all been requisitioned by working class organisations ... So were most of the larger stores. Many of the banks are closed, the others bear inscriptions declaring them under the control of the Generalitat [the Catalan provincial government]. Practically all the factory-owners, we were told,

had either fled or been killed, and their factories taken over by the workers. Everywhere large posters at the front of impressive buildings proclaimed the fact of expropriation, explaining either that the management is now in the hands of the CNT, or that a particular organisation has appropriated this building for its organising work. [92]

‘... there is only one real power in Barcelona’, says my foreign interlocutor, ‘the CNT’. So far does this go that documents signed only by the regular administration are worthless. A man will do well to bear with him, besides some document from the Generalitat, either a recommendation from CNT headquarters, or, better still, a pass from the Generalitat countersigned both by the CNT and the UGT. There is no authority besides the trade unions, and, in Barcelona, the anarchist CNT is by far the strongest among the trade union organisations. [93]

In other centres of Spain workers’ power was much more restricted than in Barcelona. Thus, wrote Borkenau, Valencia

remains a thoroughly ‘petty bourgeois’ town. There are far fewer armed militia than in Barcelona, less expropriation and workers’ control of shops, fewer red flags and more banners in the Spanish and Valencian colours. More cars belong to some regular State administration than to workers’ committees and unions. There are more fashionable, well-dressed people in the streets; and there is a significant number of beggars too, whereas in Barcelona there are almost none, on account of the newly created assistance committees. Valencia has not passed through a social upheaval like that of Barcelona ... [94]

In terms of class struggle Madrid was between Barcelona and Valencia. In Madrid,

the government element is much more in evidence than in Barcelona, where the socialist, anarchist, and trade unionist

element was more obvious. A striking example of the difference is that here in Madrid an ordinary police permit to sojourn is sufficient; it would be useless in Barcelona. There does not even exist, in Madrid, a central political committee.

Very little expropriation seems to have taken place. Most shops carry on without even control, let alone expropriation ...

The absence of begging was one measure of workers' influence:

In Barcelona begging has practically disappeared; in Valencia it was visible; in Madrid it is obtrusive; in this respect nothing seems to have changed. The begging of many children in the cafés is especially repellent ... If begging has remained the same, so has, to a certain extent, its antithesis, luxury. Certainly there are fewer well dressed people than in ordinary times, but there are still lots of them, especially women, who display their good clothes in the streets and cafés without any hesitation or fear, in complete contrast to thoroughly proletarian Barcelona ...

To sum up, Madrid gives, much more than Barcelona, the impression of a town in wartime, but much less the impression of a town in social revolution. [95]

In the key centres the Committees held real power.

All of them, in the days after the uprising, had seized all local power, taking over legislative as well as executive functions, making categorical decisions in their areas, not only about immediate problems, such as the maintenance of law and order and the control of prices, but also about the revolutionary tasks of the moment, the socialisation or unionisation of industry, the expropriation of the property of the clergy, the 'factionists', or simply the big landowners, the distribution of land to the metal workers or its collective development, the confiscation of bank accounts, the municipalisation of lodgings, the organisation of

information, written or spoken, education, and welfare. To take up G. Munis's striking term, everywhere 'Government Committees' were set up, whose authority was based on the force of armed workers and which the rest of the specialist bodies in the old state – Civil Guards here and there, Asaltos, and various officials – obeyed, whether they liked it or not. [96]

Dual power by its very nature is unstable and cannot continue for any length of time. A long period of unstable equilibrium is impossible. In Autumn 1936 the only problem was to know which of the two powers – the bourgeois Republican or proletarian revolutionary – would prevail. In every other period of dual power – Russia in February-October 1917, Germany in 1918-1919 were the most important – the bourgeois government continued to exist thanks to the support of reformist workers' parties. The Mensheviks and SRs not only defended the Provisional Government within the Soviets, but also sat with bourgeois ministers in the government. Similarly the German Social Democrats held the majority in the Soldiers' and Workers' Councils, but at the same time sat in the government.

In Spain the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the Anarchists played this role. They had an overwhelming majority among the Committees, yet at the same time they supported the Republican government. Later, on 4 September 1936 the Socialists and Communist actually entered the government and took ministerial posts. On 26 September the CNT and POUM joined the local government of Catalonia, the Generalitat (to give it its Catalonian name).

This action of the POUM demonstrated its centrist nature. When the Comintern adopted the policy of Popular Front the POUM condemned it and went on doing so for months. And then, out of the blue, in January 1936 Juan Andrade, the ex-ICE member, and now a leading member of the POUM, signed the Popular Front pact. This signalled the final break between the international Trotskyist movement and the former ICE members. On 23 January Trotsky

attacked the POUM's '*betrayal of the proletariat for the sake of an alliance with the bourgeoisie.*' [97]

Centrism led to more vacillation later on. Largo Caballero, on 4 September 1936, formed a Popular Front government including Socialists, Communists and bourgeois Republicans. In response Juan Andrade wrote an article in *La Batalla* calling this government 'counter-revolutionary'. This raised a storm of protest in the POUM and the Central Committee Plenum decided that Andrade should no longer be permitted to write editorials. [98]

Yet another twist followed: on 26 September the POUM joined the Popular Front government of Catalonia, the Generalitat which straight away dissolved the Anti-Fascist Militia Committees.

The POUM was not homogeneous. Its centrism meant there were those who looked left while others looked right. Thus, not all members supported the party's slide towards the Popular Front and membership of the Generalitat. The Secretary of the POUM's youth movement, Wilebaldo Solano, opposed it, as did the Madrid branch of the POUM. The latter fought a broad campaign for the formation of democratically elected committees in all areas starting from the barracks and all armed units right up to the formation of a congress of the committees. It declared that bourgeois democracy was an enemy. In the factories committees should take over production. United in a congress they would then have to work out an economic plan. In December 1936 the Madrid branch also demanded the formation of a revolutionary army based on the militias, which would however have to be subordinate to military discipline and unified command. It is clear that the model here was the Russian Revolution with its soviets and Red Army.

At the same time there was sympathy for Trotsky that extended far beyond the small Trotskyist groups, as became clear through the widespread printing of many of his articles. There were detailed reports about his asylum in Norway and later in Mexico. Similarly the Moscow Trials were continually denounced. [99]

After the event Andrade, Solano and Molins sharply criticised the behaviour of the POUM during the war.



During the whole course of the revolution and the Civil War there has been a more or less organised faction in the party, which did not have the slightest belief or trust in the revolutionary politics of the POUM, which had always conspired against it, which had sabotaged it at the front and behind the lines, which had forced false tactics on the party and had hindered it from adopting the role history had reserved for it ... It is the faction which throughout the course of our whole existence found its most complete expression in the majority of the members of the Central Committee; it is the faction which gave this organism a pronounced reactionary character.

Andrade, Solano and Molins regretted that they had remained silent throughout this period. That had been their greatest mistake. [100]

On the opposite wing of the POUM was the right wing Valencia section. It openly supported the Popular Front and criticised the POUM's 'Leftism'. It supported the dismantling of the committees and the militias, and supported the creation of the Popular Army. The Valencia POUM believed that 'we could win the war without making the revolution, but we could not make the revolution without winning the war. In Barcelona they were certainly fixated on the revolution', wrote Luis Portela, the leader of the POUM in Valencia. [101] The Valencia section of the POUM had as its mouthpiece the weekly *El Comunista*. This paper supported, without reservation, the government of Largo Caballero, writing: 'The government of the Republic is the expression of the will of the popular masses as incarnated by their parties and organisations.' [102] Portela reproached the executive committee of the POUM and *La Batalla* for publicly formulating criticism of the Soviet Union. *El Comunista* refused to defend the accused in the Moscow Trials, pointing out that 'they do not defend themselves'. [103]

### **The Fatal Role of the Popular Front**

THE SPANISH Popular Front was similar to the bloc of the Mensheviks and SRs with the Cadets in 1917. Both argued for unity in defence of democracy, both called on workers and peasants to sacrifice their immediate interests on the altar of unity. Both assumed that the simple unity of forces added to their total sum. Trotsky was devastating in his scorn for this simplistic calculation.

The theoreticians of the Popular Front do not essentially go beyond the first rule of arithmetic, that is, addition: 'Communists' plus Socialists plus Anarchists plus liberals add up to a total which is greater than their respective isolated numbers. Such is all their wisdom. However, arithmetic alone does not suffice here. One needs as well at least mechanics. The law of the parallelogram of forces applies to politics as well. In such a parallelogram, we know that the resultant is shorter, the more the component forces diverge from each other. When political allies tend to pull in opposite directions, the resultant may grove equal to zero. ... the political alliance between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, whose interests on basic questions in the present epoch diverge at an angle of 180 degrees, as a general rule is capable only of paralysing the revolutionary force of the proletariat. [104]

The Spanish Popular Front was an alliance with the bourgeoisie's shadow:

Politically most striking is the fact that the Spanish Popular Front lacked in reality even a parallelogram of forces. The bourgeoisie's place was occupied by its shadow. Through the medium of the Stalinists, Socialists, and Anarchists, the Spanish bourgeoisie subordinated the proletariat to itself without even bothering to participate in the Popular Front. The overwhelming majority of the exploiters of all political shades openly went over to the camp of Franco. [105]

...only insignificant debris from the possessing classes remained in the republican camp: Messrs. Azaña, Companys, and the like – political attorneys of the bourgeoisie but not the bourgeoisie itself. Having staked everything on a military dictatorship, the possessing classes were able, at the same time, to make use of their political representatives of *yesterday* in order to paralyse, disorganize, and afterward strangle the socialist movement of the masses in ‘republican’ territory. [106]

For a victory over fascism it was necessary to connect the struggle against fascism with the struggle for the emancipation of the working class and the peasantry.

Civil war, in which the force of naked coercion is hardly effective, demands of its participants the spirit of supreme self-abnegation. The workers and peasants can assure victory only if they wage a struggle for their own emancipation. Under these conditions, to subordinate the proletariat to the leadership of the bourgeoisie means beforehand to assure defeat in the civil war. [107]

In no way was the Spanish working class of 1936 weaker or more backward than the Russian working class of 1917. On the contrary:

In its specific gravity in the country’s economic life, in its political and cultural level, the Spanish proletariat stood on the first day of the revolution not below but above the Russian proletariat at the beginning of 1917.

Alas,

On the road to victory, its own organisations stood as the chief obstacles. [108]

The events in Spain would confirm the words of St. Just: ‘Those who fight revolutions half-heartedly are merely digging their own graves.’

In the dual power equation, the workers' element remained embryonic and atomised: there were many committees in the factories and the militias, but there was never a centralised national organisation – no nationwide Workers' and Soldiers' Councils as in Russia in 1917 or in Germany in 1918-19. Already in January 1931, in his pamphlet, *The Revolution in Spain*, Trotsky called for the creation of soviets: 'On the order of the day in Spain stands the creation of workers' juntas'. [109]

The fact that workers' power remained atomised, that soviets were not created, was a product of the policies of the working class parties, above all the Communist Party which strongly opposed the idea of soviets. Franz Borkenau writes: '... the communists in Spain represented the extreme right wing of the labour movement'. [110] Hugh Thomas sums up the position of the PCE with the words: 'The communists were said to have devised a new slogan: "Before we capture Saragossa, we have to take Barcelona".' [111] The victory over the militant workers of Barcelona took precedence over the victory over the fascists in Saragossa.

As the party of law and order', and having access to Soviet arms, the Communist Party changed dramatically in social composition, and grew massively in size and influence. Hugh Thomas writes about the party:

... this was no ordinary communist party. If its propaganda harked back to the Russian revolution, its practice suited, and reflected, the desires of the small shopkeepers, small farmers, taxi drivers, minor officials and junior officers who joined it between July 1936 and the end of the year, without reading much Marx or knowing much of Russia, in the hope of finding protection against anarchism and lawlessness. [112]

In Madrid in 1938, according to its own figures, the Communist Party had only 10,160 trade unionists out of 63,426 members, which suggests that no more than a small fraction were workers. [113] Franz Borkenau writes the following on the social composition of

PSUC – the United Socialist Party of Catalonia (the Stalinist party of Catalonia).

Not many industrial workers are members of PSUC, but it claims nevertheless 46,000 members, the majority of whom are state and private employees, shopkeepers, merchants, officers, members of the police forces, intellectuals both in town and country, and a certain number of peasants ... The Communist Party, to a large extent, is today the party of the military and administrative personnel, in the second place the party of the petty bourgeoisie and certain well-to-do peasant groups, in the third place the party of the employees, and only in the fourth place the party of the industrial workers. Having entered the movement with almost no organisation, it has attracted, in the course of the civil war, those elements with whose views and interests its policy agreed. [114]

The claimed membership of the PCE rose from 20,000 in October 1934, to 35,000 in February 1936, 102,000 in May, and 117,000 in July. By June 1937 the PCE and PSUC membership reached a million, and 'became a dominant factor in the political life of Spain'. [115]

The Socialist Party leaders who had moved leftwards in the years 1933-36, now became 'responsible' and moderate, and tailed behind the Communist Party. In April 1936 the Madrid Socialist branch declared:

The proletariat must not confine itself to defending bourgeois democracy but must use every means to assure the conquest of political power in order to achieve its own social revolution. In the transition period from capitalist society to Socialist society, the form of government will be the dictatorship of the proletariat. [116]

A similarly left position was taken by Largo Caballero. On 24 May he declared:

When the Popular Front breaks up, as break up it will, the triumph of the proletariat will be certain. We shall then implant the dictatorship of the proletariat, which does not mean the repression of the proletariat, but of the capitalist and bourgeois classes! [117]

But when Largo Caballero became Prime Minister he changed his tune: 'First we must win the war and afterwards we can talk of revolution.' [118]

The Anarchists played a crucial role in the Spanish revolution. It was the first time in history that they were in the centre of the arena, especially in Catalonia. They faced a grand test and failed miserably. Rejecting all state organisation in principle, the Anarchists refused to distinguish between a bourgeois and a workers' state. Now, with the real collapse of the Republican state in 1936 a vacuum was created, and the need to fill it could not be shirked. How far the logic of the situation forced the Anarchist leaders to stray from traditional principles, one can see from a statement of one of their leaders, Diego Abad de Santillán, on 13 September 1936:

The entry of the CNT into the central government is one of the most important events in the history of our country. The CNT has always been, by principle and conviction, anti-state and the enemy of every form of government ... But circumstances ... have changed the nature of the Spanish government and state ... The government has ceased to be a force of oppression against the working class, just as the state is no longer the entity that divides society into classes. Both will stop oppressing the people all the more with the inclusion of the CNT among their organs. [119]

It was the failure of the Anarchists to create an alternative state to the bourgeois republic that enabled the Communist Party and their allies to undermine the revolution. As Trotsky put it:

To renounce the conquest of power is voluntarily to leave the power with those who wield it, the exploiters. The essence of every revolution consisted and consists in putting a new class in power, thus enabling it to realise its own programme in life. It is impossible to wage war and to reject victory. It is impossible to lead the masses towards insurrection without preparing for the conquest of power. [120]

Many years before, in 1931, Trotsky had accurately prophesied the fate of the Anarchists in the Spanish revolution.

... since anarcho-syndicalism in Spain is moving inevitably to the most pitiful and ridiculous bankruptcy, there is no doubt that the Spanish revolution will be the tombstone of Anarchism. But it is necessary to be sure that the tombstone of anarcho-syndicalism does not at the same time become the tombstone of the revolution. [121]

What was the role of the POUM? The French organ of the POUM, *La Révolution Espagnole*, declared on 3 September 1936 that the dictatorship of the proletariat had already been realised: 'There does not exist ... dual power in Catalonia; the working class effectively controls the whole of society.' [122] On 6 September, Nin declared at a mass meeting, that the working class had achieved state power in Spain.

Comrades, all the concrete problems of the democratic revolution, which the bourgeoisie failed to carry out in five years, have been resolved by the proletariat in arms in as many days. [Applause] [123]

On 26 September, as we have mentioned, POUM joined the Generalitat and Nin became the Minister of Justice. He was euphoric. But his facile optimism was swiftly contradicted by events, as Broué and Témime show. The new government,

with the support of the CNT and the POUM, was in fact the death sentence of the power of the Committees. On 1 October the Anti-Fascist Militias' Committee dissolved itself and embraced, through a manifesto, the new government's policy. On 9 October, a decree in Council, with the approval of Nin and the CNT ministers, dissolved 'the Local Committees, whatever their name or title, and all the organisations that had been set up to destroy the subversive movement' throughout Catalonia. [124]

Even after the POUM was ousted from the Generalitat, on 17 December 1936, its excessive optimism remained unabated. *La Batalla* appeared with the proud headline: 'It is not possible to rule without the POUM, still less against the POUM.' It was possible, as events would show. [125] Trotsky's judgment on the POUM's joining the Generalitat was harsh but completely justified: '*There can be no greater crime than coalition with the bourgeoisie in a period of socialist revolution.*' [126]

The POUM's entry into the coalition government lessened the pressure on the CNT leaders to break with the bourgeoisie. Trotsky complained of the fact that the POUM leaders were extremely conciliatory to the CNT. As early as 31 May 1931, he had criticised the attitude of BOC, the future dominant power in the POUM, towards the Anarchists.

The Catalan Federation ... has adopted a conciliatory position towards the anarcho-syndicalists; that is to say, it has replaced the revolutionary policy of the united front with the opportunist policy of defending and flattering the anarcho-syndicalists ... [127]

The POUM's leaders always negotiated with the CNT at leadership level and failed to appeal to the CNT rank and file. Nin himself stated:



It is evident that there is a difference between the masses and the leaders of the CNT, but we have no other way than to reach an agreement with the leadership organisms and in this way to gain a certain influence at the grass roots. [128]

Paradoxically the POUM adapted to the Anarchists by breaking away from the CNT and creating a separate trade union federation of their own – FOUS. Trotsky explained how this worked:

In order not to quarrel with the Anarchist leaders, they did not form their own nuclei inside the CNT, and in general did not conduct any kind of work there ...

The POUM refrained from penetrating into the midst of the CNT in order not to disturb relations with the summits of this organisation and in order to retain the possibility of remaining in the role of counsellor to them ... The leaders of the POUM spoke with great eloquence of the advantages of the socialist revolution over the bourgeois revolution; but they did nothing serious to prepare this socialist revolution because the preparation could only consist of a pitiless, audacious, implacable mobilisation of the Anarchist, Socialist, and Communist workers against their treacherous leaders. It was necessary not to fear separation from these leaders, to change into a 'sett' during the early days, even if it were persecuted by everybody; it was necessary to put forth exact and clear slogans, foretell the morrow, and basing oneself on the events, discredit the official leaders and drive them from their positions. [129]

The POUM trade union organisation, FOUS, with Nin as its General Secretary, had a membership of some 60,000, the majority of whom were white collar workers. [130] This compared with the CNT, which had over one and a half million members, and the UGT, with a similar number of members. The formation of the FOUS was an especially grave mistake as both the POUM and the CNT had their

main power base in Catalonia, where practically all the industrial workers organised in the CNT.

Unable to survive as an independent organisation, FOUS decided in September 1936 to join the UGT, although this federation had hardly any influence in Catalonia. Nin's explanation in *La Batalla* of 23 September was very lame: 'The trade unionists orientated towards the anarchists should enter the CNT, those orientated on or influenced by the Marxists should be in the UGT'. [131] The POUM's conciliation of the CNT leaders aided and abetted the CNT's own conciliation of the Stalinists and their allies. This condemned the revolution to final defeat. Trotsky writes:

*Contrary to its own intentions, the POUM proved to be, in the final analysis, the chief obstacle on the road to the creation of a revolutionary party ... Revolution abhors centrism. Revolution exposes and annihilates centrism ...*

Left centrism, especially under revolutionary conditions, is always ready to adopt in words the programme of the socialist revolution and is not niggardly with sonorous phrases. But the fatal malady of centrism is not being capable of drawing courageous tactical and organisational conclusions from its general conceptions. [132]

### **The Liquidation of Workers' Power**

IN THE WEEKS after 19 July 1936 struggle continued between proletarian power – in the form of factory and militia committees on the one hand, and the Republican government on the other. The latter won.

On 9 October the government decided to dissolve the Committees and to restore the former municipalities in their place. The POUM leaders played a significant role in the dissolution of the local committees, although there was opposition in the POUM ranks to the move. The POUMists in Lérida, a major force in the province, protested to the party executive. Nin, however, went there with a

government commission to convince the Lérida POUM to accept the decree.

They received the delegation weapons in hand, but when they found Nin among the group, they accepted party discipline and agreed ...

On 16 November, with all resistance now vanquished and there had not been much – the Generalitat decreed the suppression of three thousand official posts in committees, people's tribunals, commissions, etc., the majority of them held by workers; the structure of working class power was, thus, eliminated. [133]

One further step to consolidating the power of the bourgeois state was taken on 27 October – a decree disarming the workers.

Steps were also taken to restore the bourgeois police.

In the first months after July 19, police duties were almost entirely in the hands of the workers' patrols in Catalonia and the 'militias of the rearguard' in Madrid and Valencia ... The most extraordinary step in reviving the bourgeois police was the mushroom growth of the hitherto small customs force, the Carabineros, under Finance Minister Negrín, into a heavily armed pretorian guard of 40,000.

On 28 February [1937] the Carabineros were forbidden to belong to a political party or a trade union or to attend their mass meetings. The same decree was extended to the Civil and Assault Guards thereafter. That meant quarantining the police against the working class ...

By April the militias were finally pushed out of all police duties in Madrid and Valencia. [134]

A comparison Franz Borckenau made of an impression of life in Spain between a first visit in August 1936 and a second in January-February 1937 is very instructive:

The troops were entirely different from the militia I had known in August. There was a clear distinction between officers and men, the former wearing better uniforms and stripes. The pre-revolutionary police force, *asaltos* and Guardia Civil (now 'Guardia Nacional Republicana'), were very much in evidence ... neither guardia nor *asaltos* made the least attempt to appear proletarian. [135]

A further vivid description of life in Barcelona at the end of April 1937 comes from the pen of George Orwell:

Now things were returning to normal. The smart restaurants and hotels were full of rich people wolfing expensive meals, while for the working-class population food prices had jumped enormously without any corresponding rise in wages. Apart from the expensiveness of everything, there were recurrent shortages of this and that, which, of course, always hit the poor rather than the rich. The restaurants and hotels seemed to have little difficulty in getting whatever they wanted, but in the working-class quarters the queues for bread, olive oil, and other necessities were hundreds of yards long. Previously in Barcelona I had been struck by the absence of beggars; now there were quantities of them. Outside the delicatessen shops at the top of the Ramblas gangs of bare-footed children were always waiting to swarm round anyone who came out and clamour for scraps of food. The 'revolutionary' forms of speech were dropping out of use. Strangers seldom addressed you as *tú* and *camarada* nowadays; it was usually *señor* and *Usted*. *Buenos días* was beginning to replace *salud*. The waiters were back in their boiled shirts and the shop workers were cringing in their familiar manner ... In a furtive indirect way the practice of tipping was coming back ... cabaret shows and high-class

brothels, many of which had been closed by the workers' patrols, had promptly reopened. [136]

The final assault of the Stalinists and their allies on working class power took a draconian form on 3 May 1937 in Barcelona.

### **The May Events**

IN MAY 1937 the leaders of the Communist Party and their Russian overseers felt confident enough to behead any proletarian opposition in the centre of the revolution – Barcelona.

The offensive of the Stalinist-bourgeois coalition against the revolution did not pass without opposition. As a matter of fact the government faced increasing economic and social difficulties. Broué and Témime write:

The factories were barely producing, or only very slowly. The supply system was poor. The position was catastrophic where food was concerned. The cost of living had doubled between July 1936 and March 1937, whereas wages had risen an average of 15 percent. The minimum promised by the ration cards was by no means always guaranteed. There were endless lines at bakers' shops. On the other hand, the black market was flourishing. Everywhere, even in Barcelona, restaurants and eating places were open again, but at prohibitive prices. The scores of offices that had replaced the Committees were often dens of corruption. The POUM and the CNT-FAI newspapers were full of letters from readers raising questions about the cost of living and calling for an end to privilege and inequality. On 14 April some women demonstrated in Barcelona against the price of food. Yet both the trade-union organisations and the parties never stopped asking the workers for ever-increasing sacrifices to contribute to military victory: they were greeted with scepticism and bitterness. [137]

The opposition to the government grew in strength. Again, to quote Broué and Témime,

In Barcelona, a group of militants hostile to the militarisation of the militias was organised under the label 'Friends of Durruti', who issued the newspaper *El Amigo del Pueblo*. In a pamphlet distributed in March 1937, they drew up what they regarded as a balance sheet: 'Fight months of war and revolution have elapsed. We note with deep regret the deviations that have occurred in the trajectory of the Revolution ... An Anti-fascist Committee, Local Committees and Control Patrols were set up, and eight months later nothing remains of them.' Their position on the war and the Revolution was similar to that of the POUM and the JCI [the POUM youth movement]: 'The war and the Revolution are two aspects which cannot be divorced. In any case, we cannot accept that the Revolution should be put off until the end of the military conflict.' In spring 1937 many local CNT and FAI organisations echoed these ideas, which appeared more or less everywhere in their newspapers, even in *La Noche*, the Barcelona CNT's evening paper, signed by Badius, moving spirit of the 'Friends of Durruti'. [138]

The Catalan Libertarian Youth denounced the coalition between the Communists and the Republicans as a reflection in Spain of the USSR's alliance with France and England with the object of 'strangling the revolution'.

It is understandable that the JCI's slogans were favourably echoed in their ranks. On 14 February more than 14,000 young people attended a meeting in Barcelona for the formation of a revolutionary youth front in Catalonia. Speeches were made in turn by Fidel Miró, secretary of the Catalan Libertarian Youth, Solano, secretary-general of the JCI, and the young Libertarian Alfredo Martínez, secretary of the Catalan Front. The movement rapidly spread to other provinces: in Madrid and in the Levante,

Libertarian Youth and JCI organised joint meetings and campaigns. [139]

The youth of the Socialist Party, the JSI, also joined the Revolutionary Youth Front. 'In spring 1937 the conditions for a revolutionary upsurge were joined once again'. [140] The masses following the POUM and the CNT were growing restive as they were witnessing the gains of the July revolution being taken away from them.

The coalition of Stalinists and bourgeois Republicans prepared an assault on the proletariat of Catalonia. This took place just after the 1917 May Day celebrations. Although there were massive rallies elsewhere, the parade in Barcelona was banned. Nevertheless workers organisations were on the alert for provocation. It occurred on 3 May and was focused on the telephone exchange. This building had been recaptured in July from the insurgents by members of the CNT. Since then the telephone exchange, which belonged to the American Telegraph and Telephone Company, had been taken over and was operating under a CNT-UGT committee with a government delegate. That day Rodríguez Sala, Commissioner of Police and a member of PSUC, went to the Telephone Exchange with three truckloads of guards and tried to occupy it. The Anarchist telephone operators refused to surrender the exchange and sharp fighting broke out between the workers and the *Asaltos*.

On hearing the news the workers of Barcelona reacted dramatically. Although no organisation called for action, a general strike gripped the city. Barricades sprang up everywhere, and within hours much of the city was under the control of revolutionary workers. 'By dawn on Tuesday [4 May] the barricades had gone up. With the exception of the area around the Generalitat, CNT and POUM workers held almost the whole of the city'. [141] Robert Louzon, in his study of the May days, stated that he was struck by the overwhelming superiority of the armed workers, masters of nine tenths of the city, almost without a struggle. [142]

After an interview with the CNT leaders, Companys spoke over the radio, repudiated Rodríguez Sala's move on the Telefónica, and made an appeal for calm. The CNT Regional Committee supported him: 'Lay down your arms. It is Fascism we must destroy.' *Solidaridad Obrera* [Anarchist daily] only mentioned the events of the previous day on page eight and did not say a word about the barricades that covered the city. At 5 p.m. Hernández Zancajo, a UGT leader and personal friend of Largo Caballero, arrived by plane from Valencia with two Anarchist ministers, Garcia Oliver and Federica Montseny. They took turns on the air, adding their efforts to those of Companys and the CNT regional leaders: 'A wave of madness has passed through the town,' exclaimed Garcia Oliver. 'We must put an immediate stop to this fratricidal struggle. Let each man stay where he is ... The government ... will take the necessary steps.'

On Wednesday 5 May the workers were still manning the barricades. The radio broadcast the text of the agreement made between the CNT and the Generalitat government cease-fire and military *status quo*, simultaneous withdrawal by police and armed civilians. No mention was made of control over the Telefónica. However the movement was receding. CNT elements from the Twenty-third Division and POUM elements from the Twenty-ninth, which had concentrated at Barbastro to march on Barcelona at the news of the events, did not proceed beyond Binéfar: delegates from the CNT Regional Committee also managed to persuade the commander of the Twenty-sixth Division, Gregorio Jover, that any aggressive move should be avoided. After some hesitation, another CNT leader, Juan Manuel Molina, undersecretary for defence in the Generalitat, managed to persuade the Anarchist officer Máximo Franco to halt his men at Binéfar ...

The Friends of Durruti called for the struggle to continue: the CNT-FAI repudiated their call with great vigor.



By Thursday 6 May order had nearly been restored. [143]

The same day *Solidaridad Obrera* [CNT daily] announced: 'The CNT and the UGT have both commanded return to work'. [144]

On 7 May *Solidaridad Obrera* appeared with this caption: 'The CNT and the UGT repeat the order to return to work':

The struggle is over. Concord is reborn with peace. Workers, brothers, united as one man for fraternity and victory ... the *Solidaridad Obrera* was the first journal to foresee and condemn the painful events which have taken place in Barcelona ... Today the Workers' Patrols have made a noble gesture, which indicates their high sense of responsibility, placing themselves under the orders of the special delegation of public order of the government of the Republic. [145]

After the events,

Mariano Vázquez, Secretary of the National Committee of the CNT, bragged in Madrid (according to the *Solidaridad Obrera*, May 15) how 'The organization made great efforts to prevent the extension of the conflict. It decided to send a delegation to each regional committee to thwart alarm and the reproduction of the Catalonian conflict. It sent three delegates to the Aragon front to block the forces there from moving. It was but natural that, on knowing that their Barcelona comrades had been attacked, those at the front should try to help them ... In Barcelona the National Committee made incessant endeavours to terminate the struggle. There was really no need for the Central Government to take over the Public Order. [146]

Victor Alba and Stephen Schwartz are absolutely right about the crucial role of the CNT leaders in the 'pacification' of Barcelona.

The streets took six days to 'pacify', and when 'order' was finally restored, it was thanks not to the action of the police but to the

speeches of the CNT leaders who ceaselessly called on the workers to return to work and lay down their arms.

If the CNT had taken power in Catalonia – where it could have done so, had it wanted to, in less than twenty-four hours – the situation would have changed in the rest of the republican zone. [147]

The May Days of 1937 were far bloodier than 19 July 1936.

The five days of fighting, which had on the whole been defensive, took an inordinately high toll: 500 dead and 1,000 wounded. The assassinations, particularly of Anarchist militants after the fighting ended, added to the toll. [148]

What was the role of the POUM in the May Days? Its leaders echoed the CNT leadership. Tosstorff writes:

On 6 May *La Batalla* published a statement from the Executive Committee, which presumably had already been issued the day before. It stated that in view of the counter-revolutionary provocation the POUM ‘in accordance with its character and its feeling’ had immediately placed itself on the side of the CNT and the FAI: ‘After the counter-revolutionary manoeuvre is foiled, the workers must withdraw from the struggle and make their way back ... to work again today ... The POUM orders all its armed fighters to withdraw from the barricades and the streets and return to work, but to continue to be on their guard.’ [149]

Thus the POUM adopted the policy of retreat, tailing behind the CNT leadership. *La Batalla* still gave the impression that the workers had repulsed the provocation and thus neglected to demand real guarantees against the Right. [150]

There were however those on the extreme left who called on workers not to give up the strike and the barricades. Thus on 5 May

the Friends of Durrutti issued a leaflet which was a clarion call for struggle:

Disarm all the bourgeois forces. Socialisation of the economy. Dissolution of the political parties opposed to the working class. We will not surrender the streets. The revolution before everything. We greet our comrades of the POUM who have fraternised with us in the streets. For the Social Revolution. Down with the Counter-Revolution. [151]

Similarly, the small Trotskyist group issued a leaflet stating:

For the revolutionary offensive. No compromise. Disarm the reactionary Civil Guards and Assault Guards. The moment is decisive. Next time will be too late. General strike in all industries not working for war until the resignation of the reactionary government. Only proletarian power can assure military victory. Full arming of the working class. Long live the unity of the CNT-FM and POUM. Long live the unity of the Revolutionary United Front. Committees of revolutionary defence in the shops, factories and on the barricades.

Bolshevik-Leninists, Spanish Section. For the Fourth International. [152]

Alas, these voices were far too weak to influence the mass of the workers in Barcelona.

In the POUM itself there was much unease at the behaviour of the party. The local committee of the POUM in Barcelona sharply criticised the executive of its party which it accused of having 'capitulated' to counter-revolution, under the pressure from the conciliatory leaders of the CNT.

The right wing of the POUM was represented by the opposite position, as taken by its Valencia branch. Its leader, Luis Portela, condemned the party leadership during the May Days as 'adventuristic'.

At a regional conference of the POUM Portela explicitly opposed the slogan of a workers' government because it would lead to the separation of the Republicans from the anti-fascist bloc.

After the May Days the tensions in the POUM increased so much that a split by the Valencians seemed likely. But it soon became clear that Portela and the Valencia branch were isolated even in their own region. The POUM youth, the JCI, now demanded the expulsion of Portela and his supporters. The only reason a split did not take place was that on 16 June the POUM fell victim to persecution. Even so this did not mean that the differences in the party disappeared, as was shortly to be shown. [153] [5\*]

The May Days sounded the death of the revolution: from now on everything went backwards, although the struggle against Franco went on for another twenty-one months.

### **Trotsky on the May Days**

IN FAR away Mexico Trotsky had a very clear grasp of the events in Barcelona. On 24 August 1937 he wrote:

All the reports after the events show that with a leadership with any seriousness and confidence in itself the victory of the May insurrection would have been assured ...

... If the Catalan proletariat had seized power in May 1937 – as it had really seized it in July 1936 – they would have found support throughout all of Spain. The bourgeois-Stalinist reaction would not even have found two regiments with which to crush the Catalan workers. In the territory occupied by Franco not only the workers but also the peasants would have turned toward the Catalan proletariat, would have isolated the fascist army and brought about its irresistible disintegration. It is doubtful whether under these conditions any foreign government would have risked throwing its regiments onto the burning soil of Spain.

Intervention would have become materially impossible, or at least extremely dangerous.

Naturally, in every insurrection, there is an element of uncertainty and risk. But the subsequent course of events has proven that even in the case of defeat the situation of the Spanish proletariat would have been incomparably more favourable than now, to say nothing of the fact that the revolutionary party would have assured its future. [157]

For Trotsky, the POUM's failure to lead the struggle for proletarian power in May 1937 was the greatest betrayal of all. On 22 October 1937 he writes:

At a distance of some thousands of miles, without having the information that one could find solely at the place of action, one was still able to ask in the month of May whether the conquest of power was not materially possible. But since then documents, reports, innumerable articles have appeared in the press of all the tendencies. All the facts, all the data, all the testimony lead to the same conclusion: the conquest of power was possible, was assured, as much as the issue of the struggle can be assured in general in advance. The most important evidence comes from the Anarchists. Since the May insurrection, *Solidaridad Obrera* has not ceased to repeat the same plaintive melody: 'We are accused of having been the instigator of the May rebellion. But we were completely opposed to it. The proof? Our adversaries know it as well as we: *if we had wished to take power, we could have accomplished it in May with certainty*. But we are against dictatorship, etc. etc.'

The misfortune is precisely that the CNT did not want power. The misfortune is that the leadership of the POUM was passively adapting itself to the leadership of the CNT ... The CNT, of which the POUM was a shadow, is now losing its positions one after the other ... the CNT and the POUM have

done just about everything to assure the victory of the Stalinists, that is, of the counter-revolution. [158]

Tragically, Trotsky's brilliant writings were a cry in the wilderness. He had only a handful of adherents in Spain. After Nin and the ICE fused with BOC to form the POUM, the remnants of the Trotskyists, fearing isolation, tried to join the POUM, asking for the right to form a faction. And this was Nin's reply, on 13 November 1936:

Dear comrades,

In response to your letter of 30 October, the executive committee bring your attention to the following:

1. You can enter the party individually but not as a group.
2. Insofar as belonging to the POUM is incompatible with affiliation to any other political organisation, you must leave the Bolshevik-Leninist organisation.
3. You must publicly declare that you dissociate yourself from and condemn the slanderous and defamatory campaign led against our party in the various publications of the so-called IVth International.
4. It is understood that, in accordance with the established norms, you renounce all factional activity within the party.

– *Andrés Nin* [159]

The Trotskyists obviously could not accept these terms. They formed themselves into a group, calling themselves the Bolshevik-Leninists of Spain, For the IVth International. At the beginning of April 1937 they started a hectographed bulletin under the title *La voz Leninista*. Altogether three issues of the paper appeared: 5 April 1937, 23 August 1937 and 5 February 1938. The membership of the group

was 30, the majority foreigners to start with. [160] In September 1938, according to the report to the Founding Conference of the Fourth International, the membership was 10-30. [161]

The trend was clear but depressing. In the stormy revolutionary events of France in June 1936 Trotsky had a few hundred adherents. Now the Spanish revolution had arrived and Trotsky had even fewer firm supporters – a score or so!

### **Further Advance of the Counter-Revolution**

THE MAY DAY events in Barcelona marked the end of the revolution. From now on the counter-revolution would accelerate.

Following the May events the bloc of Stalinists and bourgeois Republicans went on the offensive, with its first target the POUM. On 28 May *La Batalla* was suppressed. During the night of 16 June all the members of the POUM executive committee were arrested. Andrés Nin was taken away separately by the GPU (by this time well entrenched in Spain) and subsequently murdered in secret. [6\*]

The POUM was not alone in being attacked. When, on 15 May, Largo Caballero had resisted the demand of the Stalinists to suppress the POUM, the bourgeois ministers, as well as the right wing Socialist ministers, joined them to oust Caballero from the premiership. He was replaced by the right wing Socialist Juan Negrin. Shortly after this the offensive against Caballero was taken into the UGT. Caballero had been its general secretary since 1918. An imposed new executive committee under González Peña's chairmanship declared its complete loyalty to the Negrin government. The government recognised this executive committee as the sole legitimate authority. No congress of the UGT was allowed. Caballero was arrested and forced out of all political action.

An apparatus of repression was established. The Popular Tribunals were reorganised. A decree on 23 June 1937 established special tribunals for the repression of crimes of spying and high treason. They were made up of three civilian and two military jurymen, all appointed by the government. The term, 'Offences of

Spying and High Treason' was sufficiently elastic to embrace all opposition. Broué and Témime write:

As before the Revolution, trade-union meetings had to be authorised by the delegate for public order, after a request made at least three days in advance. As before the Revolution, censorship, justified at the outset by military necessity, was now imposed on political attitudes. On 18 May *Adelante* [Caballero's mouthpiece] appeared with its first page blank, under the headline ¡Viva Largo Caballero! On 18 June the government established a monopoly of radio broadcasts and seized transmitters from the various headquarters. On 7 August *Solidaridad Obrera* was given five days' suspension for committing a breach of the censorship directives by appearing with 'blanks' to indicate censored passages: the censorship was working and demanded that no trace remain of its activities. On 14 August a circular banned all criticism of the Russian government. [163]

A special role in the apparatus of repression was played by SIM (Servicio de Investigación Militar) [established] by a decree on 15 August 1937. Initially a counter-espionage service, it very soon became an all-powerful political police force, able to make arrests and grant releases without trial or investigation other than its own ... A few months after its formation, the SIM, which was completely immune from the authority of the minister of war, had more than 6,000 agents and was in control of prisons and concentration camps. [164]

Now Negrin and his war minister Prieto went further in a ruthless reorganisation of the militias into bourgeois regiments, officered by bourgeois appointees, and under the old military code. On 5 October 1937 soldiers were forbidden from taking part in political demonstrations.

The land and factories taken over by the workers in 1936 were now to be returned to their former owners.



Many proprietors reported 'missing' returned; others were released from prison. All reclaimed their lands, seized in 1936: they had right and the law on their side, as well as government support. In Catalonia, the application of the collectivisation decree was suspended, because it was 'contrary to the spirit of the Constitution'. The decree of 28 August 1937 enabled the government, through *intervención*, to take over any metallurgical or mining concern. Soon afterwards, on 26 February 1938, *The Economist* wrote: 'Intervention by the state in industry, as opposed to collectivisation and workers' control, is re-establishing the principle of private property.' Managers and directors recovered their posts. [165]

Negrin's cabinet was christened 'The Government of Victory'. History demonstrated how grotesque was that christening. The only victory Negrin won was against the workers and peasants. Its record on the military front against Franco was a total catastrophe. Clausewitz's maxim that 'war is simply the continuation of politics by other means' applies even more to civil wars: it is a continuation of the politics of the class struggle. Politics always determines the means and ends of the two camps embroiled in the civil war. Hence Trotsky was absolutely convinced that the victory over fascism in the Spanish Civil War depended much less on military technique than on the politics followed by the anti-fascists. At the very beginning of the Spanish civil war, on 30 July 1936 Trotsky wrote:

From a purely military point of view the Spanish revolution is much weaker than its enemy. Its strength lies in its ability to rouse the great masses to action. It can even take the army away from its reactionary officers. To accomplish this, it is only necessary to seriously and courageously advance the programme of the socialist revolution.

It is necessary to proclaim that, from now on, the land, factories, and shops will pass from the hands of the capitalists into the hands of the people. It is necessary to move at once towards

the realisation of this programme in those provinces where the workers are in power. The fascist army could not resist the influence of such a programme for twenty-four hours; the soldiers would tie their officers hand and foot and turn them over to the nearest headquarters of the workers' militia.

But such a policy was not compatible with the Popular Front.

... the bourgeois ministers cannot accept such a programme. Curbing the social revolution, they compel the workers and peasants to spill ten times as much of their own blood in the civil war. And to crown everything, these gentlemen expect to disarm these workers again after the victory and to force them to respect the sacred laws of private property. Such is the true essence of policy of the Popular Front. Everything else is pure humbug, phrases, and lies! [166]

The Stalinists argued that it was necessary sharply to limit social reforms in order to avoid alienating the liberal bourgeoisie and democratic governments of France and Britain, from whom they hoped to secure aid. In fact the Spanish bourgeoisie was in Franco-controlled territory, and the hope of persuading the imperialist bourgeoisie of France and Britain to support the Republic was groundless. Under the guise of neutrality Paris and London refused even to sell arms to the legitimate government of Spain, while Franco got massive military aid from Germany and Italy.

At the end of the civil war Trotsky looked back and repeated the same argument that only the socialist revolution could have overcome Franco's advance:

If the peasants had seized the land and the workers the factories, Franco never would have been able to wrest this victory from their hands!

... The Spanish revolution was socialist in its essence: the workers attempted several times to overthrow the bourgeoisie,

to seize the factories; the peasants wanted to take the land. The Popular Front led by the Stalinists strangled the socialist revolution in the name of an outlived bourgeois democracy. Hence the disappointment, the hopelessness, the discouragement of the masses of workers and peasants, the demoralisation of the republican army, and as a result, the military collapse. [167]

### Footnotes

1\*. Junta – a traditional form of revolutionary committee, first formed during the national war against Napoleon in 1808, and repeatedly since.

2\*. CNT, Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labour), the anarcho-syndicalist trade union centre; leading personalities of the CNT were at the same time members of the FAI, Federación Anarquista Ibérica (Iberian Anarchist Confederacy), the political organisation of the anarchists.

3\*. UGT, Unión General de Trabajadores (General Workers' Union), the socialist trade union centre, corresponding to the British TUC, collectively affiliated to the Socialist Party, whose main strength derived from the UGT. The Communists too belonged to the UGT.

4\*. CEDA, Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas (Electoral Confederation of the Autonomous groups of the Right), a united front organisation of all the parties of the Right under the leadership of Gil Robles.

5\*. The POUM, as a centrist organisation, lived throughout the civil war in a state of permanent crisis, and finally split. At a meeting of its Central Committee at the end of November 1937 sharp and clear differences revealed themselves. On one side stood a bloc of Josep Rebull with Solano and Andrade, arguing against all Popular Front policy and for a 'revolutionary workers' front'. At the other extreme stood Portela and Co. A tactical variant in support of the Popular Front was that of Jordi Arquer, who called for the building of a

‘revolutionary workers’ front’ as a left faction inside the anti-fascist front. As Portela and his supporters voted for this resolution, it won the day, by 22 votes to 13. [154]

A Central Committee meeting of 5-6 March went even further in the direction of the Popular Front [155]

After the Second World War Maurín declared that the policies of the POUM during the civil war were wrong – a revolutionary policy under these conditions was wrong. He agreed with the right wing of the party. [156] The POUM disbanded and joined the Socialist Party.

The conflicts inside the POUM were not taken advantage of by the Bolshevik-Leninists. They were too few in number to affect the debate inside the POUM or to take advantage of the increasing differentiation in its ranks.

6\*. Trotsky responded to the news of Nin’s assassination in an article for the *Bulletin of the Opposition*. While explaining that Nin was not in any sense a Trotskyist he denounced the Stalinist slander that Nin and the POUM were ‘agents’ of Franco:

The absurdity of this accusation is clear to anyone who is acquainted with even the simplest facts about the Spanish revolution. The members of the POUM fought heroically against the fascists on all fronts in Spain. Nin is an old and incorruptible revolutionary ...

The GPU calls everyone who is in opposition to the Soviet bureaucracy a Trotskyist. This makes their bloody vengeance easy ...

[Nin] did not want the POUM to become a tool in the hands of Stalin. He refused to cooperate with the GPU against the interests of the Spanish people. This was his only crime. And for this crime he paid with his life. [162]

## Notes

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2. *Ibid.*, pp.59-60.
3. *Ibid.*, pp.85-6 Notes 403.
4. *Ibid.*, p.130.
5. *Ibid.*.
6. K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol.13, London 1980, p.391.
7. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution*, p.244.
8. R. Fraser, *Blood of Spain*, London 1979, p.514.
9. *Ibid.*, p.42.
10. *Ibid.*, p.521.
11. H. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, London 1977, p.127.
12. *Ibid.*, p.91.
13. Fraser, p.42.
14. P. Broué and E. Témime, *The Revolution and Civil War in Spain*, London 1972, p.48.
15. Thomas, p.49.
16. Fraser, p.525.
17. *Ibid.*, p.526.
18. *Ibid.*, p.530.
19. G. Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth*, Cambridge 1971, p.235.
20. *Ibid.*, p.237.
21. Thomas, p.127.
22. *Ibid.*, p.186..
23. Brenan, p.253.
24. *Ibid.*, p.254.
25. *Ibid.*, pp.258-9.
26. *Ibid.*, p.249.
27. Broué and Témime, p.49.
28. Brenan, p.269.
29. *Ibid.*, p.270.
30. *Ibid.*, p.271.
31. *Ibid.*, p.282.
32. *Ibid.*, p.284.
33. *Ibid.*, pp.286-9.

34. *Ibid.*, p.292.
35. P. Pagés, *El Movimiento Trotskista en España 1930-1935*, Barcelona 1977, pp.40-3.
36. P. Pagés, *Andreu Nin: su evolucion política 1911-1937*, Madrid 1975, p.148.
37. P. Broué, editor, L. Trotsky, *La révolution espagnole 1930-1940*, Paris 1975, p.36.
38. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution*, p.369.
39. *Ibid.*, p.370.
40. *Ibid.*, pp.370-1.
41. *Ibid.*, p.371.
42. V. Alba, *Histoire du POUM*, Paris 1975, p.34.
43. R. Tosstorff, *Die POUM im spanischen Bürgerkrieg*, Frankfurt, p.17.
44. Alba, p.68.
45. *Ibid.*.
46. V. Alba and S. Schwartz, *Spanish Marxism versus Soviet Communism. A History of the POUM*, New Brunswick 1988, p.47.
47. Introduction to L. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution*, p.31.
48. Pagés, *El Movimiento Trotskista en España*, p.94.
49. A. Durgan, *The Spanish Trotskyists and the Foundation of the POUM, The Spanish Civil War. The View from the Left, Revolutionary History*, Vol.4, nos 1/2, London 1992, p.18.
50. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution*, p.371.
51. *Ibid.*, p.372.
52. *Ibid.*, p.373.
53. *Ibid.*, p.385.
54. *Ibid.*.
55. *Ibid.*, pp.386-7.
56. *Ibid.*, p.387.
57. *Ibid.*, p.374.
58. Tosstorff, p.14.
59. *Ibid.*, p.388.
60. *Ibid.*, p.375.
61. *Ibid.*, p.388.
62. *Ibid.*, pp.388-90.

63. *Ibid.*, p.376.
64. *Ibid.*, p.377.
65. *Ibid.*, p.379.
66. Pagés, *El Movimiento Trotskista en España*, pp.124-8.
67. Durgan, in *The Spanish Civil War*, p.25.
68. Fraser, p.552.
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71. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution*, p.202.
72. *Ibid.*, p.206.
73. *Comunismo*, Sept. 1934, Alba and Schwartz, op. cit, p.41.
74. Tosstorff, p.47.
75. L. Trotsky, *La révolution Espagnole*, p.297.
76. Pagés, *El Movimiento Trotskista en España*, pp.184-9.
77. Trotsky, *La révolution Espagnole*, pp.304-5.
78. Maurin's testimony dates from 1972. Tosstorff, pp.48-9.
79. Broué and Témime, pp.75-6.
80. Brenan, p.301.
81. Broué and Témime, pp.80-1.
82. Thomas, p.5.
83. F. Morrow, *Revolution and Counter-revolution in Spain*, New York 1974, p.45.
84. Broué and Témime, p.81.
85. Thomas, pp.169-70.
86. Fraser, p.521.
87. Thomas, p.190.
88. Morrow, p.48.
89. Thomas, p.220.
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93. *Ibid.*, p.76.
94. *Ibid.*, pp.115-16.

95. *Ibid.*, pp.123-5.
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99. Tosstorff, p.242.
100. *Ibid.*, p.350.
101. Fraser, p.340.
102. *El Comunista*, 5 December 1936.
103. Trotsky, *La révolution espagnole*, p.318.
104. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution*, pp.308-9.
105. *Ibid.*, p.309.
106. *Ibid.*, p.310.
107. *Ibid.*, p.309.
108. *Ibid.*, p.322.
109. *Ibid.*, p.86.
110. Borkenau, p.131.
111. Thomas, p.653.
112. *Ibid.*, p.646.
113. Broué and Témime, p 232.
114. Borkenau, p.192.
115. Broué and Témime, p.229.
116. *Ibid.*, p.92.
117. Thomas, p.180.
118. Fraser, p.186.
119. Broué and Témime, pp.207-8.
120. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution*, p.316.
121. *Ibid.*, p.146.
122. Quoted in Buschak, p.207.
123. Fraser, p.321.
124. Broué and Temimé, p.204.
125. *La Batalla*, 17 December 1936, Buschak, p.240.
126. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution*, p.351.
127. *Ibid.*, p.134.
128. Tosstorff, p.165.
129. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution*, pp.317-8, 345-6.
130. Alba, p.153.



131. P. Pagés, *Andreu Nin*, pp.232-3.
132. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution*, pp.318, 343.
133. Alba and Schwartz, p.140.
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138. *Ibid.*, p.277.
139. *Ibid.*, p.278.
140. *Ibid.*, pp.279.
141. Fraser, p.378.
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143. *Ibid.*, pp.283-4.
144. H. Oehler, eyewitness of the May events, *Barricades in Barcelona*, New York 1937, reissued 1982, p.11.
145. *Ibid.*, pp.12-13.
146. *Ibid.*, p.16.
147. Alba and Schwartz, pp.189-90.
148. Fraser, pp.382-3.
149. Tosstorff, pp.214-5.
150. *Ibid.*, p.224.
151. Oehler, p.10.
152. *Ibid.*, p.17.
153. Tosstorff, pp.240-1.
154. *Ibid.*, pp.333-4.
155. *Ibid.*, p.335.
156. *Ibid.*, p.367.
157. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution*, pp.277, 279.
158. *Ibid.*, pp.302-3.
159. Trotsky, *La révolution Espagnole 1930-1940*, p.726.
160. Tosstorff, p.311.
161. Reisner, p.289.
162. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution*, pp.267-8.
163. Broué and Témime, p.312.
164. *Ibid.*, pp.312-3.
165. *Ibid.*, pp.313-4.

166. Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution*, p.235.

167. *Ibid.*, p.347.

## 12. Why the Fourth International Failed to Take Off

### Trotsky's Optimism

THROUGHOUT the 'thirties Trotsky again and again repeated that the vanguard forces of revolutionary socialism were in no way weaker than those which rallied around Lenin during the first world war. Thus on 31 May 1930 he wrote: 'The Opposition has become an international factor and as such it is continually growing'. [1] On 23 March 1934 he wrote: 'It is true that the organisational base for the Fourth International is as yet very narrow. In 1914, however, the basis for the Third International was even narrower.' [2] Six weeks later he stated: 'I am certain that we are more numerous than Lenin was at the end of 1914 when he proclaimed: "Long live the Third International".' [3]

One advantage, he argued, was that international coordination already existed among the Trotskyists. Thus on 28 February 1935 he asserted, not for the last time, that:

Our great advantage over 1914 consists of the groups and organisations of hardened Bolsheviki that we have almost everywhere, which are internationally aligned and, therefore, subject to international control. [4]

In the spring of 1935 Trotsky wrote an *Open Letter for the Fourth International*, saying:

Genuinely revolutionary organisations, or at least groups, exist in all countries. They are closely bound together ideologically, and in part also organisationally. Even at present they represent a force incomparably more influential, homogeneous, and steeled than the 'Zimmerwald left', which in the fall of 1915 took the initiative in preparing for the Third International. [5]

On 10 October 1938 Trotsky wrote:

... the position of the revolutionary vanguard is far more favourable today than it was twenty-five years ago. The main conquest is that before the war there already exist in all the most important countries of the world tested cadres, numbering hundreds and thousands of revolutionists in growing numbers, welded together by the unity of a doctrine, and tested in the school of cruellest persecutions by the imperialist bourgeoisie, the Social Democracy, and, in particular, the Stalinist Mafia. [6]

Even the outbreak of war was seen as an opportunity for the Trotskyist movement to build. Writing on 5 September 1939, as World War Two began, Trotsky claimed:

The Fourth International now comprises only a small minority. But the party of Lenin also represented only an insignificant minority at the beginning of the last war and received nothing but spite from the cheap heroes of the phrase. War is a severe school. [7]

In the *Manifesto of the Fourth International on the Imperialist War and the Proletarian Revolution* of May 1940, Trotsky went so far as to describe the forces of his movement as far superior to the internationalist socialist forces existing at the beginning of the First World War:

... it is impermissible to put on the same plane the present revolutionary vanguard with those isolated internationalists who raised their voices at the outbreak of the last war. Only the

Russian party of the Bolsheviks represented a revolutionary force at that time. But even the latter, in its overwhelming majority, failed, except for a small emigré group around Lenin, to shed its national narrowness and to rise to the perspective of the world revolution.

The Fourth International in numbers and especially in preparation possesses infinite advantages over its predecessors at the beginning of the last war. [8]

On 8 June 1940 he repeated the claim.

However, Trotsky believed that not only was the subjective element – the cadres of the Fourth International – superior to the revolutionaries at the beginning of the First World War, but the objective conditions also were more favourable to the rise of mass working class revolutionary action. In the theses, *War and the Fourth International* (10 June 1934) Trotsky wrote:

Even if at the beginning of a new war the true revolutionists should again find themselves in a small minority, we cannot doubt for a single moment that this time the shift of the masses to the road of revolution will occur much faster, more decisively and relentlessly than during the first imperialist war. A new wave of insurrections can and must become victorious in the whole capitalist world. [9]

The grip of Stalinism did not daunt him. In the spring of 1935 he insisted:

The betrayal of the cause of the international revolution by the Soviet bureaucracy has thrust the world proletariat far back. The difficulties that face the revolutionary vanguard are incredible. Nevertheless, its position at the present time is incomparably more favourable than on the eve of the last war. [10]

On 10 October 1938 Trotsky wrote:

Mankind has become poorer than it was twenty-five years ago, while the means of destruction have become infinitely more powerful. In the very first months of the war, therefore, a stormy reaction against the fumes of chauvinism will set in among the working masses. The first victims of this reaction, along with fascism, will be the parties of the Second and Third Internationals. Their collapse will be the indispensable conditions for an avowed revolutionary movement, which will find for its crystallisation no axis other than the Fourth International. Its tempered cadres will lead the toilers to the great offensive. [11]

Hence the victory of the Fourth International was not far away. An introduction Trotsky wrote for the first Afrikaans translation of the *Communist Manifesto* ended with these words: 'When the centennial of the *Communist Manifesto* is celebrated, the Fourth International will have become the decisive revolutionary force on our planet.' [12] On 18 October 1938, in a speech entitled, *The Founding of the Fourth International*, Trotsky underlined the point:

Ten years! Only ten years! Permit me to finish with a prediction: During the next ten years the program of the Fourth International will become the guide of millions and these revolutionary millions will know how to storm earth and heaven. [13]

I quote Trotsky on the same theme again and again in order to establish the fact that his statements on the speedy victory of the Fourth International were not throw-away remarks, but were a constant theme throughout the 'thirties and until his death.

What were the assumptions behind these perspectives? There were basically three: 1) The final crisis of world capitalism undermined any possibility of the survival of reformism; 2) the Stalinist parties outside the USSR would be transformed into purely reformist parties; and 3) the Stalinist regime inside the USSR was very unstable and was condemned to a quick demise.

Regarding the first point, Trotsky wrote in the programme of the Fourth International, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*:

Mankind's productive forces stagnate ... in general, there can be no discussion of systematic social reforms ... every serious demand of the proletariat and even every serious demand of the petty bourgeoisie inevitably reaches beyond the limits of capitalist property relations and of the bourgeois state. [14]

In *The Manifesto of the Fourth International on the Imperialist War and the Proletarian Revolution* Trotsky wrote:

All the countries will come out of the war so ruined that the standard of living of the workers will be thrown back a hundred years. Reformist unions are possible only under the regime of bourgeois democracy. But the first to be vanquished in the war will be the thoroughly rotten democracy. In its definitive downfall it will drag with it all the workers' organisations which serve as its support. [15]

... the last war gave birth to the October Revolution upon whose lessons the labour movement of the whole world lives ... the conditions of the present war differ profoundly from the conditions of 1914. The economic position of the imperialist states, including the United States, is infinitely worse today, and the destructive power of war is infinitely greater than was the case a quarter of a century ago. There is therefore sufficient reason to expect this time a much more rapid and much more decisive reaction on the part of the workers and of the army. [16]

Regarding the second assumption – the transformation of the Stalinist parties outside the USSR into purely reformist parties attached to their own national bourgeoisie – Trotsky wrote on 10 October 1938:

The growth of the Communist parties in recent years, their infiltration into the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie, their installation in the state machinery, the trade unions, parliaments, municipalities, etc., have strengthened in the extreme their dependence on national imperialism at the expense of their traditional dependence on the Kremlin.

... until recently, the chauvinism of the French, British, Belgian, Czechoslovak, American, and other Communist parties seemed to be, and to a certain extent was, a refracted image of the interests of Soviet diplomacy ... Today, we can predict with assurance the inception of a new stage. The growth of imperialist antagonisms, the obvious proximity of the war danger, and the equally obvious isolation of the USSR must unavoidably strengthen the *centrifugal nationalist tendencies* within the Comintern. Each of its sections will begin to evolve a patriotic policy on its own account. Stalin has reconciled the Communist parties of imperialist democracies with their national bourgeoisies. This stage has now been passed. The Bonapartist procurer has played his role. Henceforth the Communo-chauvinists will have to worry about their own hides, whose interests by no means coincide with the 'defence of the USSR' .

[17]

In relation to the third point – the instability of the Stalinist regime in the USSR – in his article of 1 February 1935 *The Workers' State, Thermidor and Bonapartism*, Trotsky argued that Stalinism, as a form of 'Bonapartism ... cannot long maintain itself; a sphere balanced on the point of a pyramid must invariably roll down on one side or the other'; hence 'the inevitable collapse of the Stalinist regime' . [18]

One outcome might be capitalist restoration. In the theses, *War and the Fourth International* (10 June 1934) Trotsky wrote: '... in case of a protracted war accompanied by the *passivity of the world proletariat*, the internal social contradiction in the USSR not only might lead but also would have to lead to a *bourgeois-Bonapartist*



*counter-revolution.*' [19] On 8 July 1936 he put forward an alternative scenario:

*The USSR will be able to emerge from a war without a defeat only under one condition, and that is if it is assisted by the revolution in the West or in the East. But the international revolution, the only way of saving the USSR, will at the same time be the death blow for the Soviet bureaucracy.* [20]

Trotsky was so convinced of the instability of the Stalinist regime that on 25 September 1939, in an article, *The USSR in War*, he wrote:

Might we not place ourselves in a ludicrous position if we affixed to the Bonapartist oligarchy the nomenclature of a new ruling class just a few years or even a few months prior to its inglorious downfall? [21]

Let us now deal, point by point, with Trotsky's arguments.

First, his comparison of the strength of the revolutionary internationalist organisations in the 'thirties with those existing at the beginning of the First World War. It is really astonishing to read Trotsky on this point. What was the strength of the Bolshevik party on the eve of the First World War? In the general election of 1912 the Bolsheviks won six deputies to the Tsarist *duma* (parliament) while the reformist Mensheviks won only seven. All the Bolshevik deputies were elected in the workers' *curias*, whereas most of the Mensheviks came from middle class constituencies. In the seven *gubernias* which returned Menshevik deputies, there were altogether 136,000 industrial workers, while in the six which returned Bolshevik deputies there were 1,144,000. In other words, the Menshevik deputies could claim 11.8 percent of the workers' electors, and the Bolsheviks 88.2 percent.

The Bolsheviks had a daily paper, *Pravda*, whose circulation was quite impressive, especially if one takes into account the illegal status of the party publishing it. It ranged between 40,000 and 60,000 a day, the higher figure being achieved on Saturdays. Under

the oppressive conditions of Tsarism this was a great achievement; and the paper's ideas found response among hundreds of thousands of workers.

There was widespread support for *Pravda* by workers. In 1912 it received money contributions from 620 workers' groups, while the Menshevik paper received donations from 89 groups. During 1913 *Pravda* received 2,181 money contributions from workers' groups and the Mensheviks 661. In 1914, up to 13 May, *Pravda* had the support of 2,873 workers' groups, and the Mensheviks 671. Thus the Pravdists organised 77 percent of the workers' groups in Russia in 1913 and 81 percent in 1914. [22]

Then again, compare Rosa Luxemburg's organisation, the *Spartakusbund*, organising and influencing thousands of workers, with the German Trotskyist organisation which, according to Trotsky in 1932, failed to recruit even 'ten native factory workers'! (See p. 159) In terms of the calibre of leadership, who, except for Trotsky, was of comparable stature to Lenin and Luxemburg, or even lesser figures such as Bukharin, Radek, Liebknecht and Rakovsky?

Let us now deal with Trotsky's three assumptions about the objective factors that would lead to the speedy success of the Fourth International. We shall deal with them in reverse order. The third, as we shall explain, will determine the effect of the second, which itself will determine the effect of the first.

With hindsight it is clear that the Stalinist regime in the USSR was far more stable than Trotsky assumed. It did not behave like 'a sphere balancing on the point of a pyramid', it did 'emerge from a war without a defeat', without being 'assisted by the revolution in the West or in the East', and it survived far longer than the few months or years Trotsky gave it. The source of his misjudgement, as we have already suggested, was Trotsky's faulty analysis of the economic and social basis of the Stalinist bureaucracy; it was not balancing between classes, but was a ruling class.

If the Stalinist regime had collapsed after a few months or years, Trotsky's assumption on the second point, that the Stalinist parties would have been transformed into pure reformist parties would have proved correct. Breaking the link with the Kremlin, they would have

become dependent on the local bourgeoisie, on the national state machinery, the national trade union bureaucracy, the municipalities, etc. They would have been transformed into traditional social democratic parties. However, because of the strength and stability of the Stalinist regime in the USSR and its expansion after the Second World War into a number of other countries – East Europe, China, North Korea, North Vietnam – the ‘centrifugal nationalist tendencies within the Comintern’ remained in check. Unlike the social democratic parties which were ready to sell themselves to the national bourgeoisie, the Stalinist parties were, in accordance with Soviet foreign policy, only for hire.

Because the Stalinist parties remained intact, and even grew during the war, basking in reflected glory from the mighty Soviet Union and still claiming the mantle of the October Revolution, the mass revolutionary upsurge that the war produced, as Trotsky had indeed predicted, did not lead to the collapse of capitalism in the West: it gave new strength to the Communist and Social Democratic parties and they collaborated in shoring up capitalism. This made it possible for a new expansion of capitalism to take place. Instead of economic stagnation under which ‘every serious demand of the proletariat and even every serious demand of the petty bourgeoisie inevitably reaches beyond the limits’ of capitalism, we witnessed a massive expansion of capitalism in Western Europe and a flourishing of reformism. As Mike Kidron pointed out, ‘the system as a whole has never grown so fast for so long as since the war – twice as fast between 1950 and 1964 as between 1913 and 1950, and nearly half as fast again as during the generation before that.’ [23] In consequence the Social Democratic and Communist parties, far from disintegrating, emerged in the post-war period stronger in number and support than ever before. And reformism flourished on the basis of a rising standard of living.

Trotsky’s three assumptions regarding the objective situation facilitating victory of the revolution were intimately connected; once the assumption regarding the instability of the Stalinist regime in USSR failed to materialise, the others fell.

It was this problem, not any tactical mistakes, that negated Trotsky's predictions of a victory of the Fourth International over the following few years. As we have already mentioned, the Bolshevik leaders did make mistakes, and serious ones at that, during 1917 and the period of the civil war; but they were not enough to prevent the forward march of the revolution. It was the objective social-political forces – above all the Stalinist bureaucracy's role as gravedigger of the revolution during the Second World War and its aftermath – that falsified Trotsky's prognosis.

### ***The Transitional Programme***

AN INTEGRAL part of Trotsky's perspective of the inevitable death agony of international capitalism and the impending collapse of Stalinism, was the programme of transitional demands that he formulated for the Founding Conference of the Fourth International.

Social Democracy traditionally divided its programme into two parts: minimum demands which could be realised under capitalism, and maximum demands which would constitute the establishment of socialism. Between the two there was a complete break. This reflected the reformist nature of the actual policies of Social Democracy: at present Social Democracy would defend the immediate interests of workers, but in the future, after the workers had elected Social Democrats to government, socialism would be on the order of the day. Between the minimum and maximum programmes there were no bridges.

Of course Trotsky did not spurn minimum demands, insisting that it was necessary to defend workers' immediate interests in the here and now. But he opposed restricting the struggle to what was compatible with capitalism. Hence he rejected the mechanical separation of the minimum programme and the maximum programme. He therefore proposed

a system of *transitional demands*, the essence of which is contained in the fact that ever more openly and decisively they

will be directed against the very bases of the bourgeois regime.  
[24]

Trotsky argued that it was necessary to build a bridge between the immediate aims of the working class movement and its ultimate goal.

This bridge should include a system of *transitional demands*, stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat. [25]

One example of a transitional demand is the demand for a 'sliding scale of wages and sliding scale of hours':

Against a bounding rise in prices, which with the approach of war will assume an ever more unbridled character, one can fight only under the slogan of a *sliding scale of wages*. This means that collective agreements should assure an automatic rise in wages in relation to the increase in price of consumer goods.

Against unemployment, 'structural' as well as 'conjunctural', the time is ripe to advance, along with the slogan of public works, the slogan of a *sliding scale of working hours*.

These transitional demands fitted a situation of general crisis, of capitalism in deep slump. But under conditions of a massive expansion of capitalism, as took place after the Second World War, these demands were at best meaningless, and at worst reactionary. To limit wage rises to the rise in the cost of living was a demand of the capitalists and against the aspirations of the workers who wanted to improve their living standards. And in conditions of more or less full employment, a 'sliding scale of hours' is really meaningless.

Similarly, other demands in Trotsky's *Transitional Programme*, such as the establishment of 'workers' defence guards', 'workers' militia' and 'the arming of the proletariat', certainly did not fit a non-

revolutionary situation. Sadly many Trotskyists dogmatically repeated these slogans.

The basic assumption behind Trotsky's Transitional Demands was that the economic crisis was so deep that the struggle for even the smallest improvement in workers' conditions would bring conflict with the capitalist system itself. When life disproved the assumption the ground fell from beneath the programme.

### **Organisational Measures**

IN FACE OF the vast chasm between the grand tasks posed before the Trotskyist movement and the puny resources at its disposal, Trotsky looked for specific organisational measures to shore up the movement. To compensate for its weakness, Trotsky argued that every section should participate in a discussion of issues facing other sections. Thus he wrote to the Executive Committee of the Communist League of France on 22 December 1930: 'For a Marxist, internationalism consists first of all of the active participation of every section in the life of the other sections.' [26]

On 7 March 1936 Trotsky repeated the same argument in a letter to British supporters: 'The adherents of the Fourth International belong ... to an international organisation whose members are spread all over the world, who work closely together, *mutually criticising and controlling each other.*' (My emphasis) [27]

When there was a faction fight in the French section with Raymond Molinier, or in the German section with Kurt Landau, every section was expected to be informed of the conflict and was expected to take a stand. Similarly, when Trotsky argued that the French comrades should enter the Socialist Party, it was expected that all other sections should take a position on this tactical issue. In practice the result was mayhem. The Spanish, Dutch and Greek sections, and the majority of the German leadership not only opposed the tactic but split away from the movement. So did Eugene Bauer (the international secretary), Georges Vereecken (secretary of

the Belgian section), A.G. Muste (one of the leaders of the American Workers' Party) and others.

The problem with Trotsky's approach was that it is very difficult to draw immediate tactical lessons from one branch of a national organisation for another. How much more difficult is it to do the same on the international scale.

Compare this idea of one section intervening in the tactical disputes of another with the practice of the Comintern under Lenin and Trotsky where it was quite uncommon. For example, when, at the Second Congress of the Comintern (July-August 1920) the question arose as to whether the British Communist Party should seek to affiliate to the Labour Party, the only person to speak on the subject outside the British delegation was Lenin. The German, French, Italian and other delegates did not have the confidence to speak on such a tactical question, and it was not expected of them to do so. And the cadres of the Trotskyist movement were far less experienced than those of the Comintern under Lenin and Trotsky. How could the intervention of the weak German Trotskyist group in a faction fight of the French section strengthen it? As the main weakness of the German group was its tiny size, poor social composition and lack of implantation among the workers, would the fight against Rosmer, or later Molinier, or even later Naville, have made it less introvert, more able to relate to workers in real life struggles? The tying of one weak Trotskyist group to another weak group, could increase, rather than overcome weakness. It was not a case of addition, but multiplication: a fraction of 1 times another fraction of 1, is not larger than the original fraction.

Another method Trotsky employed in the hope of buttressing the movement was a very elaborate and tight organisational structure. At the founding conference of the International Left Opposition in Paris in April 1930, an International Bureau to handle administrative matters and coordinate relations with other national sections was established. Its members were Rosmer (France), Sedov (representing the Russian section), and Kurt Landau (Germany). Later Nin (Spain) and Shachtman (USA) were co-opted into the Bureau. However the Bureau found it difficult to function,

partly because of the distance of most of its members from the centre in Paris, partly because of the sharp factional strife that gripped the major sections. As a result, an International Secretariat (sometimes called the Administrative Secretariat) was set up in addition to the International Bureau. All three members of the first IS – M. Mill, Leonetti, and Naville – were resident in Paris. When the German and French factional crisis deepened, the relative authority of the IB and the IS became one of the issues disputed. [28]

Rosmer withdrew from the International Bureau and from the French section in November 1930; Kurt Landau broke with the International Left Opposition at the beginning of 1931; M. Mill, a Stalinist plant, withdrew at the end of 1932; Pierre Naville found himself in opposition to Trotsky in early 1931.

Of the five members of the International Secretariat in 1932 – Witte, Eugene Bauer, Roman Well, someone called Kin or Kiu and Leon Sedov – only Sedov remained in the Trotskyist movement two years later. Witte and Bauer joined the London Bureau and Well the KPD. The fate of Kin (or Kiu) is unknown.

The July 1936 conference of the International Communist League adopted very elaborate *Rules Governing the Leading International Bodies*. In addition to a General Council for the Fourth International, there were a Bureau and an International Secretariat. [29] Two years later new statutes replaced the Bureau with an International Executive Committee, composed of 15 members belonging to the most important national sections and elected by the Conference. [30] On paper this sounds fine. It was very much a copy of the structure of the much larger Comintern. Unfortunately, with the basic weakness of the movement, it did not contribute to any real stability. Thus of the 15 members of the International Executive Committee elected in 1936, by the end of the Second World War, five were killed (including Trotsky and Sedov), and of the remaining ten, only two were still active in the movement – James P. Cannon and Carl Skoglund of the American Socialist Workers' Party.



The founding conference of the Fourth International in September 1938 adopted the proposal that in case of an outbreak of war the Executive Committee of the International would be transferred to the Western hemisphere. The proposal went into effect as soon as the war started. A resident committee composed of the members of the International Executive Committee was established in New York. When the factional struggle inside the SWP became acute it turned out that most of the resident members of the International Executive Committee supported the Shachtman-Burnham faction in opposition to Trotsky.

The structure of a political organisation cannot rise very far above its real base. A small group of communists, like those belonging to the Communist League of the 1840s, would not have been helped by a structure that fitted a far larger organisation of hundreds of thousands or millions like the Comintern. And an over-heavy structure under such conditions could only be an unnecessary burden. The organisational structure must be proportional to the power driving it forward. The highly elaborate structure of the Trotskyist movement did not in any way add to its efficiency, or even stability. It contributed to a turnover of personnel in the leading bodies which was probably as great as amongst the rank and file.

This complicated structure was grafted on to a very exaggerated perspective of revolutionary success. Duncan Hallas's description of the latter's impact is apt. There was

an element of near-messianism in Trotsky's conceptions ... In a desperately difficult situation, with fascism in the ascendant, defeat piled on defeat for the workers' movement and a new world war imminent, the banner of revolution had to be flown, the programme of communism reasserted, until the revolution itself transformed the situation.

Perhaps it would have been impossible to hold his followers together without something of this outlook, which, if so, was therefore a necessary deviation from his mature view. But its later costs were none the less real. [31]

## Did Trotsky Have a Choice?

COULD TROTSKY abstain from trying to build a new international? Rejecting Stalin, could he have gone into the 'watchtower' – as Isaac Deutscher many years later recommended? Deutscher writes:

It seems that the only dignified attitude the intellectual ex-communist can take is to rise *au-dessus de la mêlée*. He cannot join the Stalinist camp or the anti-Stalinist Holy Alliance without doing violence to his better self. So let him stay outside any camp. Let him try to regain critical sense and intellectual detachment. Let him overcome the cheap ambition to have a finger in the political pie. Let him be at peace with his own self at least, if the price he has to pay for a phoney peace with the world is self-renunciation and self-denunciation.

This is not to say that the ex-communist man of letters, or intellectual at large should retire into the ivory tower. (His contempt for the ivory tower lingers in him from his past.) But he may withdraw into a watchtower instead. To watch with detachment and alertness this heaving chaos of a world, to be on sharp lookout for what is going to emerge from it, and to interpret it *sine ira et studio* – this is now the only honourable service the ex-communist intellectual can render to a generation in which scrupulous observation and honest interpretation have become so sadly rare. [32]

Deutscher does not tell us what is the difference in practice between inhabiting an ivory tower and a watchtower. In both cases no action is expected. Yet he says this in the name of Marxism, the science of revolutionary action!

Could Trotsky follow Marx's and Engels's behaviour in the years between the end of the 1848 revolution and rise of the First International (1864)? Apart from the necessity of earning a living, Marx devoted these years almost entirely to research for his *Das Kapital*. As the politics of émigré conditions in the post-revolutionary

period were futile, full of public squabbles and internecine strife, Marx and Engels were quite happy to withdraw into their studies. On 11 February 1851 Marx wrote to Engels:

I am greatly pleased by the public, authentic isolation in which we two, you and I, now find ourselves. It is wholly in accord with our attitude and our principles. The system of mutual concessions, half-measures tolerated for decency's sake, and the obligation to bear one's share of public ridicule in the party along with all these jackasses, all this is now over. [33]

In reply Engels wrote on 13 February:

At long last we have the opportunity – the first time in ages – to show that we need neither popularity, nor the *support* of any party in any country, and that our position is completely independent of such ludicrous trifles. From now on we are only answerable for ourselves and, come the time when these gentry need us, we shall be in a position to dictate our terms. Until then we shall at least have some peace and quiet. [34]

Marx and Engels could take this position because they believed 1) that there was no opening for revolutionary activity immediately, as capitalism was flourishing, and 2) that the theoretical work they were engaged in at the time was a contribution to the future when the revolution would be back on the agenda. In November 1850 Marx summed up his perspective for the coming years in the *Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung*:

With this general prosperity, in which the productive forces of bourgeois society develop as luxuriantly as is at all possible within bourgeois relationships, there can be no talk of a real revolution. Such a revolution is only possible in the period when both these factors, the modern productive forces and the bourgeois forms of production, come in collision with each other.

A new revolution is possible only in consequence of a new crisis. It is, however, just as certain as this crisis. [35]

What faced Marx and Engels in the 1850s was an expanding, progressive capitalism which increased the size and power of the proletariat. What faced Trotsky eighty years later were the horrors of counter-revolution, fascism and war. Trotsky would not have been a revolutionary if under these circumstances, he spent his time in the watchtower, or even in book research not related to the immediate tribulations and struggles facing the international proletariat.

Trotsky made a heroic effort to build a revolutionary party, a revolutionary international under the most unfavourable conditions. The continual defeats of the working class brought about by the policies of Stalinism and Social Democracy did not strengthen workers' confidence and independence from these mass organisations, but the contrary. Defeat fed defeat. There was very little space for the green shoots of Trotskyism to grow. In no country did the Trotskyists achieve the minimum critical mass required to be effective in building a real mass organisation. There was a chasm between what the historical situation demanded and what was possible. And if in these impossible circumstances Trotsky made some mistakes in the way the Fourth International was built – its over-ambitious structure, mistaken perspectives, including the semi-messianic spirit affecting it, let that be. Without trying to build a revolutionary party Trotsky would not have written his brilliant articles and essays at the time, analysing the situation and putting forward the strategy and tactics necessary for working class advance. Without the effort of building the revolutionary international, Trotsky's contribution to Marxism, which kept it alive and preserved it from ossification, would not have been achieved. Trotsky's uncompromising hostility to capitalism, fascism and war, to Stalinism, to reformism, made it necessary for him to make every effort, even if he paid with his heart's blood, to fight them in the here and now. Hence he had to make the effort, even if it did not prove very successful, to build the international. Without this, the tradition of

Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky would not have been carried forward by future generations.

However, struggling to build the Fourth International, which Trotsky did from 1933 onwards, was not the same as formally declaring its existence, which he did in 1938. The former was absolutely necessary, whilst the latter was almost certainly a mistake.

Trotsky himself recognised this distinction between ‘building’ and ‘declaring’ in 1933 when he wrote: ‘It would be an unlawful pretence, to say nothing of adventurism, to proclaim that the new International had been established today’. [36] In 1935 when he still denounced as ‘a stupid piece of gossip’ the idea that ‘the Trotskyists want to proclaim the Fourth International next Thursday’. [37]

The problem with announcing the foundation of the Fourth International when the Trotskyist current was so weak was that it generated delusions of grandeur without in practice advancing the movement in any way. Organisationally it confirmed the tendency to pretentious, top heavy structures, that we have already criticised. Politically, it tended to raise the *Transitional Programme* to the status of a classic document on a par with the *Communist Manifesto* in the minds of Trotsky’s followers.

These disadvantages became particularly damaging after Trotsky’s death. Inexperienced and untempered Trotskyists without a serious base in any national working class assumed the role of ‘international leadership’ and defended the perspectives and demands of the *Transitional Programme* as holy writ even when they clearly no longer fitted reality.

## Notes

1. *WLT*, 1930, p.261.

2. *WLT*, 1933-34, p.268.

3. *Ibid.*, p.291.

4. *WLT*, 1934-5, p.204.

5. *WLT*, 1935-6, p.24.
6. *WLT*, 1938-9, p.77.
7. *WLT*, 1939-40, p.85.
8. *Ibid.*, p.219.
9. *WLT*, 1933-4, p.329.
10. *WLT*, 1935-6, p.23.
11. *WLT*, 1938-39, p.78.
12. *WLT*, 1937-8, p.27.
13. *WLT*, 1938-9, p.87.
14. Trotsky, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*, Reisner, pp.180, 183.
15. *WLT*, 1939-40, p.213.
16. *Ibid.*, p.218.
17. *WLT*, 1938-9, p.71.
18. *WLT*, 1934-5, pp.181-2.
19. *WLT*, 1933-34, p.316.
20. *WLT*, 1935-6, p.360.
21. Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism*, London 1971, pp.16-17.
22. Cliff, *Lenin*, Vol.1, pp.325, 340, 351.
23. M. Kidron, *Western Capitalism since the War*, London 1970, p.11.
24. Reisner, p.184.
25. *Ibid.*, p.183.
26. *WLT*, 1930-31, p.114.
27. *WLT*, 1935-36, p.266.
28. *WLT*, 1929-33, p.369.
29. Reisner, pp.151-2.
30. *Ibid.*, p.178.
31. D. Hallas, *Trotsky's Marxism*, London 1979, p.95.
32. I. Deutscher, *Heretics and Renegades*, London 1955, p.20.
33. K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol.38, London 1982, p.286.
34. *Ibid.*, p.289.
35. K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol.10, London 1978, p.510.
36. *WLT*, 1933-4, p.207.

37. *WLT*, 1934-5, p.274.

## **13. *The Revolution Betrayed***

THE LAST BOOK Trotsky managed to finish was *The Revolution Betrayed*. Its timing was significant. The book was completed just before the Moscow show trial that led to the execution of Zinoviev, Kamenev and a number of other Old Bolsheviks. Publication was in May 1937 just after the trial of Radek, Piatakov and Sokolnikov and on the eve of the execution of Marshal Tukhachevsky and the other generals. This gave special force to the title of the book.

Stalin had just proclaimed the Soviet Union to have achieved socialism. The crucial aim of *The Revolution Betrayed* was to refute this assertion, and at the same time to produce a comprehensive historical analysis of the Stalinist degeneration of the Russian revolution.

### **In Defence of Socialism**

TROTSKY BRILLIANTLY juxtaposed socialism to the actual reality of Stalinist Russia. He describes the deep contradictions of Russian society:

material and cultural inequalities, governmental repressions, political groupings, and the struggle of factions. Police repression hushes up and distorts a political struggle, but does not eliminate it. [1]

The Stalinist bureaucracy was pressing forward inequalities through piece work, Stakhanovism and wage differentials more extreme than those in capitalist countries.



In scope of inequality in the payment of labour, the Soviet Union has not only caught up to, but far surpassed the capitalist countries! [2]

Side by side with the differentiation inside the proletariat there were special open and hidden privileges for the bureaucracy: special shops, luxury goods, education and other benefits. Increasing economic inequality dominated Soviet society.

If you count not only salaries and all forms of service in kind, and every type of semi-legal supplementary source of income, but also add the share of the bureaucracy and the Soviet aristocracy in the theatres, rest palaces, hospitals, sanatoriums, summer resorts, museums, clubs, athletic institutions, etc., etc., it would probably be necessary to conclude that 15 percent, or, say, 20 percent, of the population enjoys not much less of the wealth than is enjoyed by the remaining 80 to 85 per cent. [3]

The best litmus test for social inequality is the position of women in society, Trotsky argues. The 'problem of problems' – women's equality – was not solved in Russia, indeed working women were in conflict with the bureaucracy which, to defend its rule and privileges transformed every aspect of society in a bourgeois direction. Trotsky wrote:

The October revolution honestly fulfilled its obligations in relation to woman. The young government not only gave her all political and legal rights in equality with man, but, what is more important, did all that it could, and in any case incomparably more than any other government ever did, actually to secure her access to all forms of economic and cultural work ... The revolution made a heroic effort to destroy the so-called 'family hearth' – that archaic, stuffy and stagnant institution in which the woman of the toiling classes performs galley labour from childhood to death. The place of the family as a shut-in petty enterprise was to be occupied, according to the plans, by a

finished system of social care and accommodation: maternity houses, crèches, kindergartens, schools, social dining rooms, social laundries, first-aid stations, hospitals, sanatoria, athletic organisations, moving-picture theatres, etc. The complete absorption of the housekeeping functions of the family by institutions of the socialist society, uniting all generations in solidarity and mutual aid, was to bring to woman, and thereby to the loving couple, a real liberation from the thousand-year-old fetters. Up to now this problem of problems has not been solved. The forty million Soviet families remain in their overwhelming majority nests of medievalism, female slavery and hysteria, daily humiliation of children, feminine and childish superstition. We must permit ourselves no illusions on this account. For that very reason, the consecutive changes in the approach to the problem of the family in the Soviet Union best of all characterise the actual nature of Soviet society and the evolution of its ruling stratum. [4]

One side of the rehabilitated bourgeois family was the appearance of widespread prostitution:

that is, the extreme degradation of woman in the interests of men who can pay for it. In the autumn of the past year *Izvestia* suddenly informed its readers, for example, of the arrest in Moscow of 'as many as a thousand women who were secretly selling themselves on the streets of the proletarian capital.' ... it is unforgivable in the presence of prostitution to talk about the triumph of socialism. [5]

The rehabilitation and glorification of the bourgeois family remained, and reinforced the oppression of women. This rehabilitation was a by-product of the strengthening of the power of the bureaucracy.

The most compelling motive of the present cult of the family is undoubtedly the need of the bureaucracy for a stable hierarchy

of relations, and for the disciplining of youth by means of 40,000,000 points of support for authority and power. [6]

Spiritual life was stifled and the youth was subjected to authoritarianism and hypocrisy.

The school and the social life of the student are saturated with formalism and hypocrisy. The children have learnt to sit through innumerable deadly dull meetings, with their inevitable honorary presidium, their chants in honour of the dear leaders, their predigested righteous debates in which, quite in the manner of their elders, they say one thing and think another ...

The more thoughtful teachers and childrens' writers, in spite of the enforced optimism, can not always conceal their horror in the presence of this spirit of repression, falsity and boredom ... Independent character like independent thought cannot develop without criticism. The Soviet youth, however, are simply denied the elementary opportunity to exchange thoughts, make mistakes and try out and correct mistakes, their own as well as others'. All questions ... are decided for them. Theirs only to carry out the decision and sing the glory of those who made it ...

This explains the fact that out of the millions upon millions of Communist youth there has not emerged a single big figure.

In throwing themselves into engineering, science, literature, sport or chess playing, the youth are, so to speak, winning their spurs for future great action. In all these spheres they compete with the badly prepared older generation, and often equal and beat them. But at every contact with politics they burn their fingers. [7]

The Stalin era 'will go down in the history of artistic creation pre-eminently as an epoch of mediocrities, laureates and toadies.' Under Stalin 'the literary schools were strangled one after the other'.

The process of extermination took place in all ideological spheres, and it took place more decisively since it was more than half unconscious. The present ruling stratum considers itself called not only to control spiritual creation politically, but also to prescribe its roads of development. The method of command-without-appeal extends in like measure to the concentration camps, to scientific agriculture and to music. The central organ of the party prints anonymous directive editorials, having the character of military orders, in architecture, literature, dramatic art, the ballet, to say nothing of philosophy, natural science and history. The bureaucracy superstitiously fears whatever does not serve it directly, as well as whatever it does not understand. [8]

Above all Trotsky argues that the massive totalitarian state was incompatible with socialism. In his *State and Revolution* Lenin had rescued from oblivion the Marxian notion of the 'withering away of the state'. Trotsky writes:

However you may interpret the nature of the present Soviet state, one thing is indubitable: at the end of its second decade of existence, it has not only not died away, but not begun to 'die away'. Worse than that, it has grown into a hitherto unheard of apparatus of compulsion. The bureaucracy has not only not disappeared, yielding its place to the masses, but has turned into an uncontrolled force dominating the masses. The army not only has not been replaced by an armed people, but has given birth to a privileged officers' caste, crowned with marshals, while the people, 'the armed bearers of the dictatorship', are now forbidden in the Soviet Union to carry even non explosive weapons. With the utmost stretch of fancy it would be difficult to imagine a contrast more striking than that which exists between the schema of the workers' state according to Marx, Engels and Lenin, and the actual state now headed by Stalin. [9]

The Red Army was the most extreme embodiment of Stalinist reaction. A most

deadly blow to the principles of the October revolution was struck by the decree restoring the officers' corps in all its bourgeois magnificence ...

The army is a copy of society and suffers from all its diseases, usually at a higher temperature ...

In September 1935, civilised humanity, friends and enemies alike, learned with surprise that the Red Army would now be crowned with an officers' hierarchy, beginning with lieutenant and ending with marshal. [10]

Stalin polluted the very idea of socialism. Socialism signifies self-government of the toilers. The Stalin regime oppresses the toilers. Socialism signifies uninterrupted advance towards universal equality. Stalinism has established revolting privileges. Socialism aims at the flowering of a rounded personality. Stalinism degrades all individuals. Socialism signifies unselfish and humane relations between individuals. Stalinism infuses social and personal relations with greed, lies and treachery.

### **The Theory of the 'Degenerated Workers' State'**

BESIDES refuting the Stalinist claim that socialism had been established in the Soviet Union, *The Revolution Betrayed* also aimed to give a comprehensive historical and social analysis of the degeneration of the Russian revolution.

Trotsky, using the historical materialist method, started from the economic development of the Soviet Union. He juxtaposed the enormous rise in the production of iron, steel, oil, coal and electricity with 'the stagnation and decay in almost the whole capitalist world'.

... by concentrating the means of production in the hands of the state, the revolution made it possible to apply new and incomparably more effective industrial methods. [11]

Trotsky concluded from this, that

Socialism has demonstrated its right to victory, not on the pages of *Das Kapital*, but in an industrial arena comprising a sixth part of the earth's surface – not in the language of dialectics, but in the language of steel, cement and electricity ... thanks solely to a proletarian revolution a backward country has achieved in less than ten years successes unexampled in history. [12]

But this demonstration of 'socialism's right to victory' was by no means the same as the actual achievement of victory. Socialism requires a higher economic level than that given under capitalism, and this the Soviet Union was far from having achieved.

The dynamic coefficients of Soviet industry are unexampled. But they are still far from decisive. The Soviet Union is lifting itself from a terribly low level, while the capitalist countries are slipping down from a very high one. The correlation of forces at the present moment is determined not by the rate of growth, but by contrasting the entire power of the two camps as expressed in material accumulations, technique, culture, and, above all, the productivity of human labour. When we approach the matter from this statistical point of view, the situation changes at once, and to the extreme disadvantage of the Soviet Union. [13]

The average individual productivity of labour in the Soviet Union is still very low. In the best metal foundry, according to the acknowledgment of its director, the output of iron and steel per individual worker is a third as much as the average output of American foundries. A comparison of average figures in both countries would probably give a ratio of 1 to 5 or worse. [14]

It is in the backwardness of Soviet society that the roots of the bureaucracy were to be found: the bureaucracy appeared as a gendarme in the process of distribution of scarce products.

The basis of bureaucratic rule is the poverty of society in objects of consumption, with the resulting struggle of each against all. When there is enough goods in a store, the purchasers can come whenever they want to. When there is little goods, the purchasers are compelled to stand in line. When the lines are very long, it is necessary to appoint a policeman to keep order. Such is the starting point of the power of the Soviet bureaucracy. It 'knows' who is to get something and who has to wait. [15]

Of course the bureaucracy would not forget its own personal interests.

Nobody who has wealth to distribute ever omits himself ... [the bureaucracy] has attained such a degree of social and moral alienation from the popular masses, that it cannot now permit any control over either its activities or its income. [16]

Notwithstanding the massive and increasing privileges of the bureaucracy, notwithstanding the oppression of the proletariat, of women, notwithstanding the complete totalitarian nature of the state, the strangulation of the party by the Stalinist bureaucracy, notwithstanding the massive reaction in the field of the family, culture, etc. – Trotsky still considered the USSR to be a workers' state. The bureaucracy had expropriated the proletariat politically, but the basic social conquest of the October Revolution – state property and the planned economy – remained intact.

As a conscious political force the bureaucracy has betrayed the revolution. But a victorious revolution is fortunately not only a programme and a banner, not only political institutions, but also

a system of social relations. To betray it is not enough. You have to overthrow it. [17]

Correspondingly the Soviet Union remained a workers' state.

The nationalisation of the land, the means of industrial production, transport and exchange, together with the monopoly of foreign trade, constitute the basis of the Soviet social structure. Through these relations, established by the proletarian revolution, the nature of the Soviet Union as a proletarian state is for us basically defined. [18]

Although the bureaucracy is 'the sole privileged and commanding stratum in the Soviet society' [19] it is nevertheless not a ruling class.

Privileges have only half their worth, if they cannot be transmitted to one's children. But the right of testament is inseparable from the right of property. It is not enough to be the director of a trust; it is necessary to be a stockholder. The victory of the bureaucracy in this decisive sphere would mean its conversion into a new possessing class. On the other hand, the victory of the proletariat over the bureaucracy would ensure a revival of the socialist revolution. [20]

The Soviet bureaucracy has expropriated the proletariat politically in order by methods of its own to defend the social conquests. But 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 bureaucracy has not yet created social supports for its dominion in the form of special types of property. It is compelled to defend state property as the source of its power and its income. In this aspect of its activity it still remains a weapon of proletarian dictatorship.



The attempt to represent the Soviet bureaucracy as a class of 'state capitalists' would obviously not withstand criticism. The bureaucracy has neither stocks nor bonds. It is recruited, supplemented and renewed in the manner of an administrative hierarchy, independently of any special property relations of its own. The individual bureaucrat cannot transmit to his heirs his rights in the exploitation of the state apparatus. The bureaucracy enjoys its privileges under the form of an abuse of power. It conceals its income; it pretends that as a special social group it does not even exist. Its appropriation of a vast share of the national income has the character of social parasitism. All this makes the position of the commanding Soviet stratum in the highest degree contradictory, equivocal and undignified, notwithstanding the completeness of its power and the smoke-screen of flattery that conceals it. [21]

As the bureaucracy is not a class, but only a parasitic caste, its removal will not be an act of social revolution, argued Trotsky, but a political revolution.

The Soviet bureaucracy will not give up its position without a fight. The development leads obviously to the road of revolution.

... the bureaucracy can be removed only by a revolutionary force ...

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. [22]

What were the prospects for the Soviet Union? On this Trotsky's answer was completely unequivocal.

Can we ... expect that the Soviet Union will come out of the coming great war without defeat? To this frankly posed question, we will answer as frankly: if the war should remain only a war, the defeat of the Soviet Union would be inevitable. In a technical, economic and military sense, imperialism is incomparably more strong. If it is not paralysed by revolution in the West, imperialism will sweep away the regime which issued from the October revolution. [23]

Without the interference of revolution, the social bases of the Soviet Union must be crushed, not only in the case of defeat, but also in the case of victory.

More than two years ago a programme announcement, *The Fourth International and War*, outlined this perspective in the following words: 'Under the influence of the critical need of the state for articles of prime necessity, the individualistic tendencies of the peasant economy will receive a considerable reinforcement, and the centrifugal forces within the collective farms will increase with every month ... In the heated atmosphere of war we may expect ... the attracting of foreign allied capital, a breach in the monopoly of foreign trade, a weakening of state control of the trusts, a sharpening of competition between the trusts, conflicts between the trusts and the workers, etc. ... In other words, in the case of a long war, if the world proletariat is passive, the inner social contradictions of the Soviet Union not only might, but must, lead to a bourgeois Bonapartist counter-revolution.' The events of the last two years have redoubled the force of this prognosis. [24]

Fundamental to Trotsky's rejection of the view that the Stalinist bureaucracy was a ruling class was his expectation of its early demise, as previously cited: 'Might we not place ourselves in a ludicrous position if we affixed to the Bonapartist oligarchy the nomenclature of a new ruling class just a few years or even a few months prior to its inglorious downfall?' [25]

Trotsky's analysis of the Stalinist regime in *The Revolution Betrayed* has very great strengths. First of all, it is thoroughly Marxist, rooted in historical materialism. It takes as its starting point the objective economic, social and political situation – national and international – in which the Soviet Union found itself. In this it differs radically from the common idealistic explanation of Stalinism as a product of the personality of Stalin – 'the cult of the individual', as explained by Khrushchev – or a product of the ideology and form of party organisation of the Bolsheviks – as explained by liberals, social democrats and anarchists.

The analysis is thoroughly internationalist. It is rooted in the theory of the permanent revolution that takes the international nature of capitalism as the decisive factor in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the rise of Stalinism

*The Revolution Betrayed* is an uncompromising critique of Stalinism as a system which has nothing to do with socialism. *The Revolution Betrayed* is a classic indictment of the bureaucracy. It is thoroughly revolutionary; for in fighting Stalinism it makes no concession to social democracy. While being strongly anti-Stalinist, it avoids descending into Stalinophobia which is akin to reactionary anti-communism.

Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet Union thus sustained the key characteristic of Trotskyism – revolutionary Marxist opposition to both Stalinism and world capitalism.

However, there are serious weaknesses in Trotsky's analysis of Stalinist Russia. These are a natural product of meeting an historically unprecedented phenomenon: a workers' state that survived a civil war but remained besieged by massive enemy forces. Trotsky had no time to stand back from current developments

in the Soviet state. It is far easier with hindsight to see the weaknesses in Trotsky's analysis of the Stalinist regime.

### **Critique of Trotsky's Position**

IT WAS IN 1948 that I wrote *The Nature of Stalinist Russia*, a duplicated document of some 142 pages, examining Trotsky's definition of Russia as a degenerated workers' state and criticising it. In this section I largely draw on extracts from that document.

Can a state not under workers' control be a workers' state? In Trotsky's works we find two different and quite contradictory definitions of a workers' state. According to one, the criterion of a workers' state is whether the proletariat has direct or indirect control, no matter how restricted, over the state power: that is, whether the proletariat can get rid of the bureaucracy by reform alone, without the need for revolution. In 1931 he wrote:

The recognition of the present Soviet State as a workers' state not only signifies that the bourgeoisie can conquer power in no other way than by armed uprising but also that the proletariat of the USSR has not forfeited the possibility of submitting the bureaucracy to it, or reviving the Party again and of mending the regime of the dictatorship – without a new revolution, with the methods and on the road of reform. [26]

In a letter to Borodai, a member of the opposition group called Democratic Centralists, Trotsky expressed this idea even more clearly. The letter is undated, but all indications show that it was written at the end of 1928. He wrote:

'Is the degeneration of the apparatus and of the Soviet power a fact? That is the second question,' you write. There is no doubt that the degeneration of the Soviet apparatus is considerably more advanced than the same process in the Party apparatus. Nevertheless, it is the Party that decides. At present, this

means: the Party apparatus. The question thus comes down to the same thing: is the proletarian kernel of the Party, assisted by the working class, capable of triumphing over the autocracy of the Party apparatus which is fusing with the state apparatus? Whoever replies in advance that it is incapable, thereby speaks not only of the necessity of a new party on a new foundation, but also of the necessity of a second and new proletarian revolution. [27]

Later in the same letter Trotsky says:

If the Party is a corpse, a new party must be built on a new spot, and the working class must be told about it openly. If Thermidor is completed, and if the dictatorship of the proletariat is liquidated, the banner of the second proletarian revolution must be unfurled. That is how we would act if the road of reform, for which we stand, proved hopeless. [28]

Trotsky's second definition had a fundamentally different criterion. No matter how independent the state machine may be from the masses, and even if the only way of getting rid of the bureaucracy is by revolution, so long as the means of production were state-owned, the state remains a workers' state with the proletariat the ruling class.

Three conclusions are to be drawn from this:

- a. Trotsky's second definition of the workers' state negates the first.
- b. If the second definition is correct, the *Communist Manifesto* was incorrect in saying: 'the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class.' Furthermore, in this case, neither the Paris Commune nor the Bolshevik dictatorship were workers' states as the former did not statify the means of production at all, and the latter did not do so for some time.

- c. If the state is the repository of the means of production and the workers do not control it, they do not own the means of production, ie, they are not the ruling class. The first definition admits this, the second avoids this but does not disprove it.

### **Russia's Definition as a Workers' State and the Marxist Theory of the State**

THE ASSUMPTION that Russia was a degenerated workers' state led inevitably to conclusions in direct contradiction to the Marxist concept of the state. An analysis of the role of what Trotsky called political revolution and social counter-revolution will prove this.

During bourgeois political revolutions, for instance the French revolutions of 1830 and 1848, the form of government changed to a greater or lesser degree, but the type of state remained the same – 'special bodies of armed men, prisons, etc.' independent of the people and serving the capitalist class. Hitler's victory in Germany was another example. It brought with it a large-scale purge of the state apparatus, but the state machine as a whole was not smashed, remaining fundamentally the same.

However, there is a much closer connection between content and form in a workers' state than in any other state. Therefore, even if we assume that political revolutions can take place in a workers' state, one thing is clear – the same workers' state machine must continue to exist after the proletarian political revolution as before. If Russia was a workers' state, then if the workers' party carried out a large-scale 'purge' in a political revolution, it could and would use the existing state machine. On the other hand, if the bourgeoisie came to power, it could not use the existing state machine, but would be compelled to smash it and build another on its ruins.

Were these the conditions obtaining in Russia? To pose the question correctly goes half-way to answering it. It is surely evident that a revolutionary party could not have used the KGB nor the bureaucracy nor the standing army. The revolutionary party would have had to smash the existing state and replace it with soviets, people's militia, etc.

As against this, if the bourgeoisie came to power it could certainly use the KGB, the regular army, etc. Trotsky partially avoided the application of the Marxist theory of the state in this way by saying that the revolutionary party 'would begin with the restoration of democracy in the trade unions and the Soviets'. But actually there were neither trade unions nor soviets in Russia in which democracy could be restored. The question was not one of reforming the state machine, but of smashing it and building a new state.

If the proletariat would have had to smash the existing state machine on coming to power while the bourgeoisie could use it, Russia was not a workers' state. Even if we assume that neither the proletariat nor the bourgeoisie could use the existing state apparatus without 'purgation of the State apparatus' necessarily involving such a deep change as to transform it qualitatively, we must again conclude that Russia was not a workers' state. To believe that the proletariat and the bourgeoisie could use the same state machine as the instrument of their supremacy was tantamount to a refutation of the revolutionary content of the theory of the state as expressed by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky himself.

### **The Form of Property Considered Independent of the Relations of Production – a Metaphysical Abstraction**

EVERY MARXIST recognises that to consider private property independently of the relations of production, is to create a supra-historical abstraction. Human history knows the private property of the slave system, the feudal system, the capitalist system, all of which are fundamentally different from one another. Marx ridiculed Proudhon's attempt to define private property independently of the relations of production. What transforms the means of production into capital is the sum total of the relations of production. As Marx said:

In each historical epoch, property has developed differently and under a set of entirely different social relations. Thus to define

bourgeois property is nothing less than to give an exposition of all the social relations of bourgeois production. To try to give a definition of property as of an independent relation, a category apart – an abstract eternal idea-can be nothing but an illusion of metaphysics or jurisprudence. [29]

All the categories which express relations between people in the capitalist process of production – value, price, wages, etc. – constitute an integral part of bourgeois private property. It is the laws of movement of the capitalist system which define the historical social character of capitalist private property, and which differentiate it from other sorts of private property. Proudhon, who abstracted the form of property from the relations of production, ‘entangled the whole of these economic relations [the capitalist relations of production] in the general juristic conception of “property”.’ Therefore, ‘Proudhon could not get beyond the answer which Brissot, in a similar work, had already, before 1789, given in the same words: “Property is theft”.’ [30]

That one private property can have a different historical character to another, can be the stronghold of a different class than another, was made quite clear by Marx. That the same can apply to statified property also, is not so evident. This is because history in the main witnessed the class struggle on the basis of private property. Cases of class differentiation not based on private property are not very numerous and on the whole not very well known. Nevertheless they have existed.

As an example, let us take a chapter from the history of Europe: the Catholic church in the Middle Ages. The Church had tremendous tracts of land on which hundreds of thousands of peasants laboured. The relations between the Church and the peasants were the same feudal relations as existed between the feudal manor owner and his peasants. The Church as such was feudal. At the same time none of the bishops, cardinals, etc., had individual rights over feudal property. It was the relations of production which defined the class character of the Church property, which was feudal, notwithstanding the fact that it was not private.



## **The Russian Bureaucracy – a Gendarme Who Appears in the Process of Distribution?**

WE HAVE quoted Trotsky to the effect that in Russia the scarcity of goods compelled purchasers to stand in a queue and the bureaucracy's function was to control the queue. Was this the case? Did the bureaucracy appear as a gendarme only in the process of distribution, or did it appear in the process of production as a whole, of which the former was but a subordinate part? This issue is of enormous theoretical importance.

Before attempting to answer this question, let us examine what Marx thought about the connection between the relations of production and distribution. Marx wrote:

To the single individual distribution naturally appears as a law established by the society determining his position in the sphere of production, within which he produces, and thus antedating production. At the outset the individual has no capital, no landed property. From his birth he is assigned to wage-labour by the social forces of distribution. But this very condition of being assigned to wage labour is the result of the existence of capital and landed property as independent agents of production.

From the point of view of society as a whole, distribution seems to antedate and to determine production in another way as well, as a pre-economic fact, so to say. A conquering people divides the land among the conquerors establishing thereby a certain division and form of landed property and determining the character of production; or, it turns the conquered people into slaves and thus makes slave labour the basis of production. Or, a nation, by revolution, breaks up large estates into small parcels of land and by this new distribution imparts to production a new character. Or, legislation perpetuates land ownership in large families or distributes labour as an hereditary privilege and thus fixes it in castes. In all of these cases, and they are all historic, it is not distribution that seems to be organised and

determined by production, but on the contrary, production by distribution.

In the most shallow conception of distribution, the latter appears as the distribution of products and to that extent as further removed from, and quasi-independent of production. But before distribution means distribution of products, it is first a distribution of the means of production, and second, what is practically another wording of the same fact, it is a distribution of the members of society among the various kinds of production (the subjection of individuals to certain conditions of production). The distribution of products is manifestly a result of this distribution, which is bound up with the process of production and determines the very organisation of the latter. [31]

This extract from Marx, the essence of which is repeated time and time again throughout his works, is sufficient as a point of departure for the analysis of the place of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the economy.

Let us pose these questions in connection with the Russian bureaucracy:

Did the bureaucracy only administer the distribution of means of consumption among the people, or did it also administer the distribution of the people in the process of production? Did the bureaucracy exercise a monopoly over the control of distribution only, or over the control of the means of production as well? Did it ration means of consumption only or did it also distribute the total labour time of society between accumulation and consumption, between the production of means of production and that of means of consumption? Did the relations of production prevailing in Russia not determine the relations of distribution which comprised a part of them?

### **Stalinist Russia Becomes State Capitalist**

MARX'S ANALYSIS of capitalism involves a theory of the relations between the exploiters and the exploited, and among the exploiters themselves. The two main features of the capitalist mode of production are: the separation of the workers from the means of production and the transformation of labour power into a commodity which the workers must sell in order to live; and the reinvestment of surplus value – the accumulation of capital – which is forced on the individual capitalists by their competitive struggle with one another. Both these features characterised the Soviet Union during the First Five-Year Plan. The collectivisation of agriculture is closely analogous to the expropriation of the English peasantry – the enclosures which Marx analysed in *Capital* under the chapter *Primitive Accumulation of Capital*. In both cases the direct producers were deprived of the land and were therefore forced to sell their labour power. But was the Russian economy under pressure to accumulate capital? On this I wrote the following:

The Stalinist state is in the same position *vis-à-vis* the total labour time of Russian society as a factory owner *vis-à-vis* the labour of his employees. In other words, the division of labour is planned. But what is it that determines the actual division of the total labour time of Russian society? If Russia had not to compete with other countries, this division would be absolutely arbitrary. But as it is, Stalin's decisions are based on factors outside his control, namely the world economy, world competition. From this point of view the Russian state is in a similar position to the owners of a single capitalist enterprise competing with other enterprises.

The rate of exploitation, that is, the ratio between surplus value and wages ( $s/v$ ) does not depend on the arbitrary will of the Stalinist government but is dictated by world capitalism. The same applies to improvements in technique, or, to use what is practically an equivalent phrase in Marxian terminology, the relation between constant and variable capital, that is, between machinery, building, materials, etc., on the one hand, and wages

on the other (c/v). The same, therefore, applies to the division of the total labour time of Russian society between production of means of production and of means of consumption. Hence, when Russia is viewed within the international economy, the basic features of capitalism can be discerned: 'anarchy in the social division of labour and despotism in that of the workshop are mutual conditions the one of the other ...' [32]

It was during the First Five-Year Plan that the mode of production in the USSR turned capitalist. It was

now, for the first time, that the bureaucracy sought to create a proletariat and to accumulate capital rapidly. In other words, it was now that the bureaucracy sought to realise the historical mission of the bourgeoisie as quickly as possible. A quick accumulation of capital on the basis of a low level of production, of a small national income per capita, must put a burdensome pressure on the consumption of the masses, on their standard of living. Under such conditions, the bureaucracy, transformed into a personification of capital, for whom the accumulation of capital is the be-all and end-all here, must get rid of all remnants of workers' control, must substitute conviction in the labour process by coercion, must atomise the working class, must force all social-political life into a totalitarian mould. It is obvious that the bureaucracy, which became necessary in the process of capital accumulation, and which became the oppressor of the workers, would not be tardy in making use of its social supremacy in the relations of production in order to gain advantages for itself in the relations of distribution. Thus industrialisation and technical revolution in agriculture ('collectivisation') in a backward country under conditions of siege transformed the bureaucracy from a layer which is under the direct and indirect pressure and control of the proletariat, into a ruling class, into a manager of 'the general business of society: the direction of labour, affairs of state, justice, science, art and so forth.'

Dialectical historical development, full of contradictions and surprises, brought it about that the first step that the bureaucracy took with the subjective intention of hastening the building of 'socialism in one country' became the foundation of the building of state capitalism. [33]

During the First and Second Five Year Plans consumption was completely subordinated to accumulation. Thus the share of consumer goods in total output fell from 67.2 percent in 1927-28 to 39.0 percent in 1940; over the same period the share of producer goods rose from 32.8 percent to 61.0 percent. [34] This is in contrast to the period of 1921-8 when, despite the bureaucratic deformation, consumption was not subordinated to accumulation, but a more or less balanced growth of production, consumption and accumulation took place.

This analysis of Russia as bureaucratic state capitalist follows Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution in taking the capitalist world system as its basic frame of reference. If it is a step forward from Trotsky's analysis of the Stalinist regime as given in *The Revolution Betrayed* and elsewhere, it is that it tries to take account of the pressure of world capitalism on the mode of production and the relations of production prevailing in the USSR. Trotsky's explanation of the development of the Soviet Union did not reveal the dynamic of the system; it restricted itself to forms of property instead of dealing with the relations of production. It did not supply a political economy of the system. The theory of bureaucratic state capitalism tries to do both.

But let it be clear that only by standing on the shoulders of the giant, Leon Trotsky, with his theory of Permanent Revolution, his opposition to the doctrine of 'socialism in one country' and his heroic struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy can one have any grasp of the Stalinist order.

It was the opportunity of looking at the Stalinist regime years after Trotsky's death that made it possible to develop the theory of bureaucratic state capitalism. It was the transformation of Eastern

Europe into Stalin's satellites that led me to question whether Trotsky's description of Russia as a degenerated workers' state was adequate.

### **Stalin's Satellites and the Definition of Russia as a Workers' State**

THE APPEARANCE of Communist Party-controlled regimes in Eastern Europe provided the test for the definition of Russia as a workers' state.

If state property, planning and a monopoly of foreign trade defined a country as a workers' state, then without doubt Russia as well as her satellites were workers' states. This presumes that proletarian revolutions had taken place in Eastern Europe. Yet the Stalinist takeover was on the basis of national unity, governmental coalitions with the bourgeoisie and chauvinism which led to the expulsion of millions of German toilers and their families. Could such policies really oil the wheels of the proletarian revolution? If they did, then what was the future of international socialism; what was its historical justification? The Stalinist parties had all the advantages over the international socialists – the state apparatus, mass organisations, money, etc. The only advantage they lacked was an internationalist class ideology. But if it was possible to accomplish the proletarian revolution without this ideology, why should the workers move away from Stalinism?

If a social revolution took place in the East European countries without a revolutionary proletarian leadership, we must conclude that in future social revolutions, as in past ones, the masses will do the fighting but not the leading.

To assume that the satellites were workers' states means to accept that in principle the proletarian revolution was, like the bourgeois wars were, based on the deception of the people.

If the satellites were workers' states, Stalin had realised the proletarian revolution; moreover, he carried it out quite speedily. 47 years passed from the Paris Commune to the establishment of the first workers' state in a country of 140 million people. Less than 40

years passed until a number of additional countries became workers' states. Poland, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, East Germany and Czechoslovakia added their 75 million people (and this list does not include the Baltic states, Eastern Poland and Bessarabia, containing 20 million people which were annexed to the USSR.) In the East, China, with 600 million people completed the count. If these countries were workers' states then who needed Marxism or the Fourth International?

If the satellites were workers' states, what Marx and Engels said about the socialist revolution being 'history conscious of itself' was refuted. Also refuted was Engels's statement, 'It is only from this point [the socialist revolution] that men, with full consciousness, will fashion their own history; it is only from this point that the social causes set in motion by men will have, predominantly and in constantly increasing measure, the effects willed by men. It is humanity's leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom.' [35]

Rosa Luxemburg too must have spoken nonsense in her summing up of what all the Marxist teachers wrote about the place of proletarian consciousness in a revolution:

In all the class struggles of the past, carried through in the interests of the minorities, and in which, to use the words of Marx, 'all development took place in opposition to the great masses of the people', one of the essential conditions of action was the ignorance of these masses with regard to the real aims of the struggle, its material content, and its limits. This discrepancy was, in fact, the specific historical basis of the leading role' of the 'enlightened' bourgeoisie, which corresponded with the role of the masses as docile followers. But, as Marx wrote as early as 1845, 'as the historical action deepens the number of masses engaged in it must increase!' The class struggle of the proletariat is the 'deepest' of all historical actions up to our day, it embraces the whole of the lower layers of the people, and, from the moment that society became divided into classes, it is the first movement which is in

accordance with the real interests of the masses. That is why the enlightenment of the masses with regard to their tasks and methods is an indispensable historical condition for socialist action, just as in former periods the ignorance of the masses was the condition for the action of the dominant classes. [36]

### **What Prevented Trotsky from Renouncing the Theory that Russia was a Workers' State?**

ONE TENDS TO see the future in the trappings of the past. For many years the socialists who fought exploitation fought the owners of private property – the bourgeoisie. When Lenin, Trotsky and the rest of the Bolshevik leaders said that if the workers' state of Russia remained isolated it was doomed, they envisaged that doom in a definite form – the restoration of private property. State property was seen as the fruit of the struggle of working people. From here it was only one step to the conclusion that if state ownership existed in Russia it was thanks to the bureaucracy's fear of the working class (Trotsky), and conversely, if the bureaucracy strove to increase its privileges (including the right of inheritance) it strove to restore private ownership. Part experience was Trotsky's main impediment in grasping the fact that a triumphant reaction did not inevitably mean a return to the original point of departure. It could result from a decline, in spiral form, in which were combined elements of the pre-revolutionary and of the revolutionary parts. The old capitalist class content could then emerge in a new 'socialist' form, thus serving as further confirmation of the law of combined development – a law that Trotsky himself did so much to develop.

In summing up, it may be said that while Trotsky contributed incomparably more than any other Marxist to an understanding of the Stalinist regime, his analysis suffered from one serious limitation – a conservative attachment to formalism, which by its nature is contradictory to Marxism which subordinates form to content.

### **Toward the Denouement of the Stalinist Regime**



THE ASSUMPTION that the Stalinist regime was inherently superior to capitalism, that it was more progressive, was summed up in Trotsky's assertion that in Russia the productive forces developed very dynamically as against 'the stagnation and decline in almost the whole capitalist world.' [37] Of course, for a Marxist the relative progress of one regime over another is above all expressed in its ability to develop the productive forces further.

It was in line with Trotsky's statement that the Soviet regime demonstrated the ability speedily to develop the productive forces far beyond what capitalism was able to achieve that Ernest Mandel, a leading member of the Fourth International, wrote in 1956:

The Soviet Union maintains a more or less even rhythm of economic growth, plan after plan, decade after decade, without the progress of the past weighing on the possibilities of the future ... all the laws of development of the capitalist economy which provoke a slowdown in the speed of economic growth are eliminated ... [38]

In the same year, 1956, Isaac Deutscher prophesied that ten years later the standard of living in the USSR would surpass that of Western Europe!

A state capitalist analysis of the Russian regime pointed in an exactly opposite direction: the bureaucracy is, and will become, more and more an impediment to the development of the productive forces. The 1948 document, *The Nature of Stalinist Russia*, pointed out that while the bureaucracy's role was to industrialise Russia by raising the productivity of labour, in the process it entered into sharp contradictions.

The historical task of the bureaucracy is to raise the productivity of labour. In doing this the bureaucracy enters into deep contradictions. In order to raise the productivity of labour above a certain point the standard of living of the masses must rise, as workers who are undernourished, badly housed and uneducated, are not capable of modern production.

Up to a point the bureaucracy can raise the productivity of labour by coercion, but this cannot go on. Failure to raise living standards might have already been leading to a decline in the rate of productivity growth, and to jerky developments of production.' [39]

In 1964, a 100-page update to a new edition of the book on Russian state capitalism under the title *Russia: A Marxist Analysis* pointed out that the Soviet economy inherited from Stalin was more and more paralysed by elements of crisis, and became more and more of a dead weight on the development of production.

Stalin's method of approach to each new failure or difficulty was to increase pressure and terrorism. But this rigid method became not only more and more inhumane but also more and more inefficient. Each new crack of the whip increased the stubborn, even if mute, resistance of the people.

... rigid Stalinist oppression became a brake on all modern industrial progress. [40]

The book made a detailed examination of how the Stalinist regime has become a brake on all branches of the economy. We shall use some quotes from it. On the crisis in agriculture it said:

The legacy Stalin left in the countryside is an agriculture bogged down in a slough of stagnation that has lasted over a quarter of a century. Grain output in 1949-53 was only 12.8 percent larger than in 1910-14 while at the same time the population increased by some 30 percent. Productivity of labour in Soviet agriculture has not reached even a fifth of that in the United States.

This stagnation became a threat to the regime for a number of reasons. First, after the hidden unemployment in the countryside was largely eliminated, it became impossible to syphon off labour to industry on the former scale without raising labour productivity in agriculture. Secondly, it also became impossible

beyond a certain point to syphon off capital resources from agriculture to aid the growth of industry.

Stalin's method of 'primitive capital accumulation' from being an accelerator, became a brake, which slowed down the entire economy. [41]

What about industry? Although it had expanded massively over some three and a half decades, the rate of growth was distinctly declining. And productivity, which had grown more rapidly than in the West in the 1930s, was now stuck at a considerably lower level than in Russia's major rival, the United States.

At the end of 1957 the number of industrial workers in the USSR was 12 percent larger than in the USA ... Nevertheless, even according to Soviet estimates, the product turned out annually by industry in the USSR in 1956 was half that in the USA. [42]

Because of the crisis in agriculture, the lower level of productivity in industry could no longer be compensated for by a massive growth in the number of industrial workers. So the Russian bureaucracy had to pay increasing attention to the proliferation of waste and lower-quality output within the Russian economy.

Several of the sources of waste were spelt out in the book: the compartmentalism that led enterprises to produce goods internally that could be produced more cheaply elsewhere [43]; the hoarding of supplies by managers and workers [44]; the tendency of managers to resist technological innovation [45]; the stress on quantity at the expense of quality [46]; the neglect of maintenance [47]; the proliferation of 'paper work and muddle' [48]; the failure to establish the efficient and rational price mechanism which managers required if they were to measure the relative efficiency of different factories [49]. The conclusion:

If by the term 'planned economy' we understand an economy in which all component elements are adjusted and regulated into a

single rhythm, in which frictions are at a minimum, and, above all, in which foresight prevails in the making of economic decisions – then the Russian economy is anything but planned. Instead of a real plan, strict methods of government dictation are evolved for filling the gaps made in the economy by the decisions and activities of this very government. Therefore, instead of speaking about a Soviet planned economy, it would be much more exact to speak of a bureaucratically directed economy. [50]

Of course there are many accounts of inefficiencies in Russian industry. What characterised the above account was the way the waste and inefficiency were seen as the product of the state capitalist nature of the system.

What are the basic causes for anarchy and wastage in Russian industry?

... high targets of output together with low supplies – like the two arms of a nutcracker – press upon the managers to cheat, cover up production potentialities, inflate equipment and supply needs, play safe, and in general act conservatively. This leads to wastage, and hence lack of supplies and increasing pressures from above on the manager, who once more has to cheat, and so on in a vicious circle.

High targets and low supplies lead to increasing departmentalism. Again a vicious circle.

High targets and low supplies make necessary priority awareness on the part of the managers. But this priority system and 'campaign' methods, lacking a clear quantitative gauge, lead to wastage and hence to an increasing need.

All these requirements necessitate a multiplicity of control systems, which are in themselves wasteful and in their lack of

systematisation and harmony make for even further wastage. Hence the need for more control, for paper pyramids and a plethora of bureaucrats. Again a vicious circle. What has been said about a vicious circle resulting from the conflict between over-ambitious plan targets and low supply basis, applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the effect of the poor price mechanism. Thus, for instance, the poor price mechanism leads to departmentalism, priority campaigns, and a plethora of controls. And these lead to increasing faultiness of the price mechanism. Again a vicious circle ...

The great impediments on the path of lowering output targets are the world competition for power and the tremendous military expenditure. [51]

Low productivity was caused not only by mismanagement from above, but also by workers' resistance from below.

To what extent this low productivity is a result of mismanagement and blunders at the top, or of resistance of workers from below, of course cannot be estimated. The two aspects naturally cannot be divorced. Capitalism in general, and its bureaucratic state capitalist species in particular, is concerned with cutting costs and raising efficiency rather than with satisfying human needs. Its rationality is basically irrational, as it alienates the worker, turning him into a 'thing', a manipulated object, instead of a subject who moulds his life according to his own desires. That is why workers sabotage production. [52]

The chapter on Russian workers concluded with these words:

A central worry for the Russian leaders today is how to develop the productivity of the worker. Never has the attitude of the workers to their work meant more to society. By the effort to convert the worker into a cog of the bureaucrats' productive

machine, they kill in him what they most need, productivity and creative ability. Rationalised and accentuated exploitation creates a terrible impediment to a rise in the productivity of labour. The more skilled and integrated the working class the more will it not only resist alienation and exploitation, but also show an increasing contempt for its exploiters and oppressors. The workers have lost respect for the bureaucracy as technical administrators. No ruling class can continue for long to maintain itself in face of popular contempt. [53]

Bureaucratic state capitalism was sinking into a deeper and deeper general crisis. As Marx explained, when a social system becomes a brake on the development of the productive forces, the epoch of the social revolution commences.

### **Post-Mortem of the Stalinist Regime**

A POST-MORTEM reveals the deep sickness that affected a person when he was alive. The moment of death of a social order can be its moment of truth. When in the autumn and winter of 1989 the East European regimes installed by Stalin's army began to collapse, followed by the collapse of 'Communism' in the USSR itself, a clear judgment on the nature of the Stalinist regime was thereby facilitated.

The perception of the Stalinist regime as socialist, or even a 'degenerated workers' state', i.e. a transitional stage between capitalism and socialism, assumed that it was more progressive than capitalism. For a Marxist this signified first of all that it was able to develop the productive forces more efficiently than capitalism. We need only to remember Trotsky's words: 'Socialism has demonstrated its right to victory, not on the pages of *Das Kapital*, but in an industrial arena comprising a sixth part of the earth's surface – not in the language of dialectics, but in the language of steel, cement and electricity.' [54] As a matter of fact, one cannot explain the deepening crisis in Eastern Europe and USSR except by reference

to the slowing down of economic growth in the late 1970s and early 1980s leading to stagnation and a growing gap between these countries and the advanced West.

In the USSR the annual rate of growth of gross national product was as follows: the First Five Year Plan (though an exaggerated claim) – 19.2 percent; 1950-59 – 5.8 percent; 1970-78 – 3.7 percent; in 1980-82 it was down to 1.5 percent; over the last three or four years there was a negative rate of growth. [1\*]

If the productivity of labour had been more dynamic in Eastern Europe and USSR than in the West, one could not understand why the rulers of these countries eventually became enamoured with the market. Then again, the reunification of Germany should have seen the flourishing of East German industry in comparison with that of West Germany. In fact the economy of East Germany has collapsed since the unification.

The number of workers employed in East Germany in 1989 was 10 million, while now it is only 6 million. Productivity of labour in East Germany is only 29 percent of the Western level. [56] Thus the East German productivity level, though the highest in Eastern Europe, was still low compared with West Germany and other advanced economies that it now had to compete with.

If the USSR was a workers' state, however degenerated, it is obvious that if capitalism assaulted it, the workers would have come to the defence of their state. Trotsky always considered it axiomatic that the workers of the Soviet Union would come to its aid if attacked by capitalism, however corrupt and depraved the bureaucracy dominating it.

A favourite analogy of Trotsky's was between the Soviet bureaucracy and the trade union bureaucracy. There are different kinds of trade union – militant, reformist, revolutionary, reactionary, Catholic – but all are defence organisations of the workers' share in the national cake. Trotsky argued that however reactionary the bureaucrats dominating the trade unions, workers would always be 'supporting their progressive steps and ... defending them against the bourgeoisie.' [57] When it came to the crunch in 1989, the workers in Eastern Europe did not defend 'their' state. If the Stalinist

state were a workers' state one cannot explain why its only defenders were the *Securitate* in Rumania, the Stasi in East Germany, and so on, nor why the Soviet working class supported Yeltsin, the outspoken representative of the market.

If the regime in Eastern Europe and USSR was post-capitalist and in 1989 there was a restoration of capitalism, how was the restoration achieved with such astonishing ease? The events do not square with Trotsky's assertion that the transition from one social order to another must be accompanied by civil war. Trotsky wrote:

The Marxist thesis relating to the catastrophic character of the transfer of power from the hands of one class into the hands of another applies not only to revolutionary periods, when history sweeps madly ahead, but also to the period of counter-revolution, when society rolls backwards. He who asserts that the Soviet government has been gradually changed from proletarian to bourgeois, is only, so to speak, running backwards the film of reformism. [58]

The 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe were remarkable for the absence of large-scale social conflict and violence. Except for Rumania there was no armed conflict. As a matter of fact there were fewer violent clashes in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Hungary than took place between the police and striking miners in Thatcher's Britain.

The transition from one social order to another is necessarily accompanied by the replacing of one state apparatus by another. The state machine was hardly touched in 1989. The Soviet army, the KGB and the state bureaucracy are still in place. In Poland the military helped to promote the change. General Jaruzelski, the architect of the 1981 coup and the Interior Minister and chief administrator of martial law, General Kiszczak, played a crucial role in negotiating the round-table agreement with *Solidarity*, and the formation of Mazowiecki's coalition government.

If a counter-revolution took place, if a restoration of capitalism took place, there should have been a wholesale replacement of one



ruling class with another. Instead we witnessed the continuity of the same personnel at the top of society; the members of the *nomenklatura* who ran the economy, society and state under 'socialism' now do the same under the 'market'. Mike Haynes, in his very good article, *Class and Crisis – the Transition in Eastern Europe* [59] writes:

What it [the state] has succeeded in doing has been to partly shift the institutional base of its power out of a 'state pocket' and into a 'private pocket'. In the process there has been some upward mobility within the ruling class and the occasional new entrant. There has also been a change in the balance of power within the ruling class between its sections. But, contrary to those who claim that what was at stake was the substitution of the socialist mode of production ... by a capitalist society, there is no evidence that a fundamental change has taken place in the nature of the ruling class. What is striking is how little change has actually occurred. To sack a general and promote a colonel hardly constitutes a social revolution any more than selling off a state enterprise to its managers does or renationalising it with a similar group of people in control. Rather it suggests that what is at stake is an internal transformation within a mode of production, in this instance a shift in the form of capitalism from one of strong state capitalism to more mixed state and market forms. [60]

Chris Harman aptly described the development as 'moving sideways' – a shift from one form of capitalism to another, from bureaucratic state capitalism to multi-national capitalism.

Finally, if the USSR and East European countries had been in a post-capitalist economic and social order, how was it possible that a capitalist market economy could be grafted on to it. One can graft a lemon on to an orange tree, or vice versa, because both belong to the same family – the citrus; one cannot graft a potato on to an orange tree. Mike Haynes describes the process of grafting market capitalism onto the Stalinist economy with many interesting details.

It is precisely because both sides of the transition show the same structural features that individual opportunism on the scale we have analysed has been possible. We are not merely looking at class societies, but class societies rooted in a common mode of production where what has been changing has been the form rather than the essence. Unless this is understood it becomes impossible to understand how, beneath the turnover at the top, the same people, the same families, the same social networks are still toasting their good fortune in the 1990s as they had toasted in the 1980s. It is true that as they chatter and socialise they might on occasion spare a thought for some of their absent friends but they will not lose sight of the greater whole – that they are still on top despite the transition. Beneath them is the same working class, still carrying the burden of their wealth, privilege and their incompetence as it has done in the past. [61]

The people who were the real victims of the old order are now also the real victims of the new. [62]

If the expansion of the state capitalist regime into Eastern Europe raised the question of the correctness of the theory of the degenerated workers' state, the collapse of the Stalinist regime answered the question unequivocally. In both cases the theory of bureaucratic state capitalism demonstrated itself as a viable alternative.

Trotsky's work in analysing the degeneration of the Russian revolution and the rise of Stalinism as a product of the pressure of international capitalism on a workers' state in a backward country was a pioneering effort. Trotsky played a crucial role in opposing Stalin's doctrine of 'socialism in one country'. His thoroughly Marxist, historical materialist approach to the Stalinist regime was crucial to the development of the theory of bureaucratic state capitalism. It is necessary to defend the spirit of Trotskyism while rejecting some of his words.

My criticism of Trotsky's position was intended as a return to classical Marxism. Historical development – especially after Trotsky's death – demonstrated that the 'degenerated workers' state' position was not compatible with the classical Marxist tradition which identified socialism as the self-emancipation of the working class. To preserve the letter of Trotsky's writing on the Stalinist regime, the spirit of his writing had to be sacrificed.

The end of fake socialism in the USSR and Eastern Europe is opening up the opportunities for the rediscovery of the real revolutionary ideas of Lenin and Trotsky, the true legacy of the October revolution. I end this chapter with the last paragraph of my *State Capitalism in Russia*:

The class struggle in Stalinist Russia must inevitably express itself in gigantic spontaneous outbursts of millions. Till then it will seem on the surface that the volcano is extinct. Till then the omnipotent sway of the secret police will make it impossible for a revolutionary party to penetrate the masses or organise any systematic action whatsoever. The spontaneous revolution, in smashing the iron heel of the Stalinist bureaucracy, will open the field for the free activity of all parties, tendencies and groups in the working class. It will be the first chapter in the victorious proletarian revolution. The final chapter can be written only by the masses, self-mobilised, conscious of socialist aims and the methods of their achievement, and led by a revolutionary Marxist party. [63]

### Footnote

1\*. The national income of the Comecon Bloc rose annually as follows: 1951-55 – 10.8%; 1956-60 – 8.5%; 1961-65 – 6.0%; 1966-70 – 7.4%; 1971-5 – 6.4%; 1976-80 – 4.1%; 1981-85 – 3.0%; 1986-88 – 3%. [55]

## Notes

1. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.3.
2. *Ibid.*, p.125.
3. *Ibid.*, p.142.
4. *Ibid.*, pp.144-5.
5. *Ibid.*, pp.148-9.
6. *Ibid.*, p.153.
7. *Ibid.*, pp.161-3.
8. *Ibid.*, pp.181-2.
9. *Ibid.*, pp.51-2.
10. *Ibid.*, pp.221-2.
11. *Ibid.*, p.6.
12. *Ibid.*, p.8.
13. *Ibid.*, p.9.
14. *Ibid.*, p.15.
15. *Ibid.*, p.112.
16. *Ibid.*, p.113.
17. *Ibid.*, pp.251-2 K'.
18. *Ibid.*, p.248.
19. *Ibid.*, p.249.
20. *Ibid.*, p.254.
21. *Ibid.*, pp.249-50.
22. *Ibid.*, pp.287-8.
23. *Ibid.*, p.227.
24. *Ibid.*, p.229.
25. Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism*, p.17.
26. L. Trotsky, *Problems of the Development of the USSR. A Draft of the Theses of the International Left Opposition on the Russian Question*, New York 1931, p.36.
27. *New International*, April 1943.
28. *Ibid.*.
29. K. Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, London n.d., pp.129-130.
30. *Ibid.*, p.166.

31. K. Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Chicago 1918, pp.285-6.
32. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, pp.221-2.
33. *Ibid.*, pp.165-6.
34. *Ibid.*, p.47.
35. F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, London n.d., p.312.
36. Quoted by L. Laurat, *Marxism and Democracy*, London 1940, p.69.
37. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.6.
38. E. Germain, [Ernest Mandel], in *Quatrieme Internationale*, 14, 1956, Nos.1-3.
39. Cliff, *The Nature of Stalinist Russia*, pp.134-5.
40. Cliff, *Russia: A Marxist Analysis*, London 1964, pp.197-8.
41. *Ibid.*, p.198.
42. *Ibid.*, p.240.
43. *Ibid.*, p.257.
44. *Ibid.*, p.256.
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*, p.254.
47. *Ibid.*, p.257.
48. *Ibid.*, pp.248-9.
49. *Ibid.*, pp.250-4.
50. *Ibid.*, pp.273-4.
51. *Ibid.*, pp.262-3.
52. *Ibid.*, p.283.
53. *Ibid.*, pp.309-10.
54. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.8.
55. *Statisticheskii ezhegodnik stran-chlenov soveta ekonomich eskoj vzaimopomoshchi*, Moscow 1989, p.18.
56. *Financial Times*, 12 May 1992.
57. Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism*, p.31.
58. *WLT*, 1933-34, pp.102-3.
59. *International Socialism*, No.54, Spring 1992.
60. *Ibid.*, pp.46-7.
61. *Ibid.*, p.90.
62. *Ibid.*, p.69.

63. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, p.276.

## **14. Nightmare: the Moscow Trials and the Mass Purges**

### **The Kirov Assassination**

ON 1 DECEMBER 1934 Sergei M. Kirov, member of the Politburo, Secretary of the Central Committee and First Secretary of the Leningrad Party Organisation was assassinated by one Leonid Nikolaev. A few days later it was announced:

The Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR proceeded on 5 December 1934 against 71 White Guardists who were accused of preparing and organising terroristic acts against officials of the Soviet State. The court ascertained that the majority of the accused had slipped in through Poland, Latvia and Finland. They were entrusted with definite tasks in the organisation of terroristic acts. Sixty-six accused White Guardists were sentenced to be shot. The investigation against five defendants is being continued by decision of the court.

On 28 and 29 December the trial of Nikolaev and 11 others took place. Nikolaev, it was stated, had previously belonged to the Zinovievist Opposition in Leningrad in 1926. (As a matter of fact the entire Leningrad organisation of the party, with only a few exceptions, was part of the Zinoviev Opposition in 1926). In the indictment of Nikolaev, Trotsky appeared as the main culprit: it was alleged that during one of Nikolaev's visits to the Latvian consulate

the Consul gave him 5,000 roubles for expenses. Nikolaev added: 'He told me that he can establish contact with Trotsky, if I give him a letter to Trotsky from the group.' The Latvian Consul was, as a matter of fact, an agent of Hitler. Nikolaev and the other 11 accused were sentenced to death and immediately shot.

On 30 December 1934, in his article, *The Indictment*, Trotsky expressed the firm conviction that the GPU from the outset knew about the terrorist act that was being prepared against Kirov. [1] On 23 January 1935 a military tribunal condemned 12 GPU officials in Leningrad, including the chief of the GPU, F.D. Medved, and his deputy, I. Zaporozhets, to long-term imprisonment. The charge was that 'they were aware of the attempt being prepared against Kirov but showed criminal negligence in not taking the necessary security measures.' (In 1937 both Medved and Zaporozhets were executed).

Many years later, in February 1956, in his speech to the Twentieth Party Congress, Khrushchev pointed the finger at Stalin as the real author of the Kirov assassination:

It must be asserted that to this day the circumstances surrounding Kirov's murder hide many things which are inexplicable and mysterious and demand a most careful examination. There are reasons for the suspicion that the killer of Kirov, Nikolaev, was assisted by someone from among the people whose duty it was to protect the person of Kirov. A month and a half before the killing Nikolaev was arrested on the grounds of suspicious behaviour, but he was released and not even searched. It was an unusually suspicious circumstance that when the Chekist assigned to protect Kirov was being brought for an interrogation, on 2 December, 1934, he was killed in a car 'accident' in which no other occupants of the car were harmed. After the murder of Kirov, top functionaries of the Leningrad NKVD were given very light sentences, but in 1937 they were shot. We can assume that they were shot in order to cover the traces of the organisers of Kirov's killing. (*Movement in the hall*) [2]



Leon Sedov was clear about who benefited from Kirov's murder.

If Kirov's assassination helped anyone, it is certainly the Stalinist bureaucracy. Under the cover of the struggle against 'terrorists', it has stifled the last manifestations of critical thought in the USSR. It has placed a heavy tombstone on all the living. [3]

In January 1935 nineteen people, including some leading Old Bolsheviks, were put on trial: Zinoviev, founding member of the Bolshevik Party, member of the Politburo under Lenin and President of the Comintern; Kamenev, founding member of the Bolshevik Party, member of the Politburo under Lenin and Deputy to Lenin as head of the government; P.A. Zalutsky, one of the oldest worker-Bolsheviks, former member of the Central Committee and former secretary of the Leningrad Committee; G.E. Evdokimov, one of the oldest worker-Bolsheviks, former member of the Central Committee; G. Fedorov, one of the oldest worker-Bolsheviks, former member of the Central Committee and Chairman of the workers' section of the Soviet during the October revolution; G.I. Safarov, who arrived with Lenin in the sealed train, former member of the Central Committee and editor of the Leningrad *Pravda*; A.S. Kuklin, one of the oldest worker-Bolsheviks, former member of the Central Committee, and another eight Old Bolsheviks. All the accused confessed to their moral responsibility for the assassination of Kirov.

### **The August 1936 Frame-Up Trial**

THE JANUARY 1935 trial was the prologue to the major show trial of August 1936: The Case of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Centre. A number of the condemned in the first trial appeared again: Zinoviev, Kamenev, Evdokimov, Bakaev and others. The people in the dock were accused of being responsible for the assassination of Kirov and of plotting to assassinate Stalin and other Soviet leaders.

All the accused confessed to the most heinous crimes. None of their speeches could be distinguished from the speeches of the

prosecution. In their 'confessions' the defendants vied with the Prosecutor in vilifying themselves. They cursed each other as 'mad fascist dogs'. Although they had been very hostile to the Stalinist regime for years, not one now had a single word of criticism of Stalin. On the contrary, they outdid one another in praising his genius and his grand achievements for the country and for socialism. The accused, without exception, repeated that the real overlord of the terrorist conspiracy was the missing Leon Trotsky.

Vyshinsky ended his speech for the prosecution with these words: 'I demand that dogs gone mad should be shot – every one of them!' [4] After this every one of the accused stated that they would not make a speech in defence, but would avail themselves of the right to a last plea. Here again, the pleas sound more like further self-vilification. Kamenev ended his plea with these words:

Thus we served fascism, thus we organised counter-revolution against socialism, prepared, paved the way for the interventionists. Such was the path we took, and such was the pit of contemptible treachery and all that is loathsome into which we have fallen. [5]

E.S. Holtzman added:

Here in the dock beside me, is a gang of murderers, not only murderers, but fascist murderers. I do not ask for mercy. [6]

All the sixteen were condemned to death and speedily shot.

### **The Irrationality of the Trial**

NO DOCUMENTS, no material evidence, nothing written was brought before the court. No witnesses appeared either. All the evidence was confined to 'voluntary' and 'spontaneous' confessions of the invariably penitent accused. The terrible terrorists suddenly became transformed into flagellants vying with the prosecution and each other and demanding their own death sentences.

The veracity of the trial is exploded when reference is made to confessed meetings, the details of which can be verified. Thus Holtzman said in the trial

I arranged with Sedov to be in Copenhagen within two or three days, to put up at the Hotel Bristol and meet him there. I went to the hotel straight from the station and in the lounge met Sedov.

[7]

However, the GPU was careless: since 1917 there had been no Hotel Bristol in Copenhagen! The GPU was still as sloppy as it had been in the 1931 Moscow trial where a defendant confessed to meeting someone who had proof they were somewhere else at the time.

Again and again Trotsky pointed out the absurdity of the Moscow Trials of the Old Bolsheviks. For instance in an article entitled *Shame!* written on 18 December 1936 he said:

Let us ... concede the impossible. Let us concede precisely that the Trotskyists, in contradiction to their doctrine, their programme, their present writings, and their private correspondence (which is at the disposal of any honest commission of inquiry), have become terrorists – without internal struggles or splits, without the inevitable defections and denunciations. Let us admit that terrorism was necessary for them to restore capitalism. Why was this new programme accepted in silence by everyone, without reprobation, without criticism, without opposition? Let us concede further – a few absurdities more or less are of no importance – that in order to ensure the restoration of capitalism and the victory of fascism (yes, yes, even fascism), the Trotskyists signed a pact with the Gestapo and that they have been pursuing their terrorist activities at least from 1931 till the middle of 1936. Where? How? But this matters little. It all took place in the fourth dimension. They were continually trying to assassinate all the

‘leaders’, to disorganise the economy, to prepare victory for Hitler and the Mikado.

Can we take all these base absurdities for legal tender? But what do we see in the end? In the middle of 1936, the leaders of this strange tendency, accused of having taken part in these crimes, suddenly repent, all at the same time, and admit to the crimes they had committed (that is, had not committed). Each one rushes to cover himself with as much mud as he can, and each tries to drown the voice of the others in singing the praises of Stalin, whom yesterday he wanted to kill. [8]

Were the defendants completely deranged?

the accused were not satisfied with individual terror; they desired – to restore capitalism. And so strongly did they desire it that they established links with German fascism and Japanese militarism! Did they think that they and I could have leadership positions in a capitalist regime? It is hard even to phrase such a question in an intelligible way, so senseless is the political basis of the trial. [9]

And how credible is the fact that Trotsky chose five Jews, Olberg, Berman-Yudin, David, and the brothers M. Lurye and N. Lurye as his agents to deal with the Gestapo. [1\*]

Why did they confess in the Moscow Trials? First of all it is only a tiny minority of those interrogated by the GPU who broke down completely and confessed according to order. Those who refused to make the statements demanded of them were summarily shot. Walter Krivitsky, one of the top Soviet agents in the West, who broke with the Stalinist regime in 1937, remarked that ‘the real wonder is that, despite their broken condition and the monstrous forms of pressure exerted by the GPU on Stalin’s political opponents, so few did confess. For every one of the 54 prisoners who figured in the three ‘treason trials’, at least 100 were shot without being broken down.’ [11]

Still, how can one explain the cringing behaviour of some Old Bolsheviks who had not flinched in the struggle under Tsarism, who spent years in prison and Siberia? How could people like Mrachkovsky, born in prison to a revolutionary mother (and father), member of the Bolshevik Party since 1905, a very experienced and tough underground activist, and a hero of the battles of the civil war, or I.N. Smirnov, a factory worker who joined the party in 1899, was many times arrested, a hero of the civil war who ensured the victory against Admiral Kolchak and was called the 'Lenin of Siberia', and quite often referred to as the 'conscience of the party' – how could people like that become putty in the hands of Stalin and his agents? Why did such heroic figures behave so differently from the Narodnik activists who under the Tsar went to the gallows without a murmur? Why was the conduct of Mrachkovsky and Smirnov in court so radically different from the proud and defiant behaviour of Danton and Robespierre and other Jacobin leaders who went upright to the guillotine?

The Narodnik martyrs, as well as the French tribunes came directly from the combat arena; they were still at the height of their powers, they were still in the glow of the admiring masses. It was in the period of the powerful upsurge of the revolution. Zinoviev, Kamenev, Mrachkovsky, Smirnov and the others came to court after a prolonged period – more than a decade – of reaction. They went through a series of capitulations to Stalin, each act of capitulation further degrading them, sapping their confidence, their courage, eating into their nerves. To illustrate this let us make a short sketch of Zinoviev's capitulations.

On 14 November 1927 he was expelled from the Party. In December he capitulated to Stalin. On 27 January 1928 Zinoviev and Kamenev issued a statement which said: 'Outside the CPSU there is only one fate facing our Leninist ideas – degeneration and decline'. [12] In June Zinoviev and Kamenev were readmitted into the party. In October 1932 the hapless couple were expelled a second time together with a number of supporters of the Right: N.A. Uglanov, a former Secretary of the Central Committee and the Moscow Committee; M.N. Riutin, member of the Central Committee

and leader of the Moscow organisation. Riutin had written a document critical of the Stalinist policy and regime. Zinoviev and Kamenev were accused of

knowing that counter-revolutionary documents were widespread, they had preferred, rather than denounce them, to discuss this document and thus to show themselves to be direct accomplices of an anti-party, counter-revolutionary group. [13]

Just for failing to make a denunciation of Riutin, Zinoviev and Kamenev were expelled from the party and exiled from Moscow.

Six months later, in May 1933, after a further submissive statement, Zinoviev and Kamenev were once again readmitted into the party and returned from Siberian exile. The first time they capitulated, in December 1927, they still had not gone down on their knees before Stalin. Now, in May 1933, in the new recantation, they glorified Stalin's infallibility and genius.

At the Seventeenth Party Congress (January-February 1934), the 'Congress of Victors', a number of former Oppositionists – Bukharin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Lominadze, Preobrazhensky, Piatakov, Radek, Rykov and Tomsky – appeared on the platform and spoke to the Congress. Each acknowledged his past errors and ended his speech with a statement about the greatness and genius of the Leader.

Throughout 1934 articles by Zinoviev appeared regularly in *Pravda*. The most servile statement by Zinoviev was the obituary he wrote on Kirov. It was called *The Beacon Man*.

The grief of the Party is the grief of the whole people, of all the peoples of the USSR. The Party's mourning is the mourning of our whole great country ... The whole people have felt the bitterness of bereavement.

The foul murder of Sergei Mironovich Kirov has in truth roused the whole Party, the whole of the Soviet Union. The loss of this beloved and dear man has been felt by all as the loss of one who is nearest and dearest of all ...

A son of the working class – this is what this Beacon Man was ... our dear, deep, strong ... One could not help believing him, one could not help loving him, one could not help being proud of him. [14]

And a couple of months later Zinoviev confessed to ‘moral responsibility’ for the murder of Kirov!

Similarly other future victims of Stalin often had so abased themselves before Stalin in advance of their arrest that it was practically impossible for them to make up lost ground and denounce him during their trials.

For instance, a two-page article by Radek heaped sickening praise on Stalin: ‘Lenin’s best pupil, the model of the Leninist party, hone of its bone, blood of its blood’, Stalin embodied ‘the entire historical experience of the party.’ He was ‘as far-sighted as Lenin’, and so on. This article was quickly reissued as a pamphlet in 225,000 copies, an enormous figure for the time.

During the trial of Zinoviev and company, Radek wrote an article in *Pravda* entitled *The Trotskyist-Zinovievist Fascist Gang*. [15] In the same issue of *Pravda* Rakovsky demanded that Zinoviev, Kamenev and the other agents of the Gestapo should be shot. A similar bouquet of filthy accusations was poured on the heads of the defendants by Piatakov.

No less cringing was Bukharin. He ended his speech to the Seventeenth Party Congress with these words:

Hail our Party, its great fighting comradeship, the comradeship of tempered soldiers, hard like steel, revolutionaries with fortitude to win all victories under the leadership of the glorious field-marshal of the proletarian forces, the cream of the cream – Comrade Stalin. [16]

Sedov very aptly explained how the confessions were wrung from the defendants.

On the defendants' bench sat only the shadows of the Smirnov of the Civil War or the Zinoviev of the first years of the Comintern. On the defendants' bench sat broken, crushed, finished men. Before killing them physically, Stalin had broken and destroyed them morally.

Capitulation is an inclined plane: no one has yet succeeded in coming to rest on it. Once on it, you can't help but slide to the very bottom ...

The Stalinist 'art' of breaking revolutionary characters consists of going cautiously, steadily, pushing these people degree by degree, always lower and lower ... And what incentive could they have had to struggle? They had not only renounced their own ideas, but helped Stalin to drag them in the mud. If the international workers' movement had not been in such a state of collapse, these men would have undoubtedly acted differently. Isolated from the revolutionary movement, and even from the world in general, they saw only the rise and strengthening of fascism, and in the USSR the hopelessness of Stalinism. The miserable behaviour of the defendants is first of all an expression of the profound despair of people who had lost all perspective. And how could the Soviet people of today, even the best ones, not become demoralised? Have revolutionaries ever been forged in empty space? For that there must be collective work, mutual relations, links with the masses, a theoretical self-education, etc. Only in such conditions was it possible for the revolutionary and Bolshevik type to be formed. But that is the distant past. In the last ten years in the USSR, and not only there, the reverse process has taken place. [17]

Personal heroism is a social function. To go to prison and Siberia, or even the gallows under the Tsar, with the knowledge that there are people around who support you and your stand is one thing. To be completely isolated physically and spiritually is another thing. All courage is drained away. Trotsky writes:



At each new stage in the capitulation, the victims kept finding themselves with the same alternatives: either reject all the preceding denunciations and engage in a hopeless struggle with the bureaucracy – without a banner, without an organisation, without any personal authority – or sink one step lower again, by accusing themselves and others of new infamies. This was the progress into the depths! It was possible, by determining its approximate coefficient, to foresee accurately the denunciations of the subsequent stage. I did it many times in the press. [18]

Human nerves, even the strongest, have a limited capacity to endure moral torture. [19]

You know the resistance of materials; it is the same with human nature ... in order to be a hero in political activities it is necessary to have a perspective, a hope, an idea of a programme. The people who confessed had long ago lost any individual ideas. They had long ago capitulated to the bureaucracy, not once, but many times. Those on trial were isolated from the external world, they were not strong enough theoretically to analyse the situation, they lost every perspective, and it was said that the bureaucracy was victorious and then those on trial said to themselves, what can we do in this situation? Fascism has spread its power over the world, our workers are more or less disillusioned and in a depressed mood, what can we do? We are helpless; we must capitulate before the bureaucracy. They lost the small support they had before.

After their capitulation the bureaucracy said to them, it is not sufficient, friends, your capitulation, you must help us to exterminate totally all opposition. What could they do? If they refused, they were not devoted to the Soviet state and they would be shot. And then the poor isolated men said to themselves: we will sacrifice ourselves. I recognise in my capitulation that the Soviet state, as it is today under Stalin, is

the only one hope. I recognise that the Opposition has no perspective, and if I refuse to confess, it would be only because of abstract moral considerations. Then they capitulated morally just as they had done before politically. [20]

To soften Zinoviev, Kamenev and the others, five days before the trial, the government enacted a special law giving the right of appeal to those sentenced to death by a military court for terrorist crimes. Thus a flicker of hope survived in the defendants' hearts that they would be spared. They also knew that previously the government had granted clemency in trials in which the court had sentenced the accused to death (the Shakhty trial, the 'Industrial Party' trial, and the 'Menshevik Centre' trial).

However, Stalin again cheated. At 2.30 am, 24 August, the president of the Military Court, V.V. Ulrich, read the verdict condemning all the accused to be shot. The evening of the very same day the following curt official statement was issued and printed in the Soviet press the next day:

The Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR has rejected the appeal for mercy of those condemned by the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR on 24 August of this year in the trial of the united Trotskyist-Zinovievist Terrorist Centre. The verdict has been executed.

### **Further Moscow Trials**

FOLLOWING the 'Trial of the Sixteen' (Zinoviev and company) held in August 1936, there were three other well-known ones: 'The Trial of the Seventeen' (Piatakov, Radek, Sokolnikov, Muralov, Serebriakov and others) in January 1937; the secret trial of Marshal Tukhachevsky and a group of the highest Red Army generals in June 1937; and finally 'The Trial of the Twenty-One' (Rykov, Bukharin, Krestinsky, Rakovsky, Yagoda and others) in March 1938. The men in the dock included all the members of Lenin's Political

Bureau except Stalin himself. Trotsky, though absent, was the chief accused.

If the main theme of the 'Trial of the Sixteen' was that the defendants were involved in acts of terrorism against the leaders of the USSR, the 'Trial of the Seventeen' put the emphasis on their aim of restoring capitalism through acting as agents of Hitler and the Mikado, for which they offered to yield to Germany the Ukraine, and to Japan the Maritime Province and Amur region. In exchange Hitler would support a Trotsky-Zinoviev government in the USSR. Thus Piatakov stated in the court that Trotsky,

told me that he had conducted rather lengthy negotiations with the Vice-Chairman of the German National-Socialist Party – Hess ... the German fascists promised to adopt a favourable attitude toward the Trotskyite-Zinovievite bloc and to support it if it comes to power either in time of war, or before a war, should it succeed in doing so. [21]

The Jewish Communist Trotsky as Gauleiter of Hitler in the USSR!

Another element in this trial was the accusation that the defendants organised wrecking activities in a large number of enterprises and railways.

As in the 'Trial of the Sixteen', here again the only 'proof of the accusation were the confessions of the defendants. If in the 'Trial of the Sixteen' the story of Holtzman meeting Sedov in the non-existent Copenhagen Hotel Bristol had exploded the whole story, this case was shown to be nonsense when it was claimed Piatakov flew to Oslo to meet Trotsky [22]; no flight of a foreign aircraft could have taken place at the time mentioned.

The accusations in the 'Trial of the Seventeen', that the Trotskyists were engaged in massive wrecking activities, fill four fifths of the record of the court proceedings.

The bureaucratic mismanagement, the widespread underutilisation of investment, the proliferation of waste, the low quality output, disproportions and bottlenecks in production, etc., inherent in the Stalinist bureaucratic state capitalist regime, were

attributed to the wrecking activities of Trotskyist agents. As a matter of fact the report of the court proceedings of the 'Trial of the Seventeen' gives a very colourful description of the mismanagement of the economy under Stalin; industrial managers, including ministers, are scapegoated for it. The following describes an example of wrecking activities: I.A. Knyazev, chief of the South Urals railways, gave a very long list of Trotskyists who were carrying out sabotage on the railways. [23]

*Member of the Court Rychkov:* How many train wrecks were engineered by the Trotskyite organisation under your leadership?

*Knyazev:* From thirteen to fifteen train wrecks were organised directly by us.

... the increase in train wrecks was undoubtedly connected with the wrecking activities of the Trotskyite organisation in the other branches of industry as well. I remember in 1934 there were altogether about 1,500 train wrecks and accidents. [24]

These confessions of sabotage boiled down to a description of the really sorry state of the bureaucratically managed economy. As Trotsky put it in his evidence to the Dewey Commission, the counter-trial sitting in Mexico in April 1937:

The world learned, from the indictment and the proceedings, that all Soviet industry was virtually in the control of 'a handful of Trotskyites'. Nor were matters any better as regards transportation. But of what did the Trotskyite acts of sabotage really exist? In Piatakov's confessions, corroborated by the testimony of his former subordinates who sat beside him on the prisoners' bench, it was revealed that: (a) plans for new factories were too slowly drafted, and revised time and again; (b) the construction of factories took far too long, and caused the immobilisation of colossal sums; (c) enterprises were put

into operation in an unfinished state and consequently were quickly ruined; (d) there were disproportions among the various sections of new plants, with the result that the productive capacity of the factories was reduced in the extreme; (e) the plants accumulated superfluous reserves of raw materials and supplies, thus transforming living capital into dead capital; (f) supplies were widely squandered, etc. All these phenomena, long known as the chronic diseases of Soviet economic life, are now put forward as the fruits of a malicious conspiracy which Piatakov led – naturally, under my orders. However, it remains perfectly incomprehensible what, while all this went on, was the role of the state organs of industry and finance, and of the accounting authorities, not to speak of the Party, which has its nuclei in all institutions and enterprises. If one believes the indictment, the leadership of the economy was not in the hands of the ‘genial, infallible leader’, nor in the hands of his closest collaborators, the members of the Politburo and of the Government, but in the hands of an isolated man, already nine years in banishment and exile ...

The ‘Trotskyites’, we are told at every step, constitute an insignificant handful, isolated from and hated by the masses. It is for this very reason that they allegedly resorted to the methods of individual terror. The picture alters completely, however, when we come to sabotage. To be sure, a single man can throw sand into a machine or blow up a bridge. But in the court we hear of such methods of sabotage as would be possible only if the entire administrative apparatus were in the hands of the saboteurs. [25]

Piatakov, Serebriakov, Muralov, Drobnis and another nine were condemned to death while three defendants, including Sokolnikov and Radek were condemned to ten years’ imprisonment and another defendant to eight years.

## The Trial of the Generals

TOWARDS THE end of May 1937 the GPU announced that they had uncovered a conspiracy at the head of which stood Marshal Tukhachevsky, the Deputy Commissar of Defence, the moderniser and actual Commander-in-Chief of the Red Army. Also involved in the conspiracy were the outstanding Generals Iakir, Uborevich, Eideman, Kork, Putna, Feldman and Priakov, together with General Gamernik, Chief Political Commissar of the Red Army. The trial took place *in camera*, and no particulars are known except for the verdict. With the exception of Gamernik, who committed suicide, all the rest were executed. Of the four Marshals whose signatures appeared under the death sentence, Voroshilov, Budienny, Blücher and Yegorov, the last two were shortly to face the firing squad.

This was followed by widespread purges of the armed forces. Roy Medvedev records the scale of the purges in the armed forces:

3 of the 5 marshals, 3 of the 4 first-rank army commanders, all 12 of the second-rank army commanders, 60 of the 67 corps commanders, 136 of 199 division commanders, and 221 of 397 brigade commanders, both first-rank fleet admirals ... , both second-rank fleet admirals, all 6 first-rank admirals, 9 of the 15 second-rank admirals, both first-rank army commissars, all 15 second-rank army commissars, 25 of the 28 corps commissars, 79 of the 97 division commissars, and 34 of the 36 brigade commissars. There were also huge losses among the field-grade and junior officers. The shocking truth can be stated quite simply: never did the officer staff of any army suffer such great losses in any war as the Soviet Army suffered in this time of peace. [26]

## The Trial of the Twenty-One

FINALLY, IN March 1938 came the last of the much-trumpeted Moscow Trials – that of Rykov, Bukharin, Krestinsky, Rakovsky,

Yagoda and others. They were charged with belonging to a conspiratorial group named 'The Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites'.

This trial was largely a copy of the 'Trial of the Seventeen' and the 'Trial of the Sixteen'. As in the previous trials, Trotsky was again the main accused. But this time his criminal career started much earlier than previously suspected. Thus the indictment states:

The investigation has definitely established that Trotsky has been connected with the German intelligence service since 1921, and with the British Intelligence Service since 1926. [27]

Krestinsky stated in the court:

In 1921 Trotsky told me to take advantage of a meeting with Seeckt [Chief of the General Staff of the German army] during official negotiations to propose to him, to Seeckt that he grant Trotsky a regular subsidy for the development of illegal Trotskyite activities; at the same time he told me that, if Seeckt would put up a counter-demand that we render him services in the sphere of espionage, we should and may accept it. I shall speak later about the conversation I had with Trotsky when he gave me these instructions. I put the question before Seeckt and named the sum of 250,000 gold marks, that is \$60,000, a year. [28]

Trotsky at the height of his power, after winning the civil war, together with Lenin heading the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Comintern, becomes an agent of impoverished and defeated Germany, and all this for the paltry sum of 250,000 gold marks, or \$60,000 a year!

According to the evidence of Rakovsky, Trotsky headed a 'school of espionage, wrecking, treason, terrorism. We were the vanguard of foreign aggression, of international fascism, and not only in the USSR, but also in Spain, China, throughout the world.' [29]

The court verdict was: Bukharin, Rykov, Yagoda, Krestinsky, Rozengoltz and another thirteen condemned to death. D.D. Pletnev

was condemned to 25 years' imprisonment, Rakovsky to 20 years and S.A. Bessonov to 15 years.

The 'Trial of the Twenty-One' was the last show trial in the series that started with the assassination of Kirov. By the beginning of 1939 the purges had come to an end.

By the way, it is interesting that among all the documents of the Nuremberg Trial of the Nazi leaders after the war, not a single one contained as much as a hint of the alleged ties with the Trotskyists or other opposition Communists.

### **Elimination of the Old Bolsheviks**

STALIN HAD liquidated the Politburo membership, a group which directed the fate of the Russian revolution as well as of the Comintern when Lenin was alive. This body was composed as follows: Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Tomsky, Rykov and Stalin, with Bukharin as candidate. After Lenin died in 1924, Trotsky was persecuted by Stalin and finally assassinated by his agent. Zinoviev, Kamenev, Rykov and Bukharin were executed, while Tomsky committed suicide on the eve of his court case.

In Lenin's *Testament*, six men are mentioned: Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin and Piatakov, the last two as 'the most outstanding of the youth'. Four of those mentioned by Lenin were shot by Stalin, and one assassinated by Stalin's agent.

Again, of all the 21 members of the Central Committee at the time of the revolution, only two survived, Stalin and Aleksandra Kollontai.

But the purges liquidated even recent prominent supporters of Stalin. Of the 139 Central Committee members and candidates elected at the Seventeenth Party Congress (January 1934), only 21, or 15.1 percent, were re-elected at the next Congress (March 1939). Of the 1,966 delegates to the Seventeenth Congress, 1,108, or 56.4 percent, were shot over the next few years. [30]

By Trotsky's calculation, all regional party secretaries were removed and replaced by the end of 1937. [31]



But this was only the tip of the iceberg. As Roy Medvedev sums up:

the NKVD arrested and killed, within two years, more Communists than had been lost in all the years of the underground struggle, the three revolutions, and the Civil war. [32]

Roy Medvedev also writes the following:

In 1936-39, on the most cautious estimates, four to five million people were subjected to repression for political reasons. At least four to five hundred thousand of them – above all the high officials – were summarily shot; the rest were given long terms of confinement. In 1937-38 there were days when up to a thousand people were shot in Moscow alone. These were not streams, these were rivers of blood, the blood of honest Soviet people. The simple truth must be stated: not one of the tyrants and despots of the past persecuted and destroyed so many of his compatriots. [33]

In the Jacobin terror, according to the calculation of an American historian, 17,000 people were sent to the guillotine by revolutionary tribunals. Approximately the same number were condemned without a trial or died in prison. [34]

The number of people in the Gulags rose very swiftly. According to S. Swianiewicz [35], the labour force of the Gulags was:

1927	140,000
1930	1,500,000
1932	2,500,000
1936	6,500,000
1938	11,500,000

(These figures of the Gulag labour force are inflated. Compare them with the figures given in Chapter 1, subheading *Forced Labour*.)

At the beginning of the purges Stalin uttered his famous phrase: 'Life has become better, Comrades. Life has become more joyful.' [36]

### **The Historical Role of the Bloody Purges**

WHEN THE state is the repository of the means of production, when it dominates all economic, social and political activities, it is of necessity bound to attract every criticism existing in society. The state as organiser of social production becomes responsible for all failures in production, the natural butt for all discontent, the focus of social unrest. Hence the state can be either consistently democratic, or if not it has to be a strong state rising above all criticism; it has to be a totalitarian state.

When such a state, under intense pressure from world capitalism, attempts rapid industrialisation in order to catch up with rivals whose economic development is far more advanced and so has to extract a massive surplus from the labouring classes, this totalitarianism assumes monstrous proportions. This was the pattern both in Stalin's Russia and Mao's China during its Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, as well as other lesser Stalinist states. But when, as in the Khrushchev era, the process of industrialisation is essentially complete and the emphasis shifts from quantitative to qualitative development, the need for terror declines while the basically totalitarian character of the state remains.

The First Five-Year Plan, by getting rid of private farming and the NEPmen, opened the door to such a state. The forced mass collectivisation introduced massive terror, far greater than had been seen hitherto, into the social organism.

The maladministration of the economy, the waste, the disproportions between different branches of the economy, different factories, the low utilisation of capital invested, the extremely poor

quality of the products, the sacrifices, the poverty side by side with economic and social privileges – all created great tensions in society between workers and management, workers and the state, and between different sections of the bureaucracy. In an article entitled *Industrial Sabotage*, written on 26 January 1937, Trotsky explained that Stalin was looking for a scapegoat for his and the bureaucracy's mismanagement of the economy.

Any opposition to the system of work under which men are toiling is labelled sabotage by the bureaucracy. Inadequate training of engineers and workers, itself a reflection of over-eagerness to obtain huge returns on investments, has led to the deterioration of machinery, explosions in mine tunnels, numerous railroad accidents, and every kind of mishap and accident. It becomes crystal clear that all these phenomena greatly sharpen discontent among the working masses and that the bureaucracy will need a scapegoat for every crime it commits.

The GPU has distributed the catastrophes among the various defendants. In this way, the responsibility for the crimes of the bureaucracy ... once again falls on the shoulders of Trotskyism.  
[37]

Donald Filtzer describes the triangle formed by Stalin, the industrial managers and the workers thus:

Industrial managers, of course, were among the main beneficiaries of the Stalinist system and provided – together with the party bureaucracy – its main social support. Perhaps precisely for this reason they were easy scapegoats. To attack them had obvious political advantages: it fostered the illusion that the regime was defending the workers against the abuses of their superiors, whose motivations and loyalty to the 'workers' state' were always officially suspect; while at the same time it never threatened the position of managers as a group within the

emerging elite, even though the personal fortunes of individual managers could oscillate wildly. [38]

Industrial ministers, local state officials, factory managers, had to be blamed for all the difficulties: the Leader had to be raised to high Olympus.

The mass purges eliminated the great majority of industrial managers. As Roy Medvedev states:

In 1940, of 151 directors of large enterprises in the Commissariat of Ferrous Metallurgy, 62 had worked less than a year, 55 from one to two years; of 140 chief engineers, 56 had worked for less than a year. For the sake of comparison, we should note 1935, when only five directors in the entire system under the Commissariat of Heavy Industry were replaced, and only one chief engineer in Ferrous Metallurgy. [39]

Again, of railway employees in key positions on 13 November 1938, only 24 percent had been holding them for a year or more. [40]

The immediate, direct impact of the purges on industrial production in the years 1937-1940 was very severe indeed. [41]

The regime needed the purges. The person who singles out its victims and chooses their successors in office must himself be beyond its reach. He has also to be the arbiter between different sections of the bureaucracy. With power to confer life and death, while himself outside the scope of the purge, the position of the man-God is complete.

The association of Trotsky with fascism was necessary because discontented workers quite often identified with Trotsky. Thus Merle Fainsod in *Smolensk under Soviet Rule* quotes from captured GPU documents cases when even in 1936-37, at the height of the purges, workers expressed sympathy with Trotsky, and this occurred in the Smolensk province where Trotskyism was never very popular. To give a few examples:

- One worker commented on the exile of Trotsky: ‘The Party could have been mistaken in this question, for Trotsky is nevertheless an intelligent man.’ [42]
- Another worker asserted ‘that the position of the workers is growing worse, that the workers live in bad apartments and their “superiors” in good ones, that all our difficulties are the result of an incorrect policy.’ [43] Schoolchildren at a meeting to commemorate Kirov ‘proposed that Trotsky be included in the honorary presidium.’ [44] Some workers were quoted as saying, ‘Exploitation in our midst has not been eliminated; communists and engineers employ and exploit servants’. ‘The Trotskyists Kamenev and Zinoviev won’t be shot anyway – and they shouldn’t be, for they are old Bolsheviks.’ [45] To the question of an agitator as to who should be viewed as an Old Bolshevik, one worker replied: ‘Trotsky’. [46]
- Ignaz Reiss, one of the main leaders of the Soviet secret service in Europe who resigned in protest at the Moscow trials, disclosed that in 1937, when some Leningrad Young Communists who rebelled against Stalin were taken out to be shot they cried, ‘Long live Trotsky!’ [47]

The Trotskyist organisation in the USSR was effectively liquidated by the GPU. There did not even exist organised local Trotskyist groups. However, the anger and resentment against inequality, against the privileges of the bureaucracy and the suffering of the masses expressed itself in widespread, though ambivalent, sympathy for Trotsky. The Moscow trials, by their identification of Trotsky with the Gestapo, aimed to put an end to this. The heavy boot had to stamp on the symbol of resistance, to denigrate it, to abuse it. Elsewhere I wrote:

The Moscow trials were the civil war of the bureaucracy against the masses, a war in which only one side was armed and organised. They witnessed the consummation of the bureaucracy’s total liberation from popular control. [48]

Stalin crushed the people and now with the purges he was terrifying the bureaucracy itself. The bureaucracy saw in Stalin the defender of its interests against the people and therefore supported him, while resenting his whip and the way he rode roughshod over them. The purges of 1936-38 put the seal on Stalin's supremacy over the masses and over the bureaucracy.

The terror reflected the social tensions created by the forced industrialisation and made possible the replacement of the Old Bolsheviks (of all political colours) with a new generation of bureaucrats moulded in the Stalin era. The Bolsheviks who had been shaped in the struggle against Tsarism and who led the October Revolution and the civil war were liquidated. As Trotsky put it in his article *Stalinism or Bolshevism*, written on 29 August 1936, just after the 'Trial of the Sixteen':

The present purge draws between Bolshevism and Stalinism not only a bloody line but a whole river of blood. The elimination of the entire old generation of Bolsheviks, an important part of the middle generation, which participated in the civil war, and that part of the youth which took seriously the Bolshevik traditions, shows not only a political but a thoroughly physical incompatibility between Bolshevism and Stalinism. [49]

The purges completely destroyed the continuity of the revolutionary tradition and created an intellectual vacuum that would prove very difficult to fill even after Stalinism was overthrown in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The purges were also used to discredit Trotsky internationally as an agent of Hitler and the Mikado, thus putting great obstacles in the path of building the Fourth International. In his last plea at the 'Trial of the Seventeen' Radek warned the Trotskyists of Spain, France and other countries:

... we must say to the Trotskyite elements in France, Spain and other countries – and there are such – that the experience of the Russian revolution has shown that Trotskyism is a wrecker of

the labour movement. We must warn them that if they do not learn from our experience, they will pay for it with their heads.

[50] [2\*]

The Moscow trials were the springboard for the launching of the Stalin cult. It was then that it took the most extreme, Byzantine forms. Cities and towns were called after him: in 1937 there were one Stalingrad, 10 Stalinos, 4 Stalinskis, 2 Stalinskoes, 2 Stalinskis, 1 Stalinogorsk, 1 Stalin, 1 Stalinstadt, 1 Stalinabad, 1 Stalinissi, 1 Stalinir, and others.

It was just days after the 'Trial of the Sixteen' that the following song appeared in *Pravda*:

O great Stalin, O leader of the  
peoples,  
Thou who broughtest man to  
birth,  
Thou who fructifiest the earth,  
Thou who restorest the  
centuries,  
Thou who makest bloom the  
spring,  
Thou who makest vibrate the  
musical cords.

Thou, splendour of my spring, O  
Thou,  
Sun reflected by millions of  
hearts ...[55]

### **Trotsky Fights the Avalanche of Slander**

THE MONSTROUS lies, the most blatant self-accusations, the chorus of confessions, were like an unstoppable avalanche. Trotsky

stood courageously, unhesitatingly against the bloody madness of the Moscow trials. However, from the start his hands were tied.

On 26 August 1936, a day after the end of the 'Trial of the Sixteen', two Norwegian senior police officers called on Trotsky to tell him, on the order of the Ministry of Justice, that he had offended against the terms of his residence permit. The Soviet government threatened Norway with economic reprisals if Trotsky continued his stay in the country. Trygve Lie, Minister of Justice in the Norwegian Labour government, demanded a written declaration from Trotsky to the effect that henceforth he would refrain from writing about current affairs. Trotsky flatly refused. Thereupon the police put him under house arrest, forbade him to make any statement for publication, and four weeks later interned him. While hideous lies were told about him, he was unable to reply. Van Heijenoort, Trotsky's secretary at the time, wrote:

In order to refute the false accusations hurled at him from Moscow, Trotsky undertook, through his two lawyers, to institute proceedings in two or three European countries against the official Communist publications that had reproduced the calumnies. But on October 29 a special decree of the Norwegian government forbade an 'internal alien' from undertaking any court proceedings. [56]

The forced silence must have been an excruciating experience. The Stalinists made the most of the silence. Barely a fortnight after Trotsky's confinement, Vyshinsky pointed out in *Bolshevik* that Trotsky evidently had nothing to say in self-defence, or otherwise he would have spoken out. [57]

Sedov stepped into the gap. Accustomed to keep himself in his father's shadow, he came forward and wrote brilliantly for the occasion. Within a few weeks of the 'Trial of the Sixteen' he published his *Livre Rouge sur le procès de Moscou*, a brilliant factual refutation of the charges and an analysis of the social-political forces motivating Stalin to indulge in the trials.



What a relief it was for his father. Four days after Sedov's death on 16 February 1938, Trotsky wrote:

my wife and I were captives in Norway, bound hand and foot, targets of the most monstrous slander. There are certain forms of paralysis in which people see, hear, and understand everything but are unable to move a finger to ward off mortal danger. It was to such political paralysis that the Norwegian 'socialist' government subjected us. What a priceless gift to us, under these conditions, was Leon's book, the first crushing reply to the Kremlin falsifiers ... I became completely engrossed. Each succeeding chapter seemed to me better than the last. 'Good boy, Levusyatka!' my wife and I said. 'We have a defender!' How his eyes must have glowed with pleasure as he read our warm praise! Several newspapers, in particular the central organ of the Danish Social Democracy, said with assurance that I apparently had, despite the strict conditions of internment, found the means of participating in the work which appeared under Sedov's name, 'One feels the pen of Trotsky ...' All this is – fiction. In the book there is not a line of my own. Many comrades who were inclined to regard Sedov merely as 'Trotsky's son' – just as Karl Liebknecht was long regarded only as the son of Wilhelm Liebknecht – were able to convince themselves, if only from this little book, that he was not only an independent but an outstanding figure. [58]

In December 1936 Mexico granted Trotsky asylum. On the nineteenth of that month the petrol tanker *Ruth* sailed from Norway with Trotsky, Natalia and their police escort as the only passengers for Mexico, arriving on 9 January 1937. On the high seas on his way to Mexico, Trotsky was at last able to begin assembling his written refutation of the charges in the 'Trial of the Sixteen'. It was not until he reached Mexican soil that he was able to begin organising public sentiment for the creation of an international commission of enquiry to hear his side of the story and pass judgment on the guilt or innocence of the accused in the Moscow trials. Now, for eighteen

months, he had to deal with repellent filth. On 23 August 1936 he wrote: 'Now I have to spend time on the most disgusting slanders and false accusations. There is nothing to be done about it.' [59]

Hundreds of thousands of words emanated from his pen. To expose the falsity of the trial, Trotsky repeatedly demanded that the Soviet Government bring extradition proceedings against him, which would have necessitated their making a case in a Norwegian or Mexican court.

On 9 February 1937 Trotsky prepared a speech for delivery by direct telephone wire from Mexico City to the Hippodrome in New York, where a large audience awaited the sound of his voice. An unexplained hitch in the transmission lines prevented a good connection. Though he was not heard that night his speech was recorded. In it he said:

Why does Moscow so fear the voice of a single man? Only because I know the truth, the whole truth. Only because I have nothing to hide. Only because I am ready to appear before a public and impartial commission of inquiry with documents, facts, and testimonies in my hands, and to disclose the truth to the very end. *I declare: if this commission decides that I am guilty in the slightest degree of the crimes that Stalin imputes to me, I pledge in advance to place myself voluntarily in the hands of the executioners of the GPU.* That, I hope, is clear. Have you all heard? I make this declaration before the entire world. I ask the press to publish my words in the furthest corners of our planet. But if the commission establishes – do you hear me? – that the Moscow trials are a conscious and premeditated frame-up, constructed with the bones and nerves of human beings, I will not ask my accusers to place themselves voluntarily before a firing squad. No, the eternal disgrace in the memory of human generations will be sufficient for them! Do the accusers of the Kremlin hear me? I throw my defiance in their faces. And I await their reply! [60]

Trotsky made great efforts to set up Commissions of Inquiry in various countries to pass judgment on the accusations brought against him in Moscow. His efforts, however, bore practically no fruit. Sedov approached Friedrich Adler, the Secretary of the Second International, who wrote a pamphlet describing the Moscow Trials as medieval witch hunts. However, Adler could not convince the leaders of the International to take part in an inquiry or counter trial.

The International was very much under the influence of Leon Blum, who as head of the French Popular Front government, depended on Stalinist support. The Amsterdam Trade Union International also refused to participate in any commission of inquiry. The response from the intellectuals was no better. In France, Spain, Britain and the United States they were very much under Stalinist influence. Isaac Deutscher writes:

From Moscow, where the flower of Russian literature and art was being exterminated, the voices of Gorky, Sholokhov and Ehrenburg could be heard joining in the chorus that filled the air with the cry, 'Shoot the mad dogs!' In the West literary celebrities like Theodore Dreiser, Leon Feuchtwanger, Barbusse, and Aragon echoed the cry; and a man like Romain Rolland, the admirer of Ghandi, the enemy of violence, the 'humanitarian conscience' of his generation, used his sweetly evangelical voice to justify the massacre in Russia and extol the master hangman ... Where Gorky and Rolland gave the cue, hosts of minor humanitarians and moralists followed suit with little or no scruple ... In the United States, for instance, they declared a boycott on the Commission of Inquiry set up under John Dewey's auspices. They warned 'all men of good will' against assisting the Commission, saying that critics of the Moscow trials were interfering in domestic Soviet affairs, giving aid and comfort to fascism, and 'dealing a blow to the forces of progress.' The manifesto was signed by Theodore Dreiser, Granville Hicks, Corliss Lamont, Max Lerner, Raymond Robins, Anna Louise Strong, Paul Sweezy, Nathaniel West, and many professors and artists, quite a few of whom were to be in the

forefront of the anti-communist crusades of the nineteen-forties and nineteen-fifties. Louis Fischer and Walter Duranty, popular experts on Soviet affairs, vouched for Stalin's integrity, Vyshinsky's veracity, and the GPU's humane methods in obtaining confessions from Zinoviev, Kamenev, Piatakov and Radek. [61]

In Britain Bernard Shaw, along with Sidney and Beatrice Webb were apologists for the Moscow trials. H.G. Wells, whose first impulse was to support the counter-trial decided in the end to keep aloof. The Moscow trial was also supported by the Left non-CP papers, like *Tribune* and *New Statesman*. *The Observer* wrote: 'It is futile to think the trial was staged and the charges trumped up. The government case against the defendants is genuine.' [62] Even the ILP took a very equivocal position on the Moscow trials. [63]

At last on 10 April 1937 a Commission of Inquiry was assembled, chaired by John Dewey, America's leading philosopher and educationist. The Commission proceedings lasted a full week and took up thirteen long sessions. John Dewey, John F. Finerty (former counsel for Saccho and Vanzetti and also for Tom Mooney, now acting as counsel for the Dewey Commission), Albert Goldman, Trotsky's lawyer and others, cross-examined Trotsky on every detail of the charges brought in the Moscow trials. At times the cross-examination turned into a political dispute, when some of the examiners ascribed to Bolshevism the responsibility for Stalinism, and Trotsky refuted these aspersions. There was not a single question he tried to avoid.

During the long examination Trotsky went through his basic ideas on Soviet affairs and the international communist movement. His closing speech covers 126 pages, about 60,000 words. This was especially impressive as he chose to speak English, a language he was far less fluent in than German or French, not to say Russian. He ended with a paean to the October revolution and communism:

The experience of my life, in which there has been no lack either of successes or of failures, has not only not destroyed my faith

in the clear, bright future of mankind, but, on the contrary, has given it an indestructible temper. This faith in reason, in truth, in human solidarity, which at the age of eighteen I took with me into the workers' quarters of the provincial Russian town of Nikolaev – this faith I have preserved fully and completely. It has become more mature, but not less ardent. [64]

Dewey at first intended to have a summing up of his own at the end of the inquiry. But he changed his mind after hearing Trotsky's closing speech. 'Anything I can say,' he said, 'will be an anti-climax'. [65]

In September the Dewey Commission concluded its deliberation and passed a verdict: 'On the basis of all evidence ... we find that the [Moscow] trials of August 1936-January 1937 were frame-ups ... we find Leon Trotsky and Leon Sedov not guilty.' [66]

Tragically the Dewey Commission Report's impact was practically nil. It was like taking a pea shooter to shoot an elephant. Typically, seven days after the Dewey Commission verdict, Moscow announced the summary execution of eight people: seven members of the Council of Foreign Affairs, and A.V. Enukidze, for 15 years secretary of the Central Soviet Executive.

However fraudulent and irrational the Moscow trials, it seems a rational argument was not enough to expose them. A massive irrationality, madness, made people on the left everywhere ready to trust Stalin and reject Trotsky, even if the former was spreading monstrous lies and the latter veracity itself.

One can explain rationally why millions of workers and intellectuals and workers round the world believed in Stalin. That does not mean that this belief was rational. Stalinism was a blind faith, practically a religious faith. The victory of Hitler and the agonies gripping millions was the root cause of this faith. Marx's words about religion aptly describe the dedication of millions to Stalin: 'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.'

In the face of Hitler's mighty forces only Stalin and the Red Army looked like a realistic alternative. Any criticism of the latter appeared

as a stab at the only consolation existing for anti-fascists.

There are situations in which slanders do not stick, but on the contrary boomerang against the slanderers. This was the case in July 1917 when the bourgeois press accused Lenin and Trotsky of being agents of the Kaiser. A rising, confident working class strove for the truth. Now, the far more monstrous lies about Trotsky being an agent of Hitler and the Mikado did stick. The Moscow trials set the seal on the isolation of the Trotskyists and thus added to the sinking of revolutionary hopes in Spain and France.

### **Trotsky's Family Engulfed by the Purges**

AFTER A SESSION of the Politburo in 1926, in which Trotsky stated that Stalin had finally presented his candidacy for the role of 'gravedigger of the Party and the revolution', Piatakov told Trotsky: '... he [Stalin] will never forgive you for that – neither you, nor your children, nor your grandchildren.' Now the prophecy came true. A graphic description of the fate of Trotsky's family is given in an article by Valery Bronstein, the grandson of Trotsky's elder brother Alexander, *Stalin and Trotsky's Relatives in Russia*. [67]

To recap: Trotsky's first wife, Alexandra Lvovna Sokolovskaia, was arrested in Leningrad in 1935, exiled to Siberia, and shot in 1938. Trotsky's elder brother, Alexander, was shot in 1938; he was never involved in any political activity. Trotsky's younger sister, Olga, was exiled in 1935 and shot in 1941.

Of Alexander's children: Matilda was sent to a concentration camp where she died in 1952; Boris was shot in 1937; Lev died immediately after returning from the Gulag in Vorkuta – he was never involved in any political activity; Evgenia was exiled to Kazakhstan and died many years later from an illness – she was never involved in any political activity; Anna was exiled to Kazakhstan and survived – she was never involved in any political activity. Trotsky's elder sister, Elizaveta, died naturally in 1924. Her son Lev was imprisoned, then exiled to Kazakhstan but survived – he was never involved in political activity. The fate of the children of Olga, Trotsky's younger

sister, was as follows: Alexander was shot in 1937, aged 29; Yury was shot in 1936 (aged 20). Both were never involved in political activity.

The fate of Trotsky's own children, was as follows: Zina, deprived of Soviet citizenship and thus unable to return to her daughter and husband who was incarcerated in a labour camp, committed suicide in 1933. Trotsky's second daughter, Nina, died from consumption in Moscow in 1927, shortly after her husband was arrested. Trotsky's youngest son, Sergei, was arrested in 1935 and shot in 1937, aged 29 – he was never involved in political activity. Trotsky's oldest son, Lev Sedov, was murdered by Stalin's agents in Paris in 1938 (aged 32).

Of the above fifteen people, only six were ever engaged in political activity. The rest were not saved by the fact that they were not involved. It was enough to be related to Trotsky for Stalin's revenge to take its toll.

Horror without end!

## Footnotes

1\*. By the way, N. Lurye manages to get himself sent into Russia by the Gestapo in April 1932, [10] i.e., some eleven months before the Nazis came to power and established the Gestapo!

2\*. A large number of Communist leaders living in the USSR were liquidated during the purges: thus the veteran Hugo Eberlein, the German delegate to the founding congress of the Comintern; Heinz Neumann, former member of the KPD's Politburo; Hermann Remmele, Fritz Schulte and Hermann Schubert, also members of the German KPD Politburo:

Other prominent German victims included Hans Kippenberger, head of the Party's military apparatus, Leo Flieg, the organisational secretary of its Central Committee, Heinrich

Süsskind and Werner Hirsch, editors-in-chief of *Rote Fahne*, together with four of their assistant editors.

After the Nazi-Soviet pact, in 1939, about 570 German Communists were assembled in the Moscow prisons. A number of them were sentenced by the Russians, but the majority were told that they had been judged by a Special Commission of the NKVD and expelled as undesirable aliens. These German Communists ... included Jews and men especially wanted by the Nazis ... [51]

Many leaders of the Hungarian Communist Party were liquidated, including Bela Kun, the leader of the 1919 Communist revolution in Hungary, and twelve other People's Commissars of the Hungarian Soviet government. [52]

All twelve members of the leadership of the Polish Communist Party present in the USSR were executed, together with hundreds of other members of the Polish party. [53]

Leaders of the Yugoslav, Finnish and Rumanian Communist Parties were also liquidated. [54]

## Notes

1. *WLT*, 1934-35, pp.132-7.

2. N.S. Khrushchev, *Secret Address to the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, in HM Christman, editor, *Communism in Action. A Documentary History*, New York 1969, p.177.

3. L. Sedov, *The Red Book on the Moscow Trial*, London 1980, p.63.

4. *Report of the Court Proceedings in the Case of the Trotskyite Zinovievite Terrorist Centre*, Moscow 1936, p.164.

5. *Ibid.*, p.170.

6. *Ibid.*, p.172.

7. *Ibid.*, p.100.



8. *WLT*, 1935-36, p.499.
9. *WLT*, 1936-37, p.144.
10. *Report of the Court Proceedings in the Case of the Trotskyite Zinovievite Terrorist Centre.*, pp.102-3.
11. W.G. Krivitsky, *I was Stalin's Agent*, London 1939, p.212.
12. *Pravda*, 27 January 1928.
13. *Ibid.*, 11 October 1932.
14. Quoted by Vyshinsky in *Report of Court Proceedings in the Case of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Centre*, pp.135-6.
15. *Pravda*, 21 August 1936.
16. *Semnadtsatii Sezd VKPb*, Moscow 1934, p.129.
17. Sedov, pp.37-8.
18. *WLT*, 1936-37, p.59.
19. *Ibid.*, p.97.
20. *Ibid.*, p.365.
21. *Report of Court Proceedings in the Case of the Anti-Soviet Trotskyite Centre*, Moscow 1937, p.64.
22. *Ibid.*, p.60.
23. *Ibid.*, p.365.
24. *Ibid.*, p.371.
25. *The Case of Leon Trotsky*, London 1937, pp.503-5.
26. R. Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, Nottingham 1972, p.213.
27. *Report of the Court Proceedings in the Case of the Anti-Soviet 'Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites'*, Moscow 1938, p.6.
28. *Ibid.*, pp.259-60.
29. *Ibid.*, p.296.
30. Khrushchev's secret speech to the Twentieth Congress.
31. *Biulleten Oppozitsii*, No.70, October 1938, p.11.
32. R. Medvedev, p.234.
33. *Ibid.*, p.239.
34. *Ibid.*
35. S. Swianiewicz, *Forced Labour and Economic Development*, London 1965, pp.36-7.
36. *Speech at the First All-Union Conference of Stakhanovites*, 17 November 1935, in J. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism*, Moscow 1953, p.670.

37. *WLT*, 1936-37, p.150.
38. Filtzer, p.196.
39. Medvedev, p.230.
40. B.G. Katz, *A Quantitative Evaluation of the Economic Impact of the Great Purges on the Soviet Union*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Pennsylvania 1973, pp.9-10.
41. *Ibid.*
42. M. Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule*, London 1959, p.212.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*, p.302.
45. *Ibid.*, p.322.
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Biulleten Oppozitsii*, Nos.60-61, December 1937, p.12.
48. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, p.195.
49. *WLT*, 1936-37, p.423.
50. *Report of Court Proceedings in the Case of the Anti-Soviet Trotskyite Centre*, p.550.
51. R. Conquest *The Great Terror*, London 1968, pp.576-8.
52. *Ibid.*, pp.579-80.
53. *Ibid.*, p.584.
54. *Ibid.*, pp.581-2.
55. *Pravda*, 28 August 1936.
56. Van Heijenoort, p.91.
57. *Bolshevik*, 15 September 1936, in Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, p.343.
58. *WLT*, 1937-38, p.174.
59. *WLT*, 1935-36, p.410.
60. Trotsky, *I Stake My Life!* in *Leon Trotsky Speaks*, New York 1972, p.280.
61. Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, pp.367-8.
62. *The Observer*, 23 August 1936, quoted in S. Bornstein and A. Richardson, *Against the Stream*, London 1986, p.218.
63. *Ibid.*, pp.222-8.
64. *The Case of Leon Trotsky*, pp.584-5.
65. *Ibid.*, p.585.

66. *Not Guilty!, Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Charges made against Leon Trotsky in the Moscow Trials.*

67. T. Brotherstone and P. Dukes, editors, *The Trotsky Reappraisal*, Edinburgh 1992, pp.8-15.

## 15. Sliding Towards the Second World War

A VICTORY of the Spanish proletariat could have produced a great revolutionary movement in France, where massive strikes and factory occupations were taking place. A victory of the proletariat in both Spain and France would have radically changed the whole world situation. Alas, the policy of the Stalinist parties led to massive defeats of the proletariat, further debilitating the international working class after catastrophes in Germany and Austria. From now on the road was steeply downwards. The Second World War was unavoidable.

Trotsky made a massive effort to prepare his supporters and the working class movement for the crucial test of war, to reinforce their internationalism. He masterfully rejected all the bogus Social Democratic and Stalinist justifications for the war. His starting point was the imperialist nature of the war: it was the product of 'the same causes, inseparable from modern capitalism, that brought about the last imperialist war.' [1]

In the *Manifesto of the Fourth International on the Imperialist War and the Proletarian World Revolution*, May 1940, Trotsky wrote:

The present war – the second imperialist war – is not an accident; it does not result from the will of this or that dictator. It was predicted long ago. It derived its origin inexorably from the contradictions of international capitalist interests ...

The immediate cause of the present war is the rivalry between the old wealthy colonial empires, Great Britain and France, and the belted imperialist plunderers, Germany and Italy. [2]

What about the role of US imperialism?

US capitalism is up against the same problems that pushed Germany in 1914 on the path of war. The world is divided? It must be redivided. For Germany it was a question of 'organising Europe'. The United States must 'organise' the world. History is bringing humanity face to face with the volcanic eruption of American imperialism. [3]

Against 'national defence' Trotsky argued:

Almost a hundred years ago when the national state represented a relatively progressive factor, the *Communist Manifesto* proclaimed that the proletarians have no fatherland. Their only goal is the creation of the toilers' fatherland embracing the whole world ...

The struggle of the imperialist bandits leaves as little room for independent small states as does the vicious competition of trusts and cartels for small independent manufacturers and merchants ...

Official patriotism is a mask for the exploiting interests. Class conscious workers throw this mask contemptuously aside. They do not defend the bourgeois fatherland, but the interests of the toilers and the oppressed of their own country and of the entire world. The theses of the Fourth International state:

'Against the reactionary slogan of "national defence", it is necessary to advance the slogan of the revolutionary destruction of the national state. To the madhouse of capitalist Europe it is necessary to counterpose the programme of the Socialist United States of Europe as a stage on the road to the Socialist United States of the World.' [4]

Against 'defence of democracy' Trotsky writes:

No less a lie is the slogan of a war for democracy against fascism. As if the workers have forgotten that the British government helped Hitler and his hangman's crew gain power! The imperialist democracies are in reality the greatest aristocracies in history. England, France, Holland, Belgium rest on the enslavement of colonial peoples. The democracy of the United States rests upon the seizure of the vast wealth of an entire continent. All the efforts of these 'democracies' are directed toward the preservation of their privileged position. [5]

We do not forget for a moment that this war is not our war. In contradiction to the Second and Third Internationals, the Fourth International builds its policy not on the military fortunes of the capitalist states but on the transformation of the imperialist war into a war of the workers against the capitalists, on the overthrow of the ruling classes of all countries, on the world socialist revolution. [6]

At the same time Trotsky did not give up his stance of defending the USSR as a workers' state, though degenerated. But even here he did not give any concession to Stalin.

The Fourth International can defend the USSR only by the methods of revolutionary class struggle ...

The defence of the USSR coincides in principle with the preparation of the world proletarian revolution.

The defence of the USSR was not separated from 'the revolutionary overthrow of Stalin's Bonapartist clique'. [7]

Trotsky argued that the Munich Agreement between Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler and Mussolini (September 1938) hastened the outbreak of war. So did Franco's victory in Spain, as it freed the bourgeois governments from the fear of revolution in Europe. It was in these circumstances that on 22 September 1938 Trotsky prophesied the Hitler-Stalin pact – i.e., eleven months before

it came into existence. In an article entitled *After the Collapse of Czechoslovakia Stalin will Seek Accord with Hitler*, Trotsky wrote:

The collapse of Czechoslovakia is the collapse of Stalin's international policy of the last five years. Moscow's idea of 'an alliance of democracies' for a struggle against fascism is a lifeless fiction. No one wants to fight for the sake of an abstract principle of democracy. All are fighting for material interests. England and France prefer to satisfy the appetites of Hitler at the expense of Austria and Czechoslovakia rather than at the expense of their colonies ...

The terrific blow at the international position of the USSR is the pay-off for the continuous bloody purge, which beheaded the army, disrupted the economy and revealed the weakness of the Stalinist regime. The source of the defeatist policy rests in the Kremlin. We may now expect with certainty Soviet diplomacy to attempt rapprochement with Hitler at the cost of new retreats and capitulations, which in their turn can only bring nearer the collapse of the Stalinist oligarchy.

The compromise over the corpse of Czechoslovakia does not guarantee peace in the least but only creates a more favourable basis for Hitler in the coming war. Chamberlain's flights in the sky will enter into history as a symbol of those diplomatic convulsions which divided, greedy, and impotent imperialist Europe passed through on the eve of the new slaughter which is about to drench our whole planet in blood. [8]

In fact, since 1933 Trotsky had argued that Stalin's enthusiasm for alliance with democratic governments was very much an opportunist manoeuvre, that he was at the same time searching for an agreement with Hitler. To support this argument, Trotsky, in his appearance before the Dewey inquiry in April 1937 quoted from *Izvestia* of 15 March 1933:

The USSR is the only state which is not nourished on hostile sentiments towards Germany and that, independent of the form and the composition of the government of the Reich. [9]

The Hitler-Stalin Pact was concluded on 22 August 1939. On 1 September Germany invaded Poland. Now Stalinist propaganda changed 180 degrees. With real disgust Trotsky wrote:

*Pravda* of September 14 accuses Poland of oppressing the Ukrainians, White Russians, and Jews. The accusations by themselves are true. But isn't it astounding that *Pravda* remembered them precisely now when Poland is drenched with blood under the blows of the German army! [10]

From the time of the Stalin-Hitler pact until 22 June 1941, when Germany invaded the USSR, the international Stalinist press was full of attacks on British imperialism's oppression of India, Egypt, and so on, while oblivious to the horrors perpetuated by the Nazis.

#### **Headquarters of the Fourth International Transferred to the United States**

THE FOUNDING Conference of the Fourth International in September 1938 adopted the proposal that in case of an outbreak of war the Executive Committee of the International would be transferred to the United States. The proposal went into effect as the war started. A resident committee composed of the members of the International Executive Committee was established in New York.

Since coming to Mexico in January 1937 Trotsky was far more involved in the affairs of his followers in the United States than he had ever been in those of any other country. He was always ready to advise, criticise and settle disputes among the American Trotskyists. Emissaries travelled frequently between New York and Mexico City. Contact was also facilitated by the circumstance that Trotsky's secretaries and bodyguards were nearly all Americans.



The American Trotskyist organisation was by far the strongest section of the International. The minutes of the founding conference reported that the American section claimed 2,500 members (this was probably exaggerated), while all other sections were far smaller. [11]

The American labour movement was also far less the victim of terrible defeats and catastrophes than the European. As a matter of fact the years 1934-37 saw the rise of a combative, if politically quite undeveloped, trade union movement. New militancy spread in unorganised industries such as steel, rubber, and crucially, auto production. The leaders of the American Federation of Labor, who refused to organise the unskilled in these industries, were pushed aside. These were the years of the magnificent wave of mass industrial action, and widespread sit-down strikes organised by the Congress of Industrial Organisations.

The social composition of the American Socialist Workers Party was also far more proletarian than other sections of the Fourth International. The calibre of its proletarian leadership was demonstrated brilliantly in the 1934 Minneapolis teamsters' strike, 'one of the finest pages in the history of the American struggle.' [12] The organisation and leadership of the strike was of a very high political level. The story of the strike is graphically described by one of its leading participants, Farrell Dobbs. [13]

The Minneapolis teamsters' strike was a precursor of the great movement of the CIO two to three years later. When this movement took place it became clear that even if the Trotskyist movement was stronger in the US than in Germany, France or Spain, it was still very much weaker than the Stalinist Party. On 30 June 1937 the membership of the US Communist Party was 48,223. [14] This was many times greater than the membership of the SWP.

Even more decisive was the influence of the Communist party on the working class. This party produced by far the largest number of courageous organisers in the early days of the CIO. The historian Daniel Guerin reports:

It is estimated that in mid-1937 the Communists had total or partial control of about forty per cent of the CIO's International

... In addition, they controlled the most important local union coalitions (New York, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, etc.). [15]

At the time the CIO was expanding massively through the big sit-down strikes of 1936-37, the Trotskyists were absorbed in entry tactics into the Socialist Party, an organisation which was out of touch with the industrial struggle. This did not improve the position of American Trotskyism vis-a-vis Stalinism. As a matter of fact even the social composition of the Trotskyist organisation was not helped by entry into the Socialist Party. It is true there were good proletarian elements in the Trotskyist organisation, especially in Minneapolis, but the organisation as a whole was far from being proletarian in composition. On 10 October 1937 Trotsky wrote to James P. Cannon:

The party has only a minority of genuine factory workers ... The non-proletarian elements represent a very necessary yeast, and I believe that we can be proud of the good quality of these elements ... But ... our party can be inundated by non-proletarian elements and can even lose its revolutionary character. [16]

The danger of degeneration of the SWP was especially great in New York, where the membership was practically entirely petty bourgeois. Here they were very much involved in the milieu of the New York intellectuals and were therefore heavily influenced by the evolution of these towards 'liberal anti-communism.' [17] These intellectuals were demoralised by the horrors of the Moscow Trials, the international isolation of Trotskyism and strength of Stalinism. They became more and more victims of hysterical Stalinophobia, akin to reactionary anti-communism. Individuals like Sidney Hook, who broke with Trotskyism in 1936, established a pattern which many other intellectuals were to follow. This was described very well in an article entitled *Intellectuals in Retreat* written by the editors of the SWP theoretical journal, James Burnham and Max Shachtman. With

astonishing foresight the article describes the dynamics that would soon overwhelm the current generation of intellectuals and, not long after, engulf the authors of the article themselves. The retreat of the intellectuals began with a criticism of Marxist philosophy and dialectics in particular as being 'fatalistic'. It continued with an equation being made between Stalinism and Leninism, with Leninism being presented as favouring a one-party, totalitarian dictatorship. The logical conclusion was: that Trotskyism equals Stalinism, and there was a need to maintain 'freedom' and 'democracy'. The article showed: 'The main disease from which these intellectuals suffer may be called Stalinophobia, or vulgar anti-Stalinism'. This was an illness caused 'by the universal revulsion against Stalin's macabre system of frame-ups and purges, and the result has been less a product of cold social analysis, it is moral rather than scientific and political.' This article was published in January 1939. Ironically, eight months later, with the Hitler-Stalin pact and the start of the war, the same Stalinophobia overtook Burnham and Shachtman themselves.

Early in September 1939 Burnham submitted to the National Committee of the SWP a statement that 'it is impossible to regard the Soviet Union as a workers' state in any sense whatever.' A few weeks later Shachtman branded the Soviet Union's occupation of Eastern Poland as 'imperialist' and urged the party to disavow Trotsky's position of defence of the USSR.

A national conference of the SWP on 5-9 April 1940 rejected the Shachtman-Burnham position, after which the minority split and formed a new organisation, the Workers Party. Burnham's move towards the theory of the managerial revolution, and Shachtman's towards Bureaucratic Collectivism, facilitated their adoption of a hard Stalinophobic anti-communism.

Burnham moved at lightning speed away from Marxism. One month after the formation of the Workers Party, on 21 May 1940, Burnham wrote a letter of resignation from the Workers' Party, in which he states

by no stretching of terminology can I any longer regard myself, or permit others to regard me, as a Marxist ...

On the grounds of beliefs and interests (which are also a fact) I have for several years had no real place in a Marxist party.

Socialism was purely utopian, unrealisable.

I consider that on the basis of the evidence now available to us a new form of exploitive society (what I call 'managerial society') is not only possible as an alternative to capitalism, but is a more probable outcome of the present period than socialism.

Burnham then gave an explanation of the social causes that led him away from Marxism:

It will be thought and said by many that my present beliefs and the decision which follows from them are a 'rationalisation' of, on the one side, the pressure of a soft and bourgeois personal environment, and, on the other, the influence of the terrible defeats of labour, and mankind, during the past twenty years, and of the war crisis.

... It is certainly the case that I am influenced by the defeats and betrayals of the past twenty and more years. These form part of the evidence for my belief that Marxism must be rejected: at every single one of the many tests provided by history, Marxist movements have either failed socialism or betrayed it.

[18]

Burnham continued to move to the right very speedily. In 1941 he published his book, *The Managerial Revolution*, which argued that various forms of a new post-capitalist 'managerial society' existed in the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany and the United States, as embodied in Roosevelt's New Deal. In 1945 Burnham proclaimed that Leninism was the father of Stalinism. Soon after he was advocating that the

Western powers launch a preventive atomic war against the USSR.  
[19]

Shachtman followed the same path as Burnham, but much less speedily. Shachtman was a veteran of the American Communist Party and the world Trotskyist movement. His first meeting with Trotsky dated back to a visit to Prinkipo in 1929. Since then many meetings took place between the two. Their correspondence is very large. In the fight between the two factions in the Socialist Workers Party Trotsky sided with Cannon, but he still felt personally very friendly to Shachtman. At the height of the controversy he wrote to Shachtman:

If I had the possibility I would immediately take an aeroplane to New York City in order to discuss with you for 48 or 72 hours uninterruptedly. I regret very much that you don't feel in this situation the need to come here to discuss the questions with me. Or do you? I should be happy ... [20]

Shachtman ended by supporting the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, American intervention on South Vietnam and the bombing of North Vietnam. Further, he supported Richard Nixon for President.

The adherence to the theory of Russia as 'bureaucratic collectivist' facilitated Shachtman's slide towards capitalism and imperialism. Shachtman never published a developed account of the theory. It is true that he wrote hundreds of pages of criticism of the theory that Stalinist Russia was a socialist country or a workers' state of any sort. But he wrote scarcely a paragraph on the laws of motion of the 'Bureaucratic Collectivist' economy, and made no analysis at all of the specific character of the class struggle within it. The place of Bureaucratic Collectivist society in the chain of historical development is not clearly stated, and, in any case, Shachtman's account is often inconsistent. Hence he could say on one occasion that Bureaucratic Collectivism was more progressive than capitalism (however unprogressive it was compared with socialism), and, a few years later, that it was more reactionary than capitalism. In 1941 Shachtman wrote:

From the standpoint of socialism, the bureaucratic collectivist state is a reactionary social order; in relation to the capitalist world, it is on an historically more progressive plane.

On the basis of this, a policy of 'conditional defensism' was recommended. But a few years later Shachtman declared that the Stalinist regime was a 'new barbarism' – more reactionary than capitalism. [1\*]

Nonetheless, unlike Burnham, Shachtman did try for many years to build an organisation on a revolutionary basis.

Burnham and Shachtman were not on their own in turning into avid supporters of American imperialism. To give a few examples. Max Eastman was close to Trotsky from the early 1920s. In 1925 he published *Since Lenin Died*, championing Trotsky. A year later he published the biography, *Leon Trotsky: Portrait of a Youth*. Max Eastman translated Trotsky's *The Real Situation in Russia*, *The History of the Russian Revolution* and *The Revolution Betrayed*. In 1933 he wrote to Trotsky:

I supported every step taken by the Bolshevik Party and by you and Lenin from the seizure of power and the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly to the condemnation of the Social Revolutionaries. I was for six years alone in America in supporting the Left Opposition. I was the Left Opposition. [21]

In 1940 Eastman, in his book, *Stalin's Russia and the Crisis in Socialism* argued that Stalinism was the logical product of Leninism. After that he became completely opposed to socialism, ending his life as editor of the extreme right wing *Readers' Digest*. Sidney Hook who, like Eastman, had never really been a part of the organised Trotskyist movement, also surrendered to US imperialism. In 1934 he wrote an article entitled *Why I am a Communist*. 20 years later he stated: 'Communism ... is the greatest menace to human freedom in the world today.' He unashamedly called upon university administrators to enforce 'a policy of exclusion of the Communist Party and similar groups' from teaching in schools and universities.

Two decades later he campaigned for Richard Nixon, and in 1980 he proudly endorsed Ronald Reagan, who in turn sent warm greetings to Hook's eightieth birthday party in the autumn of 1982. [22]

Supporters of Trotsky and Cannon during the 1939-40 dispute in the SWP were also not immune from sliding very much to the right. By and large the social composition of the Cannon group was more proletarian than that of the Shachtman group. But Trotsky (and Cannon) exaggerated the significance of this for a small organisation of a few hundred members. What applies to a mass party does not apply to a propaganda group. When Marxism appeared in Russia in the 1880s, for over a decade it encompassed practically only intellectuals and even at the beginning of the twentieth century these elements made up a large proportion of organised Marxists. Social composition was not the decisive factor for its progress. However, for a mass party its social composition is much more significant. [2\*] The bourgeois milieu of individual leaders of the SWP, and the failure of Trotsky's prognoses based on the concept of Russia as a 'degenerated workers' state' facilitated the move to the right.

The fate of Goldman and Morrow, supporters of Cannon in the 1940 split, is instructive. Albert Goldman was Trotsky's attorney during the Dewey investigation and was for many years in the Trotskyist movement. In February 1950 Goldman declared himself a 'right-wing socialist'. In 1952 he confessed that he had collaborated with the FBI. His anti-communism became so strong that 'if I were younger I would gladly offer my services in Korea, or especially in Europe where I could do some good fighting the Communists.' [23]

No less sad was the fate of Felix Morrow, the veteran Trotskyist and author of the excellent book *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*.

Soon Morrow became more immersed in Cold War anti-communist activity than Goldman. Although he insisted that he only informed on Communists, he found it difficult to draw the line. Files obtained under the Freedom of Information Act disclosed that he may have given some information about the Socialist Workers Party as well. In addition, he began collaborating with the Central Intelligence Agency. [24]

The list of former Trotskyists who in their Stalinophobia turned into hard-line Cold War liberals is much longer.

But let us go back to the 1940 split in the SWP. Trotsky believed that after the exit of 'petty bourgeois and careerist elements' the SWP would strike deeper roots in the American working class. But this did not happen. Instead the split in the SWP weakened it radically. About 40 percent of the membership left, as well as virtually the entire youth group. In 1942 the SWP was said to have 645 members (while the Workers Party was a couple of hundred less). [25]

Trotskyist groups in other countries were also affected by the split in the SWP, especially in France, where a number of members accepted Shachtman's views. The split in the SWP led to the collapse of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International. Most of the resident members of the committee supported the Burnham-Shachtman faction in opposition to Trotsky who found himself in 1940 with far less supporters than he had had at any time during the 1930s.

### **Courage Without Equal**

THE PERIOD covered in this volume has been a very dark and long one. Trotsky's agony was extreme. While never affected by self-pity, the hurt of Sedov's death in the midst of the most terrible period of his life was excruciating, as can be seen from the obituary he wrote four days after his death entitled, *Leon Sedov – Son, Friend, Fighter*.

As I write these lines, with Leon Sedov's mother by my side ... we are unable to believe it as yet. And this, not only because he was our son, truthful, devoted, loving, but above all because he had, as no one else on earth, become part of our life, entwined in all its roots, our co-thinker, our co-worker, our guard, our counsellor, our friend.



Of that older generation whose ranks we joined at the end of the last century on the road to revolution, all, without exception, have been swept from the scene. That which czarist hard-labor prisons and harsh exiles, the hardships of emigration, the civil war, and disease had failed to accomplish has in recent years been achieved by Stalin ... Following the destruction of the older generation, the best section of the next, that is, the generation which awakened in 1917 and received its training in the twenty-four armies of the revolutionary front, were likewise destroyed. Also crushed underfoot and completely obliterated was the best part of the youth, Leon's contemporaries ... During the years of our last emigration we made many new friends, some of them ... becoming, as it were, members of our family. But we met all of them for the first time ... when we had already neared old age. Leon was the only one who knew us when we were young; he became part of our lives from the very first moment of his self-awakening. While young in years, he still seemed our contemporary. [26]

The obituary ends with words of remorse, that he could not save his son:

His mother – who was closer to him than any other person in the world – and I are living through these terrible hours recalling his image, feature by feature, unable to believe that he is no more and weeping because it is impossible not to believe ... He was part of both of us, our young part ... Together with our boy has died everything that still remained young within us.

Goodbye, Leon, goodbye, dear and incomparable friend. Your mother and I never thought, never expected that destiny would impose on us this terrible task of writing your obituary ... But we were not able to protect you. [27]

However hard the going, Trotsky's courage and clear-sightedness remained undimmed. He never lost the will to struggle whatever the

odds. He never understood the meaning of the word pessimism. Thus in a letter to Angelica Balabanoff of 3 February 1937 he wrote:

Indignation, anger, revulsion? Yes, even temporary weariness. All this is human, only too human. But I will not believe that you have succumbed to pessimism ... This would be like passively and plaintively taking umbrage at history. How can one do that? History has to be taken as she is, and when she allows herself such extraordinary and filthy outrages, one must fight her back with one's fists. [28]

Trotsky's confidence in the future remained undiminished, and his mind, will and energy were directed towards it. We have already quoted his words when he was a young man of 22:

*Dum spiro, spero!* As long as I breathe I hope – as long as I breathe I shall fight for the future, that radiant future in which man, strong and beautiful, will become master of the spontaneous stream of his history and will direct it towards the boundless horizon of beauty, joy and happiness ... *Dum spiro, spero!* [29]

A short time before his assassination, in his testament, Trotsky repeated his optimism for the future:

My faith in the Communist future of mankind is not less ardent, indeed it is firmer today than it was in the days of my youth ... I can see the bright green strip of grass beneath the wall and the clear blue sky above the wall, and sunlight everywhere. Life is beautiful. Let the future generations cleanse it of all evil, oppression, and violence, and enjoy it to the full. [30]

No person embodied the triumph and the tragedy of the revolutionary workers' movement more than Leon Trotsky. The torch-bearer of its triumphs had fallen victim to its tragedy.

## **Trotsky's Death**

THE MEXICAN Stalinists whipped up a hysteria against Trotsky, accusing him not only of plotting against the Soviet Union, but also of conspiring to organise a fascist group in the interests of American oil magnates against the President of Mexico, Cardenas. On 1 May 1940, twenty thousand Communists marched through Mexico City with the slogan 'Down with Trotsky' on their banners.

On 23 May, at 4 am, a group of armed Stalinists led by David Alfaro Siqueiros, the celebrated artist, attacked Trotsky's residence. A massive machine gun attack – some 200 shots were fired – took place. More than seventy bullets stuck in the walls and doors of Trotsky's and Natalia's bedroom. As they dropped down beneath the bed, Natalia shielded Trotsky with her body. Neither was hurt, but their grandson Seva was slightly injured. One of Trotsky's guards, Robert Sheldon Harte, was murdered.

Stalin was not content. The GPU persevered. One Ramon Mercader, son of Caridad Mercal, a Spanish Stalinist well known in her country during the civil war as having close connections with the GPU, arrived in Mexico on 10 October 1939. He called himself Frank Jacson. He worked his way into Trotsky's household through an affair he had in Paris with Sylvia Ageloff, a Trotskyist, sister of one of Trotsky's secretaries. Sylvia herself knew Russian, French and Spanish, and was also assisting Trotsky with secretarial work. On 20 August 1940, 'Jacson' came into Trotsky's study, asking him to read and comment on an article he wrote. While Trotsky was reading the manuscript 'Jacson' took out a pickaxe and smashed Trotsky's skull. Next day, on 21 August, Trotsky was dead.

## **The Legacy**

ON THE FACE of it the last chapter of Trotsky's life, which began with his exile from the USSR and ended with his assassination in Mexico, was the most arid. Compare it with the heroic days of the 1905 revolution, when Trotsky presided over the Petrograd Soviet; or

with his presidency of the same body in 1917, when he used it to organise the October insurrection; or with his role in founding and leading the Red Army; or with his leadership, with Lenin, of the Communist International!

Over the last 12 years, his efforts seemed completely insignificant. If immediate success is a measure of achievement for a revolutionary leader, this judgment would be correct. But the same measure would condemn three and a half decades of Marx's life in Britain. Mehring tells us about Marx's funeral: 'No more than a few faithful friends were at the graveside' [31], and among them hardly an English person.

Marx's stay in Britain occurred when British capitalism was flourishing and British workers' thoughts were far from socialism. When he died in 1883 the total number of workers organised in trade unions was not more than half a million, and those organised were either Liberals or Tories.

Trotsky's final years, the period 1928-1940, was a period of reaction. At such a time Stalin, relying on old habits of thought, on deference and lack of confidence in the workers, consolidated his power and isolated Trotsky. And the more the policy of Stalin led to defeats, the weaker Trotsky's influence among the masses became. Trotsky, who during the revolution and civil war could inspire millions, with thousands of workers being ready to give their lives at his call, now found hardly anyone even ready to listen to him.

Still Trotsky was right when he wrote this passage in his diary of 25 March 1935:

I think that the work in which I am engaged now, despite its extremely insufficient and fragmentary nature, is the most important work of my life – more important than 1917, more important than the period of the Civil War or any other.

... Had I not been present in 1917 in Petersburg the October revolution would still have taken place – on the condition that Lenin was present and in command. If neither Lenin nor I had been present in Petersburg, there would have been no October

Revolution: the leadership of the Bolshevik Party would have prevented it from occurring – of this I have not the slightest doubt! If Lenin had not been in Petersburg, I doubt whether I could have managed to conquer the resistance of the Bolshevik leaders ... But I repeat, granted the presence of Lenin, the October Revolution would have been victorious anyway ...

Thus I cannot speak of the 'indispensability' of my work, even about the period from 1917 to 1921. But now my work is 'indispensable' in the full sense of the word. There is no arrogance in this claim at all. The collapse of the two Internationals has posed a problem which none of the leaders of these Internationals is at all equipped to solve. The vicissitudes of my personal fate have confronted me with this problem and armed me with important experience in dealing with it. There is now no one except me to carry out the mission of arming a new generation with the revolutionary method over the heads of the leaders of the Second and Third Internationals. [32]

The only way one can preserve the revolutionary socialist tradition, to preserve Marxism, is by applying it to the class struggle. The essence of Marxism is the unity of theory and practice. Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky continued the work of Marx and Engels. To continue does not mean to repeat, but to use the teachings of previous generations to deal with the issues raised by life anew.

Trotsky's writings of the years 1928-1940 – the articles, essays and books on developments in Germany, France and Spain – are among the most brilliant Marxist writings. They are in the same league as the best historical writings of Karl Marx: *The Eighteenth Brumaire* and *The Class Struggle in France*. Trotsky did not limit himself to analysing the situation, but also put forward a clear line of action for the proletariat. In terms of strategy and tactics his writings are extremely valuable revolutionary manuals, comparable to the best produced by Lenin and Trotsky during the first four years of the Comintern.

Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* towers over any other Marxist writing of history. It is an analytical and artistic monument of unprecedented richness and beauty.

Then again, Trotsky's *Revolution Betrayed* is a crucial weapon for an understanding of the Stalinist regime. The book is an analysis of the regime that is thoroughly Marxist, thoroughly materialist. It took as its point of departure the objective conditions, national and international, in which the Russian revolution found itself. The battle between the two main contending classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, on the national and international scale, shaped the history of the country. Trotsky restates and brilliantly develops the real concept of socialism, and gives no concessions at all to the Stalinist counterfeit of the same. *The Revolution Betrayed* opposes Stalinism very strongly while avoiding the anti-Stalinist hysteria which led many others to anti-communism. Thus *Revolution Betrayed* played a crucial role in restating the main features of Trotskyism – international revolutionary opposition to Stalinism and capitalism. 56 years later this book is still the foundation for any further development of an analysis of Stalinism.

His attempt, however unsuccessful, to build the Fourth International, is also a vital link in keeping the revolutionary tradition alive. He could not give concessions to academic Marxism, to its anaemic passivity. The essence of Marxism is action. In its struggle the working class has no other weapon but organisation. And Trotsky again and again demonstrates, through the successes and defeats of the proletariat, the crucial role the revolutionary party must play. No victory of the proletarian revolution is possible without a revolutionary party. Without his efforts to build a revolutionary international, Trotsky could not have been true to himself.

Present and future generations of Marxists will carry the revolutionary flame left to us by Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky. Present and future generations will carry the traditions of the Chartists, of the Paris Commune, of the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the Chinese revolution of 1925-27, the Spanish revolution, and so on.

The last six decades belonged to Stalin. The coming decades will belong to Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky. We owe a massive debt to Trotsky. Without his opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy, without his internationalism, the tradition of 'socialism from below', that identification of socialism with the self-activity of the working class, would not have survived.

## Footnotes

1\*. For further discussion of the theory of bureaucratic collectivism see T. Cliff, *The Theory of Bureaucratic Collectivism. A Critique* in T. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, London 1988, pp. 333-353).

2\*. Cannon, in his book, *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*, used Trotsky's authority to justify a method of leadership and party building in which every opponent in the organisation was denounced as a class enemy and great stress was placed on the organisation's social composition. This was disastrous, and made it possible for the SWP leadership after the war to cast its intellectual conservatism into concrete.

## Notes

1. *WLT*, 1933-34, p.300.

2. *WLT*, 1939-40, p.185.

3. *Ibid.*, p.188.

4. *Ibid.*, pp.190-1.

5. *Ibid.*, pp.191-2.

6. *Ibid.*, p.222.

7. *Ibid.*, pp.199-200.

8. *WLT*, 1938-39, pp.29-30.

9. *The Case of Leon Trotsky*, p.293.

10. *WLT*, 1939-40, p.89.

11. Reisner, p.289.

12. D. Guerin, *100 Years of Labor in the USA*, London 1979, p.107.
13. F. Dobbs, *Teamster Rebellion*, London 1986.
14. H. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, New York 1984, p.380.
15. Guerin, p.105.
16. Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism*, London 1971, p.135.
17. A.M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, New York 1987, Chapters 6-9.
18. Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism*, pp.257-62.
19. J. Burnham, *The Struggle for the World*, New York 1947, pp.242-8.
20. Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism*, p.82.
21. Quoted in Wald, p.113.
22. Wald, p.4.
23. *Ibid.*, p.287.
24. *Ibid.*, p.288.
25. George Breitman to A. Wald, 17 July 1985, in Wald, p.165.
26. *WLT*, 1937-38, pp.166-7.
27. *Ibid.*, p.179.
28. *WLT*, 1936-7, p.193.
29. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, Moscow, Vol.20, p.78.
30. Lovell, *Leon Trotsky Speaks*, p.312.
31. F. Mehring, *Karl Marx. The Story of his Life*, London 1966, p.530.
32. *Trotsky's Diary in Exile*, 1935, pp.53-4.