



TROTSKYIST PLATFORM

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**Trotskyism: Lighting the Path
to Revolution in the Capitalist World
Ensuring Socialism's Final Triumph in China**

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TROTSKYISM: LIGHTING THE PATH TO REVOLUTION IN THE CAPITALIST WORLD & ENSURING SOCIALISM'S FINAL TRIUMPH IN CHINA

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Why Trotskyism Is The Light Shining on The Path of Socialist Revolution

21 August 2021: Exactly one year ago marked the 80th anniversary of the infamous killing of co-leader of the October 1917 Socialist Revolution in Russia, Leon Trotsky. Trotsky was the leader of the 1905 Revolution in Russia, the military leader of the victorious October 1917 Revolution (under the political leadership of Vladimir Lenin) and founder and leader of the Red Army that heroically defended the young Soviet workers state against the overthrown capitalists and invading imperialist armies. After Lenin's death in 1924, it was Trotsky who spearheaded the struggle for authentic Leninism. He defended the principles of genuine Bolshevism against the new rightist-revisionist leaderships of the Soviet communist party and the Communist International (Comintern). After the Comintern had degenerated irretrievably, Trotsky fought to build a new Fourth International to continue the original work of the Comintern in guiding the struggle for world socialist revolution.

Trotsky devoted much of his energy from the mid-1920s onwards to fighting for the victory of socialist revolution in China. He understood the significance of the Chinese toilers to the fate of humanity as a whole. In an article that he drafted in the month before his death but was unable to complete due to his assassination, Trotsky insisted that, "The Chinese people are destined to occupy the first place in the future destinies of mankind." It is, therefore, fitting that the 80th anniversary of Trotsky's death was commemorated with sympathy for Trotsky on Chinese social media. This also extended to some within the pro-working class section of the Chinese community in Australia. The secretariat of the Australian Chinese Workers Association – a group that organises Australian-Chinese workers to defend their workplace conditions and assert their rights to access social services while involving the Chinese working class community in broader social justice campaigns within Australia – posted a social media statement, "Commemorating the 80th anniversary of Trotsky's death." The posting stated that, "Trotsky was killed in Mexico on August 21, 1940. It has already been 80 years since then. Here, we offer our memory and condolences to this prophet of the international labor movement."

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, many Chinese leftists were won to supporting Trotsky's ideas. This followed the desperate efforts of the Trotskyist left-wing group (called the Left Opposition) within the Soviet Union's communist party to stop the then leadership of the Soviet Union and Comintern – both of which had been taken over a few years earlier by rightward moving factions – from compelling the Communist Party of China (CPC) to subordinate itself to a section of the Chinese exploiting classes represented by the Kuomintang (KMT). The Comintern's policy would cause the CPC and its supporters to be smashed by Chiang Kai-Shek's forces in 1927 and hundreds of thousands of Chinese communists and workers to be massacred. When Chinese youth studying in the USSR – and later several leading CPC members within China – learnt that Trotsky had fought intransigently against the disastrous policy of subordination to the KMT, they became attracted to the ideas of Trotskyism. The new Chinese recruits to Trotskyism did some powerful work in their early period, especially amongst China's industrial workers. However, they were quickly decimated by fierce repression by the KMT and later by the Japanese imperialists. Weakened by repeated imprisonment of their leaders,

disoriented by the resulting disconnection with the masses and distorted by the entry into their movement of elements not truly committed to the authentic Marxist-Leninist principles of Trotskyism, by the time of China's 1949 toiling people's revolution those who claimed to be Trotskyist in China were actually further away from authentic Trotskyism – and thus from authentic Marxist-Leninism – than the official CPC. Nevertheless, the early work of Chinese Trotskyists – and the influence of worldwide Trotskyism more generally – left a mark on the official CPC in ways that neither side could have imagined. As a result, although the post-1927 CPC nominally rejected the program advocated by Trotsky, both the partial influence of Trotskyist ideas on CPC cadre and the leftward pressure that they placed on the CPC contributed to the CPC's capability to lead China's great 1949 anti-capitalist revolution. Furthermore, Chinese Trotskyists studying in the USSR in the mid-late 1920s had participated in the struggle of the Trotskyist Left Opposition there to return the Soviet communist party to the revolutionary and internationalist program of authentic Leninism. Even though the Soviet Left Oppositionists and many of their Chinese Trotskyist allies were cruelly repressed by the right-revisionist then Soviet leadership, they succeeded in applying enough political pressure upon a largely

unwilling Soviet leadership to force the latter to finally curb the frightening growth of the power of rural capitalists within the USSR. Had the rise of this immensely numerous capitalist class been left unchecked just a little bit longer, they would have drowned the young Soviet workers state in bloody capitalist counterrevolution. Through in this way contributing to the Left Opposition's struggle that ended up saving the USSR from destruction in the late 1920s, the Chinese Trotskyists helped make it possible for the USSR to later provide invaluable material aid to Chinese revolutionaries during the 1946-1949 Civil War – assistance without which (as Mao Ze Dong acknowledged) China's 1949 Revolution would not have been possible. Most importantly, **Trotskyism today provides that invaluable guide to how socialist revolution can triumph in the capitalist world and how China's transition to socialism, which began with the toiling people's triumph in 1949, can be led to a victorious conclusion as part of the worldwide struggle for socialism. To understand what Trotskyism is, how it intersected with events in China and its great importance for today, we need to first look more broadly at the political life and struggles of both the Chinese and worldwide Trotskyists and of Leon Trotsky himself.**

Trotsky's Controversial Thesis:

The Working Class Could Take Power First in Backward Russia

In 1905, Trotsky became the main leader of the 1905 Revolution that erupted in Russia. Although crushed by brutal repression, the 1905 Revolution was crucial for steeling a layer of activists who would go on to play key roles in the October 1917 Revolution. Crucially, the revolution also saw the first emergence of soviets; that is, elected councils of rebelling workers that began to claim sovereignty over society and which, through making and executing decisions about food distribution, the economy, law and order etc start crowding out the existing power. During the 1905 uprising, Trotsky led the Saint Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Delegates that not only united the resistance of the active workers but began to vie for control over society with the Tsarist regime. The events of 1905 confirmed a theory that Trotsky had started working on even before the 1905 Revolution. This theory, that Trotsky would later call Permanent Revolution, was extremely controversial amongst Russian socialists because it challenged what had been the accepted thinking of long-time Marxists.

In outlining the program of scientific socialism, Marx had expected that workers' revolution would first take place in the most economically advanced countries where the development of industry had created a huge class of exploited workers congregated together in large workplaces. Mechanically interpreting Marx's doctrine, the moderate wing of the socialist movement in Russia, represented by the Mensheviks, argued that since Russia was backward and weighed down by the remnants of feudalism that stifled capitalist development, the conditions were not ripe there for workers' revolution. Instead, they argued, what was first needed was a democratic revolution to clear out the remnants of feudalism and bring parliamentary democracy to Russia. Since it was a bourgeois-democratic revolution that was needed, like the 1789 French Revolution, the Mensheviks insisted that this revolution would be led by the Russian bourgeoisie (the class of capitalist exploiters of workers' labour). Only after this revolution was completed and Russian capitalism was able to develop freely for an extended period so that Russia could become like, say, France, would the objective conditions make possible a socialist revolution. Trotsky, however, argued that not only was it possible for the workers to take power in Russia but that conditions in Russia may make that possible even **before** revolutions in the more advanced countries. As he explained, precisely because industrial development came so late to backward Russia, alongside a centuries-old social order, the factories that were eventually established there had some of the latest technology for the era and were very large in scale. The rapid emergence of these big factories meant that fresh layers of wage-earning workers were being brought together in huge workplaces; workplaces that were great breeding grounds for militant class struggle. This was very different to France before the French Revolution. In pre-1789 France, the bourgeoisie felt confident to lead the masses in deposing the feudal aristocracy because the French bourgeoisie did not fear the then still developing working class. By contrast, in 20th century Russia,

the bourgeoisie took one look at the often militant working class (the proletariat) and said to themselves: "I am not mobilising this proletariat for anything. I am scared of them. So, although I find the remnants of feudalism somewhat constricting, nevertheless I will always stand with the feudal landowners and monarchist bureaucrats against the far greater threat posed to my interests by an active proletariat." Moreover, Russia's young capitalist class had also developed all sorts of shared economic interests with the old feudal nobility. Therefore, even the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution had to be accomplished in opposition to not only the feudal elements but in opposition to the bourgeoisie itself. To make the bourgeois-democratic revolution, the Russian proletariat had to grab state power; or, as Marxists say, achieve the dictatorship of the proletariat – for Marxists understand that every state of whatever stripe is the enforcer of a dictatorship of one class over and against the others (the ideal form of the dictatorship of the proletariat is proletarian democracy where elected organs of the working class democratically make the decisions but where the working class as a whole dictates the affairs of state against the interests of the overthrown bourgeoisie). Trotsky understood that in establishing their own rule and beginning to accomplish the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution themselves, the proletariat could not stop there. For the capitalists and the aristocratic landowners would be working feverishly to sabotage this work and organise a counterrevolution. The dictatorship of the proletariat would thus be compelled to break the strength of both the feudal landlords linked to the capitalists and the capitalists themselves by beginning to confiscate the means of production. In other words, the proletarian state would have to, before long, pass from the bourgeois-democratic tasks and on to a socialist agenda.

In the course of outlining this perspective, Trotsky addressed the reality that Russia was still then a country where the peasantry far outnumbered the working class. He explained that because of their own internal

divisions and position as essentially small-scale businessmen, the peasantry could not play an independent political role (in Marxist terminology the peasants form part of the *petit bourgeoisie*). Either the peasantry would be led by the working class or it would line up behind the bourgeoisie. Thus, in fighting for a workers state, the proletariat needed to win the mass of the peasantry – especially the poor peasantry – behind it on the promise that only the working class in power would free the peasant from the tyranny of the landlords. Trotsky also outlined how a workers-led revolution in Russia would energise the revolutionary struggle for workers' states in the more advanced countries, which would in turn provide essential assistance for a Russian workers state to advance towards full

socialism.

The experience of the 1905 Revolution made Trotsky more certain of his ground-breaking theory because he saw how, at the decisive moment, the liberal bourgeoisie went over to the side of the Tsarist autocracy against the revolutionary struggle. It confirmed to Trotsky that the Mensheviks' platform of alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie should be completely rejected. The eventual leader of the Russian Revolution, V.I. Lenin, also drew this very same conclusion. However, instead of Trotsky's perspective of fighting for the rule of the proletariat **leading** the peasantry, Lenin initially called for the joint rule of the proletariat and peasantry to first accomplish the bourgeois-democratic revolution.

Trotsky Comes Over to Lenin's Understanding on the Need for an Exclusively Revolutionary Party

Although very advanced in his perspective on the basic strategy for socialist transformation in Russia, Trotsky had been backward on another crucial question: what type of instrument would be needed to lead that transformation. Following the socialist party in Russia's 1903 split into a revolutionary faction led by Lenin called the Bolsheviks and the moderate Menshevik faction, Trotsky tried to stay independent of both factions, even though his politics were much closer to that of the Bolsheviks. Believing in "unity of socialists", Trotsky tried to unite Russian socialists. He was dead wrong for doing so.

The error in Trotsky's "unity of the Left" perspective became especially clear after World War I broke out in 1914. World War I was a war between rival imperialist powers for spheres of exploitation. However, most socialist leaders in each of the respective warring countries criminally led workers into supporting their "own" rulers' war efforts. In opposition to these sell-out "socialists", Lenin and the Bolsheviks insisted that the main enemy of each working class are their "own" capitalist rulers who needed to be opposed through revolutionary struggle. During World War I, Lenin came to understand the full significance of his 1903 break with the Mensheviks. It became clear to him that in every imperialist country there would necessarily be a conservatised, bought off layer of the socialist workers movement that

would oppose revolutionary struggle against their "own" imperialism. Therefore, what is needed in every country is for revolutionary socialists to make a hard split with such conservatised, reformist "socialists."

Trotsky shared the Bolsheviks' internationalist opposition to World War I. However, at first, he still persisted with his efforts to unite the Left. Lenin rightly criticised Trotsky for refusing to make a clean break with sell-out social democrats who were supporting their "own" bourgeoisie's foreign policy goals. Trotsky eventually realised that he had been wrong. By the time that he returned to Russia in May 1917 from forced exile, Trotsky and his followers in the small Mezharayontsi group that he briefly joined had moved quickly towards the Bolsheviks.

The October 1917 Revolution Confirmed Trotsky's Strategy on How to Fight for Socialism in Russia



Above: Leon Trotsky, founder and first leader of the Soviet Red Army, motivates Red Army troops in 1920 during the Russian Civil War.

A few months before Trotsky's return, the masses of Russia toppled the Tsar in the February Revolution. The revolution began with a general strike, sparked by women textile workers, and was then joined by many rank-and-file conscript soldiers who, when ordered to fire on the striking workers, mutinied and joined the revolt. Effective power now lay with elected councils of the revolutionary workers and soldiers, called soviets. However, the workers – and even more so the largely peasant soldiers – had illusions in the “liberal” bourgeois politicians who had also claimed opposition to the Tsar. This is despite the fact that these liberal politicians had been terrified by the February 1917 uprising. Moreover, even though the toiling classes desperately wanted an end to the horrific war, many still had patriotic illusions. Thus, although the February Revolution was largely spearheaded by workers politically influenced by the Bolsheviks, the mass of workers and peasant conscripts largely did not elect the fiercely internationalist and anti-bourgeois Bolsheviks to the soviets. Many workers elected Mensheviks and the peasant soldiers largely elected leaders of the peasant-based Socialist Revolutionary (SR) party. However, the Mensheviks and SRs handed back the power to the bourgeoisie. These compromiser “socialists” directed the soviets to prop up the new bourgeois Provisional Government that was formed largely from bourgeois politicians and a small number of members of the compromising left parties.

Initially, many Bolshevik leaders, including Kamenev and Stalin, basically called for support to the Provisional Government, albeit with criticisms. When Lenin returned from exile in April, he was furious! He demanded resolute opposition to the Provisional Government and to the inter-imperialist war now being conducted under the cover of a “revolutionary” government. Initially he was completely isolated within the Bolshevik leadership in pushing this stance. However, Lenin remained firm, even threatening to split the party.

Those Bolsheviks opposing Lenin argued that since the then Bolshevik program was to first achieve a democratic revolution, through fighting for the joint rule of the proletariat and peasantry, the Bolsheviks needed to be in a united front with the other partially workers’ party the Mensheviks and with the parties based on the peasantry like the SRs. And since those parties supported the Provisional Government, the Bolsheviks’ task was to pressure the Mensheviks and the peasant parties to ensure that their representatives in the Provisional Government and the soviets carry through the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Lenin, however, countered that the old Bolshevik formula calling for the joint rule of the proletariat and peasantry was now obsolete because, **by itself**, the peasantry, via its wealthiest capitalist layers, had proved to be too subservient to the bourgeoisie. As Lenin put it, he who now only speaks of the old formula of joint rule of the proletariat and peasantry is “behind the times, consequently, he has in effect gone over to the petty bourgeoisie against the proletarian class struggle; that person should be consigned to the archive of ‘Bolshevik’ pre-revolutionary antiques” In his now famous *April Theses*, Lenin insisted on the need to win the working class to politically separate themselves from the compromising-with-the-bourgeois leadership of the peasantry and seek, instead, to **lead** the poor peasants behind the proletarian program. Lenin’s opponents accused him of advocating the program of Trotsky. Indeed, Lenin, in all but name, was advocating the Permanent Revolution strategy that Trotsky had long put forward.

Lenin and Trotsky’s irreconcilable opposition to the new Provisional Government was vindicated by the reality that more and more of the workers and poor peasants were aligning themselves with the Bolsheviks because of their now firm opposition to the, increasingly hated, bourgeois-led government. However, in July 1917, the revolution suffered a massive setback. The

right wing seized on militant demonstrations by impatient pro-Bolshevik conscript soldiers and workers in the then capital Petrograd (St Petersburg) as a pretext to launch an intense campaign of repression and slander against the Bolsheviks. Trotsky was arrested and imprisoned, as were several prominent Bolsheviks. Lenin had to go into hiding. It was in this extremely difficult period of anti-Bolshevik witch-hunting that Trotsky and the Mezharayontsi group formally joined the Bolshevik Party.

The reactionary mood after the July events did not last long. By September, the Bolsheviks had won a majority of delegates to the Petrograd and Moscow workers soviets. Lenin then pushed for immediate revolution. Trotsky who had been elected president of the Petrograd Soviet was entrusted by the Bolsheviks to organize the workers’ seizure of power. On October 25, the workers of Petrograd, backed by largely peasant, conscript soldiers and sailors took over Petrograd. Shortly after, they took over other cities and, with the aid of the awakened peasants, the countryside too. It was the greatest victory that the exploited and oppressed of the world had ever known. The October seizure of state power by the working class – leading behind them the poor peasants – not only put an end to Russia’s participation in the World War I slaughter but finally freed the peasants from the tyranny of the semi-feudal landlords, decisively smashed the power of the aristocracy and the remnants of the monarchy, brought legal equality for women and granted national rights to the brutally oppressed non-Russian minorities. History proved that the previous regime created by the February Revolution, even under the pressure of the soviets, could not accomplish these bourgeois-democratic tasks.

In order to secure its achievements in democratic and agrarian revolution, the workers state created by the October Revolution had to nationalise the banks, nationalise all the land and put industry under workers’ control. These measures grew into more decisive inroads into capitalist private ownership just half a year later when major confiscation of enterprises from the capitalists was conducted. Beginning with the democratic tasks, the dictatorship of the working class had to quickly move on to start undertaking socialist measures too. The Trotskyist perspective of *Permanent Revolution* had been dramatically confirmed.

Trotsky's Struggle against the Bureaucratic Degeneration of the Soviet Workers State

The working class backed by the poor peasants administered their new state through their elected soviets. In other words, the dictatorship of the proletariat was operating in the form of a proletarian democracy (sometimes called soviet democracy). In proletarian democracy, through being organised collectively as a class in their soviets, the members of the ruling working class can feel closely their common collective interests with other workers and together resist the influence of pro-capitalist forces. In order to give the soviets the best chance of being kept free from capitalist influence, the Bolsheviks strictly excluded all current and former capitalists – that is all who earn profit from businesses using hired labour – and all their henchmen from any participation in the soviets.

However, before long, the overthrown capitalists, landlords and autocrats of Russia regrouped and made a violent bid to retake power. They were backed by fourteen invading capitalist armies including those from the U.S., Australia, Britain and Japan. His fellow Bolshevik leaders entrusted Trotsky to build from scratch a new Red Army to defend the besieged workers state. This he did with vigour and ingenuity. By 1921, as a result of the tremendous sacrifice of Soviet workers and poor peasants, the Red Army, against considerable odds, triumphed in the Civil War against the overthrown bourgeoisie and their powerful imperialist allies.

However, under the vice like grip that the capitalist world was putting on Soviet Russia, the young workers state was starting to distort. For one, because of the poor level of education of the masses, the isolated workers state was forced to rely on bureaucrats from the overthrown capitalist order to fulfill many administrative roles. They were, of course, placed under the control of the ruling working class. However, with the best workers' cadre having gone to the front lines of the Civil War, where many then perished, these ex-Tsarist bureaucrats began to gain greater independence. Lenin was so alarmed that at one point he exclaimed: *who is controlling who?* For he was detecting signs that the bureaucrats were starting to corrupt the communist cadre. One of the worst examples occurred in the early 1920s when Soviet leaders, in particular Stalin and Ordzhonikidze, bullied communists

from Georgia (whose people had their national rights crushed by the previous Tsarist regime) who wanted to preserve greater autonomy for Soviet Georgia from Soviet Russia. As Lenin put it, communists like Stalin and Ordzhonikidze (who both happened to themselves be ethnic Georgians and who had both earlier been disciplined hard-working Bolsheviks) were taking on the Russian national chauvinist prejudices of the old Tsarist bureaucrats who had gained too much weight within the workers state. This bending of Stalin to Great Russian chauvinist prejudices and his increasingly rude behavior towards fellow comrades led Lenin to call for Stalin to be removed as General Secretary of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks). In a series of letters written in late 1922-early 1923, Lenin made criticisms of both Stalin and Trotsky (the latter flowing from some internal debates where Trotsky was in the wrong but "displayed excessive self-assurance") but reserved by far his harshest criticism for Stalin:

"Stalin is too rude and this defect, although quite tolerable in our midst and in dealing among us Communists, becomes intolerable in a Secretary-General. That is why I suggest that the comrades think about a way of removing Stalin from that post and appointing another man in his stead who in all other respects differs from Comrade Stalin in having only one advantage, namely, that of being more tolerant, more loyal, more polite and more considerate to the comrades, less capricious, etc."

V.I. Lenin, *Letter to Congress*, 4 January 1923, *Lenin Collected Works*, Volume 36

Through this testament, Lenin, who was both ill and deeply worried about the fate of the party, was angling for a block with Trotsky against Stalin. However, his health deteriorated even further and he ended up becoming too ill to prosecute the struggle. Then in January 1924, Lenin passed away.

Coinciding with Lenin's incapacitation following a stroke and his death in 1924, a faction of the party led by the troika of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin took over the party and dragged it in a more rightward direction. These long-time Bolsheviks still believed in communism but, as Trotsky later explained, they came to represent a bureaucratic layer that emerged atop of the workers state. This bureaucracy included not only ex-Tsarist officials but Bolsheviks who had been brought into the administration. They had been engaged in dividing up the scarce goods that were available in an isolated and besieged Soviet Russia, between city and country, village and village and individual and individual. Although this was a necessary task, the extreme scarcity – and indeed famine – in the country after seven years of first the World War and then the Civil War alongside the devastating effects of the capitalist economic blockade gave the bureaucracy an importance – and thus a power – that allowed them to escape the masses' control and guarantee privileges for themselves. Although they were not a new exploiting class but rather a privileged, upper layer of the masses, the bureaucracy and those that represented their interests in the Communist Party leadership naturally brought a conservative distortion to state policy. The new leaders moved to sideline the more intransigently Bolshevik members of the party, especially Trotsky. And they used increasingly bureaucratic means to do this including by hiding Lenin's testament from most party members. The ascendancy of this more rightist leadership was made possible by the onset of demoralisation and conservatism amongst the Soviet masses

following the defeat of several revolutionary struggles abroad that could have broken the Soviet Union's encirclement. The most significant defeat in this regard was the failure of the German working class to take the power in that country in the latter part of 1923 – a result of the Communist Party of Germany getting cold feet at the very moment that conditions were ripe for the revolution to be consummated.

Where the rightist revisionism of the new Soviet leadership first showed up was in international policy. The new leading troika now claimed that Russia could go all the way to complete socialism without the need for revolutions abroad. Trotsky argued against this conception of "Socialism In One Country" by pointing out that previously Lenin and all communists – including the troika members themselves – had insisted that only the triumph of revolution in the more advanced countries would be able to provide the material support needed for a workers state in backward, peasant-majority Russia to progress onto actual socialism; that is a society based on not only working class rule and public ownership of all the means of production but one where class and social differences are largely extinguished.

Trotsky built a Left Opposition within the Soviet Union's communist party to oppose the new leadership's turn away from Lenin's internationalism and its bureaucratic suppression of democracy within the Bolshevik Party. At first, the Left Opposition's correct struggle against the revisionist "theory" of Socialism in One Country was fought out in an abstract theoretical manner. However, what the new "theory" meant in practice was to call for the Soviet workers state to downgrade support for the revolutionary struggle of workers abroad in the hope of securing "peaceful coexistence with capitalism." Where this new anti-internationalist doctrine would lead to was starkly revealed in the events of 1925 to 1927 in China.

The Trotskyist Struggle to Avert the Catastrophic Disasters Suffered By Chinese Workers in 1927

The 1925 to 1927 period saw the Chinese working class wage increasingly militant strikes for their rights, the peasants engage in actions against their landlords and the active masses as a whole unleash determined resistance against the imperialist domination of China. Formed in 1921, the CPC, led by Chen Duxiu, had brilliantly built itself up into a powerful force in the space of just a short period. However, in 1922-1923, the Comintern pushed the CPC to join the populist KMT party arguing that the KMT included all classes and the CPC joining it would improve the KMT and prod it to advance a national-democratic revolution. However, far from being a party where all classes co-existed as equals, the KMT was thoroughly dominated by the capitalists and the bourgeois military/bureaucratic elite that dominated its upper layers. To their credit, Chen Duxiu and indeed the entire CPC Central Committee opposed the move to make the CPC join the KMT. However, they ended up acquiescing to the Comintern out of deference to international communist discipline. The CPC did not immediately put the resolution into practice. Moreover after it did, for the first couple of years that the CPC was in the KMT, the CPC still maintained a fair degree of its own political independence and activity. The CPC, for example, led the big February 1923 railway workers' strike on the Beijing-Hankow (now a part of Wuhan) line and then spearheaded the massive workers' strikes and demonstrations that responded to the 30 May 1925 massacre of pro-worker, anti-imperialist protesters by British-controlled police in Shanghai. However, in reaction to inevitable heated tensions between the pro-working class CPC and the bourgeois KMT, the then leadership of the Soviet Union and Comintern, headed by Bukharin and Stalin, pushed the CPC to try and defuse the tensions by agreeing to be compliant to the KMT leadership, hold back peasant uprisings, restrain workers' demands upon their bosses and even accede to KMT demands that the CPC disarm. The, by then, right-revisionist Soviet leadership was in good part driven by a desire to gain diplomatic advantage by courting the KMT leadership that had agreed to be sympathetic to the Soviet Union. They even admitted the KMT into membership of the Comintern! **This was their "theory" of "Socialism in One Country" and "peaceful coexistence with capitalism" being put into practice. The interests of the Chinese toilers were being sacrificed for the sake of the Soviet leadership's push for gaining – necessarily temporary – allies in the capitalist world.** However, a few CPC leaders – including party leader Chen Duxiu and also others like Mao Zedong – continued to object to being made to subordinate themselves to the KMT. They repeatedly tried to have the CPC break with the KMT. But in the face of the Comintern insistence on the pro-KMT policy, these comrades deferred to the great authority that those then leading the world's first workers state enjoyed.

Within the Soviet Union itself, Leon Trotsky was by the mid-1920s standing against the CPC's immersion into the KMT. At communist leadership meetings, Trotsky voted against the policy and in 1925 presented a formal proposal for the CPC to withdraw from the KMT. However,

his proposal was at the time rejected by all other senior leaders in the Soviet party. The following year, Trotsky's Left Opposition group within the Soviet Union's communist party joined up with Zinoviev, Kamenev and their supporters – who had partially broken from Bukharin and



Forces of Chiang Kai-Shek's Kuomintang (and the KMT's allies in the criminal underworld) behead and shoot dead Communist Party of China members and Communist-led trade unionists on the streets of Shanghai in April 1927. The KMT's massacre of its former CPC "allies" was the end result of the disastrous strategy of strategic coalition with the "national" bourgeoisie that was imposed upon the CPC by the Bukharin-Stalin-led Comintern of the time. In the year that followed April 1927, the KMT and its allies massacred between a quarter of a million to one million communists.

Stalin's rightist course – and together formed the United Opposition. However, Zinoviev, Kamenev and others were, at first, not fully convinced of Trotsky's line on China. Indeed, the United Opposition was on the verge of a split over the question of CPC withdrawal from the KMT. Believing that a split in the Opposition would be very harmful, the Trotskyist Left Oppositionists initially acquiesced to the Zinovievists' insistence that they not openly demand CPC withdrawal. What changed that was when Chiang Kai-Shek ordered the arrest of several leading members of his CPC "allies" in Guangzhou (then known as Canton) in March 1926. The Comintern leadership responded by capitulating to Chiang and negotiating a new deal with the KMT whereby the CPC would be reduced to an even more subordinate position within the KMT. From the time of this Canton coup onwards, Trotsky openly called for the CPC to break with the bourgeois-dominated KMT; and the United Opposition as a whole opposed

the Menshevik policy of the Comintern leadership, albeit in a less clear way than Trotsky.

The rationale given by Bukharin and Stalin for making the CPC subordinate to the KMT was that through this alliance the CPC would assist the KMT to lead an anti-feudal and anti-imperialist revolution after which conditions would be created for a future socialist revolution. **This was the strategy of the Mensheviks that was now being prescribed by avowed Bolsheviki!** In response, Trotsky explained that the KMT and all wings of the bourgeoisie feared the working class much more than they were annoyed by the feudal elements and the imperialists. Although it was acceptable to have a temporary bloc with the KMT for particular actions – like, say, a particular military action against semi-feudal warlords – the CPC must maintain complete political independence from the bourgeois KMT at all times. Furthermore, as the 1917 Russian Revolution proved,

the aims of even the national-democratic revolution could only be achieved by a proletarian-led worker-peasant alliance in opposition to all wings of the bourgeoisie.

In February-March 1927, the CPC organised a massive strike wave in Shanghai in support of a Chiang Kai-Shek-led KMT expedition against warlords in the centre and north of China. The Shanghai workers then went further. They seized control from a warlord of most of the city. Shanghai workers were making revolution. However, operating on the Menshevik policy that was imposed upon them, the Comintern-directed CPC worked to contain the proletariat from advancing further – thus causing the uprising to start losing steam. But Trotsky, in order to advance the Shanghai struggle and protect the rising workers and the CPC, desperately appealed to the Comintern leadership to call for the CPC to build elected organs of working class power (soviets) and to organise armed self-defence against a likely attack from Chiang's KMT. Instead, the Bukharin-Stalin leadership downplayed this threat. They even ordered the CPC to call on workers to bury their guns rather than mobilise self-defence when KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek and his forces approached Shanghai. Inevitably, in April 1927, Chiang Kai-shek ordered the bloody suppression of the rising workers and the CPC. And because CPC leaders, under orders from the Comintern leadership, had not only at this decisive moment but for years earlier schooled their working-class base in alliance and submission to the KMT, the workers were left unprepared for the KMT attack both politically and militarily. Chiang Kai-shek worked closely with Shanghai's criminal gangs and Western imperialist police forces to execute literally tens of thousands of communists

and other trade unionists.

The Soviet/Comintern leadership then instructed the CPC to look for protection from the Wuhan-based “left,” “revolutionary” faction of the KMT, led by Wang Jingwei. They told the CPC not to organise the workers and peasants to take too radical action that could scare away the “left” KMT leaders in Wuhan. Trotsky and the United Opposition again desperately warned against this Comintern-dictated policy and insisted that the CPC needed to build organs of independent workers' power in the form of workers and peasants soviets. Stalin denounced the United Opposition for this. In a 21 April 1927 article written during the Shanghai massacre, Stalin thundered that, “by declaring for a withdrawal of the Communist Party from the Kuomintang at the present moment, the Opposition is playing into the hands of the enemies of the Chinese revolution.” But the Kuomintang “Lefts,” dominated by the left-wing of the bourgeoisie and middle-class elements were ultimately still partisans of bourgeois rule! As Trotsky warned: “Politicians of the Wang Jingwei type, under difficult conditions, will unite ten times with Chiang Kai-shek against the workers and peasants.” And that is what happened! Within weeks, **the Kuomintang “Left” – the very people that Bukharin and Stalin called “revolutionary,” “allies” – turned on the CPC too and killed thousands of communists.** There followed an even wider massacre of communists. This took place not only in Wuhan but in Guangzhou, Changsha, Hangzhou, Xiamen and many other cities. **In the year that followed April 1927, it is estimated that between quarter of a million to one million communists and worker activists in China were executed by the KMT and its allies.**

The Formation of a Trotskyist Group in China

At the time of the 1927 catastrophe, hundreds of promising Chinese communists were studying in cadre schools in the Soviet Union. These schools included the Communist University of Toilers of China (for a period known as Sun Yat-sen University) and the Communist University of Toilers of the East. The students had been sent to these schools by the CPC to receive a political education, industrial skills and training in activist organising. After the Shanghai and then Wuhan disasters, many Chinese students became curious about Trotskyism. They sought out teachers sympathetic to the Trotsky-Zinoviev Opposition. They heard for the first time the Trotskyists' systematic Marxist critique of why the policy of subordination to the bourgeois KMT was so wrong. This matched their own serious doubts about the pro-KMT policy. As a result, dozens of the Chinese students in the Soviet Union became members or sympathisers of a fledgling Chinese Trotskyist circle. They began translating works by the Opposition, including Trotsky's writings on China, and distributing them amongst fellow Chinese students. Then, at the parade of the tenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution in late 1927, Chinese Trotskyists bravely unfurled a banner proclaiming their support for the left-wing faction of the Soviet communist party. Soon after, university heads turfed out around ten of the students involved in the tenth anniversary action and had these Trotskyists deported back to China. However, with their return, these deported Chinese students brought Trotskyism (in reality simply the contemporary application of the genuine Marxist-Leninism that had guided the early CPC before it was misled by the rightward-moving Comintern) to China.

Not all the Trotskyist Chinese students were expelled. Those who remained in the Soviet Union moved their operations underground in the face of the repression against the Trotskyists which intensified from late 1927 onwards. The more repressive climate made it harder for them to maintain contact with Soviet members of the Trotskyist Opposition. However, the Chinese Trotskyists found that the new batches of Chinese students that arrived after the 1927 defeat were even more receptive to their views than the students who arrived previously. These new students had directly participated in the 1925-27 Revolution. They experienced the defeat firsthand. Many personally knew of comrades who had been killed. Without understanding all the reasons why, their gut feeling was that the policy of collaboration with the KMT was wrong. So, when they realised that Trotsky and other leaders of the Russian Revolution had opposed the CPC subordination to the KMT, it had a powerful effect on them. More than half the Chinese students in the new batches arriving after the 1927 catastrophe became members or sympathisers of the Trotskyists. For many of the others who decided to stick with supporting the then leaders of the Soviet Union and the anti-Trotskyist leadership of the CPC student cells in Russia, their decision was based

not so much on supporting the Menshevik-like policy that the Soviet leaders had foisted upon the CPC but out of a misplaced notion that being "loyal" to the cause required supporting the existing leadership.

Opposing the Trotskyist students in the Soviet Union were not only the Soviet bureaucracy and anti-Trotskyist hacks placed into leadership positions of the cadre schools but also the pro-Stalin leadership of CPC student cells within Russia. Led by the unprincipled, position-chasing Wang Ming, the latter ran a propaganda campaign slandering the Trotskyists as "counterrevolutionaries" and using physical intimidation and party discipline measures against those students who sided with the Trotskyist Opposition. However, after finishing their courses, waves of newly recruited Chinese Trotskyists were still returning to China and bringing with them translations of Trotsky's and the left-wing Opposition's writings.

As a result, the Comintern leadership and Wang Ming's clique became determined to not only have the Trotskyist students expelled from the schools but to prevent them from subsequently returning to China. They worked with the heads of the cadre schools and the Soviet secret police, the GPU, to identify who the Trotskyists were. In late 1929-early 1930, the



A photo display at the Museum of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in Shanghai commemorates Chen Duxiu. Chen was the first leader of the CPC. Under his leadership, the CPC built itself up into a powerful force within a couple of years from the time of its 1921 founding. However, the CPC was then derailed by the rightward moving Comintern which pressured the party to subordinate itself to the bourgeois KMT. Chen and several other CPC leaders strongly objected to this course but followed international party discipline and adhered to Comintern instructions. This course led to the CPC and Chinese active workers being brutally slaughtered by their KMT “allies” in 1927. Chen took responsibility for his role in implementing the disastrous opportunist policy dictated by the Bukharin and Stalin-led Comintern. He was then won to the program of Trotskyism, which gave a clear theoretical basis for his own gut-level opposition to the program of strategic alliance with the bourgeois KMT. Chen became the first leader of the Chinese Trotskyist organisation, the Communist League of China (CLC). This great Chinese revolutionary then led some powerful work amongst Chinese urban workers but was jailed by the KMT in 1932 along with most other CLC leaders who had not already been jailed the previous year. Broken by repeated defeats and years in prison isolation, Chen had moved away from authentic Leninism-Trotskyism by the time of his release from prison in 1937, while retaining emotional loyalty to Trotsky and the Trotskyist movement.

GPU struck. They arrested up to 200 Chinese Trotskyists and alleged Trotskyists. Some were shot. Most were sent to prison or labor camps or to work in factories. Of these, some died in custody while others were deported back to China – some as late as the mid-1950s. These brave young communists suffered immensely. However, by then, their compatriots who had made it back to China were able to seed China’s communist milieu with Trotskyist ideas.

Parallel to the winning of Chinese students in Russia to Trotskyism, there was ferment within the CPC and its leadership back in China. The Comintern which had pressured Chen Duxiu to implement the policy of subordination to the KMT that he disagreed with now sought to blame Chen entirely for the resulting catastrophe. They began by attacking his supporters within the party leadership. Feeling under pressure, Chen stepped down from the leadership of the party in July 1927. Chen felt heavy responsibility for implementing the pro-KMT line dictated by Moscow. The defeat was also deeply personal for Chen Duxiu. His eldest son, Chen Yannian, who was a senior party leader in his own right, was among those executed by Chiang Kai-Shek’s forces in Shanghai. The following year his second son, Chen Qiaonian, a party leader too, was also murdered by the KMT. Continuing to be a CPC member, Chen put much effort into reflecting

on the party’s defeat and considering the best way forward. Many other party leaders did the same. This included many of Chen’s closest followers within the CPC who were outraged that the Comintern – and those CPC leaders following the Comintern line – were entirely blaming Chen for the disaster.

Chen and his supporters in the CPC started gaining greater clarity on where the party needed to head when, through another communist, they received documents of the Trotskyist movement from one of the local groups set up by returned students won over to Trotskyism in Moscow. After reading and debating Trotsky’s writings on China over a period of several months, Chen and his supporters were gradually won over to Trotskyism in the first half of 1929. In the case of Chen in particular, this was not so much as being “won over” to the need for the working class and CPC to be independent of the bourgeois KMT as having his earlier stance validated and – crucially – given a theoretical and principled framework. Chen had opposed the policy of immersion in the KMT from a revolutionary gut instinct and an on-the-ground knowledge of what the KMT was actually like. Trotsky’s theory now gave a systematic explanation as to why his own original instincts were correct by an understanding that, in a country like China, all wings of the bourgeoisie are necessarily

tied to the imperialists and the remnants of feudalism. Moreover, Trotsky's perspective showed that one could have a working-class perspective without downplaying the important national-democratic tasks of the Chinese Revolution – including freeing China from imperialist subjugation, liberating the peasants from landlord tyranny, granting legal equality for women and providing political democracy for the masses. The choice was not between either allying with the “national-bourgeoisie” and taking up these tasks or rejecting such an alliance and downplaying these national-democratic goals. That is what the proponents of the “united front” with the KMT had argued. Trotsky's writings not only acknowledged that the national-democratic tasks were crucial to the Chinese Revolution but outlined how they could only be achieved by the working class supported by the peasantry seizing state power. **The theoretical framework provided by Trotsky and the Soviet Opposition now allowed Chen and others that had always opposed – or had least had doubts about – the policy of an ongoing “united front” with the KMT to be far more certain about their objections to the policy and gave them the theoretical tools to both motivate their disapproval of the policy in a convincing manner and provide fellow communists with a clear alternate strategy.**

The clarity provided by Trotsky's perspective was especially bright for thoughtful CPC members because Trotsky had himself developed and perfected his theory of *Permanent Revolution* even further in the wake of the 1927 defeat of the Chinese Revolution (known as the Great Revolution). Initially developed specifically for Russia and then extended to China, Trotsky from the China experience extended the *Permanent Revolution* perspective to cover all countries of belated capitalist development, especially the countries under colonial or semi-colonial subjugation by imperialism. In such countries (like China back then and India, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Nigeria, Egypt, Brazil and Chile still today) the solution of their tasks of achieving agrarian revolution, democracy and national emancipation from imperialism requires an alliance of its proletariat with its, often numerically dominant, peasant masses. However, as the theory of *Permanent Revolution*

emphasised, the alliance of these two classes can be realised in no other way than through an irreconcilable struggle against the influence of the national-liberal bourgeoisie. Moreover, the realisation of the revolutionary alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry is conceivable only under the political leadership of the proletarian vanguard, organised in the Communist Party. This in turn means that the victory of the democratic revolution is conceivable only through the working class establishing its own class dictatorship as the leader of the subjugated nation and above all of its peasant masses. The working class having so risen to power as the leader of the democratic revolution is inevitably confronted with tasks, the fulfillment of which are bound up with deep inroads into capitalist “property rights”. The revolution beginning with addressing the national-democratic tasks grows over directly into the socialist revolution and thereby becomes a permanent revolution.

Now armed with this clear program, Chen Duxiu began openly advocating for the program of the Trotskyist Left Opposition in letters to the new CPC leadership. Aided by the respect that Chen was still held in by most CPC members, Chen and those newly won to the program of Permanent Revolution won over many CPC cadre to their views. However, within weeks of his sympathy to the Left Opposition becoming known, Chen and other Trotskyists were expelled from the CPC by its Comintern-controlled new leadership. The following month, Chen published an open letter to fellow communists in which he took responsibility for implementing the opportunist policy of subordination to the KMT that led to the 1927 disaster but also criticised the Bukharin-Stalin Comintern leadership for dictating that policy. Meanwhile, Trotskyist students returned from the Soviet Union had already been publishing journals and recruiting new members in China. Finally, at a conference beginning on May Day 1931, the different circles won to Trotskyism in China united into a single party called the Communist League of China with a combined membership of nearly 500 people. The Communist League still saw themselves as a faction of the CPC and as a project to reform the CPC, which they saw themselves as being unfairly excluded from.

The Communist League of China's Immediate Program

The newly formed Communist League of China differed sharply with the Comintern not only in its overall strategy but in its assessment of the then political condition of China. After the terrible defeats in Shanghai and Wuhan, the Comintern and the new CPC leadership did a dramatic about face in August 1927. They now criticised the CPC practice during the Great Revolution as being "right opportunist." However, they dishonestly laid the blame entirely on Chen Duxiu and other CPC leaders close to him. The Comintern did not, however, correct their flawed theory that the Chinese Revolution would at first be an entirely bourgeois-democratic revolution that would not bring about a workers state. Rather they claimed that the previous CPC applied a correct theory in a bad, capitulationist manner. *Moreover, seeking to cover up the disaster that they had caused, the Comintern insisted that the Great Revolution had not been defeated but had instead reached a new high point.* Having during the Great Revolution insisted that the CPC subordinate itself to the KMT and not push towards setting up of soviets as organs of workers' power, the Comintern now proclaimed, "Down with the Kuomintang!" and called for the formation of revolutionary soviets. They pushed the CPC to immediately organise workers and peasants uprisings. In December 1927, the CPC led tens of thousands of armed workers and pro-CPC rank and file soldiers to take over Guangzhou (then called Canton). The workers' uprising was brutally crushed within two days. Over ten thousand communists and other workers were massacred. In analysing the failed uprising, Trotsky pointed out that the insurrection did illuminate the revolutionary path that workers in China must take. By nationalising large-scale industry, banks and transport and by confiscating bourgeois apartments for use by the toilers, the Canton workers confirmed by their deeds that the future Chinese revolution, rather than being one made in a coalition with a supposed "patriotic-democratic" bourgeoisie, would need to take socialist measures against the bourgeoisie even to complete the tasks of the national-democratic revolution. However, the Trotskyist left wing of the Soviet communist party criticised the Comintern for pushing the CPC to undertake such adventurist insurrections without first ensuring that there was sufficient mass support to make the success of these uprisings possible. Trotskyists pointed out that following the recent bloody defeats of the Great Revolution, the toiling classes were currently demoralised and reticent to engage in revolutionary struggle. That is why a good part of the masses stayed away from supporting the heroic Canton uprising.

Therefore, the founding conference of the Communist League of China emphasised that the workers' and peasants' struggle needed to first be revived through mobilising the toilers for immediate and partial demands before they would be ready to be unleashed in a new revolutionary offensive. It was actually this strategic perspective that won many Chinese communists to supporting the Left Opposition. This was especially the case for the longer-time cadre around Chen Duxiu. Even before reading Trotsky's writings, they had from 1928 onwards been making their own criticisms of the new CPC leadership's ultra-leftist line (which had been dictated to by the Comintern) that armed uprisings were still immediately posed.

One of the main immediate slogans that the

League raised was for a national assembly elected by universal direct suffrage to run China. The slogan was insisted upon by Trotsky against the objections of many of the younger Chinese Trotskyists. Trotsky was, of course, clear that such a democratic assembly would still be an organ of bourgeois rule. The disproportionate ability of the wealthy capitalists to fund political parties and political advertising and their ownership of the news media means that it is they who usually end up having the decisive say in who wins "free elections." Moreover, no matter who wins entry into parliament, the exploiting classes will still be controlling the state machinery that any parliament will administer. However, given that a democratic parliament did not then exist in China, raising the demand for an

elected national assembly was seen as a way for communists to re-energise the working class and peasant movements following their massive defeats.

Prior to the 1917 Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks did make a similar call for an elected national assembly. They called for convening a constituent assembly – that is a body to write a new constitution – to be elected by universal suffrage. Given that Russia's bourgeois liberals and their Menshevik and SR allies put off convening such an assembly when they headed the Provisional Government in the wake of the February Revolution, the Bolsheviks raising the demand did help, to some degree, to expose the inability of liberal and reformist parties to even truly deliver basic democratic rights. However, the call for a constituent assembly was not key to mobilising the toilers for the Russian Revolution. Slogans around ending the war, reducing the work week, giving land to the peasants, granting self-determination to the minority nations oppressed by the Russian empire and putting an end to the economic chaos were far, far more crucial. In the end, it took the workers' seizure of state power in October 1917 to elect and convene the constituent assembly. However, the assembly turned out to be a counterrevolutionary body that opposed the power being held by the workers and peasants soviets. So, the Bolsheviks dispersed the assembly after just one day!

Long-trusted slogans of the socialist movement, just like strategies for social progress, cannot escape the basic premise on which the theory of Permanent Revolution is based; that is that countries of belated social development cannot simply follow the same path that other countries had treaded earlier. The 1917 October Revolution not only inspired the exploited masses of the world, it made the horrified oppressing classes take stock. One of the latter's key conclusions from October 1917 is that they should no longer resist the convocation of elected parliaments even if that gives workers' parties an additional forum to speak to the masses. The latter is a much lesser evil compared to losing state power outright, they reasoned. Moreover, all

the oppressor classes would have noted how the convocation of a constituent assembly in Russia had the potential to have been a bulwark against the Russian Revolution; and how, in the following decade, promises of "true democracy" in elected parliaments had been used to head off several revolutionary struggles elsewhere. Therefore, the slogan for an elected constituent/national assembly, which had at one time been used to help mobilise the toilers in struggle, would now be more likely to be used to scuttle a revolution.

To be sure, in semi-colonial countries, like pre-1949 China, there was not much room for even the pretence of political democracy. The savage exploitation of the masses by the imperialists combined with the share looted by the local elites meant that the subjugation of the toilers was very naked and could only be maintained by brute force. There was a reason that China was then ruled by the murderous KMT dictatorship and brutal warlords. Nevertheless, faced with a powerful challenge from the toilers, it was quite possible for the ruling classes to offer an elected national assembly/constituent assembly as an attempt to defuse the masses' revolt. Indeed, that is precisely what the KMT dictatorship did in 1947-1948. As they started losing the 1946-1949 Civil War to the CPC-led toiling classes, the reactionary dictatorship organised the "democratic" election of a parliament and a constituent/national assembly. The "free elections" took place while the regime continued to brutally persecute the Left. Indeed, that is typical of how "parliamentary democracy" operates in the semi-colonial countries today. In countries like the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand, there are "democratically elected" parliaments combined with bans on communist parties and advocacy of communism, other restrictions on freedom of speech, crackdowns on political protests and brutal persecution of leftists and trade unionists.

The problematic nature of the Communist League's slogan for an elected national assembly allowed the official CPC, then in the midst of a sudden, Moscow-ordered ultra-leftist turn, to paint their Trotskyist, Left Opposition-allied rivals as "right opportunists".

Furthermore, the League's call for an elected national assembly never got much traction not only among members of the official CPC but amongst the broader Chinese toilers as well. Just as the experience of the revolutionary upheaval following World War I influenced the bourgeoisie's attitude to calls for elected assemblies, it also, in quite an opposite way, affected the enthusiasm of vanguard layers of the proletariat for "democratic" parliaments and constituent assemblies. The most politically advanced layers of the toilers would have noted how the constituent assembly that convened soon after the October Revolution sought to undermine the newly won workers' rule. They would have seen how the imperialists seeking to overthrow the Soviet workers state would present "parliamentary democracy" as their alternative vision for

Russia. Moreover, within China, staunch anti-imperialists would not hold much sympathy for parliamentary democracy given that many of the imperialists subjugating China, including the British, French and American ones, were precisely such "democracies." Therefore, although the slogan for an elected national assembly was probably not hugely wrong, one thing is certain: the League would have had more impact had it instead put more emphasis on the other intermediate demands that it was raising – the transfer of the land to the peasant poor; the eight hour work-day and the independence of China. To be sure, given the KMT's brutal rule, demands for political freedom were important too, like the release of leftist, worker and peasant political prisoners, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and trade union rights.

Early Promise in China *Crushed* by Fierce Repression

Despite the somewhat disorienting effect of the National Assembly slogan, the newly born Communist League of China had several things going for them. By the time that the Communist League was formed, in addition to the returned students from Russia and those that the latter recruited within China, a fair number of CPC leaders had joined the Trotskyist movement. Many others were sympathetic to the ideas of the Left Opposition but did not join only because they thought that the official CPC was bigger and better known and thus had better prospects to effect revolutionary change. What also stopped more CPC cadre from joining the League was an intense propaganda campaign by the pro-Stalin, then CPC leadership, that accused those CPC leaders who became Trotskyists of doing so only in order to divert their own responsibility for the bloody defeats suffered by the Chinese Revolution onto the Comintern. This accusation was hurled against Chen Duxiu in particular. However, this was completely unfair. Chen actually went to great lengths to accept personal responsibility for his role in implementing the disastrous pro-KMT policy. Chen convincingly refuted his accusers by pointing out in his 1929 Open Letter that: "In reality, the documents of comrade Trotsky accuse me much more severely than do those of Stalin and Bukharin; and I could not but recognize that the lessons of the past revolution pointed out by him are one hundred percent correct, and I could never reject his words because he criticises me." However, it was possible that other longer-time CPC cadre close to Chen who became Trotskyists were not as entirely sincere as Chen himself. Indeed, some of these leaders had actually been on the right-wing of the CPC during the Great Revolution and had resisted other CPC cadre, like Qiu Qiubai, who, within the spectrum of the opportunist policy dictated by Moscow, had argued for more support to peasant uprisings. Among the former, was head of the CPC's propaganda department during the 1925-1927 Revolution, Peng Shuzhi. Peng was the second of the five member Central Bureau of the CPC Central Committee during the Great Revolution (in addition to Chen) that was won over to Trotskyism. However Peng, who had returned to China from study in Moscow in 1924, had been among the most ardent enforcers of Bukharin and Stalin's capitulationist line within the top CPC leadership. Nevertheless, this did not, in itself, necessarily mean that Peng and others like him were incapable of correcting their past grave errors.

What the Communist League most crucially possessed was a guiding theory, the *Permanent Revolution*, that provided both a clear strategy for the future and an analysis of the causes of the Great Revolution's defeat that was completely consistent with the real experience of Chinese communists. This was unlike the official CPC at the time, whose comrades were left in a state of theoretical confusion by the sharply zig-zagging – and mutually contradictory – lines imposed on them by Moscow. Moreover, Stalin and the Comintern's obsession with constantly seeking out CPC scapegoats for the defeats that their own diktats had created caused considerable internal bickering within the CPC and a culture of finger-pointing among cadre. This affected the culture of the Chinese Trotskyists too, most of whose leaders came out of the CPC. However, within the CPC, the factional rivalries were especially exacerbated when, in 1929, Moscow sent back Wang Ming (who had earlier spearheaded the attacks on Chinese students won to Trotskyism in Moscow) and his clique to take over the party. By 1931, they had effectively done so. But in the process, Wang and Co. had gutted the CPC further by conducting destructive and divisive internal purges.

Yet the newly formed Communist League of China faced many of the same objective difficulties as the official CPC. The mood and fighting spirit of the workers still had not returned following the crushing of the Great Revolution. Moreover, like the CPC, the League had to contend with the terror of the repressive KMT regime. This hit the Chinese Trotskyists like a tsunami just eighteen days after they concluded their founding congress. The KMT arrested almost the entire central committee of the League as well as many other members and sentenced the cadre to long jail terms. Later that year, more cadre were arrested.

Chen Duxiu and Peng Shuzhi, however, managed to escape the dragnet. They and the remaining Trotskyists heroically continued the League's work under conditions of illegality. They published both underground and open publications that gained a wide following amongst factory workers and

students as well as amongst CPC grassroots activists. The League agitated against state repression and called for a fighting, class-struggle alliance between urban workers and the CPC rural bases. After the Japanese imperialists annexed Manchuria later that year and soon after attacked Shanghai, the League campaigned for the defence of semi-colonial China against Japanese imperialism and for the USSR and the international communist movement to mobilise in defence of China. Through the League's agitation, they succeeded in recruiting many urban workers and rank and file CPC cadre. CPC party cells amongst the postal, power-plant and textile workers went over to the Trotskyists. The League became the leading force amongst the workers movement in Shanghai, where they led several major strikes with some success under very difficult conditions.

However in October 1932, Chen Duxiu, Peng Shuzhi and most of the remaining Trotskyist cadre not jailed the previous year were arrested in a joint operation of the KMT and British and French intelligence. This latest repression all but wiped out the Communist League. There were brief periods of revival, including when some of the arrested cadre were released. However, these intervals were soon followed by more crippling arrests. It was not until the full-scale Japanese invasion of China in 1937 that Chen Duxiu, Peng Shuzhi, Wang Fanxi, Zheng Chaolin and the other Trotskyist leaders were released from prison by the KMT regime. In the meantime, some Communist League cadre ended up dying or being killed in prison. In that period, the official CPC also suffered terribly from brutal KMT terror. However, the proportion of the League's leadership put out of action by repression was much higher than that of the CPC. Therefore, the anti-communist repression hurt the operations of the Chinese Trotskyists considerably more than it damaged the official CPC. Not having the considerable financial backing from the Soviet Union that the CPC received made it harder for the League to hide its cadre and operations. And this shortage of financial resources also put the Chinese Trotskyists at a relative disadvantage to the CPC in its overall political work.

The Left Opposition Struggle to Defend the Soviet Workers State *against* Re-Emerging Capitalists

Throughout the mid-late 1920s, Trotsky devoted much of his attention to the struggle for revolution in China. He understood that the fate of China would have great significance for the world. The other issue that pre-occupied the Left Opposition in that period was the struggle against the excessive re-emergence of capitalists within the USSR. Now, like other Bolsheviks, Trotsky understood that during the transition to socialism there would be, for a period, some degree of capitalism that would co-exist with a socialistic economic system where the banks, mines and strategic industries are in the hands of the workers state. However, once the Civil War started several months after the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks needed to quickly bring the whole economy under state control for the sake of the war effort. During the Civil War, the Soviet state forcibly requisitioned grain from the peasants in order to feed the cities. Even though peasants tend to have an individualistic spirit to the extent that they remain self-employed businesspeople, most of the peasantry accepted this Bolshevik war policy. They wanted to preserve Soviet rule so that a regime serving the overthrown landlords would not return to power. However, once that threat diminished with the Bolshevik war victory, a significant section of the peasants went into revolt. So to heal relations between the workers state and the private enterprise-oriented peasants, as well as to quickly boost small-scale production at a time when the economy was still recovering from the ravages of war and the resources available to the state to organise production and distribution of goods on all levels were necessarily limited, the Bolsheviks introduced a policy called the NEP (New Economic Policy) that ended forced requisitioning and allowed peasants to sell their produce on the market combined with a tax on their produce. Small-scale capitalist merchants were also allowed to operate to enable the market to function. The Bolsheviks understood that the NEP was a tactical retreat that was forced on the workers state by the reality that revolutionary uprisings abroad had thus far failed. Soviet Russia needed to buy itself more space to preserve proletarian rule by ensuring that the alliance between the proletariat and peasantry did not fall apart and that the newly born, isolated workers state had a fighting chance of surviving through this difficult period. However, Lenin understood that the NEP came with huge risks. Already by 1922, just a year after the NEP was introduced, Lenin (with Trotsky' support) convinced the Bolshevik Central Committee to overturn an earlier decision that they had made (when he was ill) that would have allowed the peasants to bypass the workers state and sell produce directly to overseas capitalists. Especially with the Soviet economy in such an extremely weak state then, such a loosening would have excessively undermined state control of the economy and would have allowed powerful capitalists to gain influence over the peasantry. That same year, Lenin declared about the NEP:

“We clearly realise that the New Economic Policy is a retreat, and we do not conceal it....

“But we can now say that, so far as making concessions to the capitalists is concerned, the retreat is at an end.... We can now stop our economic retreat. Enough! We shall not retreat any further; we shall set about deploying and regrouping our forces properly.”

V.I.Lenin, *The International and Domestic Situation Of The Soviet Republic*, Speech Delivered To A Meeting Of The Communist Group At The All-Russia Congress Of Metalworkers, 6 March 1922, First Published in *Pravda* No. 54, 8 March 1922, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1922/mar/06.htm>

However, after Lenin's death, the new right-leaning Soviet leadership continued retreating. They allowed kulaks (rich farmers who exploited the seasonal or sometimes all-year labour of poorer peasants), capitalist

traders who got rich through the NEP (known as NEPmen) and other sections of the newly minted bourgeoisie to gain an ever increasing share of national income. These capitalist elements kept lobbying for even greater rights

and were finding elements in the bureaucracy willing to pander to them. The main figure in the new Bolshevik leadership pushing for softness on the kulaks and NEPmen was Bukharin – who even when Lenin was alive had tried to undermine the state control of foreign trade (for latter day Chinese equivalents of post-Civil War Bukharin one can think of Chinese premier and then CPC general secretary in the 1980s, Zhao Ziyang, whose free-market fundamentalism and excessive openings to capitalism led to increased inequality, corruption and runaway inflation - that were a good part of the underlying causes of the 1989 upheaval at Tiananmen Square - or Zhu Rongji, Chinese premier in the late 1990s and early 2000s who carried out privatisations of many smaller and medium-size state-owned enterprises). The right-wing section of the party led by Bukharin, Tomsky and Rykov were supported in this course by Stalin and others in the “centre” of the party.

The United Opposition responded to this situation by calling to curb the power of the kulaks and reduce the differentiation in income in the rural areas. They pushed to greatly increase taxes on the kulaks, improve the conditions of agricultural workers and strictly enforce the rule in the party’s constitution banning those who use hired labour from participating in the soviet councils. The Opposition also called to urgently begin the voluntary collectivisation of agriculture by giving incentives – like subsidies, access to mechanisation and credit – to poor peasants to form into collectives. They advocated increasing the pace of development of state-owned industries financed through increased taxation of private profits. The Opposition also called for increasing the wages of workers, for equal pay for equal work for women workers and for a focus on increasing the skills training of women workers.

Today, and indeed ever since the founding of the PRC, there are false debates amongst Chinese communists that are typified by the analogy of “whether it is better to have socialist trains that are late than capitalist trains that are on time.” Therefore, it is important to stress that the United Opposition did not at all advocate slower development. They wanted

socialist trains that are on time! Indeed, they criticised the Bukharin-Stalin party leadership for accepting slow rates of development and slow improvements in the masses’ material conditions pointing out that this would increase the counterrevolutionary pressures on the workers state. Thus, the 1927 *Platform of the United Opposition* emphasised that:

“THE basic condition for a socialist development in the present preliminary stage and in the given historical situation – capitalist encirclement and a delay in the world revolution – is a rate of industrialization sufficiently rapid to guarantee, in the near future, a solution of at least the following problems:

“The material positions of the proletariat within the country must be strengthened both absolutely and relatively (growth in the number of employed workers, reduction of the number unemployed, improvement in the material level of the working class and, especially, raising of housing space per head to meet sanitary standards)...

“In the matter of developing the productive forces, in the matter of technique, and in the matter of improving the material conditions of the working class and the toiling masses, the Soviet Union must not fall further behind the capitalist countries, but in the near future must overtake them.

The Opposition was also not opposed to what in China is today referred to as “Opening Up.” Indeed, they criticised the Bukharin-Stalin leadership for then pursuing a policy of a closed economy. **Trotskyists were for an economy open to the world but one based on an ever increasing dominance of the socialist sector of the economy and one where the workers state would maintain strict control of exports and investments.** Thus, the United Opposition’s *Platform* emphasised that:

“In the long struggle between two irreconcilably hostile social systems – capitalism and socialism – the outcome will be determined, in the last analysis by the relative productivity of labour under each system....

“We cannot hide from the capitalist environment under cover of a nationally exclusive economy. Just because of its exclusiveness, such an economy would be

compelled to advance at an extremely slow pace, and in consequence would meet, not a weakened, but a strengthened pressure, not only from the capitalist armies and fleets (“intervention”), but above all from cheap capitalist commodities.

“The monopoly of foreign trade is a vitally necessary weapon for socialist construction, when the capitalist countries possess a higher technique. But the socialist economy now under construction can be defended by this monopoly only if it continually approaches the world economy in respect of technique, cost of production, quality and price of its products. The goal of the economic leadership ought to be, not a shut-in, self-sufficient economy, at the price of an inevitable lowering of its level and rate of advance, but just the opposite – an all-sided increase of our relative weight in world economy, to be achieved by increasing our tempo to the utmost....

“... it is necessary: To understand the gigantic significance of our export trade, now so dangerously lagging behind the development of our economy as a whole....

“To develop our bonds with world economy from the angle of an all-sided speeding up of industrialization and strengthening of the socialist element, in contrast to the capitalist element, in our own economy; not to fritter away our limited accumulations in the near future, but gradually and with a deliberate plan to pass over to new forms of production which will assure us, in the first instance, a mass output of the most necessary and most available machines; skilfully and prudently to supplement and stimulate our own industry by systematically utilizing the achievements of world capitalist technique.”

The bureaucratized Soviet leadership responded to the United Opposition’s proposals for “strengthening of the socialist element, in contrast to the capitalist element” by purging Oppositionists from party leadership positions and intimidating Oppositionists at party meetings with violence and abuse. The leadership’s attacks were assisted by conservative, despondent moods within the party ranks caused by the defeat of the Great Revolution in China and the earlier defeat of the 1926 British General Strike (again facilitated by the Comintern’s rightist revisionism). However, by late 1927,

it also became clear just how much support there was for the United Opposition within the urban working class. In October of that year, what was meant to be a celebration of the policies of the official leadership turned into a demonstration in support of Trotsky and Zinoviev. Then at the tenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution parades, large numbers of Oppositionists raised banners calling to “Turn the Fire to the Right: Strike against the kulak, the Nepman and the bureaucrat!” The Soviet leadership responded by physically smashing the Opposition contingents. Within days they expelled Trotsky and Zinoviev from the party. Thousands of other Oppositionists were also expelled. Even more capitulated to the bureaucratic attacks by renouncing their support to the Opposition including Zinoviev, Kamenev and their supporters. Then, three to four thousand Oppositionists who did not capitulate were arrested and sent into exile in far flung parts of the USSR so that they would be out of contact with both each other and with party members. Trotsky was banished to Alma Ata in Soviet Kazakhstan.

However, **under pressure from the popularity that the Opposition’s proposals had been met with, Stalin, after having slandered these policies as serving the imperialist enemies of the USSR ... began to himself implement these very same policies!** This was given extra impetus by the kulaks themselves becoming increasingly bold in demanding ever more concessions from the workers state – just as Trotsky had warned. In early 1928, the kulaks began withholding grain in order to obtain higher prices and the right to be able to bypass the workers state and directly sell their produce abroad to overseas capitalists. **By the time that the 11th anniversary of the October Revolution arrived in late 1928, the Soviet leadership was marking the anniversary by proclaiming, “The danger is on the right!”, “Strike against the kulak!”, “Curb the Nepman!” – that is, almost the very same slogans that the United Opposition had raised the year before when the Soviet leadership crushed the Opposition contingents for raising these very slogans!**

Given that the Soviet leadership was now implementing a good part of the Left

Opposition's (the United Opposition was effectively dead given the capitulation of the Zinovievists) platform on domestic questions, Trotsky now called for support for Stalin – but critical support demanding that the leadership restore internal democracy within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) as well as the internationalist foreign policy pursued by Lenin. The fact that events had proved the Trotskyists correct caused new layers of party comrades to start aligning with the Left Opposition. Many more seriously considered doing so without taking the step. Even amongst the then CPSU leadership's strongest supporters, doubts about their own hostility to the Left Opposition emerged.

Meanwhile, the logic of having to take up the Left Opposition's economic policies necessitated Stalin to make a break with Bukharin's rightist section of the CPSU. Now isolated and desperate, Stalin made overtures to the Left Opposition. Rumours flew of the possibility of a Stalin-Trotsky alliance. The Stalinists' strategy was to woo over those who could be won from the Opposition and then strike down ferociously those who remained firm. The strategy worked. Little by little, several of the most prominent Left Oppositionists capitulated – including Karl Radek, Yevgeni Preobrazhensky, Leonid Serebryakov and Ivar Smilga – and moved away from their support for the Opposition. Bending to hostile pressure was not the only factor influencing the capitulators. The fact that Stalin was now taking up many of the Opposition's key domestic policies made some of the Left Oppositionists feel that there was no longer a need to be critical of the then CPSU leadership. In drawing such a conclusion they gave greatly inadequate importance to international questions. The CPSU was now adhering to many of the key domestic economic policies needed but by treacherously subordinating the proletarian class struggle abroad to the short-term diplomatic maneuvers of the USSR, the Kremlin leadership was doing great harm to the struggle for world socialist revolution – and thus damaging the interests of the USSR too. Regardless of the reasons, the capitulations were disastrous for the USSR and the world. If the Zinovievists and the leading Left Oppositionists had stood firm, their combined grouping may well have

gained the ascendancy within the CPSU in and around 1928. The history of the USSR and the world would have ended up very differently!

Several thousand Left Oppositionists, however, bravely refused to capitulate. They became the victims of Stalin's wrath. In two separate waves in 1929 and 1930, the Soviet leadership arrested and sent into detention camps most of the publicly known Trotskyists. Trotsky himself was deported to Turkey in February 1929. As an open organised force, the Left Opposition had been all but crushed. **However, by pressuring the CPSU leadership to adopt its economic policies, the Left Opposition had prevented the Soviet Union from being engulfed by kulak-driven counterrevolution.** It is not that either the Stalin or Bukharin factions actually desired capitalist restoration. Neither did. However, had there been no Left Opposition, they would have continued with their policy of appeasement of the kulaks and NEPmen which would have allowed these numerous small-scale capitalists to gain such strength in their push for more “rights” that they would have been able to pressure the bureaucracy into yet more concessions which would have given them even more momentum to bash open the door still wider for capitalism. The forces of counterrevolution would have become such a powerful snowball hurtling down – and what's more one powerfully pushed along by world imperialism – that it would have been likely too late for Stalin, Bukharin and Co. to stop the insurgent bourgeoisie if and when they finally resolved to resist them.

It is worth comparing the USSR of the mid-late 1920s with the USSR under Gorbachev some 60 years later. There were, of course, big differences between the two situations. It is true too that Bukharin and Stalin still then had a deeper commitment to socialism than what Gorbachev did at the start of his *Perestroika* economic reforms in the mid-1980s. However, the pre-1990 Gorbachev also did not want capitalist restoration. Yet, like the course of Bukharin and Stalin in the mid-1920s, Gorbachev's rightist economic policies created a social layer that would push towards capitalist counterrevolution. This layer, consisting of petty capitalists, black

marketeers and speculators as well pro-Western, educated youth and professionals excited by the beginnings of capitalist re-emergence, became a political force pressuring the Gorbachev-headed Soviet bureaucracy further and further to the right. However, this new pro-capitalist layer did not have anything like the numerical weight of the kulaks, NEPmen and small-scale manufacturing capitalists that had been allowed to grow largely unchecked by Bukharin, Stalin and Co in the 1920s. Indeed, in terms of socio-economic policy and international policy too – long predating Gorbachev’s own late 1980s capitulations to capitalist powers in the search for “peaceful co-existence” with capitalism – **Stalin and especially Bukharin were in the mid-late 1920s the original Gorbachevites** (and here we mean not the later openly counterrevolutionary Gorbachev but the pre-1990 one). **The most important reason as to why capitalist counterrevolution was averted in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s unlike in 1991-92 is that back then the dangerous drift to the right was being resisted by a sizable organised communist force with a clear, unalloyed Leninist program – in the form of the Left Opposition – whereas such a factor was missing in Gorbachev’s time.**

So if one does a balance sheet of the Left Opposition in the 1920s, one would conclude that the Left Oppositionists had been persecuted, slandered, deported and imprisoned and ultimately crushed as an open organised force. However, at the same time, one has to conclude that **the Left Opposition had accomplished the greatest of achievements: they had, through their political pressure, saved the Soviet Union! Their goal was, of course, not merely to pressure the existing Soviet leadership to change one major aspect of their policy. The Left Opposition wanted a complete return to the path of authentic Leninism. Nevertheless, in fighting for this goal they were able to make a “lesser” achievement of still enormous significance: the saving of the Soviet workers state from capitalist counterrevolution in the late 1920s. In this, no small amount of credit must go to the young Chinese communists who chose to**

align with the Trotskyists while attending cadre schools in Russia. They bravely showed their support for the Oppositionists – including quite sensationally by unfurling pro-Opposition banners at the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution parade. This made a political difference. Concern that their international support was being lost to the Left Opposition would have been one of the factors that made the Stalin “Centre” group eventually adopt the Opposition’s economic program.

The Left Opposition’s, ultimately successful, struggle to reverse a course that was threatening to open the door to capitalist counterrevolution in the late 1920s USSR has enormous significance for the fight to defend socialistic rule in today’s China, where capitalist forces have also been dangerously allowed to develop to an extent that is far greater than what is needed in the transition phase to full socialism. As the Opposition emphasised in warning against the development of “*capitalism on the instalment plan*” – and as Lenin had repeatedly stressed – the large number of smaller-scale exploiters are “digging a deep mine under the socialist position.” Their presence was even more dangerous than having a much smaller number of big capitalists precisely because these smaller and medium size exploiters are so large in number and because their growing strength takes place, “in a fragmentary and underground manner, only to burst ‘unexpectedly’ to the surface all at once.” Therefore, there is much in the Left Opposition/United Opposition’s thrust that should be applied to the PRC workers state today. In particular the United Opposition *Platform’s* insistence that:

“The socialist state and co-operative elements must increase systematically, crowding out some and subordinating and transforming others of the pre-socialist economic elements (capitalist and pre-capitalist).”

The Left Opposition/United Opposition’s proposals to introduce “a steeply progressive tax system” and “to tax all kinds of excess profits from private enterprises” in order to finance the development of state-owned industry and collective farms is also crucially relevant to today’s China.

Trotsky's Struggle *against* the Rise of Fascism in Germany

After events proved the Left Opposition correct on both the kulaks and on China's 1925-27 Great Revolution, the Soviet bureaucracy became terrified that the Soviet masses would be influenced more and more by the Trotskyists. So they decided to try and outflank the Trotskyists by now posturing as being further to the left of the Left Opposition – if you like, more Trotskyist than the Trotskyists. From 1929, Stalin switched from following the Opposition's program of firmly but rationally curbing kulak



power and intensive, voluntary collectivisation of agriculture to a frenzied-pace, forced collectivisation. This was implemented in a frantic and brutal manner which unnecessarily alienated many middle-income peasants. It was accentuated by panic from the Stalin leadership at how much their own previous policies had emboldened the kulaks. The result was sabotage of production by large chunks of the peasantry, massive turmoil, a horrific collapse in agricultural production and then severe famine in some parts of the country. In the meantime, the CPSU leadership decided to revise the First Five-Year Plan by artificially inflating the targets. After having in the mid-1920s accused the United Opposition of being “super industrialists”, the Soviet leaders now mandated a frenetic, forced-march industrialisation plan. When the results of the Plan came through, Trotsky hailed the achievements. He pointed out that the hitherto unknown rates of industrial growth that were accomplished showed the power of socialist planning and the tremendous potential of the economic system created by the October Revolution. He also noted that while the Soviet Union was making these stunning achievements, the capitalist world was mired in the Great Depression and the masses there devastated by massive unemployment, homelessness and despair. However, Trotsky also criticised the hysterical pace that was dictated by the Plan, pointing out that it had led to much waste as well as much cruel bullying of workers in the pursuit of higher productivity. After the end of the First Five Year Plan in 1932, in response to mass disgruntlement at over-the-top measures, Stalin moved to improve the provision of consumer goods to the masses, raise the living standards of collective farmers, wind back the harshest punishments given to kulaks and improve housing for workers.

Overall, although implemented in a callous manner that brought terrible suffering to parts of, especially rural, USSR, the left turn in Soviet economic policy – that was induced by the pressure of the Left Opposition – was immensely progressive. However, the opposite was the case with the Stalin leadership's accompanying ultra-left turn in its China policy, which, as we noted earlier, led to disastrous failed uprisings. To give a theoretical basis to their sudden overall left-turn, the Soviet leadership proclaimed

that the world was now in a “Third Period” where revolution was certain in the next few years. The Comintern now decreed that social democrats are in fact no different from fascists – that they are merely “social fascists.” Where the new policy proved to be most disastrous was in Germany. Early 1930s German society was polarising at both ends. On the right extreme, Hitler's Nazis were growing in strength. Nazi gangs were more brazenly attacking the meetings and representatives of the Left parties and

trade unions. However, at the other end, the German Communist Party (KPD), because it was seen as the party of the extreme left, was growing in strength amongst the working class at the expense of the larger Social Democratic Party (SPD). The SPD's response to the Nazi threat was to look to the "democratic" capitalists and the organs of the capitalist state to save them from the Nazis. The KPD for its part, at first, downplayed the threat. They said that the Nazis are just one form of fascism rising at the expense of another.

Trotsky, however, warned that the Nazis threatened the wholesale physical annihilation of all independent organisations of the working class. He explained that it was suicidal to look to capitalist state institutions to defend organisations of the workers' movement from the fascists as the SPD did. **Trotsky called for direct, united-front defence of the workers' movement and for action to strike physical blows against the Nazi paramilitaries. He called for the communist KPD to seek agreements with the social-democratic SPD leaders on joint action to defend each other's meetings, offices and printing presses.** In doing so, Trotsky was not for one moment renouncing the Leninist understanding that social democracy acted as agents of the capitalist class within the workers' movement. Yet, Trotsky explained that fascists sought the complete annihilation of all parties of the workers movement, including social democratic parties. Therefore, the social democrats also had an interest in stopping the fascists. By publicly offering the SPD leaders proposals for united front defence against fascism, the KPD could harness the SPD's working class base to pressure their own leaders into accepting communist proposals for such joint action. Trotsky understood that even with such pressure from their ranks, SPD leaders would be half-hearted about such action. He, however, explained that should SPD leaders reject publicly made communist proposals, or only join in half-heartedly, the

communist KPD would be able to prove to the SPD ranks that only the communists are able to spearhead the struggle against fascism. In this way, the struggle to build a united front against fascism becomes the path to communists gaining the support of the mass of the working class and, thus, to opening the road for socialist revolution. Trotsky very much understood that the alternatives facing Germany then were either the nightmare of fascism or the bright future of workers' revolution. A struggle to build a workers' united front against fascism was the road to revolution.

The Comintern-directed KPD did promote the idea of socialist revolution. However, rejecting calls to seek agreements with SPD leaders (who after all were supposedly "social fascists" in the rhetoric of the KPD) for joint defence against Nazi Stormtroopers, the KPD was unable to reach out to the workers still under the leadership of the SPD. Given that this was the majority of workers, the KPD was unable to mobilise the strength needed to throwback the Nazi threat and open the road to workers' revolution. To be sure many KPD cadre, workers and youth did eventually organise brave self-defence units to combat the Nazi stormtroopers. Indeed, even SPD youth, realising that their leaders' strategy of appealing to the mainstream bourgeoisie to protect them from fascism was completely useless, in the latter stages, built self-defence groups. But all these efforts proved way too little, way too late. Using different excuses, both the KPD and SPD failed to mobilise the mass united-front workers' actions that could have crushed Hitler's Nazis. What followed was a disaster. Nazi Stormtroopers attacked KPD supporters and thousands of communists were thrown into prisons and, later, concentration camps. Soon after, the SPD and the trade unions were smashed as well. Genocidal terror against Jewish people and other minorities followed as did all the horrific war crimes and genocide by Nazi occupying forces during World War II.

The Trotskyist Struggle for Workers Revolution in France

Following the Nazi triumph in Germany, the Comintern not only upheld the disastrous course that it had taken there but even tried to claim that a catastrophic setback had not been suffered by the working class. Trotsky concluded from this that the Comintern and its constituent parties could no longer be reformed. What was now required was the building of a new Fourth International. The Comintern for its part – recoiling from the outcome of its own policies – made yet another zig zag. It veered from an ultra-leftist direction to heading even further to the right of the stance that it had taken in the mid-late 1920s. The Comintern now called for Communist parties in all countries to join in people's front/popular fronts with not only social democrats (who they had not long before been labelling as "social fascists"!) but with supposed "progressive" capitalists. The Comintern was now extending the disastrous Menshevik strategy that it imposed on the CPC during the Great Revolution to all countries – even the imperialist ones. The justification given for this new turn is that it was supposedly a means to resist rising fascism. However, the underlying driver of the new course, just like its subordination of the CPC to the KMT in the mid-late 1920s, was the bureaucratized Soviet leadership's willingness to sacrifice the revolution abroad in the quest for alliances with "friendly" capitalists. Therefore, **the Trotskyist movement devoted much of its efforts in the mid and late 1930s to opposing the "People's Front"/"Popular Front" strategy and to fighting for workers' parties to maintain independence from all wings of the capitalist class.**

The Popular Front strategy was promulgated at a time of growing left-wing radicalization of workers around the world. In May-June 1936, workers in France unleashed a massive general strike to fight for their rights. Millions of workers occupied the factories and mills. The capitalists were terrified. The most politically aware workers were looking to the Comintern-aligned French Communist Party (PCF), because of its name and tradition, to do in France what the Bolsheviks had done in Russia. However by then the PCF and the other main party leading the French working class, the social democratic SFIO party, had joined the main liberal capitalist party, the "Radicals" in a Popular Front coalition. The Popular Front had just won recent elections with SFIO leader Leon Blum becoming prime minister. In order not to scare away their bourgeois allies, the SFIO, the social-democratic union leaders and the PCF worked to prevent the explosive workers strike from going further and pushed for the strikers to negotiate a deal with the Popular Front government. **Trotsky urgently called for the workers' movement to break the coalition with the bourgeois party, the Radicals, that was strangling the struggle. He called for the Committees of Action**

that the striking workers had thrown up to be linked together to become organs of workers' will so that they could, like the pre-October 1917 soviets, begin to vie for state power with the bourgeoisie.

However, the Trotskyists in France were too newly formed to make a decisive impact. Moreover, the French Trotskyists were unable to intersect with workers influenced by the PCF – who were the most left-wing workers in the country – because by this time the Comintern/CPSU leaders had poisoned these workers with huge doses of the slanderous lie that Trotskyists were "Nazi agents." Thus, the social democrats and the PCF were able to defuse the militant strikes. An opportunity to open the road to revolution was blown. The workers did get economic concessions through the negotiated deal. However, once the capitalists had used the workers' parties to stabilise their rule and diffuse the workers' fighting energy, the bourgeoisie – including its "progressive" variety – no longer had any use for either the workers' parties or economic concessions. Before long, the Radicals dumped the SFIO and the PCF. Then in November 1938, the new government headed by Radical leader Édouard Daladier, who had

been the Defence Minister in Blum's Popular Front government, proceeded to wipe out every one of the concessions that were given to end the 1936 general strike. Daladier then brutally attacked the strikes that erupted against his anti-worker measures with police and military repression. **As Trotsky had warned, far from being a method to retard fascism, the Popular Front strategy, by demobilising and disorienting the workers' movement, facilitated the future rise of far-right reaction when the bourgeoisie needed to move to open physical attacks on the workers' movement.** In late 1939, Daladier, who let's recall was one of the "progressive bourgeois" that the social democrats and

PCF had earlier promoted as a friend of the workers, **banned** the PCF outright. Soon after, the demoralisation of the workers' movement caused by the Popular Front and the disorientation of PCF supporters resulting from the Comintern's directive to greatly tone down any criticism of the Nazis in the wake of the 1939 Hitler-Stalin pact allowed the extreme right-wing Vichy regime to take over France with little resistance. That Nazi-collaborationist regime's first Minister of State was none other than Radical politician, Camille Chautemps, who had also been the Minister of State in Blum's Popular Front government!

The Spanish Revolution *Sabotaged*

In neighbouring Spain, a similar tragedy as in France played out at the same time – only with many times greater intensity. By the mid-1930s, the toiling classes in Spain had enough of the capitalist order. Moreover, more so than in France, the International Left Opposition (as the worldwide Trotskyist movement was then known) had an instrument to intervene into events in Spain and push them towards socialist revolution. The Trotskyist group in that country, known as the Communist Left of Spain, had developed a decent-sized following. The founder-leader of the group, Andreu Nin, had earlier been a founder of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE). He was then sent to the Soviet Union to work with the Comintern and deepen his political education. There, just like so many of the Chinese students sent to cadre schools by the CPC, Nin was won to the politics of the Left Opposition. In the early 1930s, Trotsky himself turned his main focus from China to Spain. He devoted much effort to guiding the work of Nin and the Communist Left. However, Nin later became reluctant to seriously challenge the large reformist workers' groups within the Spanish left. In 1935, he broke with Trotsky and joined with a reformist "communist" group to form a party called the POUM. Nin took most of the Communist Left with him in the rightward split. The International Left Opposition was then left with a much smaller group called the Bolshevik-Leninist Section of Spain.

Soon the POUM showed the trajectory that it was on. In opposition to everything that the Trotskyist movement was emphasising, the POUM joined a "Popular Front" that tied the POUM and other groups within the Spanish workers' movement to liberal bourgeois parties. The largest component of that Popular Front was the socialist PSOE, which consisted of a typically social democratic right-wing and a more radical-talking, left-wing. Also part of the coalition was the official Comintern party, the PCE, as well as left-wing parties in the Catalonia region that soon merged into another Comintern party called the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSUC). However,

the politics of the Popular Front were subordinate to its bourgeois components – the Republican "Left" and Republic Union parties. The anarcho-syndicalist CNT union federation, which had a large following amongst the Spanish working class, did not at first join the Popular Front.

In the wake of the left-wing radicalisation of the masses, the Popular Front won elections in early 1936 and Republican "Left" politicians took over the presidency and prime ministership. With the parties that they looked to – that is not the republican parties but the PSOE, PCE, POUM and the PSCUC – now part of the government, workers'

Right, Barcelona, July 1936: In response to a far-right coup, armed workers and poor peasants took up arms to not only drive out the coup forces from Spain's industrial heartland but in the north-eastern Catalonia region also confiscated factories and seized the land from the landowners and placed them into the hands of collective farms. The revolutionary workers, mostly organised in the anarchist CNT and also in the socialist PSOE-led UGT union or in organisations led by the anti-Stalinist, Marxist POUM, had in practice established an insurgent proletarian dictatorship over Catalonia and much of the neighbouring Aragon region. However, without a consistent program for proletarian revolution, the CNT, the PSOE and the POUM allowed the republican bourgeois and the Comintern affiliated PCE/PSUC (that treacherously opposed the revolution as part of the right revisionist then Soviet leadership's attempt to win the acceptance of British and French imperialism) to crowd out the revolution. The anarchist CNT even took up ministries in the popular front coalition government with the republican bourgeois. Meanwhile, the POUM's



leader took up the post of Justice Minister in the popular front Catalan regional government that was attempting to take back the power from the revolutionary workers. In May 1937, the workers of Barcelona struck back at the attempts of the popular front Spanish and regional Catalan government to further unwind the July 1936 social revolution. They established barricades and seized control over most of the city. They were spurred on by a more principled, revolutionary splinter from the CNT called the Friends of Durruti, by the small Spanish section of the Trotskyist movement called the Bolshevik Leninists and by the POUM. However, their struggle was betrayed by CNT leaders who worked overtime to urge workers to abandon the barricades. Meanwhile, even as POUM members fought bravely on the barricades, their party sought an accommodation with the sellout CNT leaders. Given that most of the workers on the barricades were rank and file members of the CNT, the anarchists' betrayal and the POUM's indecisiveness eventually led to workers reluctantly abandoning the barricades. This allowed the forces of the republican bourgeois and the Stalinist PCE/PSUC to crush the uprising and follow that up with murderous repression of workers' leaders, the POUM, Friends of Durruti and the Trotskyists (Left). The betrayal of the May 1937 uprising and the workers' revolution in Catalonia more broadly thoroughly demoralised the workers of Spain, opening the road to the victory of Franco's fascist forces in the Spanish Civil War.

expectations were raised. They unleashed a huge strike wave. Peasants who had long been suppressed through violent attacks by their semi-feudal landlords began challenging landlord domination. In response, the capitalist and the landowning exploiting classes looked to fascist and monarchy-restorationist movements to "stabilise" their rule by crushing the Left. In mid-July 1936, these ultra-right-wing forces struck. They unleashed a military coup supported by most of the army's officers and backed by their own forces. The coup was soon to be led by General Francisco Franco.

The bourgeois leaders of the Popular Front government sought to negotiate with coup leaders. They refused demands by the CNT, the UGT (the PSOE led trade union federation) and the broader masses to arm workers to

resist the coup. However, the masses were not copping this. The CNT and UGT called a general strike against the conduct of the Republican-led government. Workers organised in these unions and in groups like the POUM built militias to fight back against the coup. They broke into and seized weapons from state depots. Fearing that it would be overthrown if it did not change its stance, the Popular Front government finally began to resist the coup and reluctantly agreed to arm the masses.

As a result of brave resistance from the workers' militias and with support from a few remaining Republican-loyal elements of the military and police, the coup forces were driven from Barcelona, Madrid and most other major industrial centres and kept out of

the east, north coast and southeast of Spain. The country was split roughly in half. In the industrial and leftist heartland in the northeast Catalonia region, the working class did more than resist the coup. Organised especially by the CNT but also by the UGT and POUM, workers' militias effectively took over those regions. They confiscated, or put under workers' control, the factories and seized the land from the landowners and placed them into the hands of collective farms. Meanwhile, columns of workers' militias streamed out to neighbouring Aragon province to bring the revolution to that region as well.

The Republican parties were terrified of this developing socialist revolution. Although their overwhelming main goal was to crush this revolution, they were also concerned about the monarchist-fascist coup. The Republican parties represented a layer of upper middle class politicians, lawyers, journalists and civil society professionals that feared that an authoritarian-monarchist dictatorship would see them lose the privileged and respected position that they held within bourgeois-democratic society. It was this social layer, as well as self-employed farmers, smaller-scale capitalists and just a handful of big-time capitalists that were the main base behind the Republican bourgeois parties. Trotsky referred to them as the "the shadow of the bourgeoisie". The big bourgeoisie for its part was overwhelmingly behind Franco.

The bourgeois Republican parties moved to slowly reverse the July 1936 Catalonia and Aragon revolution by clawing back power for the bourgeois state. They were greatly assisted in this by the Comintern-affiliated PCE and PSUC. These "Communists" argued that the workers' revolution needed to be put off until the Civil War against Franco was won. Although some in these parties had actually been convinced of this line that holding back the revolution was necessary to save the republic and "democracy", what was driving the Soviet bureaucrats who actually set the Comintern line was a cynical desire to win the support of British and French imperialism (and thus supposedly win allies against possible German invasion) by proving that the USSR was a "responsible" power that would stop

the spread of socialist revolution and at the same time save the world from fascism. Yet while the British and French imperialists sure did want to stop socialist revolution, they had no commitment to opposing fascism. They were only committed to preserving capitalist rule and furthering their own class interests. Indeed, it was actually two British intelligence officers who secretly flew General Franco to the colony of Spanish Morocco in July 1936 so that he could establish the base from which to launch his coup. Then in February 1939, before the war had ended and before Franco's forces had even taken Madrid, the British and French regimes rushed to recognise Franco as the ruler of Spain.

In the military conflict between Republican Spain led by the Popular Front government and Franco's fascist regime, the Trotskyists were of course on the side of the former and called for the international flow of arms and volunteers to those resisting Franco's forces. However, to those reformist leftists that insisted on "temporarily" opposing socialist revolution in order to unite with the liberal bourgeoisie against fascism, Trotsky countered that only by advancing the socialist revolution could the toiling classes be electrified to the levels of energy and heroism needed to enable them to defeat Franco's much better armed and trained forces. Moreover, if the transfer of land, the factories and shops from the capitalists into the hands of the people were to be proclaimed, it would have such an inspirational impact that it would cause a large section of the ranks of Franco's own troops to desert him and come over to the revolutionary workers. Trotsky called for workers, peasants and rank and file troops to sweep away the officer corps of the Republican military and to organise themselves into armed people's militias **independent of the bourgeois officers.**

Although less popular than the other workers parties, what gave the Moscow-line PCE-PSUC disproportionate influence is that while the Nazis and Mussolini sent large amounts of weaponry and troops to back Franco's forces, the only country providing weapons and military advisers to the anti-fascist side was the Soviet Union. Furthermore, it was the

Comintern that was the main force in bringing tens of thousands of volunteers from around the world to join the fight against the far-right forces. Yet, it was not only the Comintern parties in Spain that subordinated themselves to the republican bourgeoisie. So did all the other workers parties (except the Trotskyists). These other leftist workers parties hid behind the anti-Franco side's military reliance on the anti-revolution Moscow bureaucracy as an excuse for their own reluctance to follow through on their claimed commitment to workers' revolution. The unwillingness of the more left-leaning of the workers' parties to break with the republican bourgeoisie was highlighted when the CNT agreed to join the Popular Front government in November 1936. The anarchist leaders took up four ministries. Incredibly, CNT leader Juan García Oliver became the Justice Minister – thus making this anarchist the administrator of the police and courts of a capitalist state! The CNT leaders also consented to incorporating the workers' militias that they led into the Republican military – thus subordinating workers to the bourgeois officers. The POUM protested most loudly against this unwinding of the revolution but they too acquiesced to it. Indeed POUM leader, Andreu Nin, became the Justice Minister in the regional Catalan Popular Front government.

Nevertheless, tensions continued to grow within the Popular Front. The Republican parties and their Stalinist PCE-PSUC servants demanded more subordination to the bourgeois state apparatus than the militant rank and file base of the CNT and POUM would allow their leaders to make. There were armed clashes between bourgeois state forces and CNT-controlled armed groups. On 29 October 1936, armed PCE forces in Valencia despicably opened fire on an anarchist procession killing about thirty of the latter. Matters came to a head in Barcelona in May 1937 when the Republican government special police, known as the Assault Guard, took over the telephone exchange from a CNT-UGT workers' committee. Angered by this attack and worried about a wider crackdown, more militant CNT activists, the POUM, the Bolshevik Leninists (the Trotskyist section in Spain) and

a more left-wing anarchist group called the Friends of Durruti established barricades across the city. A Bolshevik Leninist leaflet distributed on the barricades stated:

“Long life to the revolutionary offensive - No compromises - Disarmament of the National Republican Guard and reactionary Assault Guard - Timing is crucial - Next time it will be too late - General strike in all the industries that do not work for the war effort, until the resignation of the reactionary government - Only Proletarian Power can ensure military victory - Give weapons to the working class - Long life to the CNT-FAI-POUM unity of action - Long Life to the Proletarian Revolutionary Front - in the workshops, factories, barricades, etc.. Revolutionary Defense Committees.”

There were bloody clashes between, on the one hand, the republican state forces and the Stalinists and on the other hand, the militants on the barricades. Most of the Barcelona working class went out on strike in support of those on the barricades. Soon the insurgent workers had control of a majority of the city. However, the CNT-FAI leaders worked to undermine support for the militant workers. They called for an end to the strikes, for CNT members to lay down their weapons and for the dismantling of the barricades. This call succeeded in turning back anarchist militias from other cities who were on their way to join the barricades. Thus cruelly betrayed by the CNT leaders, the workers on the barricades were crushed by the republican regime forces and the Stalinists with hundreds killed. Only the Trotskyists and the radical anarchist splinter group, the Friends of Durruti, took a principled stand throughout this key battle.

Soon the republican state outlawed the POUM and the Bolshevik Leninists and drove them underground. The Soviet secret police operatives of the NKVD (the successor to the GPU) that were stationed in Republican Spain had POUM leader Nin tortured and murdered alongside many others in the POUM. More broadly, the NKVD unleashed brutal and often murderous repression against the most intransigent communists, POUM members, Trotskyists and revolutionary anarchists. The NKVD bloody attacks on Spanish proletarian militants highlighted the point that Trotsky

made about the Soviet bureaucracy two and a half years earlier:

“As regards the USSR, the role of the bureaucracy, as has already been said, is a dual one: on the one hand, it protects the workers’ state with its own peculiar methods; on the other hand, it disorganizes and checks the development of economic and cultural life by repressing the creative activity of the masses. It is otherwise **in the sphere of the international working class movement, where not a trace remains of this dualism; here the Stalinist bureaucracy plays a disorganizing, demoralizing and fatal role from beginning to end.** Irrefutable evidence of this is the history of the Communist International (CI) during the last eleven years.”

L.D. Trotsky, *On the Kirov Assassination*, December 1934, Re-published in *Marxist Internet Archive*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1934/12/kirov.htm>

After the crushing of the May 1937 Barcelona workers’ uprising, the victorious republican bourgeoisie and Stalinists were now able to quickly subordinate the remaining independent workers’ militias. They also dismantled the collective farms and rolled back workers’ control of industry. The Spanish Revolution had been smashed. And with its hopes for genuine liberation crushed by the very people that it was told were its allies, much of the working class became indifferent about the Civil War and in any case unwilling to make major self-sacrifices for the war effort. Thus, it was now only a matter of time before Franco triumphed. When his monarchist-fascist forces did eventually take all of Spain in April 1939 they unleashed a new wave of terror. They murdered tens of thousands of more leftists, trade unionists and secular school teachers, as well as activists from Spain’s oppressed Basque, Catalan and Galician peoples.

The great tragedy of the defeat in Spain is that in Catalonia, Aragon and other parts of Spain, the workers had by mid-1936 – and then again in May 1937 in Barcelona – taken effective state power and gone a long way towards consummating a socialist revolution. However, in the course of preserving Popular Front unity with the “progressive bourgeoisie”, the major workers’ parties in Spain worked to dismantle the incipient workers state that

the revolutionary workers had created. This crushing of the workers’ revolution led directly to Franco’s 36 years of brutal far-right dictatorship. As Trotsky pointed out, within the Spanish left there had been at bottom a contest between Bolshevism and Menshevism. Only the Bolshevik-Leninist Section of Spain truly fought for Bolshevism in deeds (the practice of the Friends of Durruti group approached Bolshevism too). The other groups within the Spanish workers’ movement, whether they called themselves social democrats, “revolutionary socialists”, pro-Stalin “communists”, anti-Stalin “communists” or anarcho-syndicalists, all carried out the program of latter-day Menshevism. Their argument that the revolution had to be put off in order to “first” achieve “unity” against the Far Right was the exact same line sold by the Mensheviks and SRs two decades earlier to try and hold off the October Revolution. In the Russia of 1917, because the Bolsheviks eventually gained the ascendancy within the workers’ movement, the reactionary right-wing forces were defeated and the workers’ revolution was accomplished. In contrast in Spain, the various forms of Menshevism continued to dominate. Franco’s bloody victory was the result.

For the benefit of the world proletariat, Trotsky analysed the bitter lessons of this terrible defeat. He pointed out that fascism is the method that the capitalists use to preserve their own class rule when they feel that their power is threatened. It can only be defeated by the mobilisation of the working class and its allies. When there is a recalcitrant section of the bourgeoisie still in power that is involved in a military clash with the fascists, the proletariat should enter an anti-fascist *military* alliance with these bourgeois elements *only* on the basis of maintaining its own *political* independence and with a determination to simultaneously advance and prepare the class struggle against all the bourgeoisie. Moreover, workers and peasants at both the front and rear of such an “anti-fascist” war should be mobilised on the understanding that they are fighting for their full social liberation and not for the re-establishment of the old (“democratic”) forms of exploitation.

All this is how Russia's Bolsheviks conducted themselves during the united-front campaign against a far-right coup attempt by General Kornilov two months before the October Revolution. However, when conditions become ripe for socialist revolution, even when – and indeed most urgently when – a good part of the bourgeoisie is seeking to impose an authoritarian dictatorship (and this is often the case during the crisis conditions when a workers' revolution becomes immediately posed), an authentic communist party must go all the way to lead the workers to socialist revolution. Such a revolution is the best – **and ultimately the only** – way for the working class to stop fascism and other forms of far-right dictatorship. This was proven during the 1918-21 Civil War when Russia's workers and peasants triumphed over better armed and trained forces that were directly backed by the world's strongest powers, only because Russia's toilers made incredible acts of self sacrifice to win the war in the knowledge that they were fighting for their own class rule (this would later be proved again after Trotsky's death when the Soviet masses rallied to their workers state to heroically defeat a far more advanced and better resourced German fascist army during World War II). By politically chaining workers to the bourgeoisie, popular fronts are a barrier to the struggle for socialist revolution and are, thus, a great obstacle to the struggle against fascism.

Trotsky placed much responsibility for the defeat in Spain upon the POUM. This is even while acknowledging that the POUM – and certainly its rank and file members – were the most sincere of the larger leftist groups in Spain. Trotsky described POUM as a centrist group. This is not in the colloquial meaning of "centrist" as a tendency between the mainstream Left and the Right but rather in the Leninist sense as a group in the workers' movement that vacillates between social democracy and authentic Bolshevism. In words the POUM acknowledged the need for revolution to make a victory in the Civil War possible. However, in deeds, the POUM entered the bourgeois Popular Front governments. They capitulated to the reformists

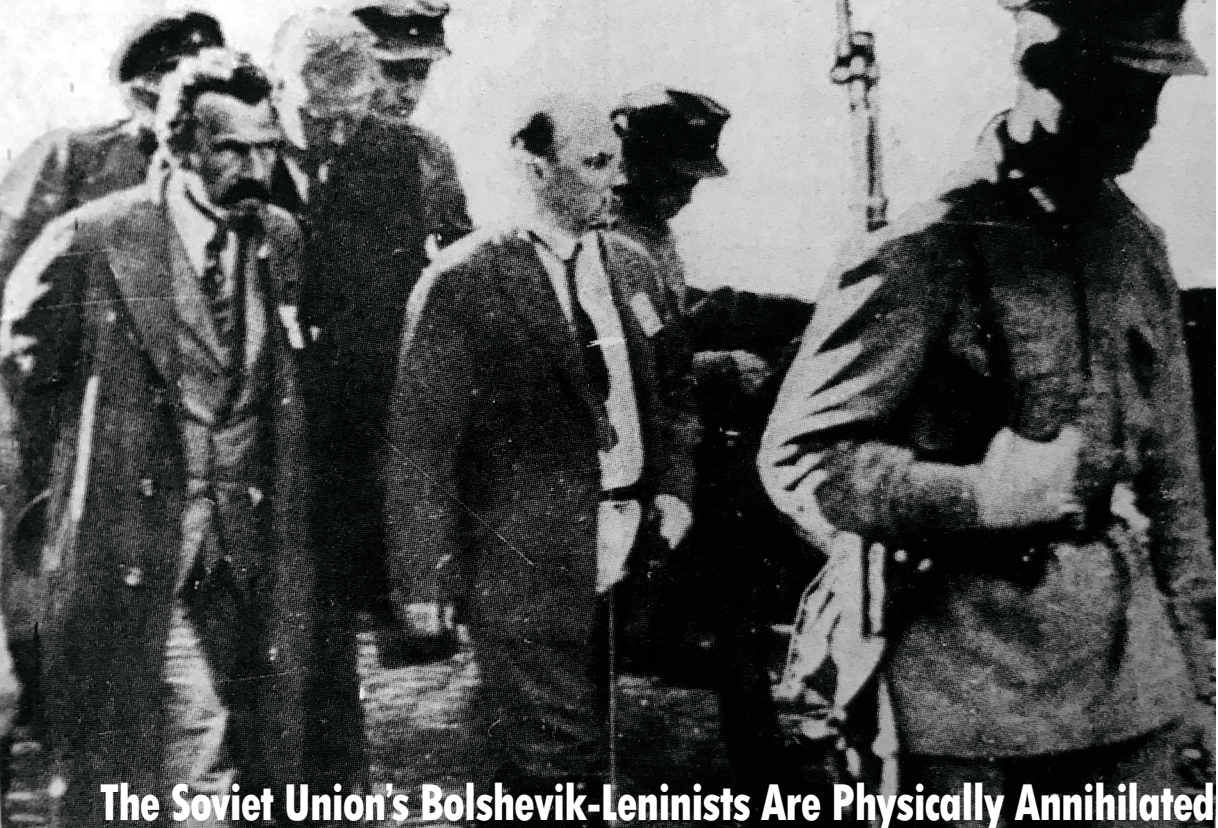
and anarchists who in turn capitulated to the Republican bourgeoisie. Even during the May 1937 uprising in Barcelona, where the POUM eventually fought heroically on the streets together with the Friends of Durruti and the Trotskyists, the POUM had earlier sought an accommodation with the CNT-FAI leaders that were stabbing the revolt in the back. That is why Trotsky devoted much of the mid and late 1930s to the struggle against centrism. His aim was to win the best of these centrists to the program of the Fourth International and to discredit the remainder of them in the eyes of the most revolutionary workers.

Today, when the Chinese workers state is under immense imperialist pressure, it is clear that new socialist revolutions abroad are needed to relieve that counterrevolutionary pressure and to open the path for the PRC's march towards full socialism. However, to advance the struggle towards such proletarian revolutions, especially at a time when, as in the 1930s, far-right forces are gaining strength, we must understand the reasons why tremendous revolutionary opportunities in the 1930s were blown in both France and Spain. To prove how essential Trotskyism is to such clarification, we can point to how Trotsky had prophetically warned where the Popular Front strategy would lead Spain to, even months **before** the start of the Civil War and the Spanish Revolution:

"The profound effervescence of the masses as well as unintermittently violent explosions prove that the workers of town and country and the poor peasants along with them, deceived over and over again, are pushing with all their strength, again and ever, towards the revolutionary solution. And what role does the Popular Front play in the face of this powerful movement? That of a gigantic brake, built and set in motion by traitors and servile scum...."

"... the workers' organizations remain completely caught in the nets of the Popular Front. The convulsions of the revolutionary masses (without a program, without a leadership worthy of confidence), thus threaten to throw the doors wide open to the counter revolutionary dictatorship."

L.D. Trotsky, 12 April 1936, originally published as *The Tasks of the Fourth International in Spain*, *New Militant*, Vol. II No. 17, 2 May 1936, republished in *The Spanish Revolution (1931–39)*, Pathfinder Press, 1973.



The Soviet Union's Bolshevik-Leninists Are Physically Annihilated

The Soviet leadership's abrupt right turn in international policy in the mid-1930s was accompanied by a turn to the right domestically. Snubbing Lenin's insistence that pre-1917 Russia had been a "prison house of peoples" where the non-Russian ethnicities were brutally subjugated, Soviet leaders began glorifying aspects of Russia's Tsarist past. Sixteenth century Tsar, Ivan Grozny ("Ivan the Terrible") was now portrayed as a strong Russian leader. Although the then Soviet leadership's claim to be the guardians of the October Revolution was still their main source of legitimacy, the new embrace of Great Russian nationalism was a slap in the face of the USSR's non-Russian minorities. Meanwhile, in the mid-1930s, the Soviet bureaucracy introduced the Stakhanov system of competition between workers. Its aim was to boost workers' productivity. However, it led to a big increase in inequality between workers as workers became paid more and more by piecework: that is according to the amount that they produced rather than an hourly or weekly/monthly wage. Workers, who for whatever reason – including lesser physical strength or poorer equipment – were able to produce less fell behind in production and became compelled to work unreasonably hard to make ends meet. At the same time, there was all sorts of backsliding in social policy. In October 1920, Soviet Russia became the very first country in the world to grant women the right to abortion on demand and the procedure became virtually free. However in 1936, the rightward moving Soviet bureaucracy took this right away from women (Soviet women again obtained abortion rights in 1955). Similarly, two years earlier, the Stalin leadership outlawed male homosexual acts. This reversed the line taken by Lenin and Trotsky's Bolsheviks. Just two months after the October 1917 Revolution, the Bolshevik government decriminalized all homosexual acts and this was again confirmed in 1922 when the penal code of Soviet Russia was instituted, which decriminalised all consensual sexual activity between adults. The Soviet workers state that had emerged victorious in a backward, benighted country had stormed decades, if not a century, ahead of the most advanced capitalist countries in terms of social policy and social freedoms. However, in the mid-1930s, the Stalinist bureaucracy dragged the USSR a fair way back again.

Opposite page: Old Bolsheviks, Bukharin and Rykov, shortly before their trial in Moscow, 1938.

The Soviet bureaucracy's move towards the right was accompanied by a crackdown of truly hideous proportions against staunch communists. Stalin and his henchmen in the NKVD leadership saw their chance when, in December 1934, popular Leningrad mayor, Sergei Kirov (released Soviet archives now suggest that Stalin likely himself orchestrated the latter's assassination) was assassinated. After initially reporting that Kirov's murder was the work of émigré anti-communists, the Soviet press within three weeks changed their story to now claim that the assassin, Nikolaev, was working for a Leningrad-based, Zinovievist "terrorist centre." Thirteen days later Nikolaev and thirteen low-ranked, former Zinoviev supporters were executed following a secret trial. Weeks later Zinoviev, Kamenev and several other long-time, senior Bolshevik leaders were sent to long jail terms not for direct involvement in the plot but for supposedly providing spiritual inspiration to the supposed "terrorists." Moreover, these old Bolsheviks, who had given decades of their life to the struggle for socialism were ridiculously accused of being motivated by the aim of capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union! The outrageous frame-up of these members of the former, Leningrad-based, Zinoviev-led Opposition – who, let's remember, had all years earlier publicly proclaimed their devotion to Stalin – was really just a stepping stone to attacking the main target: the Trotskyists. For this purpose, the fact that the former Zinovievists had once joined with the Left Opposition in a United Opposition was used to draw an amalgam between the two. The fact that Zinoviev and Kamenev had for other than this two year period been squarely allied with Stalin against the Left Opposition did not matter. Insinuating "Zinovievist" and "Trotskyite" involvement in the Kirov assassination allowed Stalin and his very small circle of trusted allies to launch in 1935 a hysterical media campaign and witch-hunt against Trotskyists and former Zinovievists within the CPSU.

Hundreds of thousands of communists were

expelled from the CPC and its youth branch. More Soviet Trotskyists (called the Bolshevik-Leninists) were expelled than Zinovievists. Most of these were younger Trotskyists as the longer-time Left Oppositionists had already been sent to hard labour camps or exile in the late 1920s. Although harsh repression had meant that the Bolshevik Leninists could not operate openly, tens of thousands of communists identified with their ideas and banner even if they were not able to get direct access to their written statements. However, the purge went much wider than Bolshevik-Leninist sympathisers and ex-Zinovievists. Anyone who had once expressed an idea that could be half construed as Trotskyist – such as criticising the new international policy of "Popular Front" alliance with the "progressive" bourgeois – was deemed a "counterrevolutionary." Many of those purged from the party were thrown into prison.

However, at this stage there was still opposition within the CPSU leadership to a bloodier purge and to a wider frame-up. Those behind the witch-hunt could only get away with "implicating" the Trotskyists in Kirov's murder in an oblique, indirect manner. That was enough for a party purge but not yet adequate for justifying large-scale executions. Stalin, NKVD chief Genrikh Yagoda and head of the CPSU discipline commission, Nikolay Yezhov, set about changing that. They organised for thousands of prisoners to be tortured and threatened that their spouses and children would be killed until they agreed to confess involvement in a "Trotskyite-Zinovievist terrorist conspiracy." Of the thousands intimidated in this way, just a few "confessed." But their "confessions" were then put forward as "proof" before the real targets of Stalin's plot – the most prominent Bolsheviks from the October Revolution and Lenin's time – of the latter's own "guilt". The old Bolshevik targets were then subjected to months and sometimes one to two years of intimidation and torture until they in turn broke. After 19 months of "preparation," the

show trials were now ready to begin.

The first Moscow show trial in August 1936 came as a massive shock to most. Long-time senior Bolsheviks, Zinoviev, Kamanev, Grigory Yevdokimov, Ivan Bakayev, Vagarshak Ter-Vaganyan and Ivan Smirnov along with nine obscure figures (the ones who originally implicated the key defendants) were made to “confess” to being part of a “Trotskyite and Zinovievite underground” “terrorist centre” formed in 1931 that under the leadership of Trotsky not only had Kirov murdered but had tried to assassinate Stalin and other Soviet leaders. The key defendants had been guaranteed beforehand that they and their family’s lives would be spared if they “confessed”. But this did not happen! They were all promptly executed and many of their family members were later shot too. Unlike in the earlier January 1935 “trial” where the Zinovievists were convicted of being driven by capitalist restoration, in this latest farce Zinoviev and Co. “confessed” to being motivated by power for power’s sake. The next show trial six months later was still more ridiculous. Here prominent, recanted ex-Left Oppositionists Radek, Serebryakov and Pyatakov alongside Bolshevik Politburo member at the time of the October Revolution, Grigori Sokolnikov, and thirteen other defendants confessed to being part of a second “Parallel Anti-Soviet Trotskyist Centre” whose aim was to ... carry out sabotage and build an alliance with Germany and Japan for the purposes of dismembering the USSR! All the defendants were eventually shot, although Radek was first not given a death sentence after he implicated the former Bukharin right-wing of the CPSU in the plot. Radek’s “confession” set the stage for the third show trial where 21 people were convicted of being part of a Nazi Germany and Japan-aligned, “Bloc of Rightists and Trotskyites.” The 21 included former prominent CPSU rightists like Bukharin and Alexei Rykov and recanted ex-Left Oppositionists Nikolai Krestinsky and Christian Rakovsky. Meanwhile, between the second and third Moscow show trials, Red Army Marshall, Mikhail Tukhachevsky, and

seven other leading Red Army generals – all eight of whom were heroes of the Civil War – were tried in secret and executed for being part of a “Trotskyite Anti-Soviet Military Organization” that conducted espionage for Nazi Germany.

The “trials” were an abomination from start to finish. All the convictions were based on the forced “confessions.” No physical evidence was presented at all. Indeed, the little detail that was provided was found to be fake. For example at the first trial, one of the defendants Holtzman “confessed” to having met Trotsky in November 1932 at a particular hotel in Copenhagen to receive terrorist instructions. However, that particular hotel had been demolished in 1917 and was only rebuilt more than three years after the alleged meeting took place! Moreover, not only was it impossible that all these senior communists who had given their lives to Russia’s socialist revolution and its defence could work for “capitalist restoration” and the dismemberment of the USSR in alliance with Nazi Germany, they had nothing to gain at a personal level from doing so. At the time of their arrest, most of the main defendants had been senior officials in the Soviet state or in the very highest ranks of the Red Army. Karl Radek, for example, had been the USSR’s propaganda chief, Rykov had been People’s Commissar of Communications and Pyatakov had been deputy head of heavy industry.

It is important to understand what a sharp change in Soviet society the Moscow trials marked. Before Kirov’s assassination, while Left Oppositionists had been expelled from the party, deported and imprisoned with hard labour and in three cases, Soviet Left Oppositionists killed, as well as some visiting Chinese student Trotskyists killed in 1930, no leading Bolshevik revolutionary from either the Left Opposition/Bolshevik Leninists or any other party tendency had previously been executed. Moreover, there had not been up until then any large-scale executions of CPSU members. The Kirov assassination and especially the first Moscow show trial changed all that. After that trial,

Stalin and his henchmen established NKVD *troikas* to pronounce and carry out death sentences independent from any party or judicial oversight. The result was the execution of CPSU, Red Army and communist youth branch members on a horrific scale. Many of the communist political prisoners in gulags were now also executed. The political demoralisation of the Soviet masses by the defeats to the working class being played out in Spain and France diminished resistance to the Purge. The most intense rate of killings continued up to the end of 1938 but did not completely stop until late 1941.

At the time, the Western capitalist ruling classes were largely silent about the blood purge. It was only much later, after the start of the Cold War that they began to recall the Purge for propaganda reasons. We, of course, reject their exaggerated claims made in retrospect that millions were killed in the purges. Nor do we have sympathy for any truly counterrevolutionary elements that were repressed during Stalin's reign, whether they be monarchists, extreme Russian nationalists or anti-Soviet Menshevik activists. Yet all this hardly makes the Great Purge any less atrocious. Most of those targeted during the Purge were communists. From 1936 to 1938, Stalin and his narrow circle of henchmen killed around 170,000 CPSU members and several hundred thousand other pro-communist people.

So who were the victims of this Great Purge? Firstly, they were the Bolshevik-Leninists. Those executed included not only members and sympathisers of this now underground Trotskyist group but also anyone who at any time had shown the slightest of sympathy or even ambivalence towards the Left Opposition. Secondly, the purge annihilated most of the known former Zinovievists. Since almost everyone in Leningrad who had been in the party before 1928 had been at one time a supporter of Zinoviev, the Purge massacred a large proportion of the communists from Leningrad. Thirdly, the Purge saw the murder of not only all the Trotskyists and the former Zinovievists but also the annihilation of almost every single one of the other most prominent,

long-time Bolsheviks other than Stalin. Out of the 21 people in the Bolshevik Central Committee that led the October Revolution, who had not already died from natural causes, all were killed by the bureaucratic rulers (or in the case of Mykola Skrypnyk driven to suicide after being officially denounced as a "counterrevolutionary") other than Stalin himself, Alexandra Kollontai who survived the Purge by fading into obscurity in a diplomatic post in Sweden and Matvei Muranov who was rewarded for his loyalty to Stalin by being shunted into retirement rather than being shot! All this makes a mockery of the official line that the Great Purge was a means to cleanse the party of counterrevolutionaries and fascist allies. For **if nearly all** the people who led the October Revolution ended up as Nazi collaborators and enemies of the workers state as the Stalin clique claimed, what would that say about the October Revolution itself?!!!

Fourthly, the Purge struck the leadership of the Red Army. By the start of World War II, 90% of Red Army generals had been sacked from their posts. Most were executed. The fifth and numerically largest group targeted in the Purge were CPSU officials and government bureaucrats who had always been with the Stalin faction. However, many of them were reported for having at some stage made statements, however mildly, critical of the leadership and were, thus, deemed to be "counterrevolutionaries". Others were targeted because they were experienced communists and administrators that were seen as too independent minded. Therefore, of the 139 members elected to the CPSU Central Committee in 1934 – and remember no Trotskyists were allowed into the Central Committee by then – 98 were killed as part of the Great Purge, a further four committed suicide as they were about to be arrested and executed, while Deputy People's Commissar for Education and Lenin widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya, was thought to have been poisoned by Stalin's henchmen after having stood up for several comrades targeted in the purges. The sixth group pursued during the purges was

foreign communists who came to the USSR as refugees. This included many veterans of the Spanish Civil War struggle against Franco and German communists who fled from Nazi Germany. Since they had witnessed first hand the disasters caused by the Comintern's zig-zagging policies and since they were considered as not having been sufficiently raised in the Kremlin's propaganda, they were seen as a dangerous layer from which could emerge future Trotskyists. As a result, tens of thousands of foreign communists in the USSR were either shot or died in gulags during the Great Purge and the following war years.

Another group targeted during the Purge were the CPSU cadre and bureaucrats that led the various non-Russian republics. Continuing with the insensitivity that Stalin and his allies had shown in the early 1920s to the understandable national feelings of those peoples who were part of oppressed nationalities in Tsarist times – an insensitivity that Lenin had tried to curb in the final period of his life – the Russian-centred outlook of the bureaucracy eventually generated resentment among ethnic minority peoples and communists. This was even as the achievements of the socialistic economy brought great benefits to the peoples of the non-Russian republics and improved their social position remarkably from Tsarist times. The Stalinist leadership responded to the grumblings from the ethnic minorities by killing their leaders, all of whom had been earlier appointed by Stalin and his inner circle. Then in an ironic twist, the last type of people killed during the Great Purge were those who knew too much about the frame ups that typified the Purge because of their own central roles in the massacres. Thus Yagoda, the NKVD chief who prepared the first Moscow show trial ... became a defendant at the later “Bloc of Rightists and Trotskyites” trial for which he was executed! His successor, Nikolai Yezhov who presided over most of the killing during the Purge, was also himself executed. So were six of the ten Red Army officers who convicted Marshall Tukhachevsky and Co. in their secret trial.

So why did this sickening episode take place in the land of the Great October Socialist Revolution? To help address this issue it is worth pointing out the following important fact: the American Ambassador at the time, Joseph Davies, defended the Moscow trials as being “fair” and the defendants deserving of the death penalty! Now would the top representative of U.S. imperialism in the world's only workers state at the time take this position if those executed really were counterrevolutionaries intent on capitalist restoration? No way! Could anyone imagine the U.S. ambassador to China today defending a trial that convicts truly anti-communist “dissidents” for undermining the Chinese workers state – like, say, the December 2009 trial of well-known pro-imperialist neoconservative Liu Xiaobo? In part, Stalin launched his bloody persecution of Trotskyists (and those whom he branded as “Trotskyists”) and long-time Bolsheviks precisely to win the acceptance of the U.S. imperialist rulers and their British and French counterparts. Moscow was saying: “See, good democratic capitalists, we are not like those Trotskyists and those incurable revolutionaries from Lenin's time who are hellbent on overturning your capitalist order ... hey, we are even wiping them out ourselves here. We are no threat to you, we are ‘responsible communists’ who respect your ‘democracy’ and desire ‘peaceful co-existence’ with you ... and, by the way, we hope that you will thereby join with us to help protect us from your German rival.” Moreover, even more than to please the Western imperialists, **the Kremlin wanted to crush any domestic resistance – or potential resistance – to their new right turn in foreign policy towards accommodation with these “democratic” imperialists; and to smash any opposition to their accompanying slide to the right in domestic economic and social policy. That meant destroying not only the Bolshevik-Leninists but even those supporters of their own faction who truly believed in their previous ultra-leftist “Third Period” line.**

However, the Kremlin leaders were also thinking longer term. Their number one,

Stalin, who had himself been a part of the October Revolution, still saw himself, in his own grotesquely distorted way, as being driven by the need to defend the October Revolution or, to put it more precisely, driven 50% by the need to defend the October Revolution and 50% by his desire to stroke his own ego and present himself before all as a truly great man who is both the legitimate successor to Lenin and a “strong” Russian leader in the tradition of his idol, Tsar Ivan the Terrible. In as much as Stalin wanted to preserve the gains of the October Revolution it was to be by the methods that were compatible with his position sitting atop a careerist, privileged, and thus necessarily conservative, bureaucracy. That meant that instead of *fighting consistently to advance* the interests of the international working class and the Soviet workers state *against* continued capitalist rule in most of the world and *against* the latent capitalist restorationist tendencies that remained within the USSR, Stalin, while still resting on the foundations of the October Revolution, sought to sit atop and *balance and arbitrate* the still unsuppressed forces pulling centrifugally within the USSR and to balance upon the gigantic contradictions between the Soviet workers state and hostile imperialism. Stalin and his immediate circle thus wanted full “freedom” to be able to perform this high-wire balancing act – by leaning mostly to the right but sometimes to the left – as they saw necessary without having to be constrained by either principled Bolsheviks, other communists with strong opinions (from whichever wing of the party) or independent-minded fellow bureaucrats. All needed to be flung out of the way, as Stalin’s clique saw it. The horrifying brutality of the way that this task was “accomplished” reflected Stalin’s own longstanding harsh nature that Lenin, in the end, found intolerable for a party general secretary. But that is only part of the story and probably the lesser part. Occupying positions within the bureaucracy below Stalin and his number two, Vyacheslav Molotov, were often people less motivated by political ideals than the former two and certainly less committed to communism than the few other old Bolsheviks allowed to remain within the

administration. These people occupying the middle ranks of the bureaucracy – and many in the upper ranks too – were often people at least 90% driven by career advancement and at most 10% motivated by a commitment to advancing socialism. They knew how much their own social layer was fragmenting under the different pressures pulling at them and how much the Soviet masses scorned them. They wanted a strong leader to hold their own social caste together and to protect them from the pro-communist masses. Their resulting obsequiousness to Stalin only reinforced the latter’s self-image as the infallible leader and made him even more unwilling to tolerate any grouping who would dare question his revered edicts. Moreover, even as each of them were individually terrified of being on the receiving end of Stalin’s wrath, in as much as these careerist bureaucrats under Stalin understood that their privileged social position was very fragile and insecure (after all, unlike a capitalist exploiting class, they owned no productive property at all and the relatively smaller privileges that they did get often came from corruption which meant that these privileges and their own position could be wiped away in no time through exposure by either the masses or rival bureaucrats), they wanted their leader *maximo* to be ruthless in suppressing threats to the status quo. In that sense, the less political, more cynical bureaucrats under Stalin egged him on to be ever more savage in crushing authentic Leninists and long-time Bolsheviks.

In an incredibly insightful article written soon after Kirov’s assassination, Trotsky, in the course of prophetically predicting an onslaught of repressive terror by the Stalinist tops against the Trotskyists, illuminated from another angle the social and political processes at play that would end up leading to the Great Purge. He pointed out that the “economic successes and the cultural progress of the population” made possible by the October Revolution “turn more and more against bureaucratic conservatism, bureaucratic license and bureaucratic rapacity”, leading to fearsome repression in response:

"The role of the Soviet bureaucracy remains a dual one. Its own interests constrain it to safeguard the new economic régime created by the October Revolution against the enemies at home and abroad. This task remains historically necessary and progressive. In this task the workers of the world support the Soviet bureaucracy without closing their eyes to its national conservatism, its appropriative instincts and its spirit of caste privilege. But it is precisely these traits that are increasingly paralyzing its progressive work. The growth of industry and the drawing of agriculture into the sphere of state planning complicate extraordinarily the tasks of the economic leadership.

"An equilibrium between the various branches of production and, above all, a correct balance between national accumulation and consumption can be achieved only with the active participation of the entire toiling population in the elaboration of the plans, the necessary freedom to criticize the plans and the opportunity to fix the responsibility and to recall the bureaucracy from top to bottom. Unrestricted domination over the economy of 170 million people implies the inevitable accumulation of contradictions and crises.

"... Under these conditions, the dictatorship of the bureaucracy, although it remains a distorted expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat, translates itself into a permanent political crisis. The Stalinist faction is compelled ever anew to destroy 'completely' the 'remnants' of old and new oppositions, to resort to ever more violent methods and to place in circulation amalgams that become more and more envenomed. At the same time, this very faction raises itself above the party and even above the bureaucracy itself. It openly proclaims the purely Bonapartist principle of the infallibility of a lifetime leader.

"The progress in technology and culture, the increasingly exacting demands and the increasingly critical attitude of the people automatically turn against the bureaucracy. The young generation begins to sense in a particularly painful manner the yoke of 'enlightened absolutism' that, besides, increasingly reveals the incapacity of its 'shining lights'. Thus conditions are created that clearly menace the rule of the bureaucracy, which has outlived itself.

"... Further development of economic and cultural life demands the destruction of the bureaucracy by way of the regeneration of Soviet democracy. The bureaucracy resists desperately."

L.D. Trotsky, *On the Kirov Assassination*, December 1934, Re-published in *Marxist Internet Archive*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1934/12/kirov.htm>

The Great Purge did enormous damage to the Soviet Union. The fact that so many of the experienced administrators were executed or imprisoned caused massive damage to economic and cultural life. Meanwhile, the crackdown filled managers, foremen and indeed many rank and file workers with a paralysing fear that any mistakes would see them branded as saboteurs deserving of execution. As a result they were loathe to take the risk of innovating or showing initiative. Soviet per capita GDP that had been growing very rapidly from 1932 onwards suddenly fell in the 1937 to 1938 period – that is in the most intense period of the Purge. This, of course, affected the USSR's level of war preparedness when World War II broke out.

It was the Soviet Union's military defence that was most harmed by the Purge. With the Great Purge removing three of the five Red Army marshalls (the highest rank in the Soviet military), 13 of 15 Red Army commanders and eight of nine Soviet Navy admirals, the Soviet military was decimated. It was stripped of its experienced leaders who had battlefield experience during the Civil War. This became evident during the Soviet-Finnish War that began in November 1939. Although the Red Army had far greater troop numbers and quantities of tanks and aircraft than those of tiny-populated Finland and although she finally gained the upper hand in the war, the Red Army suffered humiliating setbacks in the campaign and huge troop casualties. Moreover, because word about the cruelty of the Purge and its devastation of social life had leaked across the border to neighbouring Finland, there were virtually no workers' uprisings within Finland in support of the entering Red Army. This is despite workers in Finland having once been so class conscious that they had seized power in the capital Helsinki and other key cities in early 1918 and went close to consummating a revolution until intervening imperial German troops turned the tide in the Finnish Civil War against them. It was both seeing the Red Army's humiliation in Finland and his awareness that the Red Army had been beheaded during the Great Purge that encouraged Hitler to go through with German imperialism's long-held wish to invade the Soviet Union. And when the Nazis begun their invasion in June 1941, the debilitating damage to the Red Army from the



Moscow, March 1919: Lenin (second row, third from right) and Trotsky (just behind Lenin and slightly to his left) with delegates to the First Congress of the Communist International (Comintern). The Bolsheviks and other communist parties around the world formed the Comintern to advance the struggle for international socialist revolution. At the time of the Comintern's founding, all Bolshevik leaders understood that if the embattled workers state in Russia was to survive and advance towards complete socialism, it must gain the assistance of socialist revolutions abroad.

Purge became painfully apparent. The Soviet Union suffered calamitous losses in the first months of the war and setbacks continued well into 1942.

As you can see, the internal terror and repression against communists during the late 1930s brought the Soviet workers state to the very brink of destruction. The Soviet Union, however, survived that period – the workers state could not be so easily destroyed. However, what was finally destroyed by the Purge was the Bolshevik Party that made the October Revolution. After that, the Bolshevik Party (by then called the CPSU) remained a communist party only in name. Any revolutionary internationalism now remaining within the party had been pushed to the bottom and overlaid with heavy boulders of Menshevik class collaborationism and appeasement of imperialism and liberal sprinklings of Great Russian nationalism too. Most significantly, the revolutionary wing of the party, the Bolshevik-Leninists were annihilated. Not only were nearly all its members and

supporters exterminated, so were many of the most thoughtful and genuine communists not aligned with the group who could have been won to Trotskyism – that is authentic Leninism – in the future. Consequently, there was no one left to pass on the real principles of Lenin's Bolshevism to future generations of Soviet citizens. Moreover, given that the ruling bureaucracy not only physically wiped out the Trotskyists but intensely slandered them throughout Soviet society, re-planting Leninism into the Soviet Union became extremely difficult after the Purge. As a result when counterrevolutionaries made their bid for power in the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, there was no truly Leninist force there to induce a push back against them as there had been in the late 1920s – in the form of the Left Opposition – when kulak-led counterrevolutionaries started to revolt. Therefore, although it would take half a century to play out, Stalin's 1936-1940 annihilation of the Bolshevik-Leninists was a key element that made possible the 1991-92 downfall of the world's first workers state.

Trotsky's Intransigent Struggle to Defend the Soviet Union

Despite the horror of the Great Purge, Trotsky and the movement to build a Fourth International continued to stand for the defence of the Soviet workers state throughout this period. Indeed, right up until his final breath Trotsky fought for the defence of the USSR. All his criticisms of the Stalinist bureaucracy were based on this starting point. Trotsky's criticisms of the Soviet leadership were made in order to strengthen the workers state and advance her transition to a fully socialist society.

Trotsky argued resolutely against those who claimed that the repression, lack of workers' democracy and inequality in the post-Lenin USSR meant that either capitalism in a new form had been restored or that the workers state had been otherwise destroyed. Trotsky pointed out that just as the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie can have different forms of political regime – from parliamentary “democracy” to fascism – so too can the dictatorship of the proletariat. There can be the dictatorships of the proletariat based on the “ideal” form of proletarian democracy or there can be the form existing in the post-1924 USSR, where a ruling bureaucracy has monopolised political decision making. Trotsky explained that just as in many forms of capitalist rule there is a large proportion of capitalists who have little direct say in actual political decision making even though the regime still administers society for the economic benefit of the entire capitalist class, in the then Soviet degenerated workers state, in a deformed way, society was still being run for the working class' economic benefit even though workers were largely excluded from direct involvement in state affairs. In a crucial 1933 work, Trotsky demolished the arguments of those who claimed that the Soviet bureaucracy was a new ruling class:

“The frightful difficulties of socialist construction in an isolated and backward country coupled with the false policies of the leadership – which, in the last analysis, also reflects the pressure of backwardness and isolation – have led to the result that the bureaucracy has expropriated the proletariat politically in order to guard its social conquests with its own methods.

The anatomy of society is determined by its economic relations. So long as the forms of property that have been created by the October Revolution are not overthrown, the proletariat remains the ruling class.

“... Each class (the feudal nobility, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie, the capitalist bourgeoisie and the proletariat) works out its own special forms of property. The bureaucracy lacks all these social traits. It has no independent position in the process of production and distribution. It has no independent property roots. Its functions relate basically to the political technique of class rule. The existence of a bureaucracy, in all its variety of forms and differences in specific weight, characterizes every class regime. Its power is of a reflected character. The bureaucracy is indissolubly bound up with a ruling economic class, feeding itself upon the social roots of the latter, maintaining itself and falling together with it.

“... Squandering unproductively a tremendous portion of the national income, the Soviet bureaucracy is interested at the same time, by its very function, in the economic and cultural growth of the country: the higher the national income, the more copious its funds of privileges. Concurrently, upon the social foundations of the Soviet state, the economic and cultural uplift of the laboring masses must tend to undermine the very bases of bureaucratic domination. Clearly, in the light of this fortunate historical variant, the bureaucracy turns out to be only the instrument – a bad and an expensive instrument – of the socialist state.

“... whether we take the variant of

further successes for the Soviet regime or, contrariwise, the variant of its collapse, the bureaucracy in either case turns out to be not an independent class but an excrescence upon the proletariat. A tumor can grow to tremendous size and even strangle the living organism, but a tumor can never become an independent organism.”

L.D. Trotsky, *The Class Nature of the Soviet State*, October 1933, *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1933-34*, Pathfinder Press, 1972.

At the same time, Trotsky warned that the continued rule of the bureaucracy would eventually open the path to capitalist counterrevolution:

“The further unhindered development of bureaucratism must lead inevitably to the cessation of economic and cultural growth, to a terrible social crisis and to the downward plunge of the entire society....

“The bureaucracy is not a ruling class. But the further development of the bureaucratic regime can lead to the inception of a new ruling class: not organically, through degeneration, but through counterrevolution. We call the Stalinist apparatus *centrist* precisely because it fulfills a dual role; *today*, when there is *no longer* a Marxist leadership, and none forthcoming *as yet*, it defends the proletarian dictatorship with its own methods; but these methods are such as facilitate the victory of the enemy *tomorrow*. Whoever fails to understand this dual role of Stalinism in the USSR has understood nothing.

L.D. Trotsky, *The Class Nature of the Soviet State*, October 1933, *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1933-34*, Pathfinder Press, 1972.

It was to ward off the threat of capitalist counterrevolution and to extend the October Revolution abroad that the Trotskyist movement fought to regenerate the Soviet workers state. That meant that they stood for strengthening the state and collective economic sectors, for reducing

the income gap between bureaucrats and workers, for restoring political rule through elected workers' soviets and for returning the Comintern to its original purpose of organising the struggle for international socialist revolution. The Trotskyist movement's strategy for achieving these goals however changed with changes in the exact character of the Soviet state. During the mid-1920s, the Left Opposition campaigned throughout the party to try and win the membership to opposing the party leadership's rightist course. Even after most Left Opposition cadre were expelled from the party and driven into exile or prison by the late 1920s, the Trotskyists still saw themselves as a faction of the official Comintern-aligned communist parties. They fought – now from the outside – to return these parties to a truly Leninist path.

However, in 1933 Trotsky realised that the USSR's communist party and state had become so bureaucratized that it was no longer possible to decisively reform the workers state by Soviet and party constitutional means. The bureaucracy would need to be removed by force. In that sense the Trotskyists explained that a political revolution was necessary. However, Trotsky stressed that such a political revolution, far from seeking to smash the state, would regenerate the workers state:

“...if in the USSR today the Marxist party were in power, it would renovate the entire political regime; it would shuffle and purge the bureaucracy and place it under the control of the masses; it would transform all of the administrative practices and inaugurate a series of capital reforms in the management of the economy; but in no case would it have to undertake an *overturn in the property relations, i.e. a new social revolution*.

“... The question of seizing power will arise as a practical question for the new party only when it will have consolidated around itself the majority of the working class. In the course of such a radical change in

the relation of forces, the bureaucracy would become more and more isolated, more and more split. As we know, the social roots of the bureaucracy lie in the proletariat, if not in its active support, then, at any rate, in its "toleration." When the proletariat springs into action, the Stalinist apparatus will remain suspended in midair. Should it still attempt to resist, it will then be necessary to apply against it not the measures of civil war but rather the measures of a police character. In any case, what will be involved is not an armed insurrection against the dictatorship of the proletariat but the removal of a malignant growth upon it."

L.D. Trotsky, *The Class Nature of the Soviet State*, October 1933, *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1933-34*, Pathfinder Press, 1972.

Trotsky repeatedly stressed that a *political* revolution in the Soviet Union would **not** be a *social* revolution but indeed a **reform** of the workers state (that only needs to be accomplished by force because the increasingly repressive bureaucracy had cut off all legal means to affect change), moreover one that can only be accomplished by the Fourth International alongside new socialist revolutions abroad:

"The fundamental condition for the only rock-bottom reform of the Soviet state is the victorious spread of the world revolution.

"... the new International will be subjected to tests from the very first days of its existence. Before it will be able to reform the Soviet state, it must take upon itself its defense."

L.D. Trotsky, *The Class Nature of the Soviet State*, October 1933, *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1933-34*, Pathfinder Press, 1972.

The Fourth Internationalists also made clear that they were *not* for ousting the bureaucracy as a goal in itself. Rather they insisted that the Soviet bureaucracy must be replaced by the workers only when the latter are being led by an authentic Leninist party:

"The inevitable collapse of the Stalinist political regime will lead to the establishment of Soviet democracy only in the event that the removal of Bonapartism comes as the conscious act of the proletarian vanguard. In all other cases, in place of Stalinism there could only come the fascist-capitalist counterrevolution."

L.D. Trotsky, *The Workers' State, Thermidor and Bonapartism*, February 1935, Re-published in *Marxist Internet Archive*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1935/02/ws-therm-bon.htm>

The Trotskyists stressed that the struggle for political revolution is subordinate to the need to defend the workers state. Moreover, they proclaimed that when the USSR is faced with a counterrevolutionary threat they would be in a united front with the ruling bureaucracy against the forces threatening the workers state. Trotsky, in fact, explained how such a united-front defence of the workers state would be the likely road to the Fourth International gaining the authority amongst the Soviet masses necessary to regenerate the workers state:

"...On that day when the new International will demonstrate to the Russian workers not in words but in action that it, and it alone, stands for the defense of the workers' state, the position of the Bolshevik-Leninists inside the Soviet Union will change within twenty-four hours. The new International will offer the Stalinist bureaucracy a united front against the common foe. And if our International represents a force, the bureaucracy will be unable to evade the united front in the moment of danger. What then will remain of the many years' encrustation of lies and slander?"

L.D. Trotsky, *The Class Nature of the Soviet State*, October 1933, *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1933-34*, Pathfinder Press, 1972.

Trotsky Has Some Small Political Wobbles in the Late 1930s

In contrast to the program that he outlined in the preceding few years, Trotsky's writings about the USSR during the horrific Great Purge gave much more weight to the need for a political revolution to sweep away the bureaucracy in order to preserve the proletarian character of the state. Such an emphasis during that period was completely correct. However, it is quite possible that this tilt went *slightly* askew in the *Transitional Program*, the central statement, drafted by Trotsky, that was adopted by the Fourth International at its September 1938 founding conference. To be sure the section on the USSR in the *Transitional Program* was not only extremely insightful but shone a powerful spotlight on the challenges and contradictions facing the Soviet workers state. It correctly motivated the need to defend the Soviet workers state and outlined the possibility of a united front with the bureaucracy against open attack by capitalist counterrevolution. However, in emphasising the need to oust the bureaucracy, the document included slogans that perhaps did not embrace clearly enough the point stressed by Trotsky in his earlier writings that should the bureaucratic regime fall in any manner other than through the conscious act of an authentic Marxist party, "in the place of Stalinism there could only come the fascist-capitalist counterrevolution."

That the distortion in Trotsky's orientation towards the USSR at the end of the 1930s was real, even though of small-scale, became evident a year after the *Transitional Program* was adopted in Trotsky's attitude to a U.S. House of Representatives investigative committee, known as the Dies Committee. Chaired by conservative Southern Democrat, Martin Dies Jr, the Dies Committee was supposedly promulgated to investigate "Un-American Activities" by individuals and organisations with communist or fascist ties. It was really a witch-hunting committee aimed at justifying persecution of communists. The Dies Committee subpoenaed Trotsky, then in exile in Mexico, to appear as a witness before the Committee, no doubt intending to use expected testimony of repression within the USSR and of the Communist Party of the USA's (CPUSA) links with Moscow as a weapon to wield against communists in America. Trotsky agreed to appear before the Committee but made it clear that while he would be condemning the Moscow show trials and the murder of Old Bolsheviks and Red Army leaders in the Soviet Union, he would be strongly opposing any suppression of the CPUSA, would be attacking the hypocrisy of capitalist rulers and would be using the publicity provided by the public hearings of the Committee to advocate for revolutionary workers' struggle to overthrow capitalism. When the Dies Committee heard what Trotsky was going to say, they cancelled his invitation

to appear before the body and denied him an entry visa to the USA. Many within the Fourth International disagreed with Trotsky's decision to agree to appear before the Committee. Indeed, even a rightist faction on the way out of the movement, seeking to score political points against Trotsky, criticised the decision to appear before the Dies Committee. Trotsky argued that what he was proposing to do was similar to when communists enter bourgeois parliaments and use the tribune of capitalist institutions to argue for their own politics. He pointed out that the fact that Mr Dies himself withdrew the invitation of Trotsky to appear before the Committee proved that the American capitalist class themselves knew that Trotsky's testimony would harm their interests. He certainly had a point there. However, overall Trotsky and the Fourth International were wrong on this question. They should never have consented to Trotsky appearing before the Dies Committee even given what his testimony was going to say. Sure, Trotsky would have made some effective points exposing capitalist imperialism and their hypocrisy. He would have illuminated to those working class people following the hearings how repression from all capitalist states harms the working class. However, even though he was going to oppose the suppression of the CPUSA, any statements that Trotsky made about the terrible crimes of the Soviet bureaucracy and which made any references to the obvious links between the Kremlin and

the CPUSA (via the Comintern) in the course of testimony to a bourgeois body set up with the explicit purpose of justifying repression against CPUSA supporters could well have been twisted to serve the bourgeoisie's anti-communist witch-hunt.

One can say that Trotsky's consent to appear before the Dies Committee – even though never realised – was his biggest political blunder in the period since the death of Lenin. Seen in the context of his entire work since he joined the Bolshevik Party – from being the military organiser of the revolution, to forming and leading the Red Army, to leading an ultimately successful agitation to ward off the threat of kulak-led counterrevolution in the late 1920s' USSR, to a determined struggle for a proletarian strategy to stop the rise of Nazism, to his intransigent fight to defend the Soviet workers state, to his struggle to oppose latter-day Menshevik revisionism and maintain the program of Bolshevism without which future generations would have had to rediscover from the beginning the principles of Leninism (for although there remained after Trotsky's death and remain today workers states that embody terrific advances for the international working class in none of them do the nominally communist governing parties stand on the unadulterated Marxist program that the Bolsheviks and the early CPC stood for) – Trotsky's error in relation to the Dies Committee is but a scratch on an otherwise proud record.

Nevertheless, with the benefit of hindsight it is worth examining where the distortion in Trotsky's orientation towards the USSR at the end of the 1930s came from. Given the Stalin clique's murder of all of Trotsky's former Bolshevik comrades who had joined with Lenin and him (and indeed at the time Stalin too) in making the October Revolution, the grotesque slanders against him and other Bolshevik leaders used to "justify" these killings and the horrific massacre of all his supporters in the USSR, one can understand a degree of subjectivity on the part of Trotsky towards the then Soviet leadership. However, there were other political causes for these deviations – as slight as they were – on the part of Trotsky. Here we must recognise that in

the last couple of years of his life, Trotsky did in general have some small political wobbles – wobbles that must be seen in the context of recognising that overall he continued to fight powerfully for authentic Bolshevism and continued to get all the big questions right. To understand where those wobbles came from we have to understand that by the late 1930s the international working class – and, thus, Trotsky and his Fourth International that stood for the interests of the working class – had suffered an unbroken series of terrible defeats. Despite Germany having once had the most organised working class movement, Hitler was allowed to rise to power there and obliterate Germany's Left and trade unions. Then terrific opportunities for socialist revolution in France and even more so in Spain were betrayed by the Menshevik policies of the workers' leaderships in those countries. This in turn led inevitably to the ascendancy of the Far Right in both countries. Meanwhile, a shift to the right in the USSR saw not only the despicable executions of Old Bolsheviks, Left Oppositionists, Red Army leaders, Zinovievists, longer-time Stalinists, foreign communists and on the whole tens of thousands of communists but greatly increased income inequality between bureaucrats and workers and between different layers of the working class. As Trotsky had often stressed, defeats have a greatly deleterious effect on the political consciousness of most people within the socialist movement and the broader working class. To an, albeit very small, degree even Trotsky could not completely escape this truth.

Apart from the impacts of major defeats for the working class cause, there was also a significant source of rightward pressure on Trotsky and the rest of the Fourth International from within the Fourth Internationalist movement itself. To appreciate why, we need to look more closely at the 1929-1933 Stalinist "Third Period." There was much opposition from communists in many countries to the adventurist and sectarian policies of Comintern parties during this ultra-leftist turn. Some of these communists joined the Trotskyist movement in response. However, a nominal communist can oppose revolutionary adventurism for different reasons. On the one

hand, they can oppose such actions because they are authentic Bolsheviks who understand that revolutionary actions involving a physical clash with the repressive organs of a capitalist state should only be attempted when there is both sufficient mass support for the action and a political balance of forces that would give the action at least a chance of victory. On the other hand they could be socialists with a social-democratic, pacifist bent who would recoil from revolutionary actions even when the political climate is favourable to such forms of struggle. Similarly, leftists could oppose the sectarian branding of social democrats as “social fascists” either because they are authentic Bolsheviks who understand that such an approach would not only diminish the possibility of united-front action against fascists but would make communists ineffective in breaking workers from the influence of social democracy or because they are rightist opportunists who are soft on social democracy and would hence be hostile to even an authentic Bolshevik critique of social democracy. In other words there were nominal communists opposing the Third Period policies of the Comintern for both the correct and the wrong reasons. Now given that Trotskyism is a clearly defined Bolshevik perspective, theoretically speaking, former supporters of the Comintern parties should not have wanted to join the Trotskyist movement for the wrong reasons. However, the reality is that given the personal prestige of Trotsky himself and the fact that the Trotskyist groups were seen as the most viable non-Comintern movement that avowedly stood on the traditions of the October Revolution, it was to these organisations where many of those who saw themselves as being loyal to the October Revolution while being critical of the Stalinist Soviet/Comintern leadership gravitated towards, regardless of from which direction they opposed the Comintern leadership. That is why, for example, in Spain the majority of the original Trotskyist group, the Communist Left, broke from Trotsky at the key moment – the eve of the Spanish Revolution – and ended up uniting with supporters of the Communist “Right Opposition” (that is those who identified with the Bukharin-Rykov right-

wing of the Soviet Communist Party) to form the POUM.

Not everyone who joined the Trotskyist movement without truly subscribing to its principles was doing so out of rank opportunism. Some who had only partially assimilated the Trotskyist perspective had managed to convince themselves that they agreed with the Leninist principles that underpinned the Trotskyist movement. Nevertheless, the result of some joining the Trotskyist movement without truly believing in its principles was that by the end of the “Third Period” a percentage of the membership of the Trotskyist organisations in a number of countries did not politically belong in the movement. This was not merely a tiny percentage either. For in most of the countries where Fourth International sections existed, including China and the U.S., the Trotskyist organisations were first assembled, or first took shape, during the “Third Period.”

After the Comintern jumped sharply to the right in the mid-1930s, those then won to Trotskyism did so on the basis of a genuine Bolshevik opposition to the Comintern’s Menshevik-like “Popular Front/People’s Front” strategy. However, this changed somewhat in the late 1930s as the Great Purge reached its gruesome peak and the Trotskyist movement, necessarily, greatly sharpened the tone of their attacks on the domestic policies of the Soviet leadership. Many authentic communists did continue to join the Trotskyist movement in opposition to both the betrayals of the “Popular Front” strategy and in opposition to the growing repression and economic inequality within the USSR. However, others who, while being subjectively pro-communist, had not fully broken from social democracy and were thus squeamish about the stern measures that even a healthy workers state would need to take to defend working class power, also gravitated, **quite mistakenly**, towards the Trotskyist movement. They were on the one hand attracted by the connection with October 1917 and the prestige that came from embracing a movement led by the October Revolution’s co-leader and on the other, by **very wrongly** believing that they could maintain a certain distance from the Soviet workers state by identifying with

a movement that was, at the time, sharply critical of the USSR's then leadership. The late 1930s entry of such elements into the Trotskyist movement around the world was further facilitated by a particular difficulty that the Fourth Internationalist movement then faced, through no fault of its own. That difficulty arose from the intense slander of the Trotskyists that Comintern parties engaged in. In concert with the Great Purge, the Comintern parties were now not simply claiming that the Trotskyists were harming the USSR but that they were led by fascist agents hell-bent on capitalist counterrevolution. This relentless slander campaign caused workers who joined the Comintern-affiliated Communist parties to become wary of engaging in political discussion with Trotskyists. That was after all the whole purpose of the slander. Thus excluded from political work within pro-Communist Party-milieus, Trotskyist sections in the mid and late 1930s sought to recruit from within the left-wing of the social-democratic movements. The problem is that, for the most part, the best and most revolutionary-minded of the class-conscious workers still supported Comintern parties rather than the social-democratic ones. This was not because of the policies of the Soviet leadership. Rather it was because these class-conscious workers hoped that the Comintern parties, usurping the name and tradition of Lenin's Bolsheviks, would eventually lead October Revolutions in their own countries. Thus cut off from access to these Communist workers through slander and bureaucratic means, the Trotskyists did work and recruited from amongst layers that were not, at least until influenced by the Trotskyists, necessarily the most revolutionary ones in any given country. The distortion that this recruitment brought to the Fourth Internationalist movement was further exacerbated by the movement's tendency to make a virtue of this unhappy reality by comforting themselves with defiant statements that those within the left-wing of social-democratic, "socialist" movements were actually healthier and more radical than those within the Comintern parties. However, while this claim was true in Spain, where the Comintern parties' especially counterrevolutionary practice necessarily

repelled the best socialist militants, it was not true in most other countries.

The upshot of all this put together is that, by the late 1930s, a significant minority of the membership of certain Fourth International sections were not fully animated by the Bolshevik principles that underpinned genuine Trotskyism. It became probable that one or another great event would cause these layers to move sharply to the right and expose the flaws within certain Fourth International sections. That event turned out to be the 1939 USSR-Germany Non-Aggression Pact. The Soviet leadership entered the pact to try and stave off, or at least delay, a Nazi German invasion. The USSR was pushed into a corner because the Comintern's betrayals of tremendous revolutionary opportunities in Spain and France had left the USSR isolated, because the Great Purge had decimated and severely weakened the Red Army and because the "democratic imperialists" of France and Britain had refused Stalin's overtures to make an alliance with the USSR against Hitler. The USSR-Germany pact caused immense confusion and demoralisation amongst members of the Comintern parties around the globe. This was in part due to the Comintern's earlier policies. In the countries rival to Germany, like France, the Soviet/Comintern leaders had earlier instructed Comintern parties to "postpone" the fight for revolution and ally with "progressive" capitalists and social democrats on the grounds that this was needed to build an alliance between "democratic" capitalists and the USSR against Hitler's Nazis. Now the Soviet leaders were making a pact with that self-same Hitler! In the wake of the Germany-USSR pact, the Comintern ordered an abrupt change in the political line of its sections. Previously, while limiting revolutionary opposition to the "democratic" imperialist powers, the Comintern Communist parties had at least powerfully denounced the crimes of the bourgeoisie in the fascist countries. Now, the Comintern parties suddenly curbed their criticism of the Nazis and the Italian fascists. On the other hand, Comintern parties finally exposed the "democratic" pretensions of the French and British imperialists. They rightly

stated that the coming war between the Axis Powers and the “democratic” powers would be an inter-imperialist war in which the working class should oppose all sides. However, the soft-peddling of political opposition to the fascists was despicable. As was the way the Soviet leadership publicly celebrated the pact with the Nazis rather than explaining it as a tactical retreat forced on them by circumstance. Nevertheless, it was not wrong for an isolated and embattled workers state to seek to use diplomacy to make temporary pacts with one or another imperialist power in order to buy time, provided that the workers state does not simultaneously damage the workers struggle in the particular imperialist power that the pact was made with (which unfortunately the Soviet leadership definitely did) and provided that she does not harm the revolutionary workers struggle elsewhere.

The Germany-USSR pact turned middle-class public opinion in the “democratic” capitalist countries sharply against the Soviet Union. This was, on the one hand, because of the Soviet leadership/Comintern’s grotesque hailing of the pact and its disgusting retreat from criticism of the Nazis and, on the other, because the USSR and Comintern was no longer allied with the “democratic” capitalist rulers and was now correctly calling out these imperialists’ predatory agenda in the impending war. After the Soviet invasion of the Baltic states, Eastern Poland and Finland – as she sought forward bases as protection against a potential German invasion – public opinion hardened even further against the USSR in places like Britain, France and the USA. Succumbing to such sentiment, those in the Fourth International who had not fully broken from social democracy, who had opposed the “Third Period” for the wrong reasons and who while believing they were communists had not truly embraced the intransigent revolutionary principles of Bolshevism, renounced the fundamental Trotskyist tenet of unconditional military defence of the Soviet workers state. Many of these elements even claimed that the USSR was no longer a workers state but merely a state ruled by a new form of exploitative class. This revisionist current was strongest in the then U.S. section of the Fourth International, the Socialist Workers Party

(SWP). In the U.S., the anti-Soviet faction was led by prominent American intellectuals, Max Shachtman (who after his break with Trotskyism eventually became a leading pro-Cold War, anti-communist “socialist”) and James Burnham (who within days after leaving the SWP renounced Marxism completely and ended up becoming a leading and rabid neoconservative, anti-communist “theoretician”). When the Shachtman-Burnham faction left the Trotskyist movement in May 1940 they took some 40% of the SWP with them, including a majority of the party’s youth and most of the party’s central branch in New York. Significant parts of the Fourth International’s French, Brazilian and other sections also held a similar stance to the Shachtman-Burnham faction as did key leaders of the British and other sections. Meanwhile in France and certain other places, Fourth International sections tried to find a “middle ground” between the Trotskyist position of defence of the Soviet Union and the anti-Soviet position of the revisionists; or to downplay just how damaging was the anti-Soviet stance taken by the revisionists.

Although those who would become the renegades from Trotskyism only moved rapidly in an anti-Soviet direction in the wake of the Germany-USSR pact and the subsequent Soviet military operations, some of them, like Burnham, had started to raise doubts about the class character of the Soviet Union even earlier. Moreover, others amongst them had also earlier displayed other petit-bourgeois distortions in their political work. Although it was possible that favourable events could have prevented many of these elements from heading down the path that they eventually did, one could say that even before mid-1939 these people represented proto-revisionist, proto-anti-Soviet constituents within the Trotskyist movement. Given how large a minority of the Trotskyist movement that these elements comprised, especially within the U.S. which was an international center of the Fourth International, the pressure of their anti-Soviet, middle-class, democracy-obsessed political leanings could not have but distorted the program of the Fourth International and of Trotsky himself – even if only in a minor way.

Trotsky Defended the Soviet Workers State *Up to His Last Breath*

If Trotsky and the Fourth International emphasised the unconditional nature of their defence of the Soviet workers state slightly less than they should have during the late 1930s, we should in turn emphasise that any retreat on their part on this question was minor in degree. This will be especially clear if one examines the international situation that the USSR faced in this period. The late 1930s was a time when the **immediate** threat of an attack on the USSR by the “democratic” capitalist powers (the likes of the U.S., Britain and France) – **that is from the countries where the Fourth International’s presence in the imperialist countries was overwhelmingly concentrated** – was somewhat diminished. Of course, it was still true that in this period a key strategic goal of all the imperialist powers remained the destruction of the Soviet workers state. This had been the case ever since the October 1917 Revolution and remained true right up until the capitalist powers finally succeeded in strangling the USSR in 1991-92. However, how acute was the immediate military threat facing the Soviet Union and from which direction it came from were not constant. These things changed with world political conditions. In the late 1930s, the threat of attack from German imperialism was severe. However, this was a different story for the immediate military threat from the “democratic” capitalist regimes – that is the regimes ruling over the countries where most of the Fourth International’s key sections were based. During this period, the “democratic” imperialist ruling classes sought to use the USSR as a counterweight against their increasingly aggressive German imperialist rivals. Much more significantly, the imperialist rulers temporarily toned down the openness of their hostility to the USSR in order to help gain the assistance of the Soviet leadership and the Comintern for the suppression of socialist revolution in the capitalist world. In France and Spain in particular, the Stalin-led Soviet and Comintern leadership certainly obliged!

To some degree, the attitude of the “democratic” imperialists towards the Soviet workers state in the late 1930s was analogous to that of the imperialists towards the Chinese workers state in the period from the early 1970s to the end of the 1980s. In the early 1970s, the Mao leadership of China treacherously entered into an alliance with the U.S.-led imperialist powers against the Soviet workers state. By the mid-1970s, China was backing Apartheid South Africa-allied forces in Angola against Soviet and Cuban backed anti-colonial forces. Then acting as a dupe of Washington, China attacked the Soviet-allied Vietnamese workers state in 1978. By the 1980s, Beijing was helping the U.S, European and Australian imperialists in giving military assistance to the war fought by the brutally misogynist, Mujahedin religious fundamentalists against the secular, leftist PDPA government in Afghanistan and the latter’s Soviet allies. During this period, the imperialists, of course, never forgot their quest to destroy socialistic rule in China. They continued to back Chinese “pro-democracy”

dissidents who were hell-bent on capitalist counterrevolution. Nevertheless, the Chinese leadership were proving to be such a crucial ally in the Cold War against the then most powerful workers state that the imperialists were happy to temporarily dial down their open hostility to the PRC in order to ensure the latter’s support for the anti-Soviet Cold War. By the late 1980s, the imperialist strategy was playing out victoriously and the Mao-Deng strategy disastrously. The workers states in the Soviet bloc had been weakened considerably. The capitalist powers were confident that they would win the Cold War against the Soviet Union. They no longer needed China’s assistance and now moved towards intensifying their drive to strangle the Chinese workers state as well.

During the period from the time of the Nixon-Mao pact to the end of the 1980s, the correct orientation towards China that authentic communists should have taken is, while continuing to stand for the unconditional military defence of the Chinese workers state against imperialist attack and internal

**The Only Way
To Defend The
Soviet Union**

AN EDITORIAL

Jack Tanner, president of the powerful Amalgamated Engineering Union of Britain, on Tuesday cited Moore-Brabazon, Minister of Aircraft Production, as an example of the "people in high places who declare they hope that Russia and Germany will exterminate each other" while Britain becomes master of Europe. Tanner demanded that the British government remove from its ranks those who "desire the defeat of the Soviet Union."

If Tanner's demand were to be carried out, not only Moore-Brabazon but the entire cabinet would have to be ousted. Nor could a cabinet be constituted out of the Conservative, Liberal and Labor parties which would wholeheartedly desire the victory of the Soviet Union. Neither the capitalists of Britain, nor their labor lackeys, want to see a definite victory for the Workers' State.

Tanner's charge has brought into the open merely one concrete case of the anti-Soviet attitude which is held by the entire "democratic" ruling class both in Britain and the United States. Even the *New York Times* of Sept. 3, in its dispatch on Tanner's charge, admits: "Regardless of whether the remarks imputed to the Aircraft Production Minister were actually made by him or not, they are a reflection of the general attitude held two months ago by many important persons."

The *Times* goes on, however, to claim that this attitude has changed since the Red Army and the armed workers of the Soviet Union have fought so well.

But the attitude of the British and American ruling class has NOT changed. Their attitude toward the Soviet Union two months ago was motivated, not by the shifting battle lines, but by their CLASS outlook and that CLASS outlook remains the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

THE MILITANT

Official Weekly Organ of the Socialist Workers Party

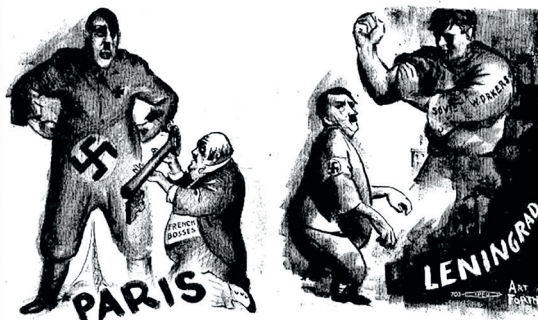
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MASSES DEFEND SOVIET CITIES

A Tale Of Two Cities



Hold Nazi Army At Odessa, Kiev And Leningrad

Traditions Of October 1917 Inspire Masses
To Fight To Death Against Imperialists

Surrounded by vast, heavily mechanized Nazi forces, the armed workers of Odessa, side by side with the Red Army are holding the invaders at bay.

As in Leningrad and Kiev, the proletarian masses of Odessa are rallying to the defense of the Soviet Union, spurred on by the memories and traditions of the October Revolution.

Eyewitness reports from the beleaguered Ukrainian city relate the tremendous effect produced on the workers' morale last week when a unit of Black Sea Marines paraded through the city's streets singing the "Kablodka," famous fighting song of the Civil War of 1918-1921.

Stirred by this revolutionary song, the populace danced in

Above: Front page of the 6 September 1941 issue of the paper of the then U.S. section of the Trotskyist Fourth International hails Soviet resistance to the Nazis and calls for defence of the Soviet Union against German imperialism. The lead article cheered that: "The very menace to the Soviet Union has unleashed a mighty revolutionary spirit among the masses. Regardless of the attitude of the Kremlin, the workers are rising in defense of the conquests of the October Revolution." The companion article stressed that, "The only loyal allies of the Soviet Union are the workers of the world."

counterrevolutionaries, to place most emphasis on opposing Beijing's anti-Soviet alliance with Washington and later also to stress opposition to the excesses of Deng's pro-market reforms and to outline a program for an authentic internationalist, communist force to take over leadership from the rightward moving Beijing bureaucracy. Somewhat analogously, in the late 1930s, when the "democratic" imperialists temporarily muted their hostility to the USSR and the Soviet leadership was busy strangling workers revolutions abroad and carrying out wholesale massacres of communists at home, the orientation of communists towards the Soviet Union in these "democratic" imperialist countries should have been one of, while continuing to stand for the unconditional defence of the workers state, emphasising the need to prepare a political revolution through which the ruling bureaucracy would be ousted by workers soviets (elected councils) led by an authentic Bolshevik party on a program of encouraging the struggle for socialist revolution abroad, putting an immediate end to the murderous repression of communists within the USSR, greatly reducing income differentials and

rolling back the attacks on women's rights that had occurred in the preceding few years. Such an agenda is indeed what the Fourth International largely fought for in this period. With the great benefit of hindsight, we can only say that, skewed somewhat by the impact of terrible political defeats and distorted further by the influence of right-leaning, middle class elements that had made their way into their movement, Trotsky and the Fourth International in this period **slightly** downplayed their earlier (and indeed later) insistence that the goal of political revolution to oust the bureaucracy was **subordinate** to the defence of the workers state.

Most importantly, however, **once the threat to the USSR actually became acute again from late 1939-1940 onwards, with the start of World War II, Trotsky and the Fourth International once again stressed that "the question of overthrowing the Soviet bureaucracy is for us subordinate to the question of preserving state property in the means of production of the USSR"** (L.D. Trotsky, *The USSR in War*, 25 September 1939, reprinted in *In Defence of Marxism*,

New Park Publications, 1971). There was, to be sure, a small time lag in making this switch in emphasis. As Trotsky had himself explained (in his crucial 1924 work, *Lessons of October*), during times of rapid change even revolutionary parties are often caught behind events due to a certain, to a degree necessary, conservative inertia that exists in any party. So it was with Trotsky and the Fourth International in the very initial period after hostility towards the USSR from the “democratic” imperialists escalated in late 1939. It is in this context that we must understand Trotsky’s wrong decision to agree to participate in the Dies Committee in late 1939 and his initially too pedagogical tone when refuting the arguments of the Burnham-Shachtman anti-Soviet faction within the American Trotskyist group. However, **once the enmity towards the USSR of the imperialist countries in which the Fourth International’s biggest sections were based further intensified following the Soviet invasion of Finland and the ensuing December 1939 expulsion of the USSR from the League of Nations (the predecessor to the UN), Trotsky fought with renewed vigour for the defence of the Soviet Union. Indeed, his struggle against those within the Fourth International who wanted to abandon unconditional military defence of the USSR was the last major battle of Trotsky’s life. Trotsky fought this battle ferociously.** Against the likes of Burnham who claimed that the USSR had become a new type of class society, Trotsky pointed out that the fact that the September 1939 entry of the Soviet Army into Eastern Poland (i.e. western Ukraine and western Byelo-Russia) spurred poor peasants in the region to confiscate the landlords’ estates and the workers to establish control over the factories was only possible because the Red Army was part of the workers state that issued out of the October Revolution. Then, responding to the hysterical anti-Soviet denunciations after the Soviet Union invaded Finland to protect her northeastern flank, Trotsky insisted that:

“Just as during strikes directed against big capitalists, the workers often bankrupt in passing

highly respectable petty-bourgeois concerns, so in a military struggle against imperialism, or in seeking military guarantees against imperialism, the workers’ state – even completely healthy and revolutionary – may find itself compelled to violate the independence of this or that small state. Tears over the ruthlessness of the class struggle on either the domestic or the international arena may properly be shed by democratic Philistines but not by proletarian revolutionists.”

L.D. Trotsky, ‘Balance Sheet of the Finnish Events’, 25 April 1940, reprinted in *In Defence of Marxism*, New Park Publications, 1971.

Less than a month after issuing the above article emphatically calling for the defence of the USSR, the secret police of that same state, the NKVD, tried to murder Trotsky. Some twenty assassins stormed Trotsky’s home in Mexico and unleashed a torrent of bullets and incendiary devices. Their assault injured Trotsky, his wife Natalia Sedova and their 14 year-old grandson, Esteban Volkov, who was shot in the foot. All three were lucky to survive. However, this assassination attempt did not stop Trotsky from standing for the unconditional defence of the Soviet Union. Indeed, just two days after this failed 24 May 1940 murder attempt, the Fourth International adopted a manifesto authored by Trotsky that included a whole section calling for the defence of the USSR. Responding to the frenzied outcry over the Soviet invasions of Eastern Poland and Finland, the manifesto stressed:

“The anti Soviet campaign, which had a class character through and through, disclosed once again that the USSR by virtue of the social foundations laid down by the October Revolution, upon which the existence of the bureaucracy itself is dependent, still remains a workers’ state, terrifying to the bourgeoisie of the whole world....

“To be sure, the nationalization of the means of production in one country [the USSR], and a backward one at that, still does not insure the building of socialism. But it is capable of furthering the primary prerequisite of socialism, namely, the planned development of the productive forces. To turn one’s back on the nationalization of the means of production on the ground that in of itself it does not create the well being of the masses is tantamount to sentencing a granite foundation to destruction on the ground

that it is impossible to live without walls and a roof. The class conscious worker knows that a successful struggle for complete emancipation is unthinkable without the defense of conquests already gained, however modest these may be. All the more obligatory therefore is the defense of so colossal a conquest as planned economy against the restoration of capitalist relations.”

Manifesto of the Fourth International: Imperialist War And The Proletarian World Revolution, Adopted by the Emergency Conference of the Fourth International, May 19-26, 1940, *Marxists Internet Archive*, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/1938-1949/emergconf/index.htm>

It cannot be stressed enough how much political pressure Trotsky and the Fourth International withstood to take this stand. In the wake of the Germany-USSR pact and the Soviet invasions of Eastern Poland and Finland, “public opinion” in the capitalist world was absolutely rabid in its hostility to the USSR. Reflecting such sentiment, the international social democracy and the minority anti-Soviet, by-then former, factions in the Fourth International zealously denounced Trotsky and the majority in the Fourth International for their Soviet defencist stance. Meanwhile, Trotsky also had to resist many subjective impulses that would have been hammering away against his position on the USSR. It was not simply that the then leaders of the workers state that Trotsky was defending were actively seeking to murder him and had been subjecting him to the most horrific slander campaign imaginable. The then leadership of the USSR had also just murdered thousands of his supporters within the Soviet Union and assassinated several of his closest supporters abroad. What would have been particularly painful for Trotsky was that, out of vengeance for him, the Soviet leadership had driven one of his two daughters, Zinaida Volkov, to suicide in 1933 and then killed both his sons: his eldest son, Leon Sedov, who himself was a leading Fourth Internationalist was murdered by GPU agents in Paris in 1938 and his younger son, Sergei Sedov, who was an apolitical scientist and was murdered in a gulag the year before.

When one appreciates the strength of political pressures and personal emotions that Trotsky withstood to maintain his intransigent defence of the Soviet degenerated workers state, it makes all the more pathetic those latter-day pseudo-Trotskyists who, in the face of far lesser social pressures and personal compulsions, abandoned defence of the former USSR and today actively side with the forces working to destroy the Chinese workers state.

The extent to which Trotsky could subordinate subjective feelings for the sake of the struggle was especially apparent during discussions that he had with the leaders of the American SWP in June 1940. These SWP leaders visited Trotsky in Mexico. Trotsky proposed that the SWP give critical support to the leader of the Stalinised Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA), Earl Browder, in the upcoming U.S. presidential elections. Trotsky’s motivation flowed from the new orientation of the CPUSA following the Germany-USSR Non-Aggression Pact. After having, for years, in the name of the “Popular Front”, greatly softened opposition to the capitalist Roosevelt Administration and to the American capitalist class more broadly, the CPUSA finally stood firmly against its “own” capitalist rulers. It now loudly opposed any U.S. participation in the war and more generally opposed all sides in the war between the “democratic” imperialists and the fascist German-Italian imperialists, correctly labelling the conflict as an inter-imperialist war. The Stalinist CPUSA now temporarily shared the same position on the war as the Trotskyist SWP. For this the CPUSA, including Browder personally, was facing intense state repression. Trotsky proposed that the SWP should offer electoral support to the CPUSA on the condition that it maintain its current stance on the war, while warning CPUSA ranks that their leadership would inevitably betray this correct stance as soon as the Kremlin decided that a new diplomatic combination was more favourable. Trotsky saw this united-front tactic as a way for the SWP to deepen support for their Leninist position on the war and as a means to win authority and recruits from amongst

the CPUSA rank and file. However, in what then SWP leader James Cannon described as an “at times heated discussion”, Trotsky’s proposal was strongly opposed by all SWP leaders. As a result, his proposal was rejected. This was a mistake. Had the SWP gone with Trotsky on this, the party would have gained great respect amongst the best worker militants within the CPUSA. Those pro-communist militants were stabbed in the back when the CPUSA leaders did an about face in June 1941, after the German invasion of the USSR blew up the Germany-USSR Pact, and the CPUSA once again cosied up to the U.S. capitalist class – this time in a manner so subservient that they actually campaigned against workers’ strikes and curbed their support for black rights struggles (black rights struggles actually intensified during the war because many black workers enduring continuing racist oppression did not buy the lie that America’s racist rulers were fighting the war to “defend democracy”).

It is important to note here that the tactic of giving critical electoral support to a Stalinist party was not equivalent to the Trotskyist position of unconditional defence of the Soviet degenerated workers state. The latter position meant **military** defence of the Soviet Union against capitalist militaries and opposition to internal capitalist restorationist movements. But it did not confer any **political** support whatsoever to the leaders of the Soviet Union nor did it assume any responsibility for their actions and policies. By contrast, when one applies the united-front tactic of giving critical support to another party in an election, one is conferring a degree of political support to that organisation – albeit with many criticisms and reservations – and is assuming some degree of responsibility for the conduct of that party in the immediate post-election period. Here we had Trotsky proposing some degree of guarded political support to a Stalinist party that was up to its ears in slandering Trotsky as a fascist agent

and was busy baying for Trotsky’s blood – agitating for Trotsky to be thrown out of the one country (Mexico) in the world that allowed him residency. Indeed, it was later revealed that CPUSA leader Browder had personally participated in meetings with the NKVD that planned Trotsky’s assassination. Yet barely three weeks after the 24 May 1940 assassination attempt on Trotsky’s life by the NKVD, Trotsky argued for giving critical electoral support to this very same Browder in the upcoming U.S. presidential elections. To put it bluntly, **Trotsky was calling for qualified political support to a person who was key to planning Trotsky’s own murder!** Trotsky took this stance simply because he understood that this was what was needed to advance the struggle for socialist revolution. It was with the same motivation that Trotsky approached his orientation to the USSR. Sure, the awful crimes of the Soviet bureaucracy in the late 1930s – crimes which caused Trotsky great personal pain – may have led him to have some minor subjectivity on the Soviet question for a period but when it really counted Trotsky fought fiercely for the unconditional defence of the Soviet state. Trotsky bravely maintained this stance right up to when a secret police operative of that state struck him with a fatal blow to the head in August 1940. For Trotsky deeply understood how much defence of the USSR was in the interests of the international working class. As he concluded in a crucial article written less than six months before his murder:

“The workers’ state must be taken as it has emerged from the merciless laboratory of history and not as it is imagined by a ‘socialist’ professor, reflectively exploring his nose with his finger. It is the duty of revolutionists to defend every conquest of the working class even though it may be distorted by the pressure of hostile forces. Those who cannot defend old positions will never conquer new ones.”

L.D. Trotsky, Balance Sheet of the Finnish Events, 25 April 1940, reprinted in *In Defence of Marxism*, New Park Publications, 1971.

The Trotskyist Orientation to Workers States *without* an Authentically Bolshevik Leadership

After Trotsky's death, most of those who considered themselves to be "Orthodox Trotskyists" tended to base their orientation towards the USSR (until its demise in the early 1990s) on the section on the Soviet Union in the 1938 *Transitional Program*. Moreover, labelling subsequent workers states – like the Peoples Republic of China, the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK, i.e. "North Korea"), post-1959 Cuba etc – as being "qualitatively similar to the post-1924 USSR", most nominal Orthodox Trotskyists applied the slogans of the *Transitional Program* to these other states where proletarian rule based on nationalised property had been established but where political administration is monopolised by a privileged bureaucracy that turns its back on the struggle for worldwide socialist revolution. In doing so, these "Orthodox Trotskyists" are actually rejecting the approach that Trotsky took towards the USSR. For based on the Marxist analytical method of dialectical materialism, Trotsky approached the post-1924 USSR not as a fixed entity but as a dynamic entity that was the product of living and conflicting social forces. That is why, within the limits of always standing for the unconditional defence of the workers state and fighting to restore to the USSR the workers democracy and revolutionary internationalism that guided her in its early years, Trotsky's program for the USSR, as we detailed earlier, was *not* fixed.

When the Trotskyists began calling for a proletarian political revolution to oust the Soviet bureaucracy in 1933, this was **not** in any way a correction to their earlier line. Rather the change in line was a response to the course of political developments within the USSR and the changing character of the Soviet bureaucracy. Similarly, the emphasis contained in the *Transitional Program's* section on the USSR should be seen as the Trotskyist approach to the USSR of 1938 rather than as Trotsky's "last word" on the Soviet Union. Whether it was before he started advocating the perspective of political revolution or after, Trotsky always adjusted the slogans of his USSR program according to the audience that he was addressing and according to the general international and Soviet domestic political situation. For example, when he delivered a 1932 lecture to a Copenhagen gathering of social democratic students – that is youth from a political tendency hostile to the Soviet workers state – Trotsky made only minimal and oblique criticisms of the Soviet bureaucracy in a speech which he devoted entirely to upholding the October Revolution and the Soviet Union. Similarly, in a *Program For Action* that he wrote to "all the toilers of France" in June 1934 – that

is **after** he had started calling for political revolution in the USSR – Trotsky made no call for such a political revolution in the section of the *Program* related to the Soviet Union. Indeed, he made no direct criticism of the Soviet bureaucracy whatsoever in that *Program For Action*. This had all do with the political context that the appeal was issued in. Firstly, this statement was neither an appeal to workers within the USSR nor a general statement of the program of the Fourth Internationalists that was to have applicability for workers in all countries. It was a call specifically to the working class of France. Mobilising to defend the Soviet workers state against French imperialism was a very immediate task posed before the French working class. By contrast, a political revolution to oust the Soviet bureaucracy was something that could not be performed by the toilers of France – it was a task for the working class of the USSR. Thus, it was not a key slogan to include in an appeal to the workers of France. Secondly, the political period that the *Program* was released in shaped its contents. This call to the French working people was written just months after a right-wing coup in France instigated by fascist and other far-right forces. It was also

the year after Hitler's seizure of power in Germany. The Fourth Internationalists could see the threat of a future war against the Soviet workers state growing rapidly. As a result, it was necessary for the section on the USSR of the *Program For Action* to focus exclusively on the need for the unconditional defence of the Soviet Union. In contrast, when the immediate threat to the USSR from the democratic "imperialists" was eased off during the 1936-1938 period, Trotskyists emphasised the need for proletarian political revolution to oust the bureaucracy. Then when the threat to the USSR became very acute after the start of World War II, the Fourth International again stressed unconditional defence of the Soviet Union and emphasised that the need for workers' political revolution to oust the bureaucracy was subordinate to the need to defend the workers state.

With the USSR not facing immediate attack from their "own" bourgeoisies in the 1936-1938 period, Trotskyists in the "democratic" imperialist countries were able to, alongside calling for the defence of the USSR, use a slogan in the 1938 *Transitional Program*: "Down with the bureaucratic gang of Cain-Stalin!" However, when the USSR was later driven into war against the Nazi invaders, to emphasise such a slogan calling for the downfall of the leader of the USSR would have become very inappropriate. That is why the American SWP did not stress such slogans during the 1941-1945 period. Instead, they emphasised the defence of the Soviet workers state and lionised both Soviet resistance and the Red Army. For example, the 6 September 1941 issue of the paper of the U.S. section of the Fourth International, *The Militant*, headlined, "MASSES DEFEND SOVIET CITIES." The lead article emphasised that, "Traditions Of October 1917 Inspire Masses To Fight To Death Against Imperialists" and begun by cheering that:

"Surrounded by vast, heavily mechanized Nazi forces, the armed workers of Odessa, side by side with the Red Army

are holding the invaders at bay.

"As in Leningrad and Kiev, the proletarian masses of Odessa are rallying to the defense of the Soviet Union, spurred on by the memories and traditions of the October Revolution.

"Eye-witness reports from the beleaguered Ukrainian city relate the tremendous effect produced on the workers' morale last week when a unit of Black Sea Marines paraded through the city's streets singing the 'Yablochka,' famous fighting song of the Civil War of 1918-1921."

As during World War II, to have emphasised the call, "Down with the bureaucratic gang of Cain-Stalin!" during periods of intense hostility between the USSR and the imperialists after the Cold War began, say during the tense standoff over Berlin in mid-1948, would have been harmful. For the slogan would have been interpreted as support to the capitalist powers in the Cold War, unless the call was explained carefully in the fine print alongside **BIG BOLD SLOGANS CALLING FOR THE UNCONDITIONAL DEFENCE OF THE USSR... and** unless there was an authentic Leninist party within the USSR **with both substantial support and serious prospects** of being able to replace the Stalin administration with a genuine Bolshevik leadership **in the short term**. The same could be said about issuing a call, "Down with the bureaucratic gang of Cain-Khrushchev" during, say, the heady days of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Today, we are in the midst of a new Cold War. Particularly the Chinese and North Korean workers states but also the Cuban one face very open hostility from the imperialist powers. Especially when anti-communist propaganda in the West demonises Chinese president Xi Jinping and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un as a means to whip up hostility towards the Chinese and North Korean workers states, mindlessly applying the slogans of the *Transitional Program's* section on the USSR to today's China and North Korea by making prominent calls to "Bring down the Xi regime" or "Bring down the Kim Jong-Un

regime”, no matter what other slogans are simultaneously raised, would be interpreted as supporting the imperialist drive to destroy these workers states.

Moreover, aside from the issue raised earlier noting that the USSR section in the *Transitional Program* contains a slight political skew, there is another crucial aspect that must be considered when examining today’s applicability of the slogans contained in it: that is that **the *Transitional Program* was written at a time when the Soviet bureaucratic leadership was doing the most damage to the workers state that it had ever done in the Soviet Union’s entire history** – if one excludes the last few years of the Soviet Union when the ruling bureaucracy opened the floodgates to capitalist counterrevolution. The Soviet bureaucracy in the period when the *Transitional Program* was proclaimed not only greatly increased inequality but also carried out the most destructive of policies towards the revolutionary workers’ struggle abroad. To be sure, the Soviet/Comintern leadership had earlier also betrayed revolutionary struggles. After all, they caused the disastrous defeat of China’s 1925-1927 Revolution. However, their conduct in Spain in the late 1930s went a step further in aiding counterrevolution than they had earlier in China. In Spain they not only subordinated the workers to the “liberal” bourgeoisie as they had subordinated Chinese workers to the “patriotic” bourgeois KMT but **they also partly aped the bloody counterrevolutionary repression of the KMT itself**. However, after the imperialists unleashed the Cold War against the USSR after World War II, Moscow’s foreign policy played a more contradictory role. Of course, there was no change in the bureaucracy’s anti-Leninist policy of seeking “coexistence with imperialism.” However, the reality from the late 1940s onwards was that even when Moscow discouraged communists abroad from engaging in revolutionary struggle, the imperialists continued an openly hostile stance towards the Soviet bloc. The extension

of proletarian rule through the bayonets of the victorious Soviet Red Army to the countries of Eastern Europe at the end of World War II, the overturns of capitalism in Yugoslavia and the northern part of Korea, the fragility of capitalist rule in Western Europe and growth of communist movements in the colonies all made the imperialist ruling classes increasingly terrified about the threat to them from socialism. By 1947, no matter how much the Kremlin reassured the capitalist powers that they had no intention to help spread socialism to their countries, no matter how much they preached the anti-revolutionary policies of the People’s Front, the capitalist ruling classes remained hell bent on an openly confrontational campaign to strangle the Soviet and allied workers states. As a result, in particular cases where the opportunities for socialist revolution became especially great and there was little way that Moscow could hold back the revolutionary movements, the Soviet leadership gave support to these revolutionary forces. After having tried unsuccessfully to push Mao into an alliance with the KMT after World War II – one that would have seen the CPC in a subordinate position in the coalition – Moscow then continued to provide material support to the CPC even after the latter fought unambiguously for revolution in the second part of the 1946-1949 Chinese Civil War. As Mao himself acknowledged, the 1949 Revolution could not have triumphed without this Soviet material and military support. This is of enormous significance. Some nominally “Orthodox Trotskyists” have tried to dismiss Soviet assistance to the Chinese Revolution as an “accident” or downplay it as an “exception.” Such characterisations simply don’t cut it. After all, that would be *some* “exception”! We are, after all, speaking here about the overturn of capitalism in the world’s most populous country, which is today the greatest **enduring** victory that the exploited masses of the world have achieved to date! Later Moscow would provide crucial assistance to the social revolutions in Vietnam and Laos too. Moreover, although

the 1959 Cuban Revolution did not receive Soviet assistance, subsequent Soviet aid to Cuba played a vital role in enabling the Cuban masses to hang onto socialistic rule as they built up their workers state in the face of intense hostile pressure from U.S. imperialism. Soviet assistance to the Peoples Republic of China in the crucial first decade after her revolution was of similar importance as was the Soviet nuclear shield that during the Cold War deterred imperialist attacks on Cuba, the DPRK, Vietnam, Laos and the Soviet Union's East Europe allies. Then in late 1979, the Soviet Red Army heroically intervened into Afghanistan to back the leftist, pro-women's rights Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan government that was being threatened by a far-right, anti-women uprising by extreme religious fundamentalists backed by the U.S. and Iran. When one adds to all this the Red Army's overwhelmingly central role in the smashing of Hitler's Nazis, the Soviet Union's hugely progressive overturns of capitalism in East Europe at the end of World War II and the Red Army's assistance to the revolutionary victories in Yugoslavia and North Korea, it is apparent that in the period from the start of World War II to the demise of the USSR, Moscow sometimes played an important role in supporting the struggle for socialism. To be sure, the Soviet leadership also continued to betray crucial revolutionary struggles. At the end of World War II alone, the Moscow bureaucrats knifed two terrific opportunities for socialist revolution in the vain hope of achieving "peaceful coexistence" with Anglo-American imperialism. Firstly, as Italian workers were rising up in militant strike waves in 1943-45, Stalin ordered the large Communist Party of Italy to seek a "democratic" capitalist Italy rather than lead a socialist revolution. Secondly, Stalin did a deal with British prime minister Winston Churchill to stab the Greek Communists in the back by withdrawing support to them during the Greek Civil War, thereby causing tens of thousands of

Greek communists to be killed by U.S. and British-backed monarchist forces. Overall, if one takes the period from the start of World War II to the demise of the USSR, Moscow's foreign policy record is mixed – her important progressive deeds in some instances are matched by her sabotage of revolutionary working class uprisings in other cases. However, this is still in stark contrast to the period when the *Transitional Program* was written. In that period, the Kremlin was playing **an overwhelmingly and almost uniformly reactionary role abroad** as she betrayed crucial opportunities for workers' revolution in Spain, France and elsewhere.

The most notable feature of Soviet political life in the period in which the *Transitional Program* was adopted is that it was in the middle of the bureaucracy's grotesque blood purge of communists. That Great Purge was, fortunately, unique in Soviet history. Even in the remainder of Stalin's rule, while there continued to be severe repression of communists – such as the late 1940s-early 1950s execution of six Leningrad Communist Party leaders and the imprisonment of hundreds of other leading members of Leningrad society – there was never anything even remotely approaching the scale of the horrific late 1930s Purge. After Stalin's successors had his secret police chief Lavrentiy Beria and five of Beria's associates executed in December 1953 and Stalin's other key security official, Viktor Abakumov and three of Abakumov's associates executed a year later, there would be no more political executions in the Soviet Union for the remaining, nearly four decades, of its existence. Moreover, while genuine workers democracy continued to be strictly suppressed, by the mid-1950s it became rare for any communist to even be jailed for lengthy periods in the USSR. Therefore, to claim that the USSR of the mid-1950s onwards was "qualitatively similar" to that of 1938 USSR during the midst of the Purge is simply wrong.

The USSR when Trotsky's Transitional Program Was Proclaimed Versus *Today's* PRC

If the horror of the Great Purge was a unique period in the history of the Soviet workers state that does not represent the remainder of her 74 year-old existence, then still less is it representative of most of the history of the other workers states, as bureaucratically deformed as they are and have been. Certainly political life today in the biggest workers state, the PRC, has little resemblance to that of the USSR during the Great Purge. Those CPC members and others who make criticisms of the Chinese leadership from a genuinely leftist direction are not being killed. Indeed, it has been decades since there has been any political execution in China.

There have been cases where targeted elements in a CPC inner-party factional struggle have been suspiciously singled out and jailed for corruption. Most notably, then Politburo member and CPC secretary of China's biggest municipality Chongqing, Bo Xilai, was purged from his positions and later jailed for corruption in 2013. After having adopted a stance very much in the mainstream of the pro-Deng Xiaoping CPC, Bo was then swept to the left by the leftward movement of China's toiling classes in the mid and late noughties. As party secretary of Chongqing he advanced a public housing program even more far-reaching than the massive public housing provision program that was being implemented across China. Bo also openly supported labour strikes (like a big 2008 taxi strike), cracked down on capitalists in Chongqing and promoted a Red Culture movement to encourage greater support for communist ideology. Bo was pushing for China as a whole to adopt an economic program involving a still greater role for the socialistic public sector and state intervention, which was dubbed the Chongqing Model. It appears that the accusations of corruption against him had validity and were connected to Bo acquiescing to corrupt activities from his high-living wife and son. However, the main specific charge made against Bo is that he was complicit in his family receiving bribes some eight years before he became Chongqing party secretary. There is strong suspicion that Bo was selectively brought down for corruption because of his political

stance and that the charges against him were exaggerated. Bo's downfall was met with outrage by staunch communists within China and hailed by the right-wing of the CPC and China's liberals and anti-communists. In the aftermath, a handful of other CPC leaders associated with Bo were also jailed for corruption. Most prominent among these was retired member of the CPC's highest body, the Politburo Standing Committee, Zhou Yongkang, who had once publicly hailed the "Chongqing Model".

Strikingly different from the former USSR's Great Purge, none of the party leaders imprisoned with the downfall of Bo and related cases were ever executed. It is notable too that, after the first couple of years of his presidency when China inched to the right, PRC leader Xi Jinping in the last few years has actually begun taking up key aspects of Bo's agenda. Moreover, since the downfall of Bo Xilai and certain of his allies there does not appear to have been any other cases since – whether under the guise of anti-corruption or other guises – where a known leftist in the CPC leadership has been imprisoned. To the extent that anti-corruption probes in China are today skewed by politics they have been targeted against right-wing elements clearly seeking to undermine socialistic rule. For example, the most high-profile, recent anti-corruption prosecution with a political bent was the September 2020 sentencing to 18 years imprisonment of right-wing, real estate

tycoon, Ren Zhiqiang. Ren had been allowed to be a CPC member until just months before his imprisonment. However, he should never have been allowed to be part of any party calling itself communist. Although Ren was actually the chairman of a state-owned rather than private real estate company he also had capitalist investments. Moreover, he openly advocated anti-working class policies including demanding an end to the Chinese government's measures to curb property speculation. He once said that commercial housing is meant to be for the rich and not for the poor! As a result, he was dubbed "China's Donald Trump." Although we say that it is more effective to defeat such elements through mass action exposing, denouncing and hounding these counterrevolutionary scum wherever they go (we absolutely love the way that a protester threw a shoe at Ren in 2010 when he was giving a public speech), we cheered the PRC's imprisonment of "China's Donald Trump." Our criticism of the CPC bureaucracy in the way that they dealt with Ren Zhiqiang is that it took them way too long to put out this filthy piece of garbage.

Now there have been reports in the past of the PRC state harassing, arresting and imprisoning labour rights activists. We are not speaking here of those in the pay of anti-communist, Western-funded NGOs who seek to misdirect genuine workplace rights grievances into an agenda that would undermine the workers state. Such counterrevolutionary elements should not in the least be defended – even when they are not completely aware of the full agenda of their paymasters. We are speaking here instead of those activists motivated by a genuine pro-working class and pro-communist agenda. However, any persecution of such elements that is still occurring in China is mostly at a moderate level. For example, we do not currently know of a single, workers rights activist who genuinely criticises the CPC leadership from the left that is currently imprisoned

in China. And remember, China has a population of 1.45 billion people. To be sure, genuine workers democracy remains suppressed within China. If people tried to establish a communist party in China to the left of the CPC, they would likely face concerted repression, even if that party unconditionally defends the workers state as any genuine left-wing party should. Nevertheless, while strong criticism of PRC leaders from a genuinely Bolshevik direction today faces censorship on social media, Chinese people are still able to make some degree of left critiques of Beijing's policies without facing repression. And such criticism is indeed very common and sometimes even makes its way into the columns of certain more left-leaning sections of the state media, especially if the attacks do not criticise party leaders by name. Meanwhile strikes, protests over land seizure by developers and protests over local issues are actually quite common in China; and although some are repressed, most are not. **Today's PRC is actually very different to the USSR that existed at the time that the *Transitional Program* was proclaimed.**

There is also a notable difference between the political lineage of the bureaucratic layer that rules today's China, DPRK, Cuba, Vietnam and Laos and that which headed the Soviet Union in 1938. The Communist party bureaucrats who rule today's workers states are all political successors – sometimes anointed (and in the case of the DPRK direct descendants) – of those that led the socialist revolutions in their countries. Yes, there were terribly cruel purges of some 1949 Revolution leaders during China's 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution. And there have been many factional struggles within the CPC. Nevertheless, the Chinese political administration is today made up of the political successors of a significant component of the leadership of her 1949 anti-capitalist revolution. Illustratively, Xi Jinping's father Xi Zhongxun was a

guerilla leader and political commissar for the Peoples Liberation Army during the CPC's revolutionary struggle. He was a vice premier in Mao's administration and although once dumped from his positions and persecuted during the Cultural Revolution he returned to the upper echelons of the PRC leadership and eventually was elected to the CPC Politburo. Xi Zhongxun was said to be part of the Deng Xiaoping faction of the CPC. It was Deng and his co-thinkers that gained the upper hand in the party in the late 1970s. Yet, most of the political successors of the revolutionary leaders who made up other trends within the CPC continued to be in the PRC bureaucracy in prominent positions – albeit in lesser positions to the pro-Deng Xiaoping political lineage. This is very different to the Soviet bureaucracy when Trotsky wrote the *Transitional Program*. By the time that Trotsky was murdered, a year and a half after the adoption of the *Transitional Program*, almost each and every one of the senior Bolsheviks who led the revolution and built up the party (and who had not already died from natural causes) had been murdered by the bureaucratic rulers that usurped administrative power. Also dumped from the ruling party were all their political successors and young followers. Thus, the Soviet bureaucracy's personal connection to October was very, very slim. It only consisted of Stalin and Molotov as well as a tiny handful of others who were of much lower rank in the party during the Revolution. By the late 1930s, the Soviet bureaucracy's upper echelons were mostly made up of people who were neither direct participants in the October Revolution nor people who were the natural political successors of the leading revolutionary participants. Instead, many of the upper ranks of the bureaucracy had in 1917 actually been opponents of the socialist revolution. Notably, Andrey Vyshinsky, the state prosecutor in the grotesque Moscow Trials had actually been a leading

prosecutor in the overthrown pre-October bourgeois government. During the period of the July-August 1917 anti-Bolshevik witch-hunt, it was Vyshinsky who signed the warrant for Lenin's arrest! The triumph of the October Revolution prevented his order from being accomplished. Yet, some two decades later, in the form of a, now, Soviet prosecutor, Vyshinsky actually succeeded in sending dozens of the most senior Bolsheviks from 1917 to their deaths. Meanwhile, the key posts of chief ambassadors to the U.S. and Britain were also then held by those who had been enemies of the October Revolution – that is by Alexander Troyanovsky and Ivan Maisky respectively. Maisky had actually been a deputy minister in the bourgeois Provisional Government overthrown by the October Revolution. During the Civil War, Troyanovsky was twice jailed by Lenin and Trotsky's Bolsheviks for counterrevolutionary activities. For his part, Maisky became a minister in the counterrevolutionary rebel government established in the south of Russia to wage civil war on the young Soviet workers state. In general one can say that **when the *Transitional Program* was issued, the upper ranks of the Soviet bureaucracy was made up almost entirely of those who rose to their position following the ousting and then brutal crushing of those who spearheaded the October Revolution (and/or built the party that led it), whereas the bureaucracies heading today's workers states are largely made up of the political descendants of those who had been in the vanguard of the toiling people's revolutions that established these states.** To be sure, the underlying social roots for sustaining bureaucratic rule in today's deformed workers states are similar to those out of which the former Soviet bureaucracy grew: that is the as-yet unfinished character of the revolutions (in that capitalism has not been vanquished on a global scale and the seeds of capitalist restoration have

not been fully crushed domestically) and the resulting lack of full satisfaction of the basic material needs of all the people. In the end, this common social basis is of greatest importance. Nevertheless, **the very different political lineages of the ruling bureaucratic elites of today's deformed workers states as compared to the late 1930s USSR cannot but result in differences in the subjective tendencies of the respective bureaucracies.**

There is another significant difference between today's China and the USSR of the mid-late 1930s. And this is that Beijing is today doing far less harm to the international working class struggle than Moscow was doing back then. That has not always been the case. In the period from the signing of the Mao-Nixon pact to the end of the 1980s, the PRC bureaucracy did terrible damage to the socialist cause by treacherously lining up behind the imperialist drive to destroy the Soviet workers state. Moreover, even though Beijing is today doing less harm to the global struggle for communism than Moscow was doing in the mid-late 1930s, this is not at all because Beijing's current international policy is any closer to an authentic communist one than that of Stalin in the 1935-1938 period. In fact the opposite is true. When the *Transitional Program* was issued, it was just twenty-one years after the October Revolution, which was thus in living memory of most adults in the Soviet Union. As a result the Soviet bureaucracy still had to pay lip service to internationalism and the need for world socialism. They still maintained the Comintern, a body that was initially formed to organise the struggle for world socialist revolution and still continued to fund Comintern parties. Of course, when the Soviet bureaucracy and Comintern spoke of the need for socialism on a global scale during this period they made sure that any references to promoting socialism in the "democratic" imperialist countries that they were then allied with was abstract enough

– and thus almost meaningless enough – to not actually bother their "democratic" imperialist "allies." In contrast, today Beijing makes almost no pretence of supporting the struggle for socialist revolution in the capitalist countries. She instead proclaims that "China does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries" and that "China respects every country's right to follow a development path that is suited to its own conditions." However, China's current stance is actually less hypocritical than that of Moscow in the 1935-1938 period. For while the Soviet bureaucracy then made noises in the abstract about supporting the struggle for socialism in the capitalist world, in the concrete they were betraying and sabotaging key revolutionary and some potentially revolutionary struggles. By contrast, ironically in good part because its openly disinterested position on the fate of the global struggle for socialism does not bring her much influence on the direction of international communist parties, the CPC bureaucracy is today, for the most part, not actually *mis*-directing workers struggles abroad. When workers and other leftist struggles are being betrayed in the capitalist world today it is almost entirely due to the current leadership of the workers movement and Left in these countries rather than in Beijing. Moreover, like the Soviet leadership following the start of the Cold War, the PRC leadership today, pushed to the wall by relentless imperialist hostility, sometimes takes a stance in the interests of the struggle for socialism. For example, the PRC is backing socialistic Cuba and has openly promised to defend her against external intervention – that is against U.S. imperialist attack. In socialist solidarity, the PRC is also providing crucial development assistance to the Laotian workers state and implicitly promises military aid to the DPRK should she be attacked; although the latter is undercut by Beijing's capitulation to the imperialist insistence on crippling North Korea through economic sanctions. In

other cases, Beijing has correctly stood by ex-colonial countries facing imperialist attack. For example, the PRC has stood by Syria in the face of a bloody attempt by Western imperialism, through its proxy “Rebel” forces, to bring that country to heel.

Other aspects of Beijing’s international policy have mixed effects. Beijing engages in mutually beneficial cooperation with “Third World” countries and provides these countries with genuine development assistance. This policy is on balance quite progressive. It has allowed many countries in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific to access markets, technology and capital without having to mortgage their countries to the imperialists. The PRC also does not demand that governments receiving its aid engage in privatisation and savage cuts to public spending the way that the imperialist powers and the agencies that they dominate, like the IMF, do. However, the PRC’s engagements are not universally beneficial. This is because the bourgeois governments that it deals with often direct PRC investment into vanity projects of leaders or other areas where the masses gain little benefit. Such cases are not Beijing’s direct fault but it can nevertheless sometimes exacerbate corruption in the host country. More fundamentally this shows the limits of the Chinese leadership’s “non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries” policy. In the modern world, especially when one is investing in another country, one is, even without meaning to, in some way interfering in the political life of that country. The reality of Beijing’s “non-interference” policy is that it often assists, not always consciously, whoever is the existing government of the country that it is engaging with. And given that most of the world is still capitalist, that means the PRC ends up helping in some way to prop up capitalist governments. Thus, China has a bad name with some Sudanese leftists because Beijing’s development aid and engagement with Sudan was seen

as having helped to prop up the rule of former capitalist dictator, Omar al-Bashir. In Sri Lanka, the pro-government logic of Beijing’s “non-interference” policy went further. China ended up aping the U.S., India, Pakistan and Russia by providing military aid to Sri Lanka in its brutal decades long war against the minority Tamil people’s just struggle for national self-determination. Nevertheless, overall, the PRC leadership’s international policies, while mixed, are doing more good for the toiling classes of the world than harm. That is very different to the actions of the Soviet/Comintern leadership in 1936-38, whose most significant international interventions then were to spike the workers revolution in Spain, betray the incipient revolution in France and suppress the militancy of class struggles elsewhere.

With today’s PRC bureaucracy conducting such different domestic and international policies to the Soviet bureaucracy at the time that the *Transitional Program* was adopted, contemporary Trotskyists should not blindly apply the slogans and tone of the *Transitional Program*’s section on the USSR to today’s China. Instead, we need to conduct a detailed Marxist analysis of the PRC and her connections to the rest of the world and, based on 100% adherence to Leninist principles, determine our slogans and emphasis accordingly. The same goes with policies regarding the other workers states. Although all of today’s five workers states – the PRC, DPRK, Vietnam, Cuba and Laos – are united by existing in the same period, they are each very different to each other and have their own histories and particularities. And they are each even more different to the USSR of the late 1930s. Let’s remember: **Trotsky wrote the *Transitional Program*’s section on the USSR to outline a program for one particular workers state at one particular time in history, not for all workers states at all times.**



Above: While in exile in Mexico, Leon Trotsky, co-leader of the October 1917 Russian Revolution and founder of the Soviet Red Army, with head bowed humbly greets exiled Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie. The humility that Trotsky, a white-skinned revolutionary leader (albeit one from the Jewish ethnicity that had been brutally persecuted in pre-revolutionary Russia and was at the time being murderously crushed in Nazi-occupied Europe), showed towards an African leader was notable given that this was a time when much of Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the Pacific were subjugated by white supremacist imperial powers.

Although Trotsky never tried to cover up that Selassie was an autocrat who presided over a society based on severe, pre-capitalist forms of exploitation (and in the decades after Trotsky's death Selassie would play an especially reactionary role enforcing the nobility's exploitation of Ethiopian tenant farmers, brutally oppressing the Oromo, Harari, Tigrayan, Tigrinya, Tigre and Somali ethnic groups and sending troops to support imperialist intervention against North Korea during the 1950-53 Korean War and in the early 1960s against Patrice Lumumba and the leftist, anti-colonial movement in the Congo), Trotsky showed respect to Selassie in recognition of the latter's leadership of the Ethiopian people's heroic resistance against Italian imperialism. Despite possessing only outdated weapons – and such limited amounts of guns that many of their troops had to use spears and bows and arrows – the Ethiopian people with great courage and ingenuity put up a hell of a fight when the Italian imperialists invaded in 1935. Selassie's Ethiopian forces stunned the world when they launched a counter-offensive in December 1935 that sent the much better-equipped Italian imperialists into a retreat. In the end, the colonial forces were only able to quash the Ethiopian resistance through the heinous use of chemical weapons and massive reprisal killings of Ethiopian civilians.

Trotsky called for the international workers movement to struggle for the victory of Ethiopia in the war. He explained that this position was necessary not because Italy happened to be under the fascist form of capitalism but because Italy was a capitalist-imperialist country fighting to subjugate the Ethiopian



people under colonialism (in other words the same stance would have been necessary if Italy was a capitalist parliamentary “democracy”). Trotsky’s stance was based on the Leninist principle of standing in wars for “the victory of the oppressed, dependent, unequal states against the oppressing, slaveowning, predatory ‘great’ powers.” At the same time, Trotsky’s perspective of Permanent Revolution stressed that the oppressed, dependent countries could only truly emancipate themselves from imperialism when the working class of those countries takes power at the head of the subjugated nation.

Following in the tradition of Lenin’s position on wars between imperialist powers and colonial and semi-colonial countries and Trotsky’s stance on the Italo-Ethiopia War, from early 2012 onwards Trotskyist Platform stood in the post-2011 Syrian Civil War for the defence of Syria against the Western imperialists and their “Rebel” proxies. We were the first leftist group in Australia to take this position. *Below:* A Trotskyist Platform banner at the 31 August 2013 Sydney rally held by the anti-colonial section of the Syrian community. *Above:* The 29 November 2014 rally in Sydney’s Ashfield initiated by Trotskyist Platform protests direct U.S. and Australian military intervention in Syria and calls to “Defend Syria Against Western Imperialism and its ‘Rebels!’”

In contrast, spitting on Trotsky’s stance during the Italo-Ethiopian war, many groups who today claim some adherence to Trotskyism sided with the pro-imperialist “Free Syrian Army” and other imperialist-supported forces in the Syrian war or otherwise refused to defend Syria against the imperialist-proxy “Rebels.”



The PRC of Today and Trotsky's USSR Program of 1926-27

At the end of this article, we will outline a Trotskyist program for today's China. In elaborating such a program one needs to learn from Trotsky's approach to the former USSR and how that transformed with different phases of the USSR's development. If one does so, one will realise that the program that Trotsky detailed with respect to the USSR that probably has most applicability to today's China is not the one that he outlined in the *Transitional Program* but rather the one that he motivated in the 1926-27 period. This is for two reasons.

Firstly, in China today, alongside the socialistic state sector that forms the backbone of the PRC economy and which largely operates on a people first basis, there is a significant private sector that runs on the capitalist profit imperative. The latter includes powerful capitalists owning big chunks of the real estate, tech, retail and light manufacturing sectors. Among these tycoons are the likes of Jack Ma, owner of E-commerce and E-finance giants Alibaba and Ant Financial. Through driving his professional and skilled technical employees to long hours of unpaid overtime, through ruthless monopolistic methods to drive out competitors and through systematically ripping off hundreds of millions of customers, Ma assembled a tens of billions of dollars' fortune. Not only do capitalists like Ma become rich by exploiting the masses, they also threaten the proletarian state more generally. A year ago, Jack Ma made a speech attacking the dominance of socialistic state-owned banks in China's financial system. Meanwhile, these capitalists have formed influential lobby groups that constantly demand ever greater "rights" for the private sector as against the socialistic state sector. Through their wealth and the army of pro-capitalist managers, economists, "experts" and lawyers tailing after them they have been able to pull the most right-wing sections of the ruling CPC to their side while having some influence over broader sections of the ruling party. All this is quite different to the late 1930s USSR when the capitalist sector had been largely vanquished. However, it has many similarities to the mid-late 1920s USSR when there was a large capitalist sector in the Soviet Union existing side by side with her socialistic state sector. And as with today's PRC, that capitalist sector, assisted by the most right-wing factions of the ruling party, was demanding ever more "freedom" to expand its power. That meant that in the 1926-27 USSR, just like in today's China, the **main** threat of capitalist

counterrevolution was through these capitalists gaining greater and greater economic weight and social influence to the point that they could become strong enough to make a bid for state power. That is why earlier in the article we motivated why the Trotskyist Left Opposition/United Opposition's slogans in the 1926-27 period have much relevance to today's China. By contrast, in the late 1930s USSR, the main internal threat of counterrevolution came not from the tiny and scattered remnants of the private sector but from the danger that significant chunks of the increasingly privileged bureaucracy – and the very best paid workers and technicians closest to them – would make a serious attempt to transform themselves into a new capitalist exploiting class. **Therefore, like in the USSR of 1926-27, the main task of authentic Bolshevik-Leninists within China is to, rather than organising a direct mass struggle against the bureaucracy, lead the working class in struggle to decisively break the power of China's insurgent capitalist class. Through the course of this struggle, the fate of the bureaucracy will be solved in passing. The proletariat's victory in the campaign against the capitalists will naturally lead to them gaining control of the political administration of their workers state from the hands of the bureaucracy.** Trotsky actually outlined how such a struggle between the working class and the active forces of capitalist restoration would play out in the former USSR:

"A real civil war could develop not between the Stalinist bureaucracy and the resurgent proletariat but between the proletariat and the active forces of the counterrevolution. In the event of an open clash between the two mass camps, there cannot even be talk of the bureaucracy playing an independent role. Its polar flanks would be flung to the different sides of the barricade. The fate of the subsequent development would be

determined, of course, by the outcome of the struggle. The victory of the revolutionary camp, in any case, is conceivable only under the leadership of a proletarian party, which would naturally be raised to power by victory over the counterrevolution.”

L.D. Trotsky, “The Class Nature of the Soviet State”, October 1933, *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1933-34*, Pathfinder Press, 1972.

The second reason why the Trotskyists’ 1926-27 program for the USSR has more relevance to today’s China than the USSR section in the *Transitional Program* is that the type and intensity of the suppression of workers democracy in today’s China is more comparable to the mid-late 1920s USSR than to the hideously extreme levels that existed at the time that the *Transitional Program* was adopted.

At the same time, one should not exaggerate the similarities between the mid-late 1920s USSR and today’s China. For in truth, the differences are greater than the similarities. The most obvious difference between the USSR of 1926-27 and the China of today is that while the private sector in the USSR was then made up of a very large number of smaller-scale capitalists – mostly rural capitalist farmers (kulaks) as well as capitalist merchants – the China of today has some extremely rich capitalists with the corresponding ability to exert major political influence. On the one hand, these very powerful individual capitalists present a great danger to the workers state. On the other hand, as Lenin often stressed, the kulaks could be a still greater threat precisely because they were so large in number and thus harder to defeat, whereas it can be easier to smash the influence of a small number of big capitalists. The latter is true partly because it is easier to identify and target the big-time capitalists. This is apparent in today’s China when one notices the Chinese people’s spirited and completely justified denunciations of Jack Ma and other billionaires on social media. As a result of this mass sentiment, unlike in mid-late 1920s USSR where the economic weight and influence of the kulaks had been on a dangerously upwards path, inequality has actually been slowly falling in China over the last decade; and there have been more spirited moves to curb the monopoly influence of big-time capitalists over the last year and a half. Nevertheless,

while not necessarily rural kulaks, today’s China, like late-1920s Russia, does also have many smaller and medium-size capitalists with a large weight in society. Worryingly, recent years has seen some elements at the very top of the Chinese government (including premier Li Keqiang) – in seeming semi-opposition to president Xi Jinping’s move to rein in the power of parts of the capitalist sector – instituting measures to favour these smaller and medium-size private “entrepreneurs”.

Today’s China is much more industrialised and her economy less agriculture-based than was the USSR of 1926-27. Given that agriculture was still largely in private hands at that time in the Soviet Union, this means that the socialistic state-owned sector actually makes up a larger proportion of today’s Chinese economy than it did in the mid-late 1920s Soviet economy. Moreover, contemporary China’s higher level of industrialisation means that the proportion of proletarian wage workers in today’s China is much higher than in the late 1920s Soviet Union. This is, of course, a good thing for class consciousness and for both mobilising struggle against labour exploitation by the private “entrepreneurs” and for waging resistance against the threat to the workers state that they pose.

There are, however, two factors that make the defence of today’s Chinese workers state more of an uphill battle than was defending the Soviet workers state in the mid-late 1920s. Firstly, the overall level of socialist class consciousness in the international working class was higher then than it is now. Let’s remember it was then just ten years or so after the earth-shatteringly inspirational events of October 1917. Secondly and more importantly, the USSR then had a significant grouping within its ruling Communist party, in the form of the Left Opposition, with a truly Bolshevik perspective. By contrast, while there are plenty of well meaning, subjective communists in China both within and outside the CPC, we do not know of any sizable grouping within China with an unalloyed Marxist-Leninist perspective – that is a group like Lenin and Trotsky’s Bolsheviks or the CPC in its early years.

All this does not mean that the Chinese workers state is doomed to destruction. One thing worth considering is that despite the above two

factors and the fact that while the USSR had just half a decade of excessive conciliation of the capitalist private sector by the late 1920s compared to the more than three decades of the same in China, the USSR went much closer to destruction in the late 1920s – when the kulaks incited a chunk of the peasantry to hoard their grain in 1928 – than the Chinese workers state is to its own demise right now. The answer to this seeming paradox can be found in the struggles of the Chinese working class and in the agitation of leftist elements within and around the CPC. Their efforts have provided powerful resistance against pro-capitalist forces. Indeed, one can say that without the struggles of the Chinese working class and the ideological battles of Chinese leftists, China would have already gone capitalist by now. This is not because the mainstream of the Chinese bureaucracy has been implementing an openly capitalist restorationist program. Instead, like Gorbachev's *perestroika* reforms in the late 1980s USSR and like Bukharin-Stalin's conciliation of the kulaks in the mid-1920s almost did, their pro-private sector measures could have created a significant and powerful enough capitalist class to lobby for further such measures that would have in turn ultimately opened the door to a capitalist seizure of state power. Fortunately, the Chinese working class and leftists resisted. In the late 1990s, Chinese workers engaged in huge struggles against privatisations and the effects of such sell-offs. This enabled them to save a bigger portion of the socialistic state sector than the rightist then-Chinese premier, Zhu Rongji, wanted from his privatisation agenda. Then, in the early-mid 2000s, agitation by Chinese leftist intellectuals, CPC cadre and journalists forced Beijing to greatly curb privatisations effected through management buyouts of state-owned enterprises. By the late noughties, Chinese workers were waging a massive series of strikes in especially the private sector. Of the few significant attempts at privatisation during this period, several were crushed by workers' mobilisations. Most spectacularly, when the Tonghua Iron and Steel Group was privatised in mid-2009, tens of thousands of workers occupied the plant and beat the new, capitalist private boss to death. Within hours, the privatisation was quashed. Such struggles changed the political direction of China. It

led to a wave of nationalisations and re-nationalisations during the 2008-2011 period as well as crackdowns on capitalists, stricter enforcement of labour and workplace safety standards and greatly accelerated provision of social programs like public housing. Then, in more recent years, angry condemnation of filthy rich tycoons from the masses has pushed Xi Jinping to clip the wings of some of the most powerful billionaires and to accelerate moves to reduce inequality. However, while the struggle of the Trotskyist Left Opposition was powerful enough to compel the Stalin grouping to at long last move against the kulaks and NEP-derived capitalists in 1928 and to strike a decisive blow in favour of the socialist economic sector, in China, the brave struggles of the working class, who however currently lack a conscious, authentic Leninist leadership, have thus far only been able to pause the erosion of the socialist sector and not yet been able to greatly reverse the course. The continuing existence of a large capitalist sector continues to put the gains of the 1949 Revolution in great peril.

A grouping of cadre based 100% on authentic Leninism-Trotskyism – that is on the principles of the early CPC before it was derailed by the rightward moving Comintern – must urgently be built to organise the Chinese masses to strike decisive blows against the insurgent capitalist class, to fight for the confiscation of the tech, real estate, big retail and light manufacturing sectors from the billionaires and their transfer into public ownership, to put the political administration of the PRC under workers democracy and to turn the PRC's foreign policy to one of internationalist support for revolutionary class struggle abroad. As part of outlining the platform on which authentic Chinese Leninists can be assembled, Trotskyists would inevitably use, in modified form, some of the slogans that Trotsky put forward for the USSR in the 1926-27 period. However, there is no substitute for Trotskyists thinking for themselves in a Marxist way. **Let us, while always standing unwaveringly by the Bolshevik principles that Lenin and Trotsky adhered to, learn from Trotsky's dialectical methods of analysis of the Soviet degenerated workers state rather than looking for ready-made formulas applicable to today's PRC in Trotsky's 83 to 95 year old programs for a different workers state!**

Let's Never Forget:

Trotsky Adjusted His Slogans Addressing the Soviet Workers State According to the Acuteness of the Threat Facing Her

Today's Trotskyists must, just like Trotsky, adjust the tone and content of our slogans concerning each of today's workers states according to the immediacy of the threat facing the workers state and the audience of our slogans. Today the PRC workers state is being battered by an intense new Cold War, with much potential to lead to either a future capitalist military attack or a further escalation in all-sided anti-PRC political, economic and military pressure. Therefore, more instructive today than the USSR section in the *Transitional Program* is the emphasis given in Trotsky's 1934 *Program For Action* addressed to the French working class, which was issued at a time when the threat of future imperialist military and political attacks on the USSR from the French and allied imperialists was greatly evident. As we noted earlier, the USSR section in this *Program For Action* overwhelmingly emphasised the unconditional defence of the workers state. Likewise, Trotskyists, right now, must overwhelmingly stress defence of the Chinese workers state. This is especially the case for statements addressed to the masses of those countries whose bourgeoisie's are at the forefront of the Cold War drive against the PRC – like Australia, the U.S. and Britain. In contrast, slogans addressed to the toilers of those countries that currently have friendly relations with Beijing – like Pakistan, Russia, Bangladesh, Uzbekistan, most African countries and Iran – could place slightly greater emphasis on criticising the accommodations to the international and local capitalist classes of the Beijing bureaucracy.

Within the context of overwhelmingly emphasising defence of the workers states, it is necessary for communists to criticise the excessive openings to the capitalist sector in China, Beijing's thumbing her nose at the struggle for international socialist revolution and the lack of genuine proletarian democracy in both the PRC and the DPRK. All these problems undermine the defence of these workers states. In the long run they threaten to weaken them to the extent that they will collapse under the gigantic weight of imperialist pressure, just like the USSR did in 1991-92. However, for Trotskyists based in those imperialist countries arrayed against the PRC, the main point of difference with Beijing that we should clarify is **how** to defend the PRC. This is precisely what Trotsky did in the USSR section of the 1934 *Program for Action*. There Trotsky stressed that the French working class could only defend the Soviet workers state through revolutionary class struggle against their own bourgeoisie rather than through putting their trust in appeals to a wing of the bourgeoisie.

In direct contrast to Trotsky's class-struggle

approach, PRC leaders hope to reduce Canberra's hostility by appealing to the commercial interests that sections of the Australian capitalist class have in maintaining good relations with China. Additionally, they hope that Chinese-Australians within the ruling class establishment will use their status within Australian society to convince the broader ruling class to dial back their Cold War drive. However, both these strategies have been a dismal failure. The Australian capitalist class is today almost completely united in its hostility to the PRC. This is reflected in the blanket anti-PRC, Cold War propaganda from all sections of Australia's capitalist media. The overwhelming bulk of the capitalist class have calculated that despite the terrific profits that they reap from exports to China, they would extract even more should capitalist restoration inevitably turn China into a giant sweatshop for exploitation by Western, Japanese, Taiwanese and Hong Kong capitalists. Moreover, they are only too aware that the PRC's economic relations with developing countries is damaging the "freedom" of Australian-owned corporations to exploit and rob the peoples of Australia's

Pacific and Southeast Asian neighbours the way that these capitalists have been doing for decades. Most importantly for the Australian capitalist class, the destruction of the world's biggest socialistic state would allay their greatest fear: that their own toiling classes would start to see the PRC workers state as a positive example and begin organising to overthrow capitalist rule here. That is why even those very few voices within Australia's bourgeois establishment questioning the intensity of anti-China hostility have made clear that they still support the bogus attacks on the PRC over "human rights" that are being used to undermine proletarian rule there. This includes the likes of former prime minister and treasurer, Paul Keating, who is one of the only ALP figures opposing the anti-PRC, AUKUS nuclear submarine deal. How little defenders of the PRC should look to Keating is apparent when one recalls how the 1980s-early 1990s ALP governments that he was a central figure in completely lined up the Australian state behind the U.S.-led Cold War drive against the Soviet Union and Vietnam. As for tycoons like Andrew Forrest and Kerry Stokes who have huge trade and investment interests with China, the whispers that they made last year against the level of Australia's anti-PRC hostility are now barely audible. Indeed, even their behavior last year seems suspiciously like one of outwardly rebuffing extreme anti-PRC rhetoric in order to please their Chinese commercial partners, while behind the scenes continuing to join with the rest of the capitalist class in pushing for a hard line against the PRC. After all, the Channel 7 outlet that Stokes owns has been very much feeding into the anti-PRC Cold War drive. Meanwhile, any efforts being made by certain Chinese-Australian corporate bigwigs to oppose anti-PRC hostility are hardly visible to most people in Australia. These tycoons hope to protect their business interests within China from anti-capitalist measures by winning credibility with the PRC through proclaiming themselves PRC patriots and through doing some pro-China, behind the scenes, lobbying of Australian ruling class figures. However, they are hardly engaging in open pro-PRC agitation within wider Australian society. For

in the end they are just plain capitalists who put their profits above all else. And they are unwilling to put those profits at risk by taking a stance that could damage their commercial ties with the broader Australian capitalist class. And that is the point: to the extent that a tiny few capitalists from inside and outside the Chinese community are opposed to the Australian ruling class' Cold War drive against the PRC this opposition is weak, inconsistent and transitory. Defenders of the PRC should not rely upon it.

The only potential, true defenders of the PRC are the working class and its allies. For it is the working class that has a consistent interest in defending those states where its overseas working class sisters and brothers have won state power. If a tiny few capitalists want to, for their own particular reasons, oppose some aspects of the anti-PRC Cold War then that is their choice. However, Trotskyists in Australia should warn against illusions in these elements. We should be wary that any apparent "China friendly" image that these filthy-rich exploiters portray would likely **repel** staunchly anti-capitalist workers – that is those workers most easily won to the defence of the PRC workers state – from taking a pro-PRC stance. Most importantly, **any concern that they may "offend" supposed "China friendly" capitalists must not hold back communists from appealing to the class interests that the working class has in defending the PRC. Communists must not hold back from emphasising that the existence of the giant Chinese workers state encourages and boosts the struggle of the Australian working class for liberation from its capitalist exploiters.** The unreliable "support" of a tiny few "China friendly" capitalists is worth nothing compared to the potential, powerful pro-workers state stance of the working class. Furthermore, if one stands by Trotsky's insistence that a workers state can only be defended through revolutionary class struggle, then one will be clear that the less overtly, anti-PRC stance of the likes of Andrew Forrest and Kerry Stokes should not hold back the working class from struggling against these exploiters as



Sri Lanka, May 2022: Anti-government demonstrators scuffle with police. Sri Lanka has seen workers' strikes and stormy struggles by the masses angry at government corruption, rampant inflation, police brutality and shortages of fuel, food and medicine in the context of a major economic crisis. The protests have brought together opponents of the government from all social classes and from all political directions. However, such a movement cannot satisfy the aspirations of the masses because, as the Trotskyist perspective of Permanent Revolution teaches us, unless the working class leads all the oppressed in seizing state power then genuine political democracy and an end to corruption, freedom of the country from the tyranny of the Western bankers and their IMF and national rights for the oppressed Tamil people cannot be achieved let alone the capitalism-derived economic crisis be addressed. That is why conscious leftists must seek to drive the capitalists and openly pro-capitalist political groupings out of the protest movement and direct the protests onto an openly pro-working class, anti-imperialist and pro-Tamil rights agenda. In the course of advancing a united-front movement built on such an agenda, communists must fight to direct the masses onto the path of Permanent Revolution, that is to the working class leading all the toilers and oppressed in the revolutionary seizure of state power.

energetically as they oppose other capitalist billionaires.

Similarly, at an international level, genuine Trotskyism teaches us that those bourgeois ruling classes that for their own reasons – whether it be to seek mutual protection with China against common enemies or to gain better access to trade and aid opportunities – choose to currently have friendly relations with the PRC workers state are no less the enemy of their own working classes than the bourgeoisies that are at the forefront of the Cold War against the PRC. Therefore communists in, say, capitalist Russia must oppose the Russian bourgeoisie and their regime as ferociously as they would if Russia's capitalist rulers happened to be allied with the Western imperialists against the PRC. They should understand that any weakening of proletarian opposition to the Russian bourgeoisie would serve to strengthen the position of capitalist rulers the world over, while channeling inevitable opposition to

Russia's oppressive rulers into support for the pro-Western wing of the Russian bourgeoisie. In contrast, powerful class struggle against the ambitious Russian bourgeoisie – and especially the revolutionary overthrow of Russian capitalism – would do much to inspire the global proletarian revolutionary struggle that in the final instance is the only effective means to defend the PRC workers state. At the same time, genuine Trotskyists in Russia should be careful not to join in any united-front alliances with any opposition groups pushing for Russia to join the Cold War against the PRC; and would indeed strongly condemn any such groups. Similarly, they would refuse to participate in any united-front alliances with – and would indeed fiercely oppose – those seeking to make a "Color Revolution" in Russia that would bring her into the fold of the most powerful and destructive capitalist powers in the world: the U.S.-led Western imperialists.

The 1949 Chinese Revolution Powerfully Validates Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution

As a human being, Trotsky's steely revolutionary resolve was motivated by deep compassion for the downtrodden and great concern for the fate of all humanity. He was a person of incredible courage prepared to sacrifice everything for the communist cause – and that is what he ended up doing. Trotsky was murdered for his unwavering commitment to authentic Bolshevism. However, Trotsky was human and so he had personal flaws. His great intellect, unparalleled ability to analyse complex political phenomena from a Marxist perspective and selfless devotion to the struggle for socialism meant that he could be too intolerant of lesser figures in his own movement; and could be prickly and impatient with those he worked with. Trotsky was an electrifying speaker who would inspire huge crowds. However, one on one, he was not as capable in bringing individual cadre forward and resolving their contradictions in a positive way as Lenin was. Therefore, Trotsky was not as effective in building communist leadership collectives as Lenin was, although he tried to identify his own weaknesses and sought to overcome them. Unfortunately, some avowed contemporary “Trotskyists” think that they ought to emulate all of Trotsky's personal characteristics, even his weaknesses (which Trotsky himself sometimes acknowledged). Imbibing Trotsky's, sometimes, excessive self-assuredness and prickliness can be obnoxious when it is done by people without a quarter of Trotsky's intellect, a tenth of his Marxist analytical ability or a hundredth of his sincere devotion to communism and who have made not even one-billionth of his contribution to the proletarian revolution. Sometimes one really needs to say to such modern-day “Trotskyists” that: “sorry to break it to you ... you are not Trotsky!”

Lenin said of Trotsky that, after Trotsky was won to Bolshevism, “there has been no better Bolshevik.” After Lenin's death, it was Trotsky who led the struggle for authentic Leninism both within the USSR and across the world. However, the only reason there is even a political trend known as “Trotskyism” is because the Bolshevik Party and Comintern leadership politically degenerated from the mid-1920s onwards. They would end up passing off Menshevism as Bolshevism. As a result, many socialist militants acquired a highly distorted view of what authentic Bolshevism stands for. To distinguish from this fake-Bolshevism, and **for this reason only**, one needs to speak of Trotskyism. But this Trotskyism is but authentic Bolshevism – it is the proletarian, revolutionary and internationalist perspective of genuine Leninism with some additional extensions arising from Trotsky's analysis of political phenomena that arose after Lenin's death.

In his struggle to defend authentic Leninism

against, mostly rightist, revisionism, Trotsky was not always 100% correct on every single question. But from the time of Lenin's passing right up until the time of his own death, Trotsky was overwhelmingly correct on all the fundamental questions. After his death, subsequent history further vindicated Trotsky's stance on all major questions.

Firstly, Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution (which was, in effect, accepted by the Bolshevik Party as a whole when they were convinced to adopt Lenin's identical platform after Lenin's return from exile in April 1917) was fully proven. As we explained earlier, Trotsky originally formulated Permanent Revolution specifically for Russia. Later, drawing the lessons of the defeat of the 1925-1927 Chinese Revolution, Trotsky extended the Permanent Revolution perspective to all countries of belated capitalist development – in particular to all the countries suffering colonial and semi-colonial subjugation. During Trotsky's

lifetime, an important aspect of Permanent Revolution theory was confirmed: that is that no wing of the bourgeoisie of the colonial and semi-colonial countries could fully emancipate these countries from imperialism nor could they liberate the peasantry from landlord exploitation. This was proven in many countries. But it was shown most starkly in China. There, decades of rule by the KMT – nominally the party of the “progressive” and “anti-imperialist” bourgeoisie – upheld landlord tyranny of the Chinese peasantry and accepted imperialist domination, even maintaining the vile system of imperialist-controlled “concessions” over major chunks of China’s key cities. However, while the theory of Permanent Revolution, as originally applied to Russia, was 100% validated by the October Revolution, Trotsky did not live to see **positive** confirmation of Permanent Revolution being carried out **in a colonial or semi-colonial country**. He had only seen - and indeed helped carry out - Permanent Revolution in an **imperialist** country of belated capitalist development, that is Russia.

The key event, after Trotsky’s death, that gave positive confirmation of Permanent Revolution in a semi-colonial country was the 1949 Chinese Revolution. Anti-capitalist revolutions in North Korea, Cuba, Vietnam and Laos also confirmed the theory of Permanent Revolution.

All these revolutions proved Permanent Revolution in two ways. Firstly, they showed that it takes the working class in state power – in these cases achieved through communist-led guerilla forces (which in the particular case of North Korea was greatly assisted by direct Soviet Red Army intervention) – to truly free subjugated countries from imperialism and to fully liberate their peasantry from landlord tyranny. Secondly, these revolutions showed that once the working class achieved state power and began undertaking national-democratic tasks, it could not stop there. The necessity, in order to complete the national-democratic revolution, of breaking the organic ties between the landlords and the capitalists on the one hand and the local

capitalists and their imperialist masters on the other, demanded that the capitalists be stripped of their control of the economy through the implementation of socialist measures.

Now some may object to the description of the 1949 Revolution as an example of Permanent Revolution by pointing out that Mao called the 1949 Revolution not a socialist revolution but a “new democratic revolution.” They may also note that Mao said that the actual socialist revolution in China only commenced some time later. Moreover, they may claim that, as the PRC flag indicates, the 1949 Revolution brought a “bloc of four classes” – the proletariat, peasantry, petit-bourgeoisie and the “national bourgeoisie” – to power rather than just the proletariat. However, that may have been the CPC’s official line but the reality was **very** different. For one, **the 1949 Revolution was actually made through overthrowing the regime of the so-called “national bourgeoisie”** – that is the KMT regime! Let’s not forget that during the 1925-27 Great Revolution, the Comintern – and arm-twisting the CPC to follow in tow – had been hailing the KMT as the party of the “national”, “anti-imperialist” bourgeoisie. Yet the 1949 Revolution was made in a bitter Civil War against this self-same “national bourgeoisie.” Indeed, the main response to the 1949 Revolution of those sections of the “national bourgeoisie” with the means to do so was to flee mainland China to Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines and the West as fast as they could! Sure, some capitalists stayed behind and tried to make do the best they could within the new order. A tiny few may have been half happy to see the back of the corrupt KMT regime and to see peace finally coming to China. Others co-operated with the new government because they hoped that doing so might somehow protect their capitalist interests. However, that is no different to what happened after the October 1917 Russian Revolution. Whereas many of Russia’s capitalists openly sought to organise a counterrevolution, some capitalists very reluctantly acquiesced to their enterprises

being put under workers control immediately after the revolution, hoping that the victorious working class would go no further. However, several months later, most of the factories in Russia were confiscated from the capitalists and brought into public ownership. No one in their right mind would say that because, in the period immediately after October, some of the capitalists reluctantly acquiesced to the victory of the soviets, they were therefore in a “bloc” sharing power with the Russian working class! It was the working class, drawing behind the peasants, who were obviously in power in Russia. Similarly, the victory of the CPC’s Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) brought the working class to state power in China.

Of course, through the triumphant CPC, the working class was allied with the peasantry, progressive intellectuals and a good chunk of the remainder of the middle class. In that sense one could say that there was now a bloc of **three** classes in power – the “national bourgeoisie” were not only not part of the bloc but were largely part of the enemy defeated in the Civil War. However, since the agenda of the party leading the new state power was for socialisation of the economy – that is a working class agenda – it was a **working class-led** bloc that was in power. This is no different to what Trotsky postulated in his Permanent Revolution perspective. There he spoke of “the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses.” The reason that a bloc between the proletariat, the peasantry and the petit bourgeois was a proletarian-led alliance rather than a bloc of equal partners is that it is only either the working class or the bourgeoisie that can be the ruling class in the modern world. As Lenin had insisted in the leadup to the October Revolution, the peasantry and other petit bourgeoisie will either be won to follow the working class or they will be under the leadership of the bourgeoisie. This is because the self-employed petit bourgeois cannot run those pivotal economic sectors – transport, storage, communications, infrastructure, banking, construction and

manufacturing – whose ownership determines who is the master of modern societies (even ones that were as rural-dominated as China was in 1949). Those sectors can only run effectively through the collective labour of many workers and not through being partitioned into tiny units worked by disparate self-employed individuals. That workers collective labour can in turn only be controlled by either bourgeois owners of the enterprises or by those who labour through collective ownership of these strategic economic sectors.

The claim by the CPC that China had two separate revolutions – first a “national democratic” one and then only a socialist one – as distinct from a Permanent Revolution obscures the reality of what actually took place through the 1949 Revolution. It is true that at first the new power began with mainly the national-democratic tasks and later focused on the socialist tasks. But that is no different from the perspective that Trotsky outlined in Permanent Revolution. This theory, after all, speaks of how “the dictatorship of the proletariat which bases itself upon the alliance with the peasantry” “solves first of all the tasks of the democratic revolution.” However, Permanent Revolution theory postulates that there will be no distinct separation between the stages – in that in accomplishing the national democratic tasks the revolutionary forces must begin to undertake the socialist tasks; or as Trotsky put it, “the democratic revolution grows over directly into the socialist revolution and thereby becomes a permanent revolution.” This is precisely what took place in China. Even as the dictatorship of the proletariat established by the 1949 Revolution immediately busied itself with ripping China free from the clutches of the imperialist powers, granting legal equality for women and putting an end to the thousands of years-old oppression of peasants by their landlords, the new proletarian state began impinging on capitalist property rights. As in the first few months after the October Revolution, the Chinese workers state very quickly nationalised the banking

sector, transferred some key industries into public ownership and put the remaining privately owned industry under state control. Meanwhile, with Soviet assistance, they rapidly built up socialistic state-owned industrial enterprises. Before long, the new proletarian state “grew over directly” into a more aggressive implementation of the socialist tasks when from 1952 to 1955, those sections of industry still in capitalist hands were stripped from the bourgeoisie and most agricultural land was collectivised.

The most important point about China post-1949 is that the very same power was in place throughout the different phases of China’s social transformation – and that power was the dictatorship of the proletariat. Indeed, even when Mao was implementing what he called the “New Democracy stage”, he admitted that the same state power would later be used for implementing the coming “socialist stage.” Thus, in his crucial 1949 speech *On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship*, Mao asserts that:

“Our present task is to strengthen the people’s state apparatus – mainly the people’s army, the people’s police and the people’s courts – in order to consolidate national defence and protect the people’s interests. Given this condition, China can develop steadily, under the leadership of the working class and the Communist Party, from an agricultural into an industrial country and from

a new-democratic into a socialist and communist society, can abolish classes and realize the Great Harmony.”

And if we look at events after the founding of the PRC, there were indeed no big, convulsive political events as the “new-democratic revolution” grew over into the socialist revolution. This is highly significant because had there been a change in which class was in power – or in this case a change from a supposed “bloc of four classes” to the rule of just one of these four classes – then that would inevitably be accompanied by a dramatic and violent upheaval. Instead, the PRC saw the very same party ruling, with the very same army and the very same leaders throughout both phases of her social transformation. That indicated that there was no change in which class ruled China during those different phases. And **this is precisely the key practical point of Trotsky’s perspective of Permanent Revolution: that is, to achieve even the national-democratic tasks the dictatorship of the proletariat must be established; and the working class once in power would inevitably cause the national-democratic revolution to grow over into the socialist one. No amount of semantics can cloud the fact that the 1949 Chinese Revolution was a powerful confirmation of this perspective.**

Trotsky’s Permanent Revolution/Lenin’s April Theses Compared with the CPC’s Theory in 1949

Why the CPC did not openly espouse Permanent Revolution is beyond the scope of this article. However, it is worth noting that after two decades in which the CPC’s theory and practice went through a number of zig-zags – both under the impact of major events and shifts in the balance of class forces on the one hand and intense internal debates on the other – the CPC ended up by the start of the 1946-49 Chinese Civil War with a theory that was more radical than that which the Bukharin-Stalin led Comintern had imposed on the CPC in the mid-1920s. This has much significance. For, although it is true that the CPC in the end acted in advance of their own theory in 1949, there is a limit to how much a mass party could act in advance of their own theory. **If the CPC had been lumbered with the theory imposed on it by the Soviet bureaucracy in the mid-1920s, it would have been impossible for them to have led the 1949 Revolution.** This truth matters much when one comes to evaluating the impact of the Chinese Trotskyists on the Chinese Revolution, which we will do later in the article.

Mao's theory in 1949 was somewhere in between the perspective of Trotsky's Permanent Revolution/Lenin's *April Theses* and the Bukharin-Stalin line that led to disaster in 1927. What the CPC's theory in 1949 had in common with the strategy imposed on them in the mid-1920s was the "bloc of four classes." Given that the so-called "national bourgeoisie" were part of this bloc and given that the whole of the bourgeoisie were not only against socialisation of the factories, banks and warehouses but against radical land redistribution in the countryside, the "bloc of four classes" strategy necessarily meant not only restricting the intensity of class struggle in the towns and cities but curbing peasants' demands for a thoroughgoing agrarian revolution. However, there was another very different aspect to the CPC's theory in 1949. And that was the insistence that the "new democratic revolution" be led by the communist party and the proletariat. In this aspect, the CPC came close to the Permanent Revolution strategy. However, communist and proletarian leadership of the national-democratic revolution was completely counterposed to a bloc with the "national bourgeoisie." What bourgeois of any kind – so-called "national" or imperialist-puppet comprador – would accept the leadership of a party that avowedly has the goal of confiscating their holdings of the means of production?! What bourgeois would accept the leadership of the very class that is exploited by their own and whose interests lie in smashing their rule?! The only way that any wing of the bourgeoisie would accept being in a "bloc of four classes" that included the proletariat is if they were in control of that bloc. Therefore, **the two fundamental aspects of Mao's theory in 1949 were diametrically counterposed to each other. Either one component or the other could be put into practice but it was simply impossible for both aspects to be implemented simultaneously.** In certain periods, the CPC prosecuted policies adhering to the first aspect of its theory, the "bloc of four classes." This was especially the case in the mid-1930s when, in part under the blows of the Comintern's insistence on the "Popular Front Strategy," the CPC entered a "United Front" with the bourgeois KMT against Japanese imperialism on the sellout promise

of suppressing the class struggle and the agrarian revolution. Indeed, at the time, the Soviet bureaucracy and their political agents within the CPC, led by Wang Ming, wanted to subordinate the CPC even further to the KMT. Later, even after the CPC's landless peasant and rural worker base had pushed them to resume radical land reform in CPC controlled liberated zones in 1946, causing the KMT to respond with Civil War, the CPC attempted to negotiate a power sharing deal with the KMT. Stalin sought to pressure Mao to offer the CPC up to be junior partners in such a coalition government with the KMT. However, given that both the unquenchable determination for radical land redistribution of the CPC's rural toiler base and the Chinese masses' burning desire to throw off the yoke of imperialism could only be satisfied by defeating the KMT regime and given that CPC-led workers in the cities wanted immediate liberation from capitalism – and put all that together with the devotion to communism of hundreds of thousands of heroic CPC cadre – the party eventually fought to implement the second aspect of its theory: that is, the CPC and proletarian leadership of the "new democratic revolution." This meant that the CPC now fought to decisively win the Civil War against the KMT and establish a dictatorship of the proletariat. In other words, in the end, the CPC fought for and succeeded in implementing the perspective of Permanent Revolution.

Although Mao's CPC ended up achieving a tremendous victory for the toiling masses of China and the whole world, their inclusion of the "national bourgeoisie" as one of the revolutionary classes in their theory made that victory a lot harder to achieve. For it dampened the working class' enthusiasm for the revolution. After all, the "national bourgeoisie" were the direct exploiters of these workers. If expropriating the "national bourgeoisie" was to be left to a "second stage" and, moreover, if these capitalists were to be embraced in the present then this made the revolution a lot less appealing to class-conscious workers. Workers like most of the Chinese population felt the burning need to free themselves from the crushing tyranny of the imperialist overlords. However, many workers still saw those deemed

to be the “national bourgeoisie” as their main enemy. These workers cared little whether the capitalist bosses who were cruelly exploiting them claimed to be “patriotic” or were openly the henchmen of multi-national corporations from the richer countries. Consequently, although the CPC was able to organise significant worker uprisings in Shanghai and other cities in the last period of the Civil War, the mobilisation of the working class in support of the revolution was far less than could have been achieved.

In summary, one can say that the 1949 victory was achieved despite the CPC’s flawed theory embracing the “national bourgeoisie” rather than because of it.

There was an aspect of how the 1949 Revolution played out that was actually different to what Trotsky envisaged in his Permanent Revolution perspective. That is that although the Chinese Revolution established the dictatorship of the proletariat, the revolutionary fighters in the Civil War and the CPC that led the revolution was neither dominated by nor led by proletarians. It is said that the Chinese Revolution was a peasant-based revolution. Now neither Lenin nor Trotsky – nor indeed any of the other Bolsheviks at the time that the party was still a genuine communist party – thought that a peasant-based movement could by itself establish a workers state. The Bolsheviks had seen how the peasant-based Social Revolutionary Party (SR) in Russia had subordinated itself to the liberal bourgeoisie and betrayed the fight for socialism in Russia. So why did things turn out differently in China?

Firstly, the description of the Chinese Revolution as being peasant-based is over-simplified, especially since the CPC’s main base was amongst the specifically poorest section of the peasantry including those who spent part of their time working as wage workers to rich farmers, that is they were semi-proletarian rather than being purely petit-bourgeois, self-employed producers. If we were to give a more precise description of the social forces that made the 1949 Chinese Revolution we would say the following: “The revolution was made by rural toilers spearheaded by agricultural workers and rural semi-proletarians but included in the movement

the mass of the peasantry and especially its poorest section. The revolution was given crucial military and technical assistance by the Soviet workers state and also supported in its decisive stages by workers’ uprisings in key cities.” Thus the CPC base was different to that of the Russian SRs whose base was dominated politically by the middle and richer peasantry. That difference in part stemmed from there being no mass, proletarian-centred communist party in China to compete with the CPC. Such a party, like the Bolsheviks, would have naturally acquired their rural base from amongst the most downtrodden section of the rural toilers. Instead, it was the CPC that almost exclusively won over these layers. As a result the composition of the CPC support base ended up being somewhere mid-way between that of the Russian Bolsheviks and the Russian SRs at the time of October 1917.

It was the rural proletarians and semi-proletarians in and around the CPC and the CPC’s smaller urban proletarian support base that pushed the party to smash the existing capitalist regime and establish a workers state rather than just a nominally – and inevitably temporarily – more “democratic” and “anti-imperialist” capitalist regime. However, the main reason that a force dominated by poor peasants was able to establish a workers state is that this force was led by a party with an agenda for a society based on socialist property forms. That party was the CPC. Given that the old capitalist state, whose core organs were the Kuomintang’s army and bureaucracy, was smashed by the 1949 Revolution and a new state based almost entirely on the CPC’s army (the People’s Liberation Army) had taken over, the new state inevitably ended up committed to socialist property forms – that is the property forms that are necessarily associated with the class rule of the working class.

When we speak of the leadership of the 1949 Revolution being committed to socialism, there is actually more to the story. Let’s go back to the 1917 Revolution first. The Bolshevik Party that led the 1917 Revolution was a workers party. Its ranks were composed of wage workers as well as middle-class and ex-bourgeois intellectuals **who had completely**

and 100% turned their back on their old classes and thoroughly immersed themselves in political work amongst the proletariat. Thus, even the ex-petit bourgeois and ex-bourgeois intellectuals who joined the Bolsheviks became fully proletarianised in their outlook. All this was true for the early CPC too. However, after the horrific defeats in 1927, the CPC largely stopped being a workers party by composition and leadership. It was, to be sure, a party led by idealistic intellectuals, largely from a middle class background, who had broken from their class and adopted a communist standpoint. However, due to the different compositions of their respective support bases, unlike the proletarianised ex-middle class intellectuals that formed a part of the Bolshevik Party, the declassed intellectuals leading the CPC were now not mostly immersed in work amongst the proletariat but mostly in work amongst the peasantry. As we have already explained, although the peasants had great reasons to oppose the pre-1949 social order they also had individualistic, capitalistic strivings. This meant that the peasants' "natural" inclination was neither towards capitalism nor socialism. Their fundamental inclination depended on who would lead them. As a result, the greater part (but not the entirety as there were proletarian supporters too as we have noted) of the CPC's base did not definitely weld the CPC to a socialist orientation. Therefore, the inclination of CPC leaders mattered even more now given how inclined to push in different directions their base could be. That is why during the two decades that followed the 1927 defeat, the CPC leadership sometimes relegated the goal of socialism to a distant "second-stage" of the revolution and one where this goal barely shaped actual party policy and work. However, in the second phase of the 1946-1949 Civil War, the party leadership did fight decisively for socialism. That they did so despite for the most part not being rooted in the proletariat – the one class capable of being consistently revolutionary – is a testament to their dedication to the liberation of the exploited and oppressed and also, it must be said, to their courage and ingenuity.

Now Marxists have long understood that prior

to the working class itself beginning to fight for socialism, it is only a small few of the very most socially conscious petit-bourgeois intellectuals who will reject their own class and come over to the side of the proletariat. It is only when the working class begins to powerfully fight for socialism that large numbers of the middle class will come over. Yet in China, the post-1927 CPC was rebuilt and led by a fairly large layer of declassed, ex-middle class, intellectuals. Why did they come over to the goal of socialist revolution even before the Chinese working class began to decisively fight for this? The answer is that the CPC cadre were inspired to fight for socialism by the 1917 Russian Revolution and the continued existence of the Soviet Union. If one visits the CPC museum in Shanghai, one will see just how much of an impact the Russian Revolution had on Chinese intellectuals. So here we have the Marxist understanding that revolutionary struggles of the working class will draw in the middle class, now playing out on an international level. The middle class being brought along by the magnetic power of the Russian workers revolution occurred not only in Russia but in China too. Moreover, the fact that the power and prestige of the Soviet workers state was greatly enhanced following her heroic victory over Nazi Germany in World War II and her creation of new socialistic states in East Europe, partly explains why the CPC leadership were emboldened to make the turn to fight for anti-capitalist revolution in the late 1940s. Furthermore, Soviet military assistance to the PLA and the likelihood that the Soviet Union would provide technical assistance to a future Chinese workers state further encouraged the CPC to fight for a proletarian state.

It must be stressed that the fact that such a sizable chunk of the middle class intelligentsia of a country (China) was won to the cause of socialist revolution by a workers revolution in another country (Russia) that they were then able to go on and lead a party without a dominant proletarian base (i.e. the CPC) to the creation of a workers state in their own country **was only possible because pre-1949 China was a country so cruelly subjugated by imperialism**. This imperialist

tyranny not only enraged the Chinese toilers but the Chinese middle class too. As a result, China's pre-1949 middle class were open to radical ideas promising liberation from the current social order. By contrast, the middle class in imperialist countries like the U.S., Australia, Japan, France and Britain are greatly conservatised by the crumbs that they obtain from the massive looting of the developing world by the bourgeoisies of their own countries. As a result it will take massive working class struggle before large sections of the middle class come over to the side of socialist revolution in an imperialist country. Therefore, **it is completely impossible to have in an imperialist country a China-1949 style scenario, where declassed middle class intellectuals lead a non-proletarian-dominated force to establish a workers state.** This is impossible for another fundamental reason too. In the imperialist countries, there is no large, super-downtrodden, non-proletarian class that could spearhead such a revolution. There is no peasantry suffering under both landlordism and imperialist tyranny.

The fact that, while agricultural proletarians had played a key role in the 1949 Revolution and urban workers in key cities had made important contributions in the final stages, it was peasants led by de-classed middle class intellectuals that were numerically the main force in the Chinese Revolution does have significance. The scattered, individualistic nature of peasant farming meant that the tenant farmer base of the CPC had to be held together somewhat artificially from above by the more politically aware communist cadres. During the Civil War, the burning necessity to defeat the landlords kept the poor farmers together. But afterwards, especially, the CPC cadres were required to smother centrifugal tendencies that would otherwise have torn the unity of the tenant farmers apart. As a result, unfortunately, the workers state produced by the 1949 Revolution was bureaucratically deformed from its very inception.

That the Chinese workers state has not been based on a genuine workers democracy has made a big difference to her history. For one, when the CPC leadership made costly mistakes – even ones made with the best of intentions

like the disastrous 1958-1961 Great Leap forward when Mao adventuristically sought to industrialise China in a short number of years without the technical means to do so – they could not be quickly corrected by the masses. Moreover, although the collectivisation of the key sectors of the Chinese economy led to tremendous economic development, this was still short of what could have been achieved had the motivating force of workers democracy and the efficiencies that such a form of direct administration bring also been present. In the absence of proletarian democracy, the CPC had to turn to excessive use of market methods – including allowing inequality and accepting unemployment – from the late 1970s onwards to drive the masses to boost productivity. Today, although China remains a workers state in which socialist public ownership plays the dominant role in her economy, more than four decades of market reforms have not only increased inequality but created a sizable capitalist class that wants nothing less than complete capitalist restoration. Moreover, the lack of genuine workers democracy could allow some of the Chinese masses, in a time of difficulty, to be led astray by pro-capitalist forces singing the praises of capitalist “democracy”; or at least end up indifferent to the threat posed by such “democratic” counterrevolutionaries. This is in good part how capitalist counterrevolutionaries were able to gain the ascendancy in the former Soviet Union and East European workers states in 1989-1992.

Although the 1949 Revolution produced a workers state that was bureaucratically deformed from its inception, the establishment of a workers state was nevertheless a massive advance for China's workers and peasants. **The fact that China became a workers state in 1949 and remains one today allowed her to complete a remarkable feat at the end of 2020: she lifted all her people out of extreme poverty.** This is an extraordinary achievement for a country that prior to the 1949 Revolution had been so trampled on and so forcibly kept backward by imperial powers that her per capita income then was barely more than **half that of India's**. Meanwhile, although Chinese women have a long way to go before

achieving complete equality, it is Chinese women who have gained the most from the 1949 Revolution. Previously so oppressed that many were subjected to forced marriages and the barbaric practice of foot binding, today the social and economic status of women in China and the freedoms that they enjoy are far in excess of capitalist developing countries like India and Indonesia.

Whereas the social revolutions in China, North Korea, Cuba, Vietnam and Laos gave positive confirmation to Permanent Revolution, events in other ex-colonial capitalist countries also confirmed the theory but from the opposite side. If one looks at all the large developing countries that remained under capitalist rule after achieving their formal independence – like India, Indonesia, Philippines, Mexico, Egypt, Brazil, Thailand, Nigeria and Bangladesh – in none of these countries have the people been able to achieve true emancipation from the colonial powers. They all remain under, especially economic, domination of the imperialists. To the extent that some of these countries have been able to achieve a slightly greater level of economic independence it is only through aid and mutually beneficial relations with the giant workers state, the PRC. Moreover, in none of these capitalist, ex-colonial countries has landlord exploitation of tenant farmers and other remnants of feudalism – such as India's caste system, legal inequities against women in many countries and the imposition of religion in state affairs – been totally eradicated. All this proves Trotsky's point that "with regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of the permanent revolution signifies that the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving democracy and national emancipation is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat."

That the theory of Permanent Revolution has been so resoundingly proven from many angles has great relevance to today's struggle for national and social liberation in the ex-colonial countries. In these countries, because the bourgeois rulers are so tied to the imperialists while the nations as a whole continue to be plundered by imperialism,

the local ruling elites are weak and unstable and can only rule through the most repressive measures. Uprisings against brutal, corrupt regimes are thus frequent in the likes of the Philippines, Thailand and Egypt. However, in the absence of leftists in these countries genuinely embracing the perspective of Permanent Revolution, they typically end up channelling the anti-regime anger of the masses that they influence into supporting all-encompassing opposition movements against whoever happens to be the current ruler. Typically, all bourgeois factions participate in these all-encompassing movements except the one currently in power. Therefore, the uprisings inevitably result in merely a rival bourgeois faction or coalition of factions coming to power to replace the previous regime. However, because the new bourgeois rulers are themselves necessarily incapable of freeing the country from imperialism and of genuinely solving the tasks of the national-democratic revolution let alone the socialist one, they end up being little better than the previously ousted regime. New uprisings result, a new bourgeois ruler is brought to power and the whole cycle starts again. This has been strikingly evident in Egypt over the last decade. In early 2011, in the early part of the "Arab Spring", a mass all-encompassing opposition movement brought down Egypt's hated capitalist dictator, Hosni Mubarak. The secular, pro-Western Mubarak was eventually replaced by a bourgeois, politically Islamist administration headed by Mohamed Morsi. However, Morsi proved to be just as subservient to the imperialists as Mubarak, just as unwilling to bring genuine political democracy to the country and just as incapable of guaranteeing the living standards of the masses. This encouraged popular revolts against him and Morsi ended up being toppled in 2013 following mass protests. The new post-Morsi regime is, however, similar to the one led by Mubarak. Thus, after two anti-government mass movements Egypt is essentially back to where it was before the "Arab Spring" uprisings emerged! To break out of such vicious cycles, leftists in the countries subjugated by imperialism must adhere to the central tenet of the theory of Permanent Revolution which mandates that no bourgeois faction, no matter how much they promise "democracy" and

anti-imperialism, is worth supporting. This means that when mass resistance inevitably arises against a hated ruler, communists must not join all-encompassing opposition movements. Rather they should build a separate united-front opposition movement on a pro-working class, pro-women's rights and anti-imperialist agenda. Such a movement would not only refuse to support any rival bourgeois faction to the current rulers but would ensure that its demands are so clearly anti-bourgeois that no capitalist faction would want to participate in it. This working class-led movement would then begin to vie for power with not only the existing regime but with its bourgeois rivals.

In those dependant capitalist countries whose rulers currently have very frosty relations with the imperialists, like Iran and Syria, there is an additional complication to enacting this strategy. This is that communists must be doubly vigilant to ensure that any forces funded or backed by imperialism are not allowed to participate in the pro-working class, pro-women's rights and anti-imperialist mobilisations. Understanding that imperialism is the main enemy in the ex-colonial world is key to implementing a strategy based on the perspective of Permanent Revolution.

There is another aspect of the theory of Permanent Revolution that was validated after Trotsky's death. Although the main aspect of the perspective deals with how to solve the national-democratic tasks in the countries of belated bourgeois development and the growing over from there to the socialist tasks, Permanent Revolution also addresses more broadly what is faced by a workers state after it has been established. Trotsky stressed that the victory of the toilers by establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat does not at all complete the class struggle. As long as capitalist relationships dominate most of the world, a workers state would always face, on the one hand, the threat from capitalist restorationist forces internally and, on the other, the necessity of supporting revolutionary struggles abroad. As Trotsky put it, "The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds on the international arena, and is completed on the world arena. Thus, the socialist revolution becomes a

permanent revolution in a newer and broader sense of the word; it attains completion, only in the final victory of the new society on our entire planet." **Until that final victory, there will be social explosions and crucial class battles even in countries where proletarian rule has already been established.** If one looks at the history of the PRC this has been proven to be true. For example, there were the stormy late-1990s strikes and factory occupations by Chinese workers against privatisation and its effects. Although not directed against openly counterrevolutionary forces, they were directed against measures that would have clearly boosted the strength of the fledgling Chinese capitalist class. Then there were later Chinese workers' struggles like the victorious 2009 battle against the privatisation of the Tonghua steel works and the wave of similar militant struggles that it inspired. The Xi Jinping government's recent moves to rein in capitalists in especially the tech, education and real estate sectors are a form of class struggle administered from above. In the opposite direction, there was the 2019 imperialist-backed uprising by a section of Hong Kong's bourgeoisie and a large proportion of her pro-capitalist, upper middle class. Had that rich people's uprising succeeded, it would have injured the proletariat's grip on power throughout all of China. Additionally, there have been many crucial factional struggles – as well as on-going factional jostling right now – within the CPC, which while not open contests between proletarian and capitalist restorationist forces have nevertheless been indirect refractions of this fundamental contest. **The essence of any Trotskyist perspective towards the PRC workers state is that the terrific gains of the 1949 Revolution can only be secured and China's progress towards complete socialism achieved by prosecuting the class struggle to a complete victory within both China and the world.** Within China, that means fighting to greatly curb the power and wealth of the capitalists, spreading the socialist system to Hong Kong and Macao and encouraging workers in Taiwan to overthrow their own capitalists so that they can join in socialist unity with the mainland.

The Strategy of the “Popular Front” Keeps on Leading to Terrible Defeats for the Workers Movement

The second crucial aspect of Trotskyism that kept on being vindicated after Trotsky's death was its opposition to workers' parties joining with a section of the bourgeoisie in “popular front” coalitions. As had occurred during Trotsky's lifetime – including most notably in China in 1927 and France and Spain in the mid-late 1930s – the Popular Front strategy continued to always lead to defeat for the working class.

One of the most dramatic displays of the damage caused by the Popular Front strategy was seen just a few years after Trotsky's death. That was in Italy. After a massive strike struggle by workers under fascist rule, the Italian bourgeoisie deposed Mussolini in mid-1943 to save their own rule. However, the working class only became more emboldened. But the Moscow-line, Italian Communist Party (PCI) instead of leading the militant workers' struggles towards socialist revolution built a coalition with “democratic” capitalist parties. They even entered the coalition government of the “new” monarchist regime – a regime largely made up of yesterday's fascists now calling themselves “democrats.” Nevertheless, in April 1945, workers and communist partisans in the German-occupied north of Italy rose up and occupied the factories, seized key buildings, defeated the Nazi forces and summarily executed leading fascist criminals, including Mussolini. **Armed workers and communist partisans had effectively taken the power in the key northern industrial cities of Italy!** But the PCI, in the name of unity with the “democratic” bourgeoisie, demobilised the uprising and managed, with much difficulty, to get the partisans to hand over their weapons to the “democratic” Anglo-American Allied forces as the latter moved north. **The PCI and its popular front strategy had saved hated, thoroughly fascist-tainted, Italian capitalism from being served the final death blow by the revolutionary working class.** The Allied imperialists “rewarded” the Communist partisans by throwing huge numbers of them into prison camps. In July 1948, the Stalinised PCI would again betray a massive general strike and workers' uprising in the north of Italy. A few years later, the re-stabilised capitalist order in Italy had not only

stopped making any fascists pay for their grizzly crimes whatsoever but accelerated the persecution of partisans for their heroic deeds during the anti-Nazi resistance.

As during Trotsky's lifetime, in not one single case did the strategy of the Popular Front open the road to socialist revolution. Instead, what it did was derail and lead to defeat countless revolutionary working class upsurges. This included in Iraq in 1958, Chile in the early 1970s and Portugal in 1975 to name just a few examples. The most calamitous example of where the Popular Front strategy leads was played out in Indonesia in the 1960s. There the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) had built itself up into the largest communist party in the capitalist world. It had millions of members and led the majority of the country's working class. The brutally exploited Indonesian workers and poor peasants brought into political consciousness by the PKI wanted genuine liberation from the capitalists and the landlords. They staged militant struggles like occupations of workplaces and actions against landlordism. However, instead of leading the struggles towards a workers state backed by the peasants, the PKI entered into a long-term popular front bloc with bourgeois Indonesian president Sukarno and his Indonesian Nationalist Party. To satisfy its bourgeois allies, the PKI worked overtime to try and curb the militancy of the working class and to limit peasant struggles to demands for rent reduction as opposed to genuine land redistribution. The PKI meanwhile heaped praise on Sukarno even as his regime brutally attacked strikes and peasant struggles. The PKI even joined Sukarno's government where it jostled for influence with rightist forces also in the “national unity” government. However, all the PKI's suppression of class struggle militancy

The always unbearably tragic epilogue to class collaboration and the failed strategy of Popular Front-ism, Indonesia 1965-66.

Top: Indonesian Communist Party members & sympathizers rounded up in Bali. **Middle:** Leftists being herded off to public execution. **Bottom:** Skulls from the massacre with a relative of one of the victims.

was not enough for the right-wing forces. They would not tolerate any struggle by the toiling classes for their rights whatsoever. As the threat of right-wing repression loomed, the PKI became even more craven in its loyalty to Sukarno hoping that he would protect them. Eventually the anti-communist forces saw an opportunity to attack the PKI after some right-wing military officers were murdered in September 1965. Indonesian general Suharto began repressing the PKI. But the PKI refused to mobilise its millions of members to resist. Instead they appealed to Sukarno. As the repression intensified, Sukarno, after being neutral for a while, dramatically threw his support behind the crackdown. Sukarno denounced the PKI as “rats.” With its worker and peasant base having been schooled over many years in trust in Sukarno and the “anti-imperialist bourgeoisie” and having been demoralised by the PKI’s repeated curbing of their struggles, the PKI and its supporters were left completely politically and militarily disarmed in the face of the anti-communist crackdown. This only emboldened the right-wing forces to become ever more vicious. The Indonesian military and Islamic fundamentalist gangs set about carrying out a horrific massacre of Indonesian communists. They murdered some one to two **million** communists and other worker and peasant activists, alongside members of the country’s Chinese minority.

The strategy of the popular front had not only wiped out the opportunity for socialist revolution in Indonesia for decades but had led to the destruction of a three-million strong communist party and to the worst massacre in post World War II human history. In 1927, it had been the Soviet bureaucracy, then headed by Bukharin and Stalin that had forced the CPC leadership, against its protests, into a disastrous bloc with the KMT. The result was a terrible massacre of the CPC and its supporters. Ironically, less than four decades later, it was now the CPC-headed



bureaucracy of the Chinese deformed workers state that had fully supported the PKI in carrying out a similar strategy to the one that the Soviet bureaucracy had calamitously imposed on the CPC in the mid-1920s (although it must be said that the Mao-led CPC encouraged rather than forced the PKI into this course – the PKI leadership very much agreed with the popular front strategy unlike Chen Duxiu and Co. in the mid-1920s). The result was the same!

Even when the popular front strategy does not lead to such spectacular defeats, it has always demobilised militant class struggle. In South Africa in the mid and late 1980s there was a pre-revolutionary situation as the pro-communist, black working class waged militant struggles for their workplace rights and spearheaded a broader revolt against Apartheid. However, following the strategy of the popular front, the large South African

Communist Party chained the working class to pro-capitalist, middle-class black leaders within the ANC (African National Congress). Although the workers' struggles succeeded in forcing the racist South African capitalists to retreat from the horrors of formal Apartheid, the Popular Front strategy saved South African capitalism. Today, black workers in ANC-administered capitalist South Africa remain brutally exploited. And while a layer of black middle class have made it into the capitalist establishment, the black masses, alongside many of the Coloured and Indian toilers, continue to face both intense racial oppression and economic disenfranchisement. As well as heading off immediate or short-term opportunities for revolution, the strategy of workers organisations entering political blocs with bourgeois forces, which the 1930s Comintern called Popular Fronts/Peoples Fronts, prevents even emerging class struggles from gaining greater militancy and clarity. Moreover, even when a formal coalition between workers parties and "progressive" bourgeois parties has not been proclaimed, Popular Frontist politics continue to do terrible damage to the workers movement today. This is because reformist workers and left parties continuously seek unity with "progressive" capitalists in campaigns over all manner of immediate issues of vital concern to the masses. And such **class collaboration is the essence of Popular Frontist politics**. For example in Australia, when reformist left-wing groups organise opposition to, say, the sell-off of public housing or to the inadequacy of dole payments to the unemployed, they typically tailor their demands to try and win the favour of dissident elements of both the capitalist class and of the pro-capitalist middle class – both often represented by the Australian Greens political party. In thus politically subordinating movements to a wing of the exploiting class, these reformist forces curb the ability of the movement to mobilise the militant class struggle that would, both, give the best chance of victory in the immediate battles and guarantee that the movement advances the masses' revolutionary socialist consciousness.

At times, the Popular Frontist perspective of alliance with a wing of the capitalist class can even lead the workers movement in a reactionary nationalist direction. Thus, the strategy to fight against unemployment of the current, pro-Labor Party leadership of the Australian workers movement is to seek an alliance with a section of the local capitalist class to advocate for "protecting local businesses and jobs" against overseas producers with tariffs and preferential treatment for local companies in procurement. Such protectionist strategies do not work because they only lead to reciprocal actions by governments abroad to protect their own producers against Australian ones. Understanding this and based on our rejection of the Popular Frontist strategy of alliance with the capitalists, authentic Trotskyists oppose protectionism, since such agendas tie workers to their local capitalist exploiters. Because we understand that it is class struggle that offers the working class the way forward and not Popular Frontist alliances – whether formal coalitions or not – we see that protectionism is positively harmful because it damages working class unity by dividing local workers from their true allies: the workers of the world. Instead of protectionism, we put forward a class struggle strategy to fight for secure jobs for all. This program stands for mobilising actions to force bosses to increase hiring at the expense of their profits and to demand the immediate conversion of all casual jobs into permanent, secure ones. If such a struggle is to reach the levels of militancy needed to force the capitalist exploiters into making concessions, the demands of the movement must not be curtailed to satisfy any elements of the "progressive" bourgeoisie – like the Australian Greens. From the fight for the most immediate interests of the toilers to the final push for workers power during a pre-revolutionary upsurge, Trotsky's opposition to Popular Frontism must be upheld. After all, that merely equates to standing on the principles of Bolshevism as against Menshevism – that is, to standing on Leninist-Trotskyist principles that have been 100% vindicated by history.

All Aspects of Trotsky's Approach to the USSR Were Vindicated by History

The third crucial aspect of Trotskyism that has continued to be proven correct after Trotsky's death is its approach to the, now former, Soviet Union. Ever since a bureaucratic caste grabbed control of the political administration of the USSR, the two fundamental principles that underpinned Trotskyist strategy towards the Soviet Union were, firstly, the need for unconditional defence of the workers state and, secondly, the necessity to restore to the degenerated workers state the revolutionary internationalism and workers democracy that invigorated the October Revolution.

During his lifetime, Trotsky insisted that, despite bureaucratic degeneration, the Soviet Union remained a state based on progressive, socialist property forms. In the years after Trotsky's death, just how significant was this conquest was dramatically proved by the Soviet Red Army's heroic victory over Nazi Germany in World War II. And let's be clear, it was the Soviet Union that almost single-handedly crushed the Nazis. Although 76 years later, Western propaganda has managed to obscure this truth from many people, everyone at the time knew this to be true. The overwhelming majority of the fighting against the Nazis was in the Eastern Front where the Red Army and her communist partisan allies stood up to the Nazis and their allies. Of all the casualties in the European and North African theatres of World War II, more than 90% were in the Eastern Front. The political significance of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany becomes apparent when one recalls that when the territory of the USSR was under capitalist rule – that is in the pre-October Russian Empire days – capitalist Russia had been resoundingly defeated by Germany in World War I. It had been clear then that Russia had been the weakest of the imperialist powers. Even before her defeat in World War I, she had been humiliated by her Japanese rival in the 1904-5 Russo-Japanese war. Now, in World War II, the people of the former Russian Empire now organised in the USSR were up against an imperial power that was so formidable that it had recently completely overrun a technologically advanced industrial power in the form of France. To achieve victory in a war is not merely about

the troops and military tactics but largely about supplying the military with sufficient and suitable quality weapons, ammunition, transport, clothing, food and other supplies. The old Russia's reverses in World War I were largely due to being outperformed in this area by her enemies. In a diametrically opposite way, the Red Army's victory in World War II was in good part due to the Soviet Union being able to produce and supply her troops with more quality tanks, aircraft and provisions than her Axis enemies. That a country once so industrially backward could achieve this feat was due to the fact that her economy was now running on a socialistic, planned basis. The second crucial factor in any war is the determination and willingness to sacrifice of the troops. The Nazi and other Axis troops were largely working class conscripts mobilised on the basis of extreme national and racial arrogance to go and kill for the sake of the capitalists that exploit them and the brutal fascist bureaucrats who enforce that exploitation. In contrast, for the most part, the Soviet workers fighting with the Red Army were mobilised on the basis that they were fighting to protect their own state. Although bureaucratic repression and privilege would have partially obscured the class character of their state, many Soviet soldiers saw themselves as fighting to defend the conquests of the October Revolution. As a result, they fought with much greater courage and resolve than their German counterparts.

During Trotsky's lifetime itself, the Soviet workers state was able to achieve spectacular advances in industrialisation,

infrastructure development, literacy and women's participation in the workforce. Her socialist planned economy allowed the Soviet Union to spare her people the horrors of mass unemployment and pauperisation that enveloped the capitalist world during the Great Depression. Instead the Soviet Union was providing her masses access to some of the sporting, artistic and cultural life that had previously only been available to the wealthy. On the other hand, while Trotsky was still alive, Soviet wages remained not much better than the capitalist days and most workers still had to endure the degrading system of piecework (where wages are paid according to output rather than hours worked) that they had in the pre-revolution times. During the Great Purge, the pro-communist masses were hit with terrifying repression that reminded them of the horrific cruelty of the Tsarist secret police, the fascist Black Hundred gangs that terrorised non-Russian minorities in the pre-revolutionary times and the murderous brutality of the counterrevolutionary forces during the Civil War. Meanwhile, the introduction of the Stakhanov system and heavy-handed bureaucratic pressure on workers to step up production recalled workplace life in capitalist times. Especially during the worst period of the Purge, some workers would be in doubt about whether their lives were much better than in the pre-1917 times. Flaky elements within the Fourth Internationalist movement and Trotsky's external critics on the Left pointed to this reality to try and pressure the Trotskyists to abandon defence of the USSR. However, Trotsky very correctly rejected such an empirical way of looking at the question; i.e. looking at the stance to take towards the Soviet Union from the angle of simply determining whether life is now much better for an average Soviet worker than it was before in capitalist times. Trotsky looked at the question from a historic and international point of view. He knew that capitalism could no longer provide humanity with a decent future. It only promised ever more catastrophic economic crises, fascism and horrendous inter-imperialist wars

where tens of millions of people would be slaughtered. The cause of the toiling classes and all humanity demanded that capitalism be overthrown on a global scale. The victory of socialist revolution in one country is a precious conquest in this overall class war. It is a conquest that must be defended to the hilt. But that conquest alone does not bring paradise. The bureaucratic degeneration of the world's first workers state was itself a result of the reality that while a key battle was won, the overall class war hadn't yet come to a victorious conclusion for the world's workers. Only the final victory of the world socialist revolution will truly guarantee a greatly improved life for the masses and humanity's further progress. We should add that during the desperate days of the Civil War and for a period after, all during Lenin's time, Soviet workers' living standards were actually much worse than during the pre-World War I days. But only an enemy of the revolution would conclude that this meant that the Soviet workers state should have been abandoned then. In an analogous way one can look at the significance of a workers' strike for improved wages in a capitalist country. The launching of the strike is an advance for the class struggle and for improving workers' lives. However, the strike does not immediately bring a better life for the workers taking the action. On the contrary, workers undergo hardship because they are not being paid and they face the great stress of not knowing whether they will still have a job. But workers hold out for victory in the strike and the better life that would ensue after. It is with this same long-term perspective that Trotsky looked at the question of the Soviet Union.

By about a decade after the end of World War II, just how much a conquest for the working class was the Soviet Union's existence became even clearer. Despite the devastation of World War II, by the time of Stalin's death in 1953, Soviet living standards had risen appreciably from pre-revolutionary times. From there, the lives of the masses continued to improve considerably

over the next two and a half decades. Far from facing excessive bureaucratic compulsion to speed up production, Soviet workplace life became typified by its relaxed nature, certainly compared to workplaces in capitalist countries. There was full employment and workers had absolute job security. The late 1950s, 1960s and 1970s were the heyday of the Soviet Union. By the late 1950s, the Soviet Union had basically achieved 100% literacy, a great achievement when one considers how poorly educated the population had been prior to the October Revolution. By two decades after Trotsky's death, even a very empirical look at the lives of Soviet workers and how much they had improved since 1917 showed how correct it was for Trotsky to stand for the unconditional defence of the Soviet Union.

There was an aspect, not of his programmatic conclusions but of his predictions about the Soviet Union that Trotsky did not get right. By the late 1930s, Trotsky expected that the Soviet bureaucracy would not survive the then coming war. He thought that either one of two variants would transpire. In the tragic variant, the Soviet bureaucracy would pave the way for the imperialist destruction of the USSR that would in turn sweep them away. On the other hand, in the variant that Trotsky fought for, the proletariat would make revolutions in the capitalist world which would in turn prod Soviet workers to dislodge the bureaucratic administrators of their workers state because the extension of proletarian rule internationally would give Soviet masses confidence that ousting the bureaucracy would not open the flood gates to capitalist counterrevolution. This prognosis was based on Trotsky's analysis of the bureaucracy during the Great Purge. He spoke of the bureaucracy appropriating an ever greater share of national income and of becoming more and more the organ of world capitalism within the workers state. Certainly, in the late 1930s, when the bureaucracy was massacring not only the Trotskyists but the broader left of the CPC and when it was increasing income inequality,

through for example pushing the Stakhanov movement, that is where the bureaucracy was headed. However, based on Trotsky's own analysis of the Soviet bureaucracy as a layer that balances between the different elements in Soviet society and between the Soviet working class more broadly and world imperialism, it is apparent that increased pressure from the Soviet workers could also turn back the rightist moves of this fragile, bureaucratic caste. Thus, because the Stakhanov movement met with much resistance from workers, the bureaucracy had to fairly quickly shelve the Stakhanov system. The bureaucracy, which did not have the security of being an exploiting class with its own property system, **had to adapt to the masses in order to preserve their own privileged positions.** Notably, during the war, the Soviet leadership, in order to maintain the allegiance of the masses and mobilise them for the war effort, reduced income inequality further. It did this by lowering the threshold for workers to receive performance bonuses, thus undercutting the bonus system itself and the inequality that it generated.

After Stalin's death, the new Soviet leadership reduced income inequality even further and raised workers wages. Meanwhile, Khrushchev and Co. released hundreds of thousands of political prisoners from gulags. Terror as a means to maintain bureaucratic rule was largely ended. It is important to understand that these "De-Stalinisation" changes were not simply the result of a change of leader. By the time of Stalin's death, per capita GDP in the Soviet Union was four times the level that it was when the bureaucracy first began seizing the reigns of administrative control in 1923 and more than 60% higher than it was at the start of the Purge. As Trotsky explained, the overall reason for the Soviet bureaucracy's emergence and the main rationale for its continued existence was to arbitrate the conflicting claims for scarce articles of consumption and production between city and village, city and city, enterprise and

enterprise and individual and individual. One can use the analogy of the bureaucracy being like the mountains that rise when two tectonic plates that are headed in different directions collide. However, by 1953, that scarcity, while definitely still there, was nowhere near as grave as it had been previously. The struggle of each against all over the share of national income was hence less desperate. The edge was taken off conflicts over resources between different regions. Disputes between different sections of the bureaucracy itself became less intense. The tectonic plates were colliding but at a lower velocity. Therefore, the mountain in the middle was not as high. The reasons for the bureaucracy's existence, while still there, had somewhat diminished. Hence they could not rule as they previously had. The masses would not tolerate it. For the Soviet people innately knew that the bureaucracy's function was less important now that the scarcities were fewer. That is why even if Stalin had lived longer, "De-Stalinisation" was inevitable. Stalin himself may have been pressured to oversee the changes. And if he resisted, others in the bureaucracy may have worked up the courage to depose him. Recent evidence that Stalin's secret police chief, Lavrentiy Beria, poisoned Stalin or that he and other Stalin lieutenants hastened Stalin's death by ensuring that Stalin did not receive timely medical care would, if true, confirm this point about "De-Stalinisation". We cannot, of course, know for sure if Stalin was indeed killed in this way. However, our point about the growing wealth of the Soviet Union making it harder for the bureaucracy to rule in the way that it had previously is confirmed by the fact that in the short few months that Beria ruled the USSR after Stalin's death, Beria himself began a "De-Stalinisation." This is notable because this very same Beria, who as NKVD head had overseen terrible murderous repression of communists (including the murder of Trotsky, the execution of foreign communists exiled in the Soviet Union and bloody purges of Red Army leaders during the early part of World War II), now oversaw the release

of hundreds of thousands of people from prisons.

By the late 1950s, the Soviet bureaucracy maintained its privileges – relatively small compared to those held by the bourgeoisie in a capitalist country – not through brute repression but through keeping the masses largely depoliticised. Especially during Brezhnev's rule beginning in 1964, the Soviet masses were almost bored into allowing the bureaucracy to maintain a relatively privileged position. The masses were happy to stay out of politics because their living standards were continually improving, their jobs were guaranteed and they had abundant opportunities for entertainment, holidays and hobbies. However, this depoliticisation would cause huge problems. It would, indeed, prove to be a major factor in the Soviet Union's eventual demise.

Annoyed by the bureaucracy's petty tyrannies, kept out of decision making by the lack of genuine workers democracy and looking disparagingly at the bureaucracy's privileges, the Soviet masses increasingly greeted their leaders' talk of socialism with cynicism. Soviet people were not opposed to socialism but many were no longer passionately committed to fighting for it. This started to affect the USSR's economic performance. In a socialistic society, where workers' jobs are guaranteed and there isn't the threat of the poverty that arises from unemployment to spur workers' production, the understanding that their labour helps to develop a socialist society that serves all the working people is crucial to stimulating workers' labour and creativity. The deterioration of this socialist consciousness led to laziness amongst Soviet workers and high levels of absenteeism. Meanwhile, the system of political administration by the bureaucracy hindered further economic development the closer that the USSR came to catching up economically with the most advanced countries. Even in his lifetime, Trotsky foretold of this problem:

"While the growth of industry and the bringing of agriculture into the sphere of state planning

vastly complicates the tasks of leadership, bringing to the front the problem of quality, bureaucratism destroys the creative initiative and the feeling of responsibility without which there is not, and cannot be, qualitative progress....

"The progressive role of the Soviet bureaucracy coincides with the period devoted to introducing into the Soviet Union the most important elements of capitalist technique.

"The rough work of borrowing, imitating, transplanting and grafting, was accomplished on the bases laid down by the revolution. There was, thus far, no question of any new word in the sphere of technique, science or art. It is possible to build gigantic factories according to a ready-made Western pattern by bureaucratic command – although, to be sure, at triple the normal cost. But the farther you go, the more the economy runs into the problem of quality, which slips out of the hands of a bureaucracy like a shadow. The Soviet products are as though branded with the gray label of indifference. Under a nationalized economy, quality demands a democracy of producers and consumers, freedom of criticism and initiative – conditions incompatible with a totalitarian regime of fear, lies and flattery.

"Behind the question of quality stands a more complicated and grandiose problem which may be comprised in the concept of independent, technical and cultural creation. The ancient philosopher said that strife is the father of all things. No new values can be created where a free conflict of ideas is impossible.... Soviet democracy is not the demand of an abstract policy, still less an abstract moral. It has become a life-and-death need of the country."

L.D. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* (1937), Pathfinder Press, 1974 Edition.

By the mid-1950s onwards, the Soviet workers state was no longer administered by "a totalitarian regime of fear, lies and flattery." But she was overseen by a bureaucratic administration of paternalism, censorship and flattery that similarly sapped the creativity and initiative of the masses. This and the lack of workers' productive energy led to a slowing of economic growth in the late-1970s. Crucial international factors were at play too. Although the Soviet bureaucracy, on the one hand, bent to the pressure of the masses during "De-Stalinisation" by increasing workers' wages and curbing repression, on the other hand, it bowed to the imperialists by showing its willingness to

make still greater concessions to them in its futile quest for "peaceful coexistence". Over the next few decades, the Kremlin would help betray several tremendous opportunities for socialist revolution abroad. As a result, although capitalism was overthrown in Cuba, Vietnam and Laos, bourgeois rule in all the richer capitalist countries survived the late 1960s-early 1970s revolutionary upsurges. These imperialist powers united against the USSR and its allies with renewed zeal in the 1980s. Financed by cutting social welfare, the U.S. – backed by the West European and Australian imperialists – unleashed a massive, threatening arms build up against the Soviet Union. Understandably fearful of an attack, the Soviet Union tried to match the buildup. Unlike the capitalist U.S., she did not provide the resources for this buildup by cutting wages or social welfare. Rather, Moscow cut back on maintenance and upgrading of factories. As a result, by the mid-1980s Soviet economic growth had all but stalled.

Soviet economic stagnation had profound political effects. For one, by the 1980s, a section of the population of the Eastern bloc started looking enviously at the higher standard of living in Western countries. The people that did so of course ignored the fact that, before the 1917 Revolution, incomes in then capitalist Russia had been much lower relative to those in the Western imperialist countries. In 1917, per capita income in the Russian Empire was only one-fifth that in Britain and one-sixth than in the USA. They also ignored the truth that while average per capita income in the Soviet Union had been less than 40% of the average in Latin American countries in 1920 (the year closest to the October Revolution that average data is available for the Latin American countries), by 1980 average per capita incomes in the Soviet Union were 20% higher than the average in Latin America and with a much, much higher share of income going to her working class masses. Those in the Soviet bloc who looked positively at the wealth of the West also turned a blind eye to

the homelessness in those countries and to the grinding poverty that the unemployed, low-paid workers and working class single mothers faced in even the richest of the capitalist countries. They only saw the BMWs and designer clothes possessed by the upper and upper-middle classes. There was a reason for their skewed view. Those that looked enviously at life in North America and Western Europe were overwhelmingly the most educated sections of the USSR – the ones who thought that should Russia ape the Western capitalist countries *they* would be the ones who would climb into the upper and upper-middle class elites. And of the Soviet intelligentsia that looked favourably on Western capitalism it was the youth who were the most inclined in this direction. There was a reason for this too. In the time that they were old enough to be politically conscious, they had only experienced economic stagnation at home. They were not old enough to have witnessed the Soviet Union's spectacular rebuilding efforts after World War II or the tremendous achievements that she made in economy, science and education in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. The heroic victory of the Red Army in World War II was but a tale of their grandparents. The significance of the October Revolution, an event that occurred seven decades earlier, was even fainter in their consciousness and associated with the party that in their minds was bringing society to stagnation in the present.

As Trotsky had emphasised, the USSR desperately needed soviet democracy to ensure continued economic and cultural development. However, to introduce such a system would mean the bureaucracy losing its privileged position. Therefore, the Soviet bureaucracy was left with no means to spur production except to turn to pro-market reforms. This is how Gorbachev sought to address the economic stagnation in the mid-1980s. The idea behind these *perestroika* reforms was to introduce greater income disparities and to use that as a whip to boost productivity. Meanwhile, with the same motivation, Gorbachev allowed

small levels of petty capitalism. This only wetted the appetites of the young pro-Western intelligentsia. These *wanna be* yuppies and the new small-scale capitalists and speculators created by the *perestroika* reforms pushed for further anti-egalitarian reforms. These anti-socialist forces, often disguised as “pro democracy” movements, received massive backing from Washington and her allies including those in London, Bonn, Canberra, Paris and Tokyo. The USSR was spiraling to the right and Gorbachev had unleashed forces that pushed him more and more in a pro-capitalist direction.

Under the impact of these events, the Soviet bureaucracy fractured. Some in the bureaucracy broke away from the Soviet apparatus to become open activists for counterrevolution. These elements after all knew that their own privileges would put them in poll position to zoom into a new capitalist class should proletarian rule be destroyed. This layer was led by Boris Yeltsin and included the likes of Vladimir Putin. During the crucial events that destroyed the Soviet workers state, Putin was a senior aide to Leningrad Mayor, Anatoly Sobchak, a leading figure in the counterrevolution. Others in the bureaucracy did not support capitalist restoration but just stayed quiet – they just wanted to keep a decent-paying job no matter which type of state they were administering. There were several Soviet leaders who did try to resist. However, their resistance was ineffective because they did not often try to mobilise the masses against the counterrevolution. And when they did try, they did not know how to do it. They had been so used to keeping the masses out of political activism!

The Soviet working class largely did not participate in the decisive events of 1991-1992 on either side. Most glumly looked on. Most were worried about events but not sure enough of themselves to actually mobilise in resistance to the capitalist counterrevolution. This does not mean that there was no resistance whatsoever. From about three months after the pro-capitalist Yeltsin forces

seized the reins of government in August 1991 until the northern hemisphere spring of the following year, there were some huge pro-Soviet demonstrations. However, the movement lacked a consistent revolutionary program to defend the embattled workers state. After all, the CPSU had become a far cry from the Bolshevik Party that made the October Revolution, led the Civil War victory and built up the workers state in the 1917-1923 years. It is a bitter irony that the Great October Socialist Revolution – that terrific victory for the downtrodden when the working class of Russia seized state power over one-sixth of the earth's surface – was destroyed in events that such a small percentage of the population actually participated in.

The capitalist counterrevolution that engulfed the Soviet Union in 1991-92 and Eastern Europe in 1989-1992 was a calamity for the working class, women, ethnic minorities and indeed most people. Unemployment and poverty skyrocketed. Workers' living standards dived. By 1994, average life expectancy in Russia had plummeted five years from what it had been in 1988. Ethnic groups that had for decades lived in relative harmony in the socialistic days engaged in bloody feuds in Southern Russia, Georgia, the Caucasus, Ukraine, Hungary and Yugoslavia. Just like in the pre-revolutionary days, ethnic minorities, like the Roma and Jewish peoples, were once again persecuted. Fascist forces emerged out of nowhere to terrorise ethnic minorities, immigrants and leftists. Today in the likes of Poland and Hungary, rabidly racist, far-right parties are in government. Religious reaction has reared its ugly head, women's social position has been driven downwards and in Poland women lost the right to abortion. The immiseration, suffering, oppression and nationalist fratricide caused by the destruction of the Soviet and East European workers states proved just how progressive these workers states had been, despite their serious bureaucratic deformations. Even in the downfall of the Soviet Union, Trotsky's

insistence on unconditional defence of the Soviet workers state has been proven to be 100% correct.

Today, many who consider themselves "Marxist-Leninists" often point to the great achievements of the Soviet Union. This is completely understandable. However, some of these leftists at the same time avoid the issue of why the Soviet Union was destroyed. This is only possible because it has now been some three decades since the USSR's collapse. In the 1990s, it was simply impossible for any avowed communist to avoid this issue. Today as then, the regeneration of a global communist movement demands a clear understanding of the reasons for the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet workers state and the drawing of the appropriate lessons. Attempts to avoid a Marxist analysis for the defeat through conspiracy theories suggesting that Gorbachev was a CIA agent simply don't cut it. Even if he was, he would not have been able to bring down a workers state if that state was healthy. Others in the leadership, not to mention the Soviet working class, would have resisted. It is worth noting that after the Russian Revolution, it emerged that a large number, if not a majority, of the Bolshevik's parliamentary representatives in the pre-Soviet capitalist parliaments had been Tsarist secret police spies. Their spying, of course, hurt the party and facilitated much repression of communists. But they were not able to distort the party's political line one bit. Even the Tsarist spies had to carry out the Bolshevik line in public! A healthy CPSU would not have allowed any capitalist spy who had wormed their way into a senior position to divert the party from a correct communist line *let alone* take it down the road of capitalist counterrevolution!

So why was the Soviet workers state destroyed? Ultimately, Trotsky was proven correct when he explained that if the working class do not oust the bureaucracy and restore a regime of soviet democracy, the bureaucracy's continued rule would eventually open the path for capitalist

counterrevolutionaries to take over. This process took longer to play out than Trotsky had expected. But tragically, play out it did! By strangling workers' democracy, the bureaucracy caused economic stagnation. Its only response to this stagnation was to institute market reforms that in turn fueled capitalist restorationist tendencies. Meanwhile, by breeding cynicism about socialism through its bureaucratic privileges, through depoliticising the masses and through its political forebears literally exterminating the human link with the October Revolution through the horrific 1936-1940 Purge, the bureaucracy sapped the working class' ability to resist counterrevolutionary forces.

However, the above is only half the story and perhaps not even the most important half. For, analysing events from an international and historic standpoint, the main reason for the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet workers state was the incessant military, economic and political pressure of world capitalism. The bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet workers state was itself a product of that imperialist pressure. The bureaucracy's rule was in effect a punishment upon the international working class for their victory in October 1917 having remained as yet unfinished – that is, not yet extended to most of the rest of the world. Of course, just as a structure with cracks is less likely to bear the weight of overloading without crumbling, bureaucratic rule weakened the ability of the Soviet workers state to withstand capitalist pressure.

Of all the defects in the Soviet structure resulting from the bureaucratic administration, the most damaging was its policy of "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism. If just one or two of the impending revolutions that it (or the Moscow-line parties that it guided) betrayed had instead been allowed to consummate – whether in China 1927, Spain 1936-37, France 1936, Italy 1943-45, Italy 1948, Iraq 1958, France 1968, Italy 1969, Portugal 1975, South Africa mid 1980s and many other cases – proletarian rule would have spread to many more

countries by the late 1980s (if not globally) and the Soviet Union would have faced far less pressure. A fair portion of the blame for the USSR's demise must also be assigned to the PRC bureaucracy – in particular to the later Mao and then Deng administrations. Their criminal early 1970s to late 1980s anti-Soviet alliance with Western imperialism added greatly to the capitalist pressure that ended up squeezing the USSR to death. **An even greater share of guilt must be laid upon the social-democratic and pseudo-Leninist leaderships of the union movements and Far-Left groups in the imperialist countries. They largely failed to lift a finger to defend the USSR. For the most part, they even sided with the forces of capitalist counterrevolution on the basis of supporting "democracy".** The effect of their treachery was that they added to the imperialist pressure upon the Soviet Union rather than relieving it. Just as crucially, they left those communists in the Soviet Union who wanted to defend the workers state feeling isolated and friendless; and left with the impression that they had no choice but to surrender.

The downfall of the Soviet workers state was dramatic proof of Trotsky's assertion that it is impossible to secure proletarian rule and progress all the way to socialism while the richest countries in the world still remain under capitalist rule. Of course, once a workers state has been won in one country, every effort must be made to secure that conquest, build up a collectivised economy there and make as much progress towards socialism as possible. However, such work will in good part end up being a case of holding the socialistic fortress while working to make new proletarian victories abroad that would in turn enable the isolated workers state to advance further towards socialism. However, if the socialistic fortress does not receive solidarity from the working classes abroad and if the proletariat internationally does not itself take power in a number of countries, the socialist conquest will eventually face the prospect of meeting

the same fate as the former USSR. This is a crucial lesson for all those committed to defending the Chinese workers state. Today, it may seem that the PRC is invincible as she goes from one advance to the next – from eliminating extreme poverty to curbing COVID better than any country in the world to building crucial infrastructure in the developing world. Yet that is how it seemed in the USSR in its heyday too. For example in 1957, the Soviet Union stunned the world by launching the world's first satellite into space. Three and a half years later she put the first human into space. At the same time, the Soviet economy was growing at a rate more than twice that of the richest capitalist countries. This reality led then Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev to confidently predict that the Soviet Union would bury the capitalist world through peaceful economic competition. However, history proved that Khrushchev's strategy did not work. It indeed could not work, because the imperialists were not interested in "fair", "peaceful competition". They instead did everything in their power to undermine the workers state. And the stronger the Soviet Union grew, the more determined the capitalist powers were to destroy it.

Today, especially after the PRC responded to COVID so dramatically better than all the capitalist powers, the imperialist ruling classes have ratcheted up their Cold War offensive several notches. No matter how much Beijing reassures the imperialists that it fully accepts capitalist rule in most of the rest of the world, the capitalist powers do not let up on their attacks on the PRC. Their threats to boycott the Winter Olympics in Beijing have all the hallmarks of their boycott of the Moscow Summer Olympics in 1980.

Worryingly, there are several reasons why the PRC is in an even more difficult position than the USSR was. Due to the terrible colonial oppression that China suffered in her pre-1949 days, China is today even weaker, both economically and militarily, relative to the most powerful imperialist country, the U.S., than the USSR was, not

only at the time of her collapse but, even in the mid-1950s. When the USSR launched the Sputnik satellite into space, Soviet per capita income had reached one-third that of the USA. By contrast, the PRC's per capita income today is around just (by different estimates) one-sixth or one-fourth that of the USA. One should stress too that if any country could have pulled off "socialism in one country" it would have been the USSR. She was blessed with a huge land area and great natural wealth. The PRC, by contrast, is per head of population poor in mineral resources, arable land and water resources. Moreover, in terms of having fellow workers states that could potentially provide a reliable bulwark against imperialist pressure, the PRC is obviously in a weaker position than the USSR was in the years leading up to her collapse. Furthermore, the level of socialist consciousness in the international working class is overall much less now than it was in the last days of the USSR. The global workers movement is still recovering from the defeat that it suffered when the Soviet workers state was drowned in capitalist counterrevolution.

However, Trotskyists do not despair. Our revolutionary optimism flows from our understanding that capitalism itself creates the conditions for its own revolutionary overthrow. We know that painstaking and precise efforts by dedicated communists can create the parties needed to lead working class upsurges to socialist revolution. We know too that in the three decades since the USSR's collapse, increased industrialisation of countries like Mexico, Brazil, Indonesia, Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Egypt, Nigeria, South Africa and many more have increased the relative size of the proletariat in these countries and, thus, made the objective conditions more favourable for workers' revolution in these lands. Moreover, capitalism is in a more advanced state of economic and social decay than it was three decades ago. We can say too that there have already been more significant concrete actions in solidarity with the Chinese workers

state in Australia in recent years than there had been with the USSR during the entire period of the 1980s Cold War II. The most important of these actions was the October 2019 united front demonstration to mark the 70th anniversary of the Chinese Revolution that was built mainly by the Australian Chinese Workers Association and ourselves in Trotskyist Platform. That action saw some 70 people march through the heart of Sydney behind the slogans “Stand with Socialistic China” and “Condemn Hong Kong’s Pro-Colonial Rich Kid Rioters.” Such actions must urgently be built upon. **It is the responsibility of the working classes in the imperialist centres to mobilise actions in defence of the PRC and the other workers states; and to advance the socialist revolutions in our own countries that alone can ensure the long-term survival of the Chinese workers state and her progress onto complete socialism.**

Meanwhile, it is the responsibility of the PRC to undertake an internationalist policy of solidarity with the class struggle abroad. Understanding how Trotsky’s prophetic

warning, about the long-term impossibility of building socialism in one country if the richest countries in the world remain under capitalist rule, was tragically confirmed by the downfall of the USSR, the PRC must abandon its strategy of “friendly coexistence” with capitalism. That strategy and its corollary of mutual “non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries” has proven to be an abject failure. Beijing is certainly seeking “friendly coexistence” with the capitalist world and making no effort to promote class struggle in the capitalist countries. However, that is hardly a “mutually” reciprocated policy. For the capitalist powers have been doing everything possible to undermine socialistic rule in China. And they are getting more aggressive in this pursuit every day. The PRC must “mutually” reciprocate by doing everything possible to politically support the anti-capitalist struggles of the working class and all oppressed in the capitalist world – especially in the imperialist countries. That is after all what the Soviet government led by Lenin and Trotsky fought to do, until the right revisionists took over in 1924.

The Degeneration of the Fourth International

It is of enormous significance that world history after Trotsky’s death has vindicated his positions on all major questions. But what of the work of the Trotskyist Fourth International? In the last few months of his life, Trotsky fought hard to ensure that the Fourth International would be up to meeting its great mission during World War II. There were three main planks to the Fourth International’s platform that it established in 1940, while Trotsky was still alive, to guide their work during the war. Firstly, based on the understanding that the war between the rival capitalist powers was an imperialist war, just like World War I, Fourth International sections should not side with one capitalist bloc or the other but should work to turn the imperialist war into a civil war against each of their own respective capitalist ruling classes. History proved this position correct. Although they partly sold their war as a “war against fascism”, the Allies’ opposition to Germany, was driven by imperialist rivalry. Moreover, despite Stalin’s desperate appeals to Washington and London to open their promised second front, the U.S. and Britain did not make a serious attempt to defeat the Nazis until they saw the Soviets winning on the Eastern Front. And their reason for finally opening up a second front against Germany was that they feared that if the Red Army alone overran the Axis Powers all of continental Europe would go socialist. Meanwhile, the Anglo-American Allies main pre-occupation during their invasion of Italy from 1943 was to ensure that workers did not take over the country in the wake of the defeat of the Nazis. They deliberately slowed their advance northwards from the south of Italy in the hope that the Nazis occupying northern Italy would have sufficient time to terrorise the working class into submission.

The second main plank of the Fourth International's war program was the unconditional defence of the USSR. However, the Fourth International rightly stressed that this does not mean that they should defend whichever capitalist power happened to be allied with the USSR at a given time. No way! Nevertheless, to the extent that any capitalist state provided material assistance to the USSR (it turned out that, to the disgust of the Soviet leadership, the supplies provided by the U.S. and Britain to the USSR after 1941 were very limited), the Fourth International would not only not obstruct these deliveries but would seek to facilitate them. Thirdly, the Fourth International reaffirmed its defence of China against Japanese imperialism and its general support for the national liberation struggles of other colonial and semi-colonial countries whether they were under the imperialist tyranny of the Axis Powers or that of the "democratic" Allied ones. The Fourth International, for example, called for intensifying the struggle against the British subjugation of the Indian subcontinent and for combining that struggle with the fight for agrarian revolution in that region. "A revolution led by the [Indian] proletariat will be directed not only against British rule but also against the Indian princes, foreign concessions, the top layer of the national bourgeoisie, and the leaders of the National Congress, as well as against the leaders of the Moslem League", insisted the *May 1940 Manifesto of the Fourth International on Imperialist War* that was drafted by Trotsky.

During the war, many Fourth International sections fought bravely to put these positions into practice. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union, the seamen in the American SWP heroically volunteered to work on the dangerous sea route that provided U.S. supplies to the Soviet Union's northwestern port city of Murmansk. The Fourth Internationalists stressed unconditional defence of the Soviet Union. However, while maintaining this emphasis, they did still criticise the anti-Leninist policies of the Soviet leadership and the Stalinist parties in the West. They did so from the point of view that the Comintern's return to prettifying the U.S. and British imperialists

(as Trotsky had warned would happen) after a brief period of opposing them during the Germany-USSR pact, was undermining the international workers struggle so crucial to the ultimate defence of the Soviet workers state. The Fourth Internationalists understood that revolutionary class struggle in any of the imperialist countries would inevitably spark revolts by the German working class against the Nazi regime then invading the USSR. In a front page article in the 6 September 1941 issue of the SWP's paper the *Militant*, the party pointed out that the perspective of the U.S. and British imperialists was to hope that their German imperialist rivals and the Soviet workers state would destroy each other. Outlining how "the 'democratic' capitalists are basically as hostile to the Soviet Union as are the fascist capitalists", the article stressed that, "the only loyal allies of the Soviet Union are the workers of the world. They can best defend the Soviet Union by continuing the irreconcilable class struggle against all the imperialists, 'democratic' as well as fascist." Prophetically, given the Cold War that exploded just two years after Hitler's downfall and the collapse of the Soviet Union several decades later, the article stressed that:

"Only Workers' and Farmers' Governments can be true allies of the Soviet Union. Only if such revolutionary governments come to power in the United States and Britain can the Soviet Union be assured of security when Hitler is crushed."

The American SWP bravely continued to support and lead workers' strikes during the war and backed ongoing black peoples' struggles for liberation. As a result, the SWP faced persecution from the very early period of the war. In July 1941, the U.S. regime hit 29 SWP leaders and leaders of the SWP-led Teamsters Union branch in Minneapolis with charges. In 1943, eighteen of these comrades, including SWP head James Cannon, were imprisoned for between 12 to 18 months.

In occupied France, Trotskyists carried out truly heroic efforts to organise occupying German troops to revolt against their own imperialist regime. They put out a secret paper in German addressed to the occupying troops and organised political meetings between French revolutionaries and anti-Nazi German



The disaster that followed the counterrevolution that destroyed the Soviet Union in the early 1990s proved just how correct it was for Trotsky to stand for the unconditional defence of the Soviet workers state against imperialist attack and capitalist counterrevolutionary forces despite the grabbing of administrative control over the workers state by a bureaucratic layer in the mid-1920s. *Left:* A scene from the 1980s in the Soviet Union's Artek summer camp for children. The camp was located in the Crimean peninsula on the Black Sea in the then

Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. As well as bringing together children from different parts of the Soviet Union, the camp also included visitors from various parts of the world including from many countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and South America. At the camp, youth took part in sports and activities and generally had a great time while building strong friendships with people of different races and ethnicities.

Bottom Left: Post-Soviet, capitalist Ukraine. In Kiev, just a few hundred kilometres north from where Artek had been located, vacationing school children undergo military training and indoctrination in white supremacist and anti-Russian hatred at a base of the despicable, neo-Nazi Azov Battalion.

Bottom Right: Russian fascists, brandishing white supremacist flags, take part in the annual, extreme nationalist "Russia March" held on Russia's National Unity Day in 2016.

Below: A comparison of the life expectancy at birth in Russia and Ukraine with that in China based on data from the World Bank. At the end of the 1980s, before Russia, Ukraine and the rest of the former USSR started plummeting towards capitalist restoration, the average life expectancy in then Soviet Ukraine was about a year and a half higher than in the Peoples Republic of China, while the life expectancy in Soviet Russia was about the same as in China. However, capitalist counterrevolution brought a sharp plunge in the life expectancies in Russia, Ukraine and other former Soviet republics. Although life expectancies somewhat recovered later, this continued to be uneven, with life expectancies again falling in both Russia and Ukraine during COVID. In 2020, the

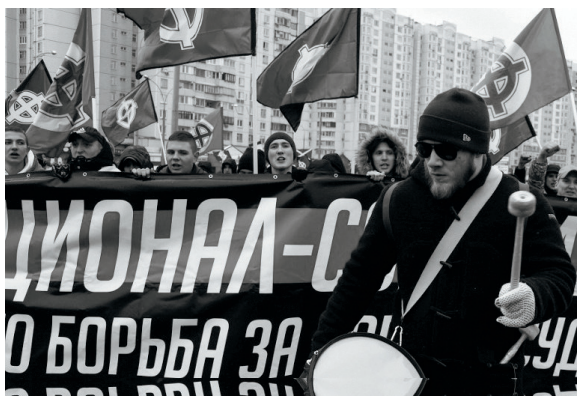
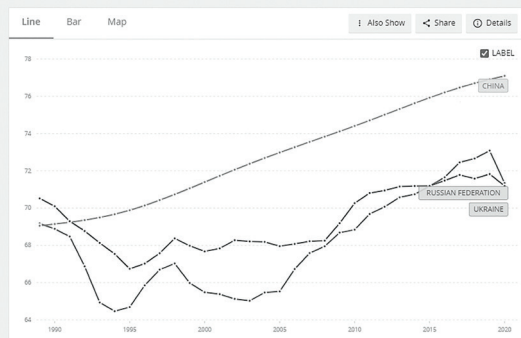
average life expectancy in Ukraine was basically the same as what it had been three decades earlier in Soviet times, despite the big advances in global medical science. By contrast in China, which remained under socialistic rule, the life expectancy has continued to grow robustly. By the end of 2020 (that is even before the current Ukraine-Russia War), the average life expectancy at birth in socialistic China was about seven years higher than in both capitalist Russia and capitalist Ukraine. This proves how much a defeat for the working class masses was the capitalist counterrevolution that destroyed the USSR.

Photo Credits: (Above photo): Vintage Everyday, (Below Left photo): Sergei Supinsky/AFP, (Below Right photo): AFP/Pool/Vasily Maximov

Life expectancy at birth, total (years) - Russian Federation, China, Ukraine

(1) United Nations Population Division, World Population Prospects: 2019 Revision, or derived from male and female life expectancy at birth from sources such as: (2) Census reports and other statistical publications from national statistical offices, (3) Eurostat: Demographic Statistics, (4) United Nations Statistical Division, Population and Vital Statistics Report (various years), (5) U.S. Census Bureau: International Database, and (6) Secretariat of the Pacific Community: Statistics and Demography Programme.

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troops for the purpose of motivating struggle against their own respective bourgeoisies. The pro-Trotskyist German troops helped provide travel passes for the French activists and even arms for the French resistance. Eventually Gestapo spies exposed the underground Trotskyist cell in the German army. Between fifty to a hundred revolutionary German troops and their French Trotskyist fraternisers were shot and dozens more were jailed, tortured and sent to the Buchenwald concentration camp.

Such repression devastated the Trotskyist movement in Europe. Many of their senior cadre were killed by the Nazis and a small number also by the Stalinists. As a result, younger cadre with little experience had to take over the leadership. Meanwhile, Nazi repression was so intense that the groups in each occupied country were scattered into many tiny grouplets. International collaboration between the Trotskyist sections was even more difficult. All this not only made political agitation difficult but affected the political line. Without comrades being able to meet – even within the same city, let alone internationally – the cadre could not collectively hammer out a correct Leninist line and, thus, were more permeable to alien political pressures. This was further exacerbated by the reality that the European sections of the Fourth International had not been in good political shape at the start of the war. The root cause was the disparity between the groups' small size and the urgent necessity for the existence of mass revolutionary parties in the context of not only the looming war but the militant working class struggles that indicated the possibilities for revolution. Many European Trotskyist sections had tried to overcome this divergence through opportunistic, political short cuts. Others tried to guard against such damaging opportunism by withdrawing from intervening into the actual mass struggles. These problems were only magnified during the hothouse climate of the war. In France, some Trotskyist grouplets capitulated to French imperialist sentiments by almost uncritically tailing after bourgeois resistance groups. On the other hand, others ignored the legitimate aspirations of the

French masses to throw off the Nazi occupiers. Moreover, the revisionist sentiments that caused the big anti-Soviet split in the SWP were present within the European Trotskyist sections. As a result, the stance taken on the Soviet Union of the different groupings was varied. Some took a correct Trotskyist stance. Others tried to avoid splits by minimizing any mention of the USSR. Still others tried to adopt "compromise" positions that could be acceptable to all members by only speaking of the need for political revolution to oust the bureaucracy, while not mentioning whether they were for or against defence of the USSR. In practice, this meant that those particular groupings abandoned defence of the Soviet workers state. Meanwhile, the root cause of the anti-Soviet revisionism – the entry into the movement of formerly social-democratic elements who had not fully broken with reformism, the presence of middle class intellectuals who had not completely turned their back on their former class and the ways of petit bourgeois dilettantism, etc, etc – affected the Trotskyists' work on other questions too. War is the toughest of tests for revolutionaries. Some of the top leaders of the Fourth International's European sections abandoned the movement at the start of the war, dealing a serious blow to the movement.

Encouragingly, determined efforts to organise an underground Europe-wide leadership of the Trotskyists did later help correct some of the opportunist, sectarian and anti-Soviet deviations of some grouplets. Moreover, the American SWP was able to take a more consistent Trotskyist stance during the war than most European Fourth International groupings. This was in good part because the party, unlike the European sections, had benefitted from a decisive split with the anti-Soviet revisionists. This made the rump party much more ideologically strong. Moreover, with SWP leaders having been able to visit Trotsky while he was still alive in Mexico, Trotsky had been able to guide the work of this section, up until 1940, much more than that of any other Fourth International section. Furthermore, the SWP did not face the same level of murderous repression as their comrades in Europe.

Whereas the SWP's class struggle line during the war had won them new recruits, the Fourth International's European sections, despite some truly heroic work, had emerged from the war in a weakened state. Their best cadres had been murdered and some key leaders had abandoned the movement. One of the first overt signs of revisionism appeared in the late 1940s when a section of the British Trotskyist movement led by Tony Cliff came up with a theory that the USSR had actually been "state capitalist" *for the previous twenty years!* This was an obvious capitulation to the anti-Soviet Cold War that had then just hit the world. When the 1950-53 Korean War commenced, the Cliffites publicly renounced the Trotskyist position of unconditional defence of the DPRK and PRC in the war. They were rightly expelled from the Fourth International for this. There are two Cliffite groups in Australia: Socialist Alternative and Solidarity.

The Fourth International as a whole was desperately missing the guidance of Trotsky when new theoretical questions arose at the end of the war. One of the points that Trotsky, if alive, would have addressed and provided a forward path from is that his prediction that the Soviet bureaucracy would not survive the war did not arise. Secondly, the anti-capitalist revolutions in Yugoslavia and China by majority peasant-based, revolutionary movements required a new Marxist analysis of how non-proletarian-centred movements were able to overthrow capitalism in certain non-imperialist countries and what the implications for this are for the Fourth International's work. Not being able to adequately address these questions caused theoretical confusion amongst Trotskyist cadre.

Yet amidst its weakened state, the European Fourth International sections faced huge immediate tasks. As Trotsky predicted, the war did lead to an outbreak of revolutionary struggles most notably in Italy and Greece. Elsewhere, including in France and Belgium, the working classes were waging massive general strikes that posed the possibilities of short-term progress onto revolution. The immediate need for mass Leninist parties to lead the struggles to revolution was obvious. Yet, the best of the workers in the capitalist

world continued to look to the Stalinist parties. They, mistakenly, still saw the Soviet leadership as the leaders of the party of the October Revolution and, thus, looked to the Moscow-aligned parties to lead them to salvation. Moreover, the Red Army's stunning defeat of Nazi Germany gave the Stalinists renewed authority amongst the masses. Yet the Trotskyists knew that the Moscow-line parties were not going to lead the workers in their respective countries to revolution. How then were the Trotskyists to bridge the gap between the immediate need for mass revolutionary parties and the reality that the most class conscious workers' allegiance to the pro-Moscow Communist parties would make it extremely difficult for the Trotskyists to win the leadership of the workers in a short time period? The European Trotskyists had already faced this challenge before the war started. Now they were confronted with it even more starkly at the end of the war. In the midst of theoretical confusion, the Fourth International tried to resolve this dichotomy between its massive tasks and its small size (and its limited immediate prospects for growth) by opportunist short cuts.

At the start of the 1950s, the new post-war leader of the Fourth International, Michel Pablo, proposed that Trotskyists conduct a deep entry into the mass Stalinist and social democratic parties. It must be stressed that what Pablo was advocating was not at all the tactic that Lenin and Trotsky had advocated when they sometimes proposed that communists enter leftward moving reformist groups for the purpose of winning the best of the host group's members 100% to the platform of authentic Bolshevism and then quickly splitting away from the reformist elements. On balance, it must be said that hindsight showed that, even when attempted in that latter Leninist manner, this tactic had largely proved to be a failure. This was especially the case in Europe where the entering Trotskyist formations became politically corrupted by their entry into left-social-democratic formations. However, what Pablo proposed went radically further than even that version of entryism. He was now advocating that Trotskyists enter reformist parties and remain there indefinitely. The

main purpose was no longer to win cadre to an irreconcilable Bolshevik party and to then make a hard break with the reformist party but to instead try to push these parties further to the left, all while hiding some of their own principles and modifying their policies to adapt to the host party. What Pablo was proposing was effectively the liquidation of the fight to build authentic Bolshevik parties. And since history had proven that even the most left-wing of socialist parties that were not 100% revolutionary-internationalist could not lead workers' revolutions anywhere (and could not lead anti-capitalist overturns of any sort in any imperialist country), in practice this meant the abandonment of the fight for workers' revolution, period! Given that the biggest and most vibrant mass reformist workers' parties in Europe – as in France and Italy – were then the Moscow-line parties, Pablo's agenda, in the short-term, most often meant adaptation to the politics of the Stalinist parties. However, **more significant than to who the Fourth International was then bending to was the fact that they were bending at all to some non-Leninist tendency and in the process abandoning the struggle to build authentic Leninist parties. For once the logic and spirit of capitulating to one non-Bolshevik set of forces is established, it is inevitable that a movement would adapt to other such forces when expediency demands it.** As we shall detail shortly, this is exactly what the, now revisionist, Fourth International did.

There was belated resistance to Pablo's course from a major portion of the Fourth International's French section and from the American SWP. A de facto split resulted in the Fourth International. The SWP's resistance arose both from the fact that it emerged in better theoretical and political shape at the end of the war than the European Trotskyist sections and because it did not face a really big Moscow-line party exerting a distorting gravitational pull on itself. Furthermore, once Cold War McCarthyism exploded in the U.S., the SWP felt a pressure to distance itself from the Soviet Union. In other words, the SWP's opposition to Pabloist adaptation to, largely, Moscow-line reformist parties, while partly motivated by a healthy opposition to

liquidation of the fight for Bolshevism, was also motivated by their own capitulatory course – in this case backpedaling in the face of McCarthyism. This was evident in the fact that the SWP's trade union work did not strongly enough oppose anti-communist persecution of Stalinist trade unionists. Part of this seems driven by the harmful desire for revenge upon the Stalinist CPUSA for the latter's despicable support to the U.S. regime's wartime imprisonment of Trotskyist leaders. Additionally, the SWP refused to recognise the PRC as a workers state until several years after the Chinese Revolution. It seems that the minor Stalinophobia evident in the SWP leaders' rejection of Trotsky's 1940 proposal for critical electoral support to the U.S. Stalinist leader had, in the context of Cold War hysteria, been magnified into a more serious retreat in the face of anti-Soviet hysteria. There was a faction of the SWP that did demand stronger defence of the Stalinist trade unionists against McCarthyist witch-hunting. But this healthy push was unfortunately driven from a very unhealthy support for Pabloism.

Overall, the Pabloist liquidators were on a faster train to abandonment of Leninism than the anti-Pabloists. But the SWP and Co. were on such a train too nevertheless! Therefore, by the early-mid 1950s, the Fourth International's sections were no longer authentic Trotskyist parties. They were, to be sure, for the most part, closer to being authentic Leninists than most of the Moscow-line Communist parties. However, they fell short of being authentic Bolshevik groups.

As the political climate changed, the Pabloist Fourth International adapted to different non-Leninist forces. They tailed after the gay liberation movement as it is – that is tailed after the movement with its existing non-Leninist leadership rather than supporting the gay liberation struggle with a Marxist program – and adapted to the 1960s student radical movement. The common thread was that in whatever movement that they intersected, they abandoned the struggle to promote and intervene with a fully Leninist-Trotskyist program. Given that the anti-Pabloists were also capitulating, albeit initially to different

pressures, the Pabloist Fourth International (now led by Ernest Mandel) and the SWP reunited in 1963. Later there were more splits and some fusions too. However, at the start of Cold War II, nearly all the major competing nominally “Trotskyist” internationals took an almost identical stand to each other in supporting the anti-communist, “pro-democracy” movements in the Soviet Bloc. They nearly all hailed the anti-communist, Polish Solidarnosc movement that was avidly backed by the reactionary Pope, by right-wing imperialist leaders like Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and by Australian imperialist prime ministers, Malcolm Fraser and Bob Hawke. Committing this betrayal were not only the Cliffites, the SWP and the anti-Pablo/anti-Mandel International Committee for a Fourth International (whose Australian section is today called the Socialist Equality Party) but all the Mandel-led groups.

It is telling that the Fourth International groups that in the 1950s capitulated to the popularity of the mass Moscow-line parties, three decades later joined their Cliffite and anti-Pabloist/anti-Mandel rivals in capitulating to Cold War, anti-Soviet “public opinion”. For those among these groups that still claimed to be “Orthodox Trotskyists”, their inappropriate use of Trotsky’s 1938 slogans from the USSR section of the *Transitional Program* – including the injudicious centring of the slogan of political revolution to oust the conservative bureaucracies of workers states – in this time of intense imperialist hostility to the Soviet Union and its allies formed one of the theoretical paths to their anti-Soviet capitulations. At one level this can be blamed on these ostensible “Trotskyists” being theoretically lazy and not being willing and able to think for themselves. At another level, they were fairly conscious **in choosing to** utilise the *Transitional Program*’s USSR section – **as opposed to say** the emphasis given in Trotsky’s crucial 1933 work *The Class Nature of the Soviet State* or in the section on the USSR in his 1934 *A Program of Action for France* – as the USSR section of the *Transitional Program*’s overwhelming focus on the call for political revolution to oust the bureaucracy

(which had been appropriate in 1938 but was not appropriate **as a slogan** for a time when the USSR was facing intense Cold War hostility) provided the cover for these groups to avoid having to stand four-square against the tide of anti-Soviet “public opinion”.

By the 1980s Cold War II, many a nominally Trotskyist organisation that in Trotsky’s time had been a genuine Bolshevik, left alternative to the Comintern parties had ended up as right, social-democratic opponents of the then Moscow-line parties – at least on the crucial question of their stance towards the then USSR and the other workers states. Just as social democratic opponents of the Bolsheviks in Lenin’s time tried to sell as “Marxism” their liberal-reformism and the post-1924 – and especially post 1935 – Comintern sold as “Leninism” their latter-day Menshevism, the degenerated nominal “Trotskyists” sought to sell as “Trotskyism” their left social-democratic politics (which were a latter day version of the politics of German left social-democrat Karl Kautsky who had attacked the young Soviet workers state for its refusal to adhere to bourgeois parliamentary “democracy”). Following on from their support for Solidarnosc, these pseudo-Trotskyists criminally called for “united front” support to the Boris Yeltsin-led counterrevolutionaries when those Washington-backed forces seized power in Russia in August 1991.

Today, nearly all these same nominally “Trotskyist” groups refuse to defend the Chinese workers state. Instead, using the ludicrous claim that China has gone – or has always been – capitalist, they line up behind counterrevolutionary forces like the pro-colonial, Hong Kong, rich-kid rioters. In diametric opposition to the stance of such groups, we in Trotskyist Platform are a notable exception amongst those that today call themselves “Trotskyist”. In standing energetically by the Chinese workers state – despite all its undermining through intrusion by capitalist economic forces – we are merely following in the tradition of Trotsky who fought to his last breath for the unconditional defence of the Soviet workers state *despite* its bureaucratic degeneration.

China's Trotskyists Move Away from Authentic Bolshevism

We have mentioned how the European Trotskyists were decimated by repression during World War II. Severe repression hit the Chinese Trotskyists even earlier. First the late 1929-early 1930 roundup of 200 Chinese Trotskyists resident in Moscow, then the arrest of almost all the Trotskyist Communist League of China (CLC) leaders in China in May 1931 and then finally the arrest of the remaining key leaders, including Chen Duxiu in October 1932. In these mass arrests, several of the Trotskyist prisoners were killed or died in jail.

The repression took a political as well as personal toll. By the time that Chen Duxiu was released from prison in 1937 he had moved away from Leninism in key areas. Chen now expressed opposition to the idea of establishing proletarian dictatorships and claimed that the Soviet Union was no different to the imperialist powers. Clearly the impact of yet another defeat – this time the close to total beheading of the CLC through repression – combined with the earlier smashing of the Great Revolution had, alongside the long harsh years in prison and the isolation that it brought, sapped Chen's revolutionary morale. It should be noted that Trotsky held Chen in very high esteem and hoped he could be won back to Leninism, especially since Chen continued to express sympathy for the Trotskyist movement. Before Chen was imprisoned, Trotsky had even once told Chen that he wanted to learn Chinese so that he could read Chen's writings in his original language. Trotsky recognised that Chen was a revolutionary of immense stature who had led three great movements – the 1919 anti-imperialist May Fourth Movement, the CPC and then the Chinese Trotskyist movement. However, Chen did not undergo a political regeneration after his release from prison. He did not participate in public political activity in his final years and died in obscurity in 1942.

Despite repeated arrests of its key cadre, the Chinese Trotskyist movement, each time, made partially successful efforts at revival. However, they faced not only repression but massive slander campaigns directed against them by a clique in the CPC led by Wang Ming (Stalin's man in the CPC). In 1931, after he had been earlier sent by Moscow to take over the CPC, Wang unleashed the anti-Trotskyist slander campaign. When Wang returned again in 1937 to take over the party – this time unsuccessfully – he unleashed a still

more vicious slander campaign accusing the Trotskyists and Chen Duxiu of being variously Japanese or KMT agents. Mao at first avoided buying into the slander campaign but in the end acquiesced – likely in order to maintain relations with Moscow. These accusations of being “Japanese agents” did not stop the Japanese occupation forces from murdering several of the Trotskyist cadres. Meanwhile, some of the Trotskyists made heroic efforts at building guerilla resistance to the occupation forces.

Wang Ming's slander campaign was aimed at both ensuring that CPC members did not consider the Trotskyists' program and at making the broader masses wary of the Trotskyists. In part, the campaign succeeded. Repeated imprisonments combined with the effect of the slanders isolated the Trotskyists. In 1941, the CLC split into two groups over major differences over war policy. The larger of the groups became known as the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) and the smaller the Internationalist Workers Party (IWP). After the end of the war both groups had a revival in activity and recruitment.

However, there was now a really big problem. Both groups were taking a terrible position on the Civil War that had exploded in 1946 between the CPC and the KMT. The RCP was at best neutral demanding that “both the KMT and the CPC should unconditionally stop the war.” When the CPC was close to winning in the latter years of the war, this demand took on an especially harmful character as the implementation of the demand would have meant the aborting of the victory of the revolutionary toilers. The IWP's position was only marginally better. When the CPC's revolutionary forces triumphed, both groups failed to welcome the victory and refused to recognise the PRC as a workers state.

Here was the world's greatest victory for the downtrodden since the Russian Revolution – and in some ways the greatest victory ever – and these parties were at best neutral on it! That means that these parties could no longer be called Trotskyist. Indeed, objectively speaking they were further away from authentic Leninism than was the Maoist CPC. Some period later, both the groups recognised the PRC as being deformed workers states. However, this change was too little, too late, especially given that there does not seem to have been a serious attempt to come to grips with what led them to their earlier deviant position or indeed any appreciation of just how awful their stance had been.

Nevertheless, the fact that the RCP and IWP did change their line to recognise the progressive content of the PRC was better than nothing. However, in December 1952, the Mao government arrested all the avowed Trotskyists residing in mainland China and their family members in a massive dragnet operation. Relatives, those who recanted and those who agreed to re-education were soon released. But many were jailed for long periods. In general, the prisoners were given better treatment than regular prisoners. However, the jailing of the ostensible Trotskyists was truly cruel and unjust. Twelve of the prisoners spent 27 years incarcerated.

When the twelve longest incarcerated prisoners were finally freed in 1979, one of the long-time Trotskyists, Zheng Chaolin was later given a seat in the advisory, upper house of the Shanghai municipal legislature, the Shanghai People's Consultative Conference. Until his death, Zheng continued to speak out defending his politics and his previous work. One can admire his resolve and tenacity. However, the Chinese organisations that today call themselves "Trotskyist" have nothing to do with authentic Trotskyism. Although the IWP which Zheng belonged to was dissolved in the 1950s, its rival, the RCP, still exists. The RCP backs anti-communist, pro-democracy "dissidents" in China and was noted for prominently backing the well-known such dissident, Wei Jingsheng, and his call for multiparty parliamentary elections in

China. However, Leninists are categorically opposed to parliamentary "democracy" being imposed on workers states. In so-called "democracies", the capitalists and other privileged classes are able to use their massive wealth to disproportionately fund political forces and, thus, disproportionately influence all political events – including elections. Such "democracies" see the working class left as atomised individuals, easily swayed by bourgeois propaganda. That is why in Western countries the form of parliamentary "democracy" is but a means of imposing a dictatorship of the capitalist class. Leninists refer to such "democracies" as "bourgeois democracies." Although the PRC is not a capitalist country, inequality remains and was present even when Wei Jingsheng first made his push for parliamentary "democracy" there. If parliamentary democracy was instituted in China it would be tycoons, privileged bureaucrats, high-paid managers of capitalist companies and other wealthy individuals who would gain a greatly disproportionate influence. So would the overseas imperialists and Hong Kong and Taiwanese capitalists who would all use their tremendous wealth to favour pro-capitalist candidates. That is why **the imperialist powers and pro-capitalist "dissidents" always call for "free, multiparty, parliamentary elections" in socialistic countries. For they understand that such parliamentary elections are the road to capitalist counterrevolution.** Trotsky explicitly opposed any call for "free elections" and bourgeois democracy in the USSR, even after its bureaucratic degeneration. Instead he called for proletarian democracy – that is the rule through elected workers soviets:

"We are fighting for proletarian democracy precisely in order to shield the country of the October Revolution from the 'liberties' of bourgeois democracy, that is, from capitalism....

"It is necessary to reject and condemn the program of struggle for 'the freedom to organize' and all other 'freedoms' in the USSR – because this is the program of bourgeois democracy. To this program of bourgeois democracy we must counterpose the slogans and methods of proletarian democracy, whose aim, in the struggle against bureaucratic centrism, is

to regenerate and fortify the dictatorship of the proletariat.”

L.D. Trotsky, *The Defense of the Soviet Union and the Opposition* (1929), *Marxist Internet Archive*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1929/09/fi-b.htm>

The RCP not only backs the counterrevolutionary call for multiparty, parliamentary elections in mainland China but is a strong supporter of the pro-colonial, “pro-democracy” movement in Hong Kong. That rich people’s movement seeks bourgeois “democracy” in order to

ensure that it will be the capitalists and the upper middle class who will be able to continue to dominate Hong Kong. They want such bourgeois “democracy” in order to repulse the “threat” of the Chinese workers state instituting pro-working class and pro-socialist measures in Hong Kong. Thus, in standing by the movements for bourgeois democracy in mainland China and Hong Kong, the RCP is on the side of, respectively, capitalist counterrevolution and capitalist preservation.

The Positive Impact of the Chinese Trotskyists

Although the Chinese Trotskyist movement degenerated into something far removed from authentic Trotskyism, in its healthy early days it made a positive impact on the Chinese Revolution in two ways. Firstly, through the participation of Chinese students won to Trotskyism in the agitation of the Soviet Left Opposition, these Chinese Trotskyists helped their Soviet counterparts to have such a political influence that they ended up pressuring the then Soviet leadership to, at long last, crack down on the USSR’s dangerously growing rural capitalist class and seriously undertake the collectivisation of agriculture. By in this way helping to save the USSR from the imminent threat of a kulak-led counterrevolution in 1928, the Chinese Trotskyists helped make it possible for the USSR to later provide invaluable material aid to Chinese revolutionaries during the 1946-1949 Civil War – assistance without which China’s 1949 Revolution would not have been possible.

Secondly, although the Chinese Trotskyists did not win the leadership of the Chinese toilers, they did shape the ideas of CPC members and supporters. That the Trotskyists, in their early days, had a big impact on the CPC is evident from the fact that of the CPC youth sent to cadre schools in the USSR, nearly half ended up becoming Trotskyists or Trotskyist sympathisers. Meanwhile in China itself, the former top leader of the CPC as well as several other upper and middle-ranking CPC members became Trotskyists. For a period, the Trotskyists even had a bigger base amongst Shanghai workers than the official CPC. Meanwhile, even those CPC cadre who did not join the Trotskyists were profoundly affected by their ideas. These included some of the delegates to the Sixth Congress of the CPC that was held in Moscow in mid-1928. After Chinese Trotskyists residing in the USSR smuggled translations of Trotsky’s writings into the hands of delegates, several leading delegates found the ideas compelling. Other CPC leaders then had to spend a great deal of time de-“Trotskyifying” these delegates. However, some of the ideas would still have

left a lasting impact. Moreover, the amount of resources that the GPU spent on preparing its late 1929-early 1930 crackdown on Chinese Trotskyists in the Soviet Union and the amount of effort that the Comintern went to in order to unleash the Wang Ming-driven anti-Trotskyist slander campaigns shows just how concerned the Comintern and its allies were about the influence of the Trotskyists within the Chinese communist movement.

What made Trotskyist ideas carry more weight amongst CPC cadre is that many did not believe Wang Ming’s slanders. True, many younger, less informed members bought the lies. But the older generation of CPC cadre saw the Trotskyists as well-meaning fellow revolutionaries. Privately, Mao also thought that way but he cynically supported the slander campaigns to maintain the favour of Stalin. Behind the scenes, Mao criticised the Great Purge in the Soviet Union. Indeed, the year before Wang’s second return to China in 1937, the CPC issued a united-front call for action against Japanese imperialism that included an appeal to the CLC (the mere existence of that appeal was also an

implicit rejection of the slander that the Trotskyists were “Japanese agents”). One of the mechanisms through which the influence of Trotskyist ideas actually affected the CPC’s work is in the outcome of crucial factional struggles. The most important of these is the one fought in the late 1930-early 1940s between Moscow’s man Wang Ming and Mao Ze Dong. Under Moscow’s direction, Wang wanted the CPC to subordinate itself more servilely to the KMT in the United Front against Japanese imperialism. Mao wanted the CPC to maintain greater independence from the KMT. Those CPC cadre influenced by Trotskyist ideas, if only partially, would have been more likely to support Mao. Mao did emerge victorious. Although his program was not authentically Bolshevik either, the victory of Mao over Wang ensured the possibility of the anti-capitalist revolution. If Wang had won, the CPC would have been reduced to its line from the mid-1920s. There could be no revolution with that program. To the extent that the impact of Trotskyist ideas on CPC cadre helped ensure Wang’s defeat in the factional struggle, it helped to make the 1949 Revolution a possibility.

One should add that because the CPC and

Comintern were always concerned about losing influence to the Trotskyists, the CPC likely made their platforms and practice more left-wing than they otherwise would be in order to protect their more radical members and supporters from defecting to the Trotskyists. After all, the Canton insurrection and the period of the post-1927 adventurism was in part a way for the Comintern to outflank the Trotskyists. It is possible that the Mao perspective for the Chinese Revolution, which is notably more radical than the Bukharin-Stalin perspective of the mid-late 1920s was partly shaped by a need to be credible to CPC members and workers influenced by Trotskyist ideas. Of course, we cannot entirely credit the Trotskyists for Mao’s more radical perspective. For Mao himself had been opposed to the ultra-Menshevik line imposed on the CPC by the Comintern during the Great Revolution. Nevertheless, Mao, like other CPC members would have felt the left political pressure exerted by the Trotskyists. And as we noted earlier, if the CPC’s theory during the Chinese Civil War had simply been the Bukharin-Stalin theory of the mid-1920s rather than Mao’s more radical, half-way-Permanent Revolution perspective, there would have been no 1949 Revolution.

The Degeneration of the Chinese Trotskyist Movement *in Historical Context*

So what made the Chinese Trotskyists, after their early good work, veer off so far from authentic Bolshevism that they failed to support the Chinese Revolution when it took place? Theoretical confusion seems to be part of the reason. We know that the Fourth International, as a whole, was struggling with the issue of peasant-based anti-capitalist revolutions. There were other factors responsible for the degeneration too. Their isolation from the masses caused by repeated imprisonments and Wang Ming’s slander campaigns necessarily limited the Trotskyists understanding of their own society.

Like with their international counterparts, a major cause of the Chinese Trotskyists’ degeneration was the skewing of the movement caused by the recruitment of those not fully committed to Leninist principles. It is likely that this played an even greater factor in the Chinese Trotskyist movement than other Fourth International sections. This is because the initial cadre in the CLC were in good part recruited during the Third Period. Later accounts from former Chinese Trotskyists seemed to indicate that many of those won to Trotskyism from the

grouping of CPC leaders around Chen Duxiu were largely won over not mainly because of their adherence to Permanent Revolution but because of their agreement with Trotsky’s assessment that the Great Revolution had been defeated after the 1927 massacres and that communists should therefore first focus on partial and democratic demands to revive the movement before moving to the offensive. The trouble is that one could agree with Trotsky’s correct opposition to the Comintern’s adventurism and with his correct agitational

focus on partial and democratic demands either if one is animated by authentic Bolshevik impulses like Trotsky or because one has a reformist-pacifist bent and would, therefore, recoil from revolutionary actions and more offensive demands at any time. It seems that especially looking at the “Chen Duxiuites,” both types of people were won over to the Trotskyist movement. It is known that a party or coalition is only as strong as its weakest elements – especially if those elements are more than a tiny few in number. Or in other words, parties operate on their lowest common denominator and the most rightist, reformist elements inside a communist party can end up setting the agenda. The danger of people with reformist-pacifist impulses becoming senior figures in the movement would not have been apparent in times of relatively low levels of class struggle. However, when an intense Civil War is raging, reformist and pacifist leanings become exposed. It seems that the reformist-pacifist inclined members dragged the Trotskyist groups into bending to “peace now” sentiments within the cities that the Trotskyists were based in – sentiments that would have no doubt been abundant during the Civil War.

It seems also that some of the Chen Duxiuites joined the Trotskyists largely out of personal loyalty and out of a feeling that Chen had been treated unfairly by the Comintern and CPC when they blamed him entirely for the 1927 defeat. Such personal loyalty is a good quality in personal relationships. However, they are a poor basis for building communist parties, which must be based entirely on shared agreement with principles and program. Such a personalist way of seeing political issues plagued the official CPC too. It is worth stepping back and examining why this happened. Our explanation goes back to the law of combined and uneven development, a law that Trotsky spoke much about when formulating his theory of Permanent Revolution. China in the first half of the 20th century was a country of great social backwardness where remnants of feudalism were widespread. At the same time she had some big factories, ports and transport infrastructure built with imperialist capital. And she existed in the modern world, the world soon after the October Revolution. This combined and uneven development meant that before China had time to even see the development

of a widespread trade union movement and reformist left parties, she already had the emergence of a mass communist party inspired by the Russian Revolution. Chinese comrades were participating in communist parties – the most progressive organisations possible – while still being shaped by their rearing in a society where feudal values – like leader worship and the placing of personal loyalty before principle – were dominant. The latter is where the excessive importance given to loyalty to Chen Duxiu amongst some of those who joined the Trotskyists came from and where the unwanted personalism within both the Trotskyist CLC and the official CPC arose from. The personal loyalty to Chen Duxiu may have seemed to bring a short-term advantage to the CLC but, actually, recruitment on such a basis weakens the party – especially when the movement is faced with major events like a Civil War.

The combined and uneven development of 1920s China meant that before a trade union and Left movement tempered in partial struggles could be consolidated and stabilised, she saw a massive revolution that had the potential to lead to the overturn of capitalism (i.e. the 1925-27 Great Revolution). Thus, dramatic events were compressed into a short period of time, much shorter than even in Russia. **The Great Revolution lit up China just four years after the CPC was formed!** All this meant that Chinese communists were confronted with revolutionary events before they had even time to temper themselves in daily political work and before they had time to deepen their understanding of Marxist theory and practice. This explains the relatively low, theoretical level of the CLC, despite the incredible courage, resourcefulness and ingenuity of the Chinese Trotskyist comrades in their early years. After all, many cadres went, in just a short few years, from having no knowledge of Marxism whatsoever and having no previous experience of involvement in any organised labour struggles to playing prominent roles in a massive revolution, enduring a bloody defeat and then being won to Trotskyism. The frenetic pace of events and the spectacularly explosive rise of communist and union movements in China were products of her combined and uneven development – the very phenomena that made her so ripe for Permanent Revolution.

Lessons of the Degeneration of the Fourth International

If one steps back and examines the degeneration of the Fourth international more broadly, some of the very same factors that caused the degeneration of the Chinese Trotskyists are evident. The decimation of leading cadre through state repression, theoretical confusion, the recruitment of those not fully committed to Bolshevik principles – especially during the “Third Period” – and so on. Meanwhile, all Fourth International sections faced the huge divide between their massive tasks and their often small size (the latter a product of the advantage over them that Moscow-line parties had both because of the material support provided by the Soviet state and because leftist workers’ sympathy for the Soviet Union was usually transferred into support for the Moscow-line Communist Parties). Attempts to quickly bridge this divide often spurred opportunist lunges.

For the groups in the imperialist countries, there is another cause for their eventual degeneration in the direction of anti-Soviet, social democracy. Adapting to the intense anti-Soviet Cold War, “Trotskyist” groups often selectively applied Trotsky’s slogans on the USSR so that they would seem the least oppositional to Cold War “public opinion” and the least aggressively Soviet defencist. This, of course, led these parties to attract and recruit elements who were less intransigently committed to opposing the anti-Soviet Cold War drive than existing members. This skewed these parties further and made them apply Trotsky’s formulations in a yet more inappropriate manner which attracted still less resolute elements and so on. In this way, the parties spiraled themselves down into a social-democratic rejection of the fundamental Trotskyist tenet of **unconditional** military defence of workers states.

So what are the lessons? For one it is apparent that Trotskyists must be more diligent in ensuring that new recruits truly subscribe to the principles and spirit of the party. This is especially the case when the party happens to be winning people on the basis of opposition to ultra-leftist deviations of another tendency – as it was during the Comintern’s “Third Period”. Right now we do not see any tendency taking a “Third Period” line. Nevertheless, today elements could be won over to Trotskyism from dissenting voices within adventuristically militant, far-left anarchist milieus. One must be careful that agreement with elements breaking from such

milieus on the need to avoid adventurist actions that are not centred on the mobilisation of the masses does not allow any recruits recoiling from such milieus to bring with them a pacifist or reformist rejection of all militant struggle. Of course, all this is easier said than done. For in tumultuous periods, there is a need for rapid recruitment. This inevitably brings with it the pressure to reduce the level of political vetting of potential recruits. Nevertheless, the experience of the Fourth International has shown that much harm was done by opening the parties to elements not truly won over to Leninist-Trotskyist principles.

The second crucial lesson that we must assimilate from the degeneration of the Fourth International is that nominally Trotskyist groups that have tried to artificially overcome the contradiction between their huge tasks and their modest size through opportunist short cuts have **always** headed towards political oblivion. So the understanding that there should be no opportunist short cuts under any circumstances is an important lesson. Thirdly, it is apparent that the senseless application of Trotsky’s slogans (especially those related to the then existing workers state, the USSR) to contexts and periods very different from when he advocated those slogans has also caused much disorientation to nominally Trotskyist groups.

However, there are no silver bullets as far as avoiding political degeneration is concerned. Every communist party is constantly faced with degenerative pressures. Ultimately, one can say that the Fourth International succumbed

to the same pressures that destroyed the Third International (the Comintern) as a revolutionary force several decades earlier. Leninists are tested every day. In the end, the degeneration of a communist political party is a consequence of the same pressures that caused the degeneration and then destruction of the Soviet workers state. Those pressures are the pressures exerted by the powerful capitalist ruling classes. A difference is that Leninist parties are far more fragile than workers states. A workers state's ruling party can degenerate to unrecognisable levels under hostile pressure but the state can continue to survive for much longer as it is propped up by real material relationships and the anti-capitalist sentiments of its most conscious toilers who act as a bulwark against counterrevolutionary forces. The Bolshevik Party had degenerated by 1924 and had been effectively dead by the end of the 1930s but the USSR continued to survive as a workers state for many decades longer and continued to bring great benefits to her people until she was destroyed by capitalist counterrevolution in the early 1990s.

One observation that we should make is that ever since most of the nominal "Trotskyists" took the side of imperialism in the 1980s Cold War II, it is no longer true that people that call themselves "Trotskyists" are necessarily closer to authentic Bolshevism and thus authentic "Trotskyism" than those that consider themselves anti-Trotskyist, "Marxist-Leninists". This had been largely true when Trotsky was still alive – especially in the countries whose sections Trotsky was more able to influence. However, it is no longer true today. Of course, it is still very possible that an avowed Trotskyist group has a better line on many questions than a non-Trotskyist left group. However, there are certainly many cases where many avowedly Trotskyist groups are more objectively distant from true Leninism than many avowedly anti-Trotskyist, "Marxist-Leninist" or even "Anarcho-Communist" formations and sometimes, though rarely, even avowedly Stalinist groupings.

One implication of all this is that the slogan used by some ostensibly Trotskyist groups: "Reforge the Fourth International" is no longer useful today. For the slogan implies that those who are avowed Trotskyists are necessarily closer to authentic Bolshevism than parties that are not and that the former merely need to be re-oriented and regrouped into a renewed Fourth International. This notion can be disorientating when it is obviously not still the case that avowed Trotskyists are necessarily closer to authentic Leninism than those nominal Marxists who do not claim adherence to Trotskyism. For example, this incorrect notion can lead to healthier nominally Trotskyist groups feeling the pressure to amend their own slogans away from what they know to be correct just in order to protect themselves from severe criticism by others in the supposed "Trotskyist family." As an example, a healthier Trotskyist group could feel the pressure to curtail taking, say, a too intransigent stand in defence of the PRC workers state out of concern that other "Trotskyists" would accuse them of being "Stalinists" for doing so.

At the same time the idea that nominal Trotskyists are necessarily more politically flawed than other leftists is also incorrect. It is true that many nominally "Trotskyist" groups took an appalling line during the 1980s Cold War and are taking a similar stand with respect to today's anti-PRC Cold War. Misapplication of Trotsky's slogans allows them to falsely claim "justification" for such capitulations. But it is hardly only Trotskyists who are guilty of capitulating to the incessant pressure of Cold War anti-communism. For example, two anti-Trotskyist, nominally "Marxist-Leninist" parties in Australia – the Australian Communist Party and the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) – take anti-PRC positions. Both support (albeit with criticism) the anticommunist, pro-colonial Hong Kong opposition forces. Meanwhile, the avowedly Trotskyist group that has written this article, Trotskyist Platform, is proudly the staunchest and most active group in opposing the anti-PRC Cold War drive in Australia.



June 2013, Huairou District, Beijing. *Below left:* American capitalist owner of a medical devices manufacturer is held hostage by workers (Top) who got wind of his plan to retrench them. The feisty workers gave the greedy boss his own back as they shone lights and banged on his window to deprive the captured exploiter of sleep. When trade union and Chinese government officials intervened (*Below right*) to negotiate with the business boss, they joined with workers in pressuring the capitalist to accede to workers demands, which he was eventually forced to do. While being held hostage, the capitalist told American media that the most upsetting thing about his plight was his “disappointment” with the Chinese government for doing nothing to help him. After workers took the capitalist hostage, Chinese police refused to do anything to come to his aid, Chinese state media tacitly backed the workers and government officials pressured him to accede to workers demands. Although a narrow bureaucratic layer administers China, the continued consciousness amongst workers that society does and ought to belong to them – a healthy sense of entitlement that arose from their joint triumph with poor tenant farmers during the 1949 Revolution – has ensured, that up to now, China’s ruling bureaucracy continues to, albeit in an incomplete way, uphold the workers state and pro-worker socialist ownership of key sectors of China’s economy. However, whether working class rule in China will continue to be upheld and whether it will progress onto complete socialism is still a question that has not been decided. This world-shaking question will be settled through intense political battles within China and in the international arena.



In the end, all Marxist groups are subjected to the same pressures regardless of the political tradition that they claim to stand on. For leftists operating in a capitalist country these pressures include the threat of state repression faced by authentic communists, the potential victimisation and exclusion from employment of leftist and class struggle militants by capitalist bosses and, most overbearing of all, the remorseless pressure of bourgeois-created, anti-communist “public opinion” that inevitably squeezes every socialist from all sides. How truly a nominally Marxist group fights for a revolutionary line in good part depends on how well the organisation resists the degenerative pressures of bourgeois society no matter what particular political tradition that the group claims to stand on. Too often, ostensible “Trotskyists” and pro-Stalin “Marxist-Leninists” have succumbed to these pressures in almost identical ways. We have already noted above how, today in Australia, several supposed “Trotskyist” groups and anti-Trotskyist “Marxist-Leninist” groups alike are, albeit with slightly different excuses, siding with counterrevolutionary forces arrayed against the PRC workers state. Such identical treachery by tendencies nominally on opposite sides in their attitude towards Trotskyism has been common over the last several decades. An important example occurred in Sri Lanka. This has particular significance because, since the death of Trotsky, it is in Sri Lanka where forces claiming adherence to Trotskyism had their greatest influence.

In the period before her independence, pro-Trotskyist leftists led massive workers’ strikes in Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon) – including in the country’s central highlands tea and rubber plantations where descendants of Tamil labourers brought in from South India by the British as semi-indentured workers continued to be brutally exploited. The Trotskyists spearheaded Ceylon’s independence struggle from British colonialism. They had such mass support that despite, as in all “free elections” under capitalism, having far fewer financial resources and media support than

the bourgeois parties, the two avowedly Trotskyist parties, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Bolshevik Samasamaja Party (which three years later merged into the LSSP), won a combined almost 17% of the vote in Ceylon’s elections held shortly before her February 1948 independence. The country also had a Stalinist party, the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL – then called the Communist Party of Ceylon) which, while smaller than the LSSP, also had mass support. In August 1953, the LSSP – and to a lesser extent the other left parties in Ceylon – led a massive general strike after the government took measures that led to a huge increase in the price of rice and made other attacks on social welfare. Importantly, strike leaders also demanded an end to the disenfranchisement of ethnic Tamils living in the upcountry plantation areas, who the Sinhalese-chauvinist (Sinhalese being the majority ethnic group in the country) government had prevented from gaining citizenship. Thus, the strike united Ceylon’s workers of all different ethnicities in all parts of the country. Workers took militant action to enforce the strike including by sabotaging rail lines, knocking down telegraph and telephone posts to block roads and sending squads of flying pickets to attack buses driven by scab drivers. The government was so terrified of the prospect of workers’ revolution that they not only unleashed brutal army attacks on the striking workers but decided that the only place where the cabinet could safely hold their emergency meeting was aboard a British warship that had docked in the harbor of the capital. However, instead of the LSSP and CPSL leading the militant working class to unite all the toilers in struggle towards the seizure of state power, these nominally “Trotskyist” and “Stalinist” parties both drifted towards a popular front alliance with one of Ceylon’s two main bourgeois parties, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). In 1956, the CPSL despicably joined an SLFP-led government, even after that government ran on a racist platform of *Sinhala Only* – that is, preferential status for those fluent in the Sinhala language spoken by the majority

ethnic group and no recognition for those who spoke Tamil or otherwise could not speak Sinhala. In 1964, the LSSP too subordinated itself to the SLFP, which can be thought of as Sri Lanka's version of the Kuomintang. The supposedly "Trotskyist" LSSP united with their anti-Trotskyist, "Marxist-Leninist" rivals in the CPSL in a popular front coalition with the SLFP. The same year they joined the SLFP-led government and treacherously took up ministerial posts in the capitalist government. Some more principled Marxists within the LSSP did do the right thing and split from the party in opposition to its embrace of the bourgeois SLFP but many of these elements over the years drifted back towards popular frontist politics. Although the popular front government collapsed in 1965, in 1970 the LSSP and CPSL again took up ministries in a new SLFP-led government. Pushed by the demands of the toiling masses, the left parties did get some minor progressive measures through. However, they were part of governments that oversaw continuing cruel exploitation of workers and peasants, discriminatory policies against Tamil students living in the North and East of the country, the brutal repression of protests by Tamil youth in the northern city of Jaffna, murderous suppression of a 1971 uprising by leftist youth in the south and massive corruption. Seven years of popular front coalition so disappointed the masses that it paved the way for the right-wing to gain the ascendancy in 1977. Yet the "Trotskyist" LSSP and the "Marxist-Leninist" CPSL continued on the same treacherous path of the popular front. For the majority of the last three decades, they have been part of SLFP-led capitalist governments. In doing so they helped preside over the Sri Lankan regime's genocidal suppression of the Tamil people's struggle for self-determination. However, when it comes to Marxist politics, crime does not pay! Today, in both size and influence, both the LSSP and CPSL are a shadow of what they were when they first embarked down the road of the popular front. However, with their capitulations they have dragged the working class down with them. The betrayals of

both the "Trotskyists" and the anti-Trotskyist "Marxist-Leninists" alike have decimated Sri Lanka's once huge Left and put the Lankan working class which was once class-conscious, strongly pro-socialist and in 1953 on the verge of taking power on the back foot and divided and diverted by Sinhalese chauvinism and nationalist resentments. One could say that at least the "Marxist-Leninist" CPSL acted consistently with the "Peoples Front/Popular Front" strategy proclaimed by the Comintern in 1935 and uninterruptedly adhered to by most Moscow-line parties around the world from 1941 onwards. By contrast, the supposedly "Trotskyist" LSSP completely violated Trotsky's opposition to the Popular Front strategy. In other words, while the CPSL followed the flawed tradition that they stand on, the LSSP, while acting in an almost identical way to the CPSL, spat on the very political tradition that they claim to stand on.

The LSSP and CPSL are on opposite sides of bitter theoretical and historical debates about Trotskyism, Stalin, Trotsky, the Great Purge and even *in the abstract* about the strategy of the Popular Front/Peoples Front, yet in substance they have acted in an almost identical way, often in coalition with each other. And the identical path that they took was to sell out the Lankan working class, the subjugated Tamil minority and all the oppressed people of the island in the pursuit of a popular front coalition with the "national" bourgeoisie. **This treachery has far, far greater importance than the fact that the two parties adhere to rival traditions.** Actions speak louder than words! **Both the "Trotskyist" LSSP and the anti-Trotskyist "Marxist-Leninist" CPSL capitulated in the face of the disintegrative pressures that capitalist society places on any nominally Marxist party.** In the case of the LSSP and CPSL, they were knocked off the rails not only by the bourgeois pressures that would confront all socialist parties – small and large – but by the corrupting effect of leaders of larger leftist parties being enticed by the perks and status that would come from accepting ministries in capitalist governments.

The bottom line of all this is that **any socialist workers group must be judged mainly by their actual actions and political positions and not mainly by the particular “ism” (whether that be Trotskyism or Stalinism or Maoism or anarchism or some other “ism”) that they claim to stand by.** Or in other words, the proof of the pudding is in the eating and not in the recipe. As avowed Trotskyists we can say that an avowed “Stalinist” in Australia who in action defends the PRC workers state, refuses to prettify “liberal” bourgeois parties like the Greens, believes that fascist forces can only be defeated by mass working class-led action rather than appeals to the capitalist state and who opposes divisive protectionism is closer to being an authentic Leninist and, thus, an authentic Trotskyist than a “Trotskyist” who takes the opposite positions. However, **while the proof of the pudding is in the eating, the recipe is still important.** It is true that just like how a cook who can bake a good pudding with a bad recipe has great cooking instincts, a socialist who can arrive at the correct positions despite a flawed political theory has good revolutionary class instincts. But sooner or later, the cook with the bad recipe, perhaps when tired, will get the pudding wrong. Similarly, flawed political principles based on a flawed political tradition will eventually lead to flawed political positions. Meanwhile, just like how getting the recipe right allows the cook to teach others to cook well, a correct political theory allows a Marxist to train others in revolutionary politics. That is after all the most crucial task of communist activists – to spread communist consciousness. That is why the principles of authentic Trotskyism need to be explained and propagated. Urgently! Given the world that we face today of growing far-right reaction, insecure jobs, white supremacist violence against minorities and a hysterical Cold War drive against socialistic China that threatens to morph into a hot war, we desperately need to build parties that can lead the revolutions that will rescue humanity from the horrors of the abyss of decaying capitalism.

Political clarity on what type of socialist workers parties must be built is absolutely essential because **the history of the last 100 years – that is since the 1921 Soviet victory in the Russian Civil War that consolidated the October Revolution – is a history of blown opportunities for socialist revolution.** Sure, some very important victories were achieved in this period in the so-called “Third World” – that is, the anti-capitalist revolutions in North Korea, China, Cuba, Vietnam and Laos. However, at the same time, the world’s first workers state was destroyed in counterrevolution and so were the East European ones created in the wake of World War II. Moreover, countless opportunities for revolution were not taken or betrayed – mainly as a result of the re-badged Menshevik strategy of the Popular Front. In the last 100 years, there has not been one successful workers revolution made by workers in an imperialist country (workers states were created on the bayonets of the Red Army in the likes of the Eastern part of Germany but even these proletarian states were later destroyed). It is as if there has been a soccer match between two sides where one side – the proletariat – has all the opportunities to score and the other side – the bourgeoisie - has very few *but the score still ends up a draw!* We, therefore, insist on Trotskyism as the perspective needed to ensure that the working class seizes all the goal scoring opportunities that history inevitably creates for it. As we have detailed in this article, it is Trotskyism alone that has been vindicated by history on all major questions – from the necessity for a perspective of Permanent Revolution in the developing world, to opposition to the disastrous class collaborationist strategy of People’s Fronts/ Popular Fronts to unconditional defence of workers states to the need for workers states to undertake an internationalist policy of giving support to the revolutionary toilers’ struggles across the world. For Trotskyism is but authentic Bolshevism kept free from the right revisionism of the post-1924 Comintern. The problem is that it is not clear what authentic Trotskyism actually consists of to

many leftists – both to those who consider themselves sympathetic to Trotskyism and those that consider themselves opposed to it. Especially since it is now 97 years since the split between the Trotskyist Left Opposition and the post-Lenin leadership of the CPSU, the reasons for this split are often obscured in myths, conspiracy theories and disputes about who said and did what back then. The real political issues and disputes are often muddled. People and political groups are today calling themselves “Trotskyist” or alternatively “Stalinist” for a whole bunch of different reasons, some of which have little relation to the politics actually fought for, respectively, by Trotsky and post-1921 Stalin (pre-1921 Stalin was actually a determined Bolshevik who had spoken glowingly of Trotsky and had collaborated with the latter and Lenin on some important battles). Hence, the massive variety of political positions taken both by different “Trotskyists” and by different “Stalinists”; and indeed by different “Maoists”, Khrushchevite “Marxist-Leninists” and “Anarcho-Communists.”

Moreover, “Stalinism” is not a consistent ideology. The term only had true meaning when Stalin was alive when it meant the **current** ideological line of the Soviet bureaucracy under Stalin’s leadership. But even that – as we have seen – was not a consistent line. **It was a series of zig zags.** The Third Period Line is completely counterposed to the later Popular Front Line. Some people choose to call themselves “Stalinist” because they like the militancy of the Third Period. They are often serious leftist militants albeit mistaken in their ideology. On the other hand, those modern-day “Stalinists” who embrace the Popular Front “strategy” are often social democrats trying to sound “radical” and “out there” by giving themselves a “Stalinist” tag. Sometimes they are trade union officials, who in substance are only slightly stauncher than garden-variety social-democratic bureaucrats, but who ostentatiously wear the notoriety and seeming radicalism of the “Stalinist” label in order to give themselves credibility with their more militant ranks.

The best of those who today call themselves

“Stalinist” are those who do so because they, in the final analysis **very incorrectly**, identify Stalin as being a “hard,” full-on communist in contrast to rightist revisionists like, say, Gorbachev or those who turned once nominally communist parties – like the Italian Communist Party – into openly social democratic ones. As we detailed in this article, post-1924 Stalin was in fact often “hard” only against fellow communists and especially against those who insisted on sticking to authentic Bolshevism. Albeit to a lesser extent than Bukharin, Stalin in the mid-1920s was actually one of the original Gorbachevites in terms of economic policy. One reason that some leftists mistakenly see Stalinism as the hard, staunch form of Marxist politics is because of their understandable revulsion at the conduct of nominally “Trotskyist” outfits that support counterrevolutionary movements against workers states (like the Hong Kong anti-PRC movement) and back imperialist-proxy forces (like the “Free Syrian Army” “Rebels”) against more anti-Western, “Third World” governments. If one is a committed communist and has only seen “Trotskyists” of this kind – that is fake-Trotskyists – then it is understandable that one may have a negative perception of Trotskyism and Trotsky and thus be attracted to the latter’s nemesis, Stalin. Whatever the reason, nearly seven decades after Stalin’s death, some subjective communists today, **very mistakenly**, identify Stalin with staunch, uncompromising Bolshevism. To the extent that such elements genuinely believe this, even if completely incorrect from a factual point of view, their support for what they mythologise as “Stalinism” can reflect a healthy, if warped, impulse. Indeed, **to the extent that Stalinism is misidentified with “anti-revisionist” Leninism, and to that extent only, we authentic Trotskyists are, if you like, more “Stalinist” than the “Stalinists”.**

On the other hand, there are today those who identify as “Stalinist” because they like the latter’s Great Russian chauvinism. Even here their view of Stalin, although partly valid, is not completely factually correct.

For although Stalin in the post-1921 period became insensitive to the national feelings of the Soviet peoples that had once been cruelly subjugated in Tsarist times (like his own Georgian nationality), Stalin's policies during the period he was Soviet leader were still far less oppressive towards the non-Russian peoples than in the time before the October 1917 Revolution. The reality of the USSR's socialistic system meant that it was the non-Russian peoples who gained the most from socialistic rule – and this was true even when Stalin was leader of the USSR. Nevertheless, there are real reasons why many Great Russian chauvinists in today's Russia revere Stalin as do others who pander to reactionary nationalism. After all, especially during the most right-wing period of his rule in the mid-late 1930s, Stalin did cruelly persecute many minority peoples. In a paranoid, national-centred way he identified whole peoples with either counterrevolutionary tendencies or with potential support for Trotskyism. Then in the very last few months of his life, Stalin embraced anti-Semitism in a fervent way believing that his Jewish doctors were planning to kill him. Yet even this truth must be balanced by the reality that the USSR in Stalin's time was the only country that took in Jewish refugees from Nazi-occupied areas during World War II and that, as in Lenin's time, the Soviet leadership during Stalin's rule embraced a disproportionately high percentage of Jewish people in the leadership (a reflection of the severity of the oppression that Jewish people faced in Tsarist Russia).

Those that admire Stalin for what they see as his strong Great Russian nationalism include nominally "Stalinist" groups in Europe that are, quite despicably, hostile to immigration and the entry of refugees. These groups are a long way to the right of where the actual Stalinist, Comintern parties in Stalin's time were. Meanwhile, in today's Russia, there are nominally "Stalinist" groups that rabidly back their own bourgeoisie's agenda for a restored "Great Russian"-centred empire in the region. At the extreme end, there are even actual far-right, racist groups in the

former USSR that revere Stalin.

The huge variety amongst those who today identify as being "Stalinist" is a reflection of the reality that not only are the actual political positions taken by Stalin and Trotsky lost in myths and conspiracy theories, "Stalinism" as an actual consistent political ideology simply does not exist. By contrast there really is a consistent ideology called Trotskyism. It is the ideology of authentic Bolshevism. But what that ideology *actually is* has been obscured by latter day left social-democrats or ex-Trotskyists who have usurped the name of Trotskyism. That is, after all, why we have written this article – to clarify what authentic Trotskyism is.

We must stress an additional point here: that the Fourth International followed the Comintern in degenerating should not be grounds for pessimism. Although all socialist workers parties inevitably come under the disintegrative pressures of powerful capitalism, there is another factor that works in the exact opposite direction. And that is that the realities of capitalist exploitation inevitably push fresh layers of the toiling masses to participate in class struggle resistance. These struggles necessarily inject any party that dares to stand on an authentic communist platform with new energy. It sustains the party's cadres, inspires them with new hope and lifts them to new feats of courage in their quest to mobilise working class people against capitalist rule. Meanwhile, as Marx explained, capitalist economy by assembling a class of wage workers at the point of production, is creating its own grave diggers. And as sure as night follows day, these proletarian, potential grave diggers of capitalism will engage in brave class struggle resistance. What avowed Leninists must do is ensure that we are up to the task of intervening in those struggles to advance the toilers towards the goal of socialist revolution. Then, when the decisive moment arrives, we must go all the way to the working class conquest of state power. Trotskyism, the Leninism of today, provides the essential guide to carry out this revolutionary work.

What Fighting For Trotskyism Means Today

Based on Trotsky's struggle against rightist revisionism, below are some of what those who want to be authentic Trotskyists must stand for today. **Only listed are those points that are in dispute amongst avowed communists of different traditions.**

In the imperialist countries:

- ★ Learn the lessons of Trotsky's struggle to stop the Nazis rise to power in Germany! Learn the bitter lessons of the failure of German social democrats and Stalinists to take up the strategy advocated by the Trotskyists! For mass working class-centred, united-front actions to sweep violent far-right racists and anti-union thugs off the streets! No reliance on the capitalist state or any of its institutions to curb the fascists.
- ★ No more sabotaging of class struggle through the failed strategy of People's Fronts/ Popular Fronts! No ongoing alliance or electoral support to bourgeois formations – including “progressive” capitalists like the Greens in Australia! For working class independence from all wings of the capitalist class! Advance the class struggle! Advance towards the goal of socialist revolution!
- ★ Advocating protectionism to reduce unemployment is a form of Popular Frontist strategy that ties workers to their local capitalist bosses at home. Meanwhile, it harms class struggle by damaging the unity of local workers with their international sisters and brothers. Down with protectionism! No support for any demands that favour producers in one country over producers in another! For international workers' unity to fight for secure jobs for all at the expense of capitalist profits!
- ★ The Trotskyist understanding that class struggle is the road forward and not Popular Frontist alliances with a wing of the capitalist class means everything must be done to build the workers' unity so critical to class struggle. Positively fight against attempts to divide the working class with nationalism and racism – mobilise the workers movement to demand the rights of citizenship for all guest workers, international students, visitors and asylum seekers! In Australia, mobilise mass action uniting trade unionists, Aboriginal people, other people of colour and all anti-racists to oppose racist state terror against Aboriginal people!
- ★ For unconditional defence of the Chinese, North Korean and Cuban workers states! Down with the pro-colonial, rich people's opposition in Hong Kong! Down with the lying slander campaign against the PRC over the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region!
- ★ Oppose Australian imperialism! Australian imperialism: Hands off the Pacific!



In the colonial, semi-colonial and dependent capitalist countries:

- ★ Heed the lessons of Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution! Do not get sucked into all-encompassing movements against corrupt rulers! Replacing one bourgeois leader by another is useless! Split such opposition movements on a class basis by driving the bourgeoisie out of the opposition movements! For united front movements built on a pro-working class, pro-women's rights and anti-imperialist agenda! In those dependent or semi-colonial countries that are currently targeted by imperialism, like Iran, place extra insistence on rejecting any participation in joint actions with any opposition groups that receive funding or other backing from the imperialists. No unity or alliance with imperialist proxies! Make staunch anti-imperialist demands a pre-condition for building any united front actions!
- ★ In the case of imperialist military attack – either direct or through proxies – for the military defence of the colonial, semi-colonial or dependent country against the imperialists and their proxies.
- ★ Advance towards the working class seizure of power at the head of all the oppressed! No strategic collaboration with any wing of the bourgeoisie!

In China:

- ★ For unconditional defence of the workers state!
- ★ Oppose demands for “free parliamentary elections” in China and the other workers states! Such “free elections” are always promoted by those who want capitalist counterrevolution because they know that such a political form always allows the rich, the capitalists and their powerful imperialist allies to use their wealth to exert a greatly disproportionate influence on elections and political processes. For **workers** democracy exerted through the rule of elected workers councils - not bourgeois democracy!
- ★ Curb the power of the big capitalists! Confiscate the tech, real estate, big retail and light manufacturing sectors from the billionaires and bring them into public ownership – stop Jack Ma and his ilk from continuing to leach from the people!
- ★ No more tax and financial concessions for private capitalists! For state takeover of promising small enterprises in financial trouble! Advance the socialistic state sector!

Below and Opposite page: Participants listen to a speech by Trotskyist Platform chairwoman, Sarah Fitzenmeyer, during the 7 October 2019 demonstration calling on “Working Class People in Australia & the World” to “Stand With Socialistic China.” The united-front action was built primarily by Trotskyist Platform and the Australian Chinese Workers Association. This rally and march through the centre of Sydney city also called to “Defeat Hong Kong's Pro-Colonial, Anti-Communist [Opposition] Movement!” In contrast, most of the other left groups in Australia that claim some connection with Trotskyism, as well as two of Australia's anti-Trotskyist, “Marxist-Leninist” parties, with varying degrees of avidness, support the counterrevolutionary, rich people's opposition in Hong Kong.



- ★ Fight to secure the great gains of China's 1949 Revolution by struggling to extend them! Bring the benefits of socialism to the people of Hong Kong and Macao! Encourage workers in the island of Taiwan to overthrow their own capitalists and join in socialist unity with the mainland. For one China under one socialist system!
- ★ Abandon Beijing's failed policy of "non interference" in the affairs of other countries. In practice this policy has meant that China does almost nothing to support the working class struggle in the capitalist world while the capitalist powers do everything possible to undermine the PRC workers state. For the PRC to instead give internationalist support to the working class and oppressed peoples' struggles in the capitalist world – especially in all the imperialist countries! Greatly strengthen PRC support for the Palestinian struggle!
- ★ For China to unilaterally lift all sanctions on the DPRK! For close cooperation between the PRC and the DPRK! For the PRC to quickly settle all border disputes with the Vietnamese workers state – the PRC as the bigger socialistic power to make appropriate concessions. For socialist unity!

Workers of all countries we must unite!

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