Chapter 10: Centrism and Stalinism - the falsification of Trotsky's analysis

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Between the European conference of 1944 and the Third World Congress of 1951, no section of the Fourth International (FI), nor any tendencies within the sections, developed a correct appraisal of the role of world Stalinism in Eastern Europe. Up until the Second World Congress of 1948 this did not preclude the Fourth International from making a series of meaningful insights into the nature of and role of Stalinism.

Nor did it lead to the abandonment of the Trotskyist analysis of Stalinism as counterrevolutionary. However the errors were to become amplified and extended, under the impact of the Stalin-Tito break of 1948, into a qualitative revision of the Trotskyist understanding of Stalinism.

The resolutions of the 1944 and 1946 gatherings of the FI made two interconnected errors on Stalinism and East Europe. On the one hand, they underestimated the counter-revolutionary role of the Kremlin in Eastern Europe; on the other, they overestimated the instability of Stalinism and the potential for its revolutionary defeat at the hands of the working class. The perspective of the coming ?death knell? of Stalinism with which the Trotskyists entered the war continued to operate, unmodified after the war. In the theses passed by the 1944 Congress, the Fourth International declared:

?The war, sharpening intolerably the contradictions of the Russian economy, has sounded the knell of the inevitable liquidation of the Bonapartist Stalinist bureaucracy. The latter is destined to perish without fail, under the blows of world imperialism or under those of the proletarian world revolution.?1

This perspective was contradicted by events in Russia itself, in the buffer zone, in Italy, Greece and France. However the FI in its later theses, refused to abandon or even partially correct its original perspective. Consequently, although the FI recognised the counter-revolutionary role played by the Red Army in demobilising the independent struggles of the masses, they suggested that these struggles would quickly throw aside Stalinism. Trotsky?s statement that the ?laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus? (true at a general level) was used to justify a prognosis for the immediate future. This prognosis left out of account both the subjective weaknesses of the masses (the absence of revolutionary parties) and objective difficulties (such as the armed might of the Soviet bureaucracy, and its enhanced prestige after the defeat of Nazism.) In short, it was a wrong prognosis. Refusal to acknowledge this led the FI to overestimate the ?revolutionary? developments taking place in the buffer zone. In 1946 the FI argued:

?The Soviet occupation and control have given an impetus, although in varying degrees, to civil war and the development of a regime of dual power.? 2

This was untrue. The occupation checked and arrested the development of civil war. Moreover, the regime of dual power consisted of the Stalinists and the bourgeoisie, not the Stalinists and independent workers? organisations.
This error of prognosis did not have an immediate programmatic consequence. The programmatic tenets of Trotsky still held good for the FI. The theses of 1944 and 1946 do clearly and unequivocally call for the revolutionary overthrow of Stalinist rule and the expropriation of the capitalist economies in Eastern Europe, and for the building of independent sections of the FI to lead such overthrows. In a resolution of the International Executive Committee published in the June 1946 issue of Fourth International, the FI made clear their refusal to compromise with Stalinism:

?The Fourth International demands the withdrawal of all foreign armies, including the Red Army, from all occupied territories.?3

Further, the FI raised a programme of transitional demands for the East and the West which argued for political revolution, defence of the USSR and the overthrow of capitalism in the buffer zone and the west by the independent organisations of the working class under Trotskyist leadership.

The leadership of the FI, particularly the young European leader Germain, developed an analysis of the buffer zone as capitalist states, but ones which could potentially become ?structurally assimilated? into the Soviet Union. By this Germain meant that the states of the buffer zone could, under certain conditions, be geographically integrated into the USSR and at the same time be economically transformed ? from capitalist into degenerated workers? states like the USSR. But Germain, dogmatically clinging to Trotsky's analysis of the pre-war bureaucratic social overturn in Eastern Poland, insisted on maintaining that the condition for ?structural assimilation? was the independent intervention of the masses.

?But in order to completely assimilate a given territory, that is to say, in order to expropriate and destroy as a class the landed proprietors and capitalists, the bureaucracy is compelled ? even if in a limited way and with the aim of always controlling it and crushing it when necessary ? to call upon the autonomous action of the masses. It is precisely for this reason, among others, and precisely because the bureaucracy fears the autonomous action of the masses like the plague, that it will be unable to accomplish assimilation except on a relatively limited scale.? 4

While such an intervention of the masses (free of Stalinist control) is a condition for the creation of a healthy workers' state, this is not as a general rule necessary for the creation of degenerate workers? states. Germain, however, only approached the problem at a general level. He ignored the specific features of the buffer zone ? dislocation from the world market, decimation of the indigenous capitalists, monopoly of control by the Stalinists over the repressive apparatus, demobilised working class ? that were all crucial to facilitating precisely an overturn of capitalism without the intervention of the masses.

In circumstances where, as Germain rightly states in his document, the principal foreign policy objectives of the Kremlin were the creation of a military buffer to rebuild Socialism in One Country, his theses appeared plausible. However after 1947, when conditions changed dramatically and Moscow was forced to carry through overturns in the buffer zone to counter the plans of the imperialists, Germain?s maintenance of his preconditions for an overturn of capitalism proved his theory to be a rigid and useless dogma. This became apparent by 1948 and, disarming Germain in the Yugoslav question, led him to support Pablo?s revision of the Trotskyist position in 1951.

Germain?s insistence on the need for mass mobilisations to accompany an overturn had a definite opportunistic kernel. Tied to the prognosis of the imminent collapse of Stalinism, this analysis caused the FI to constantly look for and anticipate the development of such mobilisations. Further it was conceded that such mobilisations could lead to a turn in the policies of the communist parties themselves:

?All of these countries, including Yugoslavia, will however be exposed to an especially powerful pressure
from imperialism. It is not excluded that in this case the Communist Parties, basing themselves firmly on the revolutionary aspirations of the masses, will move forward and abolish the remnants of bourgeois power and property. 5

Such a development, it was thought, could only testify to the crisis of Stalinism. However, when the FI applied this prediction in practice to the Tito-Stalin split, they insisted that Tito had split from Stalinism. In so doing they believed that their prediction about revolutionary upheavals in the buffer zone had been fulfilled. This belief had serious consequences for the revolutionary integrity of the FI. The 1948 Congress and its resolution on “The USSR and Stalinism” did little to guard the FI from these consequences. In fact it merely codified all of the earlier errors of perspective. The theses detailed the counter-revolutionary role of the Kremlin in the preceding years, yet still insisted on the same artificial pre-conditions for the carrying through of bureaucratic social revolutions as before (the need for mass mobilisations and geographical assimilation). They maintained their fundamentally erroneous perspective with regard to the crisis of Stalinism. At no point between 1944 and 1947 did the FI make an exception of Yugoslavia in its analysis of Eastern Europe.

After 1948, the liquidation of the capitalist economies in Eastern Europe and the Tito-Stalin split propelled the FI leadership into a further re-examination of the nature of Stalinism.

Defining Stalinism narrowly as the subordination of each CP to the interests of the Kremlin, the 1948 Theses stated:

under Stalinist leadership they have turned into organisations whose only function is to serve the diplomatic manoeuvres of the Soviet bureaucracy. (our emphasis). The FI concluded that the Tito-Stalin split signified that the YCP had ceased to be Stalinist.

Unable, or unwilling, to recognise that Stalinism remains true to itself even while breaking up along nationalist, social-patriotic lines, the FI used the split to re-read events in Yugoslavia from 1943 onwards. The FI saw the split as a verification of their perspective with regard to the crisis of Stalinism. They saw it as the latest manifestation of a break with Stalinism that had been effectively completed when the YCP in 1945 was said to have led the masses, under pressure, in a genuine proletarian revolution, which successfully overthrew capitalism and created a “deformed workers” state? not in need of political revolution.

Michel Pablo was the principal advocate of this position. In August 1948 Pablo hesitantly began to lay the foundations for his revisions of Trotskyism on the Yugoslav question. In the article The Yugoslav Affair he claimed:

As against all the other Communist parties in the “buffer zone” which won their power thanks to the direct support of the Kremlin and the Red Army, the Yugoslav Communist Party (YCP) during the war led a real mass movement with distinct revolutionary tendencies which brought it to power. 6

The revolutionary tendencies of the masses had imparted to the YCP a “special character”. At this stage Pablo did not claim that the YCP was as yet centrist.

He did, however, suggest that independence from Moscow gave the YCP, as a whole, the potential to break from Stalinism thus rendering the need for a new Trotskyist party in Yugoslavia obsolete. His programmatic conclusion in this article was that the Fourth International should seek to pressure the YCP onto the road of self-reform.

By September 1949, building on his incorrect appraisal of the potential for self-reform of the YCP, Pablo
correctly designated Yugoslavia as a workers? state. It was his definition of it as a deformed workers? state that was fundamentally wrong. In using this term, Pablo implied that the bureaucratic deformation of the Yugoslav workers? state was only qualitative. That is, political power to some extent lay in the hands of the working class:

?Within this framework of a workers? state, defined in this sense, can be contained for a long time a partially bourgeois content both in the sphere of distribution norms as well as in several aspects of political power.? 7

Such a formulation is true for a healthy workers? state as well. It will contain bourgeois features in its economy and its political superstructures. But what distinguishes a healthy workers? state or even a workers? state with bureaucratic deformations, is that political power still lies with the working class or in the hands of a revolutionary party, not in the hands of a consolidated bureaucratic caste set against the working class and with its own distinct interests.

The existence of such a caste, and one clearly existed in Yugoslavia, signified a qualitative difference between a healthy and a degenerate workers? state and necessitated in the latter case a political revolution to take political power back into the hands of the working class. Failure to make this distinction led Pablo at first to fudge the question of political revolution in Yugoslavia and later to completely abandon the call for it.

Instead Pablo merely called for the extension of the world revolution as a means of gradually undermining the material base (backwardness) of bureaucratic deformations in countries such as Yugoslavia. In February 1950, therefore, he argued:

?between capitalism and socialism there will be an entire historic period and a whole gamut of transitional regimes which, while ceasing to be capitalist, will undergo various degrees of evolution with regard to one another and in relation to socialism in which the state (state apparatus) will be more or less deformed by the bureaucracy; in which the (deformed) laws of capitalism will continue to operate to some extent or another, and in which all these difficulties and obstacles will be overcome only by the extension of the revolution on the world arena.? 8

Not only was the programme of political revolution rendered irrelevant in this formula, so too was the Marxist programme for the struggle against bureaucracy in the transition period.

Pablo compounded these errors by claiming that, given the experience of Yugoslavia and the YCP (a Stalinist party transformed into a centrist party by the pressure of the masses). Stalinism generally could be transformed by such pressure. In his report to the 1951 Congress of the Fourth International he argued:

?We have made clear that the CPs are not exactly reformist parties and that under certain exceptional conditions they possess the possibility of projecting a revolutionary orientation.? 9

Pablo?s positions on Yugoslavia were adopted by the FI at its 1951 Third World Congress. It was subscribed to by all the major sections and leading figures of the FI. There was no revolutionary opposition to Pablo?s centrist position that:

?In Yugoslavia the first country where the proletariat took power since the degeneration of the USSR, Stalinism no longer exists today as an effective factor in the workers? movement, which, however, does not exclude its possible re-emergence under certain conditions.? 10

Germain?s objections to this position had become obsolete in the face of the reality of the Yugoslav
workers? state, and useless in terms of explaining the counter-revolutionary nature of the party that brought that state into being. At the same conference the FI did recognise the rest of Eastern Europe as deformed workers? states in need of political revolutions. But the resolutions of Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia were seen as a complementary whole and this whole entailed a right centrist revision of the Trotskyist position on Stalinism.

This revision entailed redefining Stalinism as having a ?dual nature?. The bureaucratic social revolutions in the buffer zone were seen as examples of the counter-revolutionary role of Stalinism. The progressive side of Stalinism is regarded as being the ability of some of the CPs, acting under the pressure of the masses, to break with the Kremlin and project a ?revolutionary orientation.? This was what the FI claimed had happened in Yugoslavia and later in China. It fell to Germain, now obediently following Pablo?s line, to give this revision theoretical expression in his Ten Theses on Stalinism:

?The contradictory nature of the Soviet bureaucracy is only partially reflected in the Stalinist parties. The dual nature of these parties is of a different social origin; it does not flow from the special role of a parasitic bureaucracy in a workers? state but from the dual function of these parties, which are working class because of their mass base in their own country as well as international instruments of the Soviet bureaucracy.? 11

It was only the latter characteristic that defined them as Stalinist. The former characteristic could, under certain conditions, serve to negate this Stalinism. Thus:

?The Yugoslav and Chinese examples have demonstrated that, placed in certain exceptional conditions, entire Communist parties can modify their political line and lead the struggle of the masses up to the conquest of power, while passing beyond the objectives of the Kremlin.

Under such conditions these parties cease being Stalinist parties in the classical sense of the world.? 12

That is, they became centrist parties.

We reject the view that Stalinist parties are defined as such exclusively by virtue of their relationship to the Kremlin. This forms only one important constituent part of a Stalinist party?s programme and overall nature. Further we reject the notion that Stalinism has a dual nature and that it can be pushed in a revolutionary direction without first breaking up and being replaced by a revolutionary party.

Against this notion of Stalinism as possessing both a progressive and counter-revolutionary side, each weighing equally in the scales and separated in time and space, we re-assert the Trotskyist conception of Stalinism as predominantly counter-revolutionary but with contradictory characteristics. We recognise this contradiction as an intensely dialectical one; that is, that Stalinism is capable of achieving (in exceptional circumstances) results which, taken in isolation are progressive (the liquidation of capitalism).

But Stalinism achieves these results by counter-revolutionary means. In recognising this we by no means equate the progressive and reactionary elements. We recognise that the progressive part is permeated and dominated by the counter-revolutionary whole.

By dissolving this dialectical understanding of Stalinism into a pair of formally opposed and separable elements ? progressive and reactionary ? the FI after 1951 opened the way to a liquidation of the revolutionary programme in favour of an orientation (deep entryism) which sought to pressure the national CPs into taking the progressive path.

Finally, the FI?s revisionism on the question of Stalinism cannot be fully understood without reference to
the positions taken on the FI’s other major concern of the period – the continuing instability of imperialism. Up to 1948 this instability was understood in terms of chronic economic stagnation. After 1948 this instability came to be expressed, according to the FI, more and more in terms of preparations for a third world war against the USSR and Eastern Europe.

The errors on Stalinism and East Europe and on the prospects for imperialism came together in the 1951 Congress resolutions on Orientation and Perspectives. These argued that a new world war was imminent, that the balance of forces was weighed against imperialism in favour of the workers’ states, and that the newly discovered potentially progressive character of Stalinism would mean that the new war would take the form of an international civil war. The end result of this would be a series of revolutions at least as healthy and progressive as the Yugoslav one.

An opposition that purported to defend Trotskyism against Pablo’s revisionism on the question of Stalinism was the Vern/Ryan tendency inside the SWP(US) during 1950-53. This tendency argued that the FI had been wrong to delay for so long in characterising Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia included, as workers’ states.

They argued that the only decisive criterion for the characterisation of the class nature of a state was which class’ representatives controlled the repressive apparatus of the state machine. In Eastern Europe the entry of the Red Army (the repressive apparatus of a workers’ state) marked the establishment of workers’ states i.e. as early as 1944-5. They reasoned that it was here in this superstructure of society, is where the revolution of our time takes place. Stalinism is rooted in the working class therefore the Stalinists in power always equal a distorted form of workers’ power. Stalinism could not possibly rest on capitalist property relations, or prop up a capitalist state, even for a limited period, because it itself rests on the post-capitalist property relations.

These undialectical positions of the Vern/Ryan tendency which failed to recognise the contradictory nature of Stalinism, foreshadowed many of the errors of the international Spartacist tendency (iSt) on the Russian question. Their position can be defined as Stalinophile.

It rests in the first place on an incorrect analogy with the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Because the Bolsheviks in state power presided over private property in whole sections of the economy the Vern/Ryan tendency disregarded economic criteria altogether. They equated a healthy revolution, in which the capitalist state was decisively smashed by the direct action of the masses led by a revolutionary party and a new type of state established, with the Stalinist bureaucratic overturns of capitalism and the establishment of degenerate workers’ states.

The same criterion was applied to two distinct historical phenomena. This was done because the Vern/Ryan tendency regarded the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy as only qualitatively different from the early Bolshevik state functionaries. They define the bureaucracy solely as part of the working class, ignoring their nature as a caste within Soviet society that is based on the working class but with interests distinct from, and opposed to, the working class. They deny the predominantly counterrevolutionary nature of the bureaucracy. They deny the reality of Stalinism in Eastern Europe after the war. They ignore the reality that Stalinism did defend capitalist property relations for a period and that it did hand back countries it controlled, like Finland and Austria to the imperialists rather than abolish capitalism in them. This tendency’s one-sided analysis of Stalinism grants to the Soviet bureaucracy a revolutionary dynamic it does not possess. The criterion for establishing whether a degenerate workers’ state exists is not, in the first place dependent upon whether the Stalinists have secured political power. As we have shown, this is a precondition for the creation of a degenerate workers’ state. But it does not follow that fulfilment of this condition will inevitably lead to the establishment of planned property relations. This fact was proved
beyond doubt by Austria, Finland and Vietnam (in 1945).

In the period 1948 to 1953 (in 1953 the FI split into the International Committee (IC) and the International Secretariat (IS) there was no revolutionary opposition to Pablo?s revisionist positions on Stalinism. The American SWP, the British Healy group and the French PCI (all of which joined the IC) repeatedly expressed their support for the FI?s positions, up to and including the 1951 Congress documents on Yugoslavia. ostensibly the IC?s split with Pablo involved a rejection of his tactical orientation towards Stalinist parties and his organisational methods, not his analysis and understanding of Stalinism.

The Germain opposition to Pablo on the Yugoslav question was not able to sustain an alternative position. Their dogmatism proved to be increasingly at variance with reality in Eastern Europe. Their conversion to Pablo?s viewpoint was made easy by the fact that throughout the debate they accepted all of the premises that Pablo drew his conclusions from ? the exceptional nature of the Yugoslav revolution, the centrist nature of the YCP and the conception of the Tito-Stalin split as a ?proletarian revolt against the anti-proletarian, counterrevolutionary policy of the Kremlin? (Germain).

At the 1951 Congress Pablo?s centrist position on Yugoslavia and on Stalinism was passed, unchallenged by any section of the FI or even any section of a section, on a revolutionary basis.

This was quickly to take programmatic effect in the tactics and slogans raised by the FI. For example, in 1953 during the East German uprising, the FI (IS) refused to call for political revolution.

That is why we recognise the 1951 Congress as the point at which the FI ? codifying its errors instead of rectifying them and abandoning the Trotskyist position on Stalinism ? completed its collapse into centrism.

**Mandel?s orthodox revisions**

In the demonology of the ?anti-Pabloite?, Fourth International International Committee (IC) tradition, the chief demon was, and remains, Michel Pablo. While it is certainly true that he ushered in the ?theoretical rearmament? of the Fourth International (FI) that was to rob it of every vestige of authentic Trotskyism, he rapidly lost the role of principal theoretical revisionist of the FI after the 1953 split. The IC?s constant harping on ?Pabloite revisionism? was actually a testimony to their own theoretical bankruptcy. It replaced any attempt to theoretically refute the chief spokesman for the FI?s International Secretariat (IS), Ernest Germain, later to become better known as Ernest Mandel.

He was the architect of the analysis of the crisis within Stalinism after Stalin?s death in 1953, and was chiefly responsible for formulating the IS programmatic response to the events surrounding the ?crisis? of Stalinism at the 1954, 1957 and 1961 Congresses of the IS. He played a leading role in the re-unification discussions with the main grouping in the IC, the Socialist Workers Party (US), reaching agreement with its leader, Joseph Hansen over the analysis of the Cuban revolution. From the reunification in 1963 ? when the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI) was established ? to the present day, Mandel has retained his position as the major USFI theoretician on Stalinism, the USSR and the degenerate workers? states.

After 1950, Germain (Mandel) was forced to concede his error on the Yugoslav revolution. Pablo had been right to characterise Tito?s Yugoslavia as a ?deformed workers? state?. His defeat ? or rather his collapse ? on this question prompted him to carry out a task that has since become the trade mark of his books, pamphlets and articles. He set to work to disguise the FI?s revisions of Trotskyism with the gloss of Marxist ?orthodoxy?. In 1951, he reaffirmed the Trotskyist position on Stalinism in the USSR, but revised it with regard to other Stalinist parties. In his Ten Theses, he argued:
The contradictory nature of the Soviet bureaucracy is only partially reflected in the Stalinist parties. The
dual nature of these parties is of a different social origin; it does not flow from the special role of a parasitic
bureaucracy in a workers? state, but from the dual function of these parties, which are working class
because of their mass base in their own country as well as international instruments of the Soviet
bureaucracy...For the Kremlin, the usefulness of this mass base consists exclusively in serving its
diplomatic designs. But these designs periodically involve a political line diametrically opposed to the most
elementary aspirations of the masses. From this flows the possibility of the outstripping of the Communist
parties by their own base, which, in action, can go beyond the objectives set by the Kremlin and escape
from its control. This possibility has always been one of the fundamental perspectives of the Trotskyist
movement.14

In the event of this happening, claims Germain, such parties cease to be Stalinist.

This analysis leads to a practical capitulation to what remain, in essence, Stalinist parties. Mandel uses the
apparently orthodox analysis of Stalinism as contradictory to obscure the real nature of Stalinism behind a
spurious ?dual nature?, a bad side under Kremlin orders; a good side under mass pressure. When the
latter becomes predominant, Stalinism turns into ?centrism? or an ?empirically revolutionary tendency?.
This fails completely to comprehend why Stalinism is counter-revolutionary.

As we have shown, wherever a break with the Kremlin takes place and the indigenous Stalinists carry
through an overturn of capitalism, as in Yugoslavia and China, this is prompted by the need for self-
preservation on the part of the already-established bureaucracies of these parties, not as a result of
pressure from their mass base. Where such pressure is involved, it plays only a secondary, coincidental
role, and is usually accompanied by increased repression against the masses. While the possibility of such
fractures within world Stalinism has indeed always been part of Trotskyism?s perspectives, the belief that
parties breaking from Kremlin control thereby cease to be Stalinist has never been part of those
perspectives.

Germain applied this position to the Chinese revolution. Mao became a second Tito.15 The position of the
Chinese Trotskyists on the1949 revolution which attacked Mao?s Stalinist popular frontist project, was
replaced by Germain?s analysis of the Chinese coalition government as a ?workers? and farmers?
government?, following the Yugoslav road:

?Many reasons permit us to hope for such a development (a left turn ? Eds). More than any other
Communist Party the Chinese CP has been obliged to keep a less bureaucratic and centralised structure,
to maintain a constant metabolism between its own aspirations and pre-occupations and those of the
masses. The objective situation pushes it along this road.? 6

In 1977, Mandel maintained that the Chinese CP, which had ceased to be Stalinist, did indeed take the
sought-after left turn:

?The victory of the third Chinese revolution in 1949 was the most important gain for the world revolution
since the victory of the October socialist revolution.? 17

This assessment, stemming from his false analysis of Stalinism?s dual nature, ignores the massive
counter-revolutionary setback for the Chinese working class that this revolution involved. Since 1949 the
Chinese Stalinists have excluded the masses from any real political power, but have rather used them as
cannon fodder for their inter-bureaucratic faction fights.

The programmatic logic of this analysis of Stalinism in China (and Yugoslavia) was to return to Trotsky?s
pre-1934 position, namely a position calling for the political reform of these Stalinist regimes. The 1954 Congress resolution, subscribed to (if not indeed written by) Germain, explicitly rejects political revolution for China and Yugoslavia together with the perspective of a new party. It argues instead for the creation of soviets, as forms of proletarian democracy, and factions inside the Chinese and Yugoslav CPs, whose objective should be to replace the ?centrist? leaderships of those parties through a democratic process of reform:

?Since both the Chinese and to a certain extent also the Yugoslav CP are in reality bureaucratic centrist parties, which, however, still find themselves under the pressure of the revolution in their countries, we do not call upon the proletariat of these countries to constitute new revolutionary parties or to prepare a political revolution in these countries.?18

This position had the advantage of pre-1934 Trotskyist ?orthodoxy?. But whilst Germain borrowed the term, his purpose was to wipe out the historical gain of Trotsky?s analysis of the Stalinism after 1934. Moreover, Germain?s position ignored the reality that the working class had been politically expropriated by a bureaucratic caste. It ignored the fact that in all fundamentals the ruling parties practiced the Stalinist programme of ?socialism in one country?, the stifling of any independent political life for the masses, the bureaucratic operation of the plan, and the subordination of international revolution to the strategic deal of the bureaucracy with imperialism.

Since the 1950s, the brutal reality of Stalinism has impinged on Mandel?s consciousness, and has led him to change his stance on these countries. His method, though, remains exactly the same, and the USFI has on various occasions found replacements for China and Yugoslavia as non-Stalinist workers? states, in Vietnam and Cuba.

With regard to Eastern Europe, 1954 witnessed the beginning of a new stage of the FI?s revision of the programme of political revolution. The crisis of Stalinism after Stalin?s death and the East German workers? uprising, threw the bonapartist clique in the Kremlin into a turmoil, and led to a relative loosening of the bureaucracy?s stranglehold on the political life of the masses of Eastern Europe. Mandel recognised that the measures promulgated by Stalin?s successors in the USSR and Eastern Europe were, in fact, measures of self-preservation, concessions designed to buy, them time for retrenchment.

Nevertheless, he did argue that the rumblings in Eastern Europe did open up a persepective of fragmentation in the national CPs, with a section (defined as being ?closest to the masses?) placing themselves at the head of the struggle for political revolution. While the fragmentation has occurred, Mandel went further and argued that the IS programme should centre on developing such a split as the best means of achieving the political revolution. To this end, an entry tactic was advocated, and the ?prioritised? programme of political revolution was reduced to the call for a series of reforms that would be palatable to a potentially revolutionary section of the bureaucracy:

?1. Freedom for working class prisoners.
4. Legalisation of all workers? parties and organisations.
5. Election and democratic functioning of mass committees.
6. Independence of the trade unions in relation to the government.
7. Democratic elaboration of the economic plan by the masses for the masses.
8. Effective right of self-determination for the peoples.?19

The programme fails to link these demands to the struggle to overthrow the bureaucracy and establish
genuine workers? power. Indeed, calls for this course of action are not raised precisely because of the IS?s new view of the bureaucracy as containing within it potentially centrist elements.

Between 1954 and the Fifth World Congress in 1957, further enormous upheavals occurred in the degenerate workers? states and the USSR. The 20th Congress of the CPSU ?secret speech? by Kruschev and the ensuing concessions, the revolutionary uprising against the bureaucracy in Hungary and in Poland ? all in 1956 ? made a deep impression upon the IS?s perspectives. Mandel gave the report to the Congress on the crisis within Stalinism. The reactions of the YCP and the CCP leaderships to the Hungarian events, whilst uneven, were held to be progressive, confirming the perspective of reform.

Yet a major change in orientation to the buffer zone and the USSR was outlined by Mandel. For him and the IS leadership, the Hungarian and Polish events had proven that a wing of the bureaucracy would follow the Tito-Mao road: in Hungary ? Nagy, in Poland ? Gomulka. In the USSR the ?centrist? faction of Kruschev was crowded on its left by Malenkov and Mikoyan, who whilst not of the Nagy-Gomulka mold, presaged the emergence of such a tendency.

In a bid to facilitate the development of such tendencies in the bureaucracy, the programme of political revolution for Eastern Europe and the USSR was completely revised. Since the prospect of political revolution was seen to depend upon a section or wing of the bureaucracy, soviets could not be organs of struggle against the bureaucracy. Political revolution was considered as (i.e. was replaced by) competition between an ?FI faction? and the rest of the bureaucracy for the leadership of the working class.

From this point onwards, the notion of workers? councils or soviets as revolutionary organs of struggle is lost, and replaced by the conception of soviets as organs of administration, for bringing the masses into democratic life, to participate in the plan. The political revolution is thus reduced to the peaceful withering away of the bureaucratic caste.

This programme of political ?revolution? emerges from the Fifth Congress as a unified strategy for all workers? states. It was merely a question of the ease and rapidity with which the objective crisis in Stalinism would produce the necessary tendencies and splits within the bureaucracies.

In 1961, the Sixth Congress, and again the 1963 Reunification Congress, merely repeated these same formulae, and added nothing new by way of programme.

During the last decade, Mandel has further revised the programme of political revolution. As we have shown, he first revised it by degutting the soviets as organs of struggle against the bureaucracy. At that time (1957), he was still clear that soviets should at least exercise the workers class?s dictatorship against restorationists. But in the 1970s, a social-democratic wing emerged within the Stalinist parties ? ?Eurocommunism? which identified Bolshevism with Stalinism, and advocated greater use of bourgeois parliamentary institutions as a guarantee against the ?natural tendency? to dictatorial/bureaucratic abuse that is supposed to accompany rule by soviets.

Whilst Mandel has attacked such conceptions, he has made unwarranted concessions to this wing of Stalinism. He has done so by accepting that soviet power must include representatives of the bourgeoisie, at least in the transition period, if not in the struggle for political power. Mandel explicitly rejects Lenin?s and Trotsky?s justifications for such exclusion, a justification which he himself accepted in earlier years.

In short, Mandel, most particularly in his Theses on Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, passed at the USFI?s World Congress in 1979, obliterates the repressive character of the workers? dictatorship, in a way similar to Kautsky?s denial of the repressive character of all political forms
of the bourgeoisie’s dictatorship. Applied to the programme of political revolution, this can only mean support for open restorationists or counter-revolutionary Stalinist bureaucrats — sworn enemies of the proletariat — in the workers’ councils.

Mandel’s political perspective is intimately tied to his economic understanding of the Soviet Union and the degenerate workers’ states. Mandel laid down his basic position in Marxist Economic Theory. While not uncritical, he presents a picture of the Soviet economy as an ever-expanding one:

“This progress is not to be explained primarily by the enormous backwardness it had to overcome, in comparison with the industry of the most advanced capitalist countries. It has continued after this backwardness has already been, by and large, overcome. This progress is proceeding apace especially in the directions of increase and modernisation of the country’s stock of machines and of striving to automatise production.”

This process is, for Mandel, proof of the superiority of planning over capitalist anarchy. However, he does recognise that managerial self-interest and bureaucratic control of the state leading to hyper-centralisation act as a fetter on the planned economy, particularly in the sphere of the production of consumer goods. But while Mandel accepts that the bureaucracy act as a fetter, he does not believe that they undermine the working of the plan and threaten to plunge it into reverse, opening the way to capitalist restoration. How this accords with his analysis of Kampuchea, which was a planned economy thrown into reverse, he has never deigned to explain.

The planned economy of the USSR is not without its contradictions, and the chief contradiction is, for the “orthodox” Mandel, the one that Marx pointed out would inevitably exist in the period of the transition from capitalism to communism:

“In fact, Soviet economy is marked by the contradictory combination of a non-capitalist mode of production and a till basically bourgeois mode of distribution. Such a contradictory combination points to an economic system which had a ready gone beyond capitalism, but which has not yet reached socialism, a system which is passing through a period of transition between capitalism and socialism, during which, as Lenin already showed, the economy inevitably combines features of the past with features of the future.”

In a 1979 work, Mandel elaborated on this point:

“Just because a transition is more complex and — to put it paradoxically less dynamic, since it transits less rapidly than expected, is no reason to say that it is not transitional.”

As well as planning, the other key feature in Mandel’s analysis of the USSR is that is is a transitional society in the classical Marxist sense.

A further element of his analysis to be noted is his position on the Soviet bureaucracy. He regards it, as a whole, as becoming objectively weaker, even redundant, as, the productive forces grow, since its social role as an arbiter in the distribution of scarce goods declines as production increases. The growth of the working class concomitant with this is a further objective factor operating against the bureaucracy. He developed the kernel of this position in 1952:

“The level of development of the productive forces has become incompatible with bureaucratic management.”

Once again this position has the advantage of orthodoxy. It starts with Trotsky’s prognosis of Stalinism as a regime of crisis and objectively creating its own grave digger.
However, through the 1950s and 1960s, Mandel added his own prognoses to this orthodoxy, and built out of it constant predictions of developing centrist/reform wings of the bureaucracy, in turn citing this as evidence for his essentially ?objectivist? view of the bureaucracy?s crisis.

Taken together, Mandel?s positions on planning, the transition and the bureaucracy constitute a thoroughly false, non-revolutionary Marxist understanding of the economic and political nature of the USSR and the degenerate workers? states.

They lay the basis for his reduction of the programme of political revolution to a series of structural reforms which can, potentially, be carried out in alliance with a wing of the bureaucracy.

Mandel?s explanation of the progress of the Soviet economy is based on a one-sided assessment of the planned economy which ignores the bureaucratic and blind nature of the plan itself. By attributing this bureaucratic plan with the power of unlimited economic growth (albeit at a slower rate than would be possible with a democratic plan), Mandel overlooks the existence of a series of intrinsic contradictions that the planned economies of the USSR and of the degenerate workers? states suffer from.

The bureaucracy, according to Mandel, undermines the efficiency but not the existence of the plan. In his view, the main threats to the plan are external to it ? imperialism and the plan/ market contradiction inside the workers? states.

But these threats would inevitably exist with regard to a healthy workers? state. The problems facing the plans of the USSR and the degenerate workers? states are of a different order. Poland, Yugoslavia, China, the USSR itself and other workers? states have all suffered from serious economic crises that have included unemployment, wage cuts etc ? features which Mandel suggests have been removed in these countries.

Of course the bureaucracy (and Mandel) disguise such crises with figures indicating overall economic growth. Nevertheless this growth is increasingly artificial in that it is not, and cannot be, short of political revolution, qualitative economic growth. The bureaucratic plan has proved itself incapable of outstripping the highest economic and technical achievements of capitalism. It lags behind the world?s largest imperialist power, the USA. This is an inevitable product of the plan?s internal contradictions its inability to mobilise the creativity of the masses, its tendency to increase disparity between branches of economic life, its tendency to increase inequality, and so on.

The dynamism of the plan that does exist (and has been shown by the industrialisation of backward countries) is strictly limited to the tasks of catching up with capitalism. Periods of economic growth in the planned economies, as Trotsky pointed out in The Revolution Betrayed, are those periods when the bureaucracy builds up industry by copying the industrial, achievements of the capitalist countries. While this frees degenerate workers? states from the yoke of imperialism and facilitates growth rates that are unthinkable in imperialised countries, it does not enable those economies to create the material base necessary for socialism.

This is because the plan is not merely threatened by external factors. It is threatened by the caste that politically controls it the bureaucracy. Trotsky was clear on this in a period when the economic growth of the USSR was dazzling fellow-travellers and enemies alike:

?While the growth of industry and the bringing of agriculture into the sphere of state planning vastly complicates the task 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
In other words, bureaucratism is not simply an inefficient fetter on the functioning of the planned economy. It actually blocks and threatens the existence of the planned economy.

Mandel’s inability to see this, his faithful retailing of official Soviet figures to prove his case, is tied to his position of the ?transition? question. To accept that the Soviet Union is a transitional society is, necessarily to accept that it is still moving towards socialism. Mandel argues that this is so, but at a slower pace than expected by earlier Marxists. Mindful of orthodoxy on this question, Mandel justifies his position by arguing:

?First of all there is no ?Marxist tradition? on this subject in the real sense of the word?26. On the contrary! Marx, Engels and the Bolsheviks were clear on the key aspects of a transitional society, and on the programme necessary to direct the transition to socialism. Apart from the economic expropriation of the bourgeoisie, these aspects do not exist in the USSR or any of the degenerate workers? states.

All the political features of a society transitional to socialism have been crushed except those which are leftovers of the old, corrupt, capitalist past. These features the bureaucracy have rapidly developed!

In other words, in these post-capitalist societies, the transition in the Marxist sense (from capitalism to communism) has been blocked and thrown into reverse by the bureaucracy. These states are degenerating back towards capitalism, a process that can, of course, only be completed by an actual social counterrevolution. For the transition to be restarted, a political revolution is required. Contradictions will continue to exist after the victory of the revolution, but the political rule of a bureaucracy fanning the flames of those contradictions and preventing their resolution by the workers, will not.

The ever-upward motion of the planned economy detailed by Mandel in his writings as proof of the continuing ?transitional? nature of the USSR, facilitate his interpretation of the bureaucracy?s impending fate. To justify his old position on Yugoslavia, Pablo was forced to offer a different explanation of the power of the bureaucracy than the one put forward by Trotsky.

Trotsky had been clear that the functional roots of the bureaucracy lay in the backwardness of Soviet Russia and the scarcity of goods that such backwardness implied. The bureaucracy arose as a gendarme over the distribution of scarce goods. However, the nature of that bureaucracy was qualitatively transformed when, from being an agent of the workers? soviets, it usurped political power and wielded it in its own interests, smashing the vanguard of the working class, the Left Opposition of the party, in the process.

Pablo ignored the political nature of the bureaucracy that this process resulted in (i.e. its counter-revolutionary nature), and analysed Stalinist bureaucracies purely from the standpoint of their functional roots. He was convinced by the colonial revolutions that the world revolution would spread from the periphery (backward countries) to the centre (advanced countries). Therefore, he concluded, bureaucratic deformations would be an inevitable, indeed necessary, feature of transitional societies for some time to come. However, as productive forces grew, and as the world revolution spread, so the material base of these bureaucracies would disappear as would the bureaucracies themselves. This conveniently left out the need for political revolution against the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy that rules in every existing post-capitalist society on the planet.

Pablo explained this revisionist position in polemics with no less a person than Ernest Germain:

?Thus in the historic period of the transition from capitalism to socialism we shall witness the rise not of normal workers? states, but of more or less degenerated workers? states that is, states with strong
bureaucratic deformations which can reach the point of complete political expropriation of the proletariat?27

But Pablo did not despair at this prospect since the forward march of deformed revolution is guaranteed by the objective situation and with it the withering away of the deformations.

Mandel?s position on the bureaucracy are taken straight from his one-time adversary and long-time master, Pablo. The plan guarantees growth. Growth guarantees that the proletariat will increase in size and culture and that the bureaucracy will weaken. When faced with this contradiction posed to it acutely, at times of crisis, a section of the bureaucracy will move closer to the masses and become a leading force in the process (Mandel's favourite word) of political revolution. Indeed, Mandel sometimes implies that the process has already made qualitative leaps forward:

?Can it be said that the Soviet Union in which oppositionists were found only in Gulag camps and the Soviet Union today with its ferment of political currents, samizdat and discussions at all sorts of levels (not only among intellectuals, but also in the unions) are one and the same thing?28

Trotskyists recognise that for a real change to take place in the USSR and the degenerate workers? states, the power of the bureaucracy must be smashed decisively by the working class.

Therefore to Mandel?s question ? flowing from his crass impressionism ? the answer would be yes!; in essence the Soviet Union today is the same as the Soviet Union under Stalin. It remains the land of bureaucratic tyranny over the workers.

In his long-forgotten polemics with Pablo in the 1940s, the young and rash Germain argued vehemently:

?Any revision, either current or retrospective, of the results of this analysis [of the buffer zone as capitalist states ? Eds] implying both a revision of the criteria employed and a revision of the Marxist theory of the state, could only have disastrous consequences for the Fourth International.?29

At that time, Mandel was wrong in his characterisation of Eastern Europe, but right in his estimation of the dangers of Pablo?s position. However, having been defeated by 1951, Mandel has spent over 30 years providing a theoretical justification for those ?consequences? with a sophistry and alacrity of which Pablo was incapable. His responsibility for the destruction of the international Trotskyist movement as a revolutionary force is far greater than Pablo?s. And it continues up to the present. Authentic Trotskyism has no place for Mandel?s ?orthodox? concoctions ? they are a mockery of the Marxism of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

In the 1953 split within the FI the analysis of Stalinism developed by Pablo, and refined and modified by Germain (Mandel) was not really in dispute. Therefore once the immediate tactical issue in the dispute ? orientation to national Stalinist parties became irrelevant, unification of the International Secretariat and the International Committee again became a possibility.

Hansen on Cuba

The Cuban Revolution showed that Mandel?s theories had an advocate within the Socialist Workers Party (USA). His name was Joseph Hansen.

In late 1949 Hansen emerged as a major protagonist in the debate on Eastern Europe arguing a line very close to that being defended by Pablo and against those who continued to regard Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe as ?capitalist states on the road to structural assimilation?, principally Germain (Mandel):
This degenerated workers? state [the USSR ? Eds] spilling over the frontiers fixed at the close of World War 1, has upset capitalist property relations in Eastern Europe and given rise to formations that are pretty much replicas of the USSR.? 30

Hansen observed that the European and American opponents of Pablo?is crude impressionism were wrestling with the ?norms? of Trotsky?is programme ? civil war, direct action of the masses, soviets, ?real? planning. They were seeking to defend this programme against the revisions they instinctively felt would be ushered in by accepting these misbegotten Stalinist monsters as workers? states.

Hansen, however, had no such misgivings and mercilessly mocked their ?normative? method with quotes from Trotsky. He was easily able to trip them up in the contradictions of their own confused dialectic. After all, by 1949 capitalism and the capitalists palpably did not exist in Eastern Europe. Here, a good American pragmatist, unhampered by ?dialectical? baggage, could see and say that ?the Emperor had no clothes.?

In this assessment Hansen was not wrong. He utilised the empirical shrewdness which he later applied to Cuba. Against those who were inventing all sorts of new criteria for the existence of workers? states, Hansen insisted:

?In my opinion, in a country where the rule of the bourgeoisie has been broken AND the principal sectors of the economy nationalised, we must place the state in the general category of ?workers? state? no matter how widely or monstrously it departs from our norms. This change cannot occur without a civil war although this civil war may also be a mutilation of the type, differing in important respects from our norms.?

This position contains two key errors that laid the basis for Hansen?s acceptance of Pablo?is revisionism on Yugoslavia and for his own application of that revisionism to the Cuban events.

Hansen is wrong to equate the political expropriation of the bourgeoisie and extensive nationalisation with the establishment of post-capitalist property relations. Eastern Europe between 1944 and 1948 showed instances where the political power of the bourgeoisie was broken (crucially their control of armed bodies of men defending their property, was gone), the economy nationalised the Stalinists in power and yet these countries (e.g. Poland and East Germany) remained capitalist.

For Hansen to be consistent he would have to date the creation of workers? states in these countries between 194 and 1946, a position he did not hold. Thus his empiricism in 1949 did not enable him to isolate what was the defining attributez of the workers states, nor the means by which they were created. As we have shown, the political expropriation of bourgeoisie and nationalisation are pre-requisites for the establishment of a degenerate workers? state. But only when the economies are planned on the basis of suppressing the operation of the law of value can we talk of degenerate workers? states having been established.

Hansen?is second error, and one that he shared with his opponents in 1949, was his insistence on the need for ?civil war? for the creation of degenerate workers? states. Although he accepts that such civil wars can be of a ?mutilated? type he does argue: ?Overturns in property relations cannot occur without the revolutionary mobilisations of the masses.? 32

But Hansen?is dating of such mobilisations in Eastern Europe takes him back to the time of the entry of the Red Army not to the actual times of the overturns. Precisely because the workers? states are degenerate from birth, their creation can be accomplished in the special circumstances detailed elsewhere in this book, without the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses by a Stalinist bureaucracy. Moreover, as
Czechoslovakia showed, even where mobilisations do take place, they are completely bureaucratically controlled by the Stalinists. No organs of working class democratic power - soviets - are formed.

While Hansen in his 1949 document, The Problem of Eastern Europe attacks those who have a normative notion of civil war, it must be said that his alternative is really to operate with an idealist notion of civil war. That is, he is forced to invent civil wars where they did not take place.

The real weakness of this method was exposed when it was applied to Yugoslavia. Here there was a fairly normal civil war, though under a leadership with Stalinist origins, as Pablo afterwards put it. Such a war is essential to the overturn of property relations. The Yugoslav civil war ushered in a workers state before this had happened in the rest of Eastern Europe. Further, as this civil war only deviated slightly from the norm, so, the Yugoslav workers state itself must only have deviated slightly from the norm. That is, Hansen's method led him, by 1951, to concede that the Yugoslav revolution and the workers state it created only deviated from the norm quantitatively not qualitatively.

Hansen rejected the normative method but not from the standpoint of the genuine materialist method which can evaluate what the deviations from the norm mean. Hansen effectively rejected the norms - soviets, proletarian democracy, direct participation of the masses in their own emancipation as secondary, not essential or merely formal questions. The full flowering of Hansen's pragmatism was to take place over his analysis of Cuba.

In 1960 Hansen stepped forward to re-apply the method that had yielded these liquidationist conclusions with regard to Tito. The adaptation to Castroism copied the capitulation to Titoism. This methodology was unable to combat the petit bourgeois anti-imperialism and Stalinism and 22 years later blinds its followers to the necessity for a political revolution.

Nevertheless Hansen did empirically register the decisive political and economic events and even the stages of the Cuban revolution.

In this he retained the advantage over his anti-Pabloite critics. Mage, Wolforth, Healy all constructed lifeless abstract and idealist schemas - classless transitional state, structural assimilation, capitalist state - which not only involved serious revisions of the Marxist theory of the state but also blinded their authors to the major events and turning points of the Cuban revolution.

However, Hansen's evaluation of the significance of the Cuban revolution, whilst able to perceive the breaks with imperialism and the Cuban bourgeoisie, the decisive importance of the material links with the USSR and the expropriation of capitalist property, was nevertheless hopelessly at sea when it came to the evaluation of political tendencies, governments and, consequently, strategy and tactics for the proletarian vanguard.

Whilst Hansen based his approach on the 1948-50 Fourth International analysis of Titoism, a new problem posed was the non-Stalinist origins of the July 26th Movement (J26M), indeed its non-proletarian origins both in social and political terms.

Hansen argued that the Castro movement was a radical petit-bourgeois movement with a bourgeois democratic programme. Its programme promised thoroughgoing agrarian reform and industrialisation to break Cuba's dependent status vis-a-vis the USA. The Castroites however, were serious about their programme and as a matter of principle insisted on revolutionary methods to oust Batista.

During the civil war phase in the Sierra Maestra Castro mobilised the poor peasants and the agrarian proletariat, the decisive sector of the Cuban working class. By a reciprocal action the J26M leaders?
outlook became modified. The urban workers on the other hand proved unable to bring their power to bear at this stage, but later rallied to Castro.

Castro destroyed Batista’s armed forces and took power in January 1959 inaugurating a process of smashing the bourgeois state machine. It was a popular political revolution but appeared to be limited to democratic aims. The government was a coalition with important bourgeois democratic elements. The attempt to carry through the agrarian reform and other measures led to a clash with US imperialism and its Cuban agents.

Castro broke with the bourgeoisie, expelled their representatives from the government and formed a workers? and farmers? government, in autumn 1959. Cuba’s workers? and farmers? government could be so designated because of its firm resistance to imperialism and its Cuban agents; its resolute pursuit of the agrarian reform; its disarming of reaction and its arming of the people; its carrying out of pro-working class measures at the expense of the bourgeoisie; and its conflict with imperialism forced it to take increasingly radical measures.

The period of the workers? and farmers? government was completed by late 1960 with the establishment of a workers? state. The decisive measures were: the establishment of a monopoly of foreign trade, the nationalisation of the latifundia, the expropriation of the US and Cuban capitalist holdings in all the key sectors of the economy. This process was completed in the August 1960 period and Hansen could therefore proclaim that planning is now (December 1960) firmly established. In his view planning developed concomitantly with the nationalisation of industry.

The procedure for planning the economy was based on a study of the USSR and Eastern Europe and thus in the final analysis the overturn in property relations is an echo of the October revolution in Russia.

The Castro movement and the state that it had created had however unique features. The Cuban workers? state was neither degenerate nor deformed, indeed it was a pretty good looking one. However, it was lacking as yet in the forms of democratic proletarian rule. Though if it were to develop freely, its democratic tendency would undoubtedly lead to the early creation of proletarian democratic forms.

There were no bureaucratic obstacles to the advance to socialism in Cuba or to the international spread of the revolution. The Castro leadership by their failure to proclaim socialist aims during the course of the revolution demonstrated that the subjective factor in the revolution remained unclear. Nevertheless, the Castro current was empirically revolutionary and above all not Stalinist, a fact of world wide significance.

The non-Stalinist and indeed profoundly democratic essence of Castroism meant that the Cuban CP could itself be purged of its legacy of Stalinism. There was no need to programmatically counterpose Trotskyism to Castroism since there was no need to build a separate Trotskyist party. Hansen rejected political revolution and a Trotskyist party for Cuba. He gives exceptionalist reasons to explain why a Trotskyist leadership is not necessary capitalism is weaker in imperialised countries and there, a socialist minded leadership will do because of the strength of the objective process of revolution.

Hansen’s analysis is thoroughly liquidationist in its programmatic conclusions. In the first place by entrusting the tasks of a revolutionary communist party leading a working class organised in armed, democratic organs of direct power, to the Castroites his position represents a capitulation to an agent of the petit-bourgeoisie. Castro’s programme in 1959 was absolutely clear. He held back on developing
institutions of democracy? bourgeois or proletarian? because his role was that of a bonaparte
demagogically appeasing the masses but acting in defence of capitalism.

The fact that Castro had employed revolutionary methods? i.e. armed struggle? does not make him a
communist, conscious or unconscious. Countless nationalists in the imperialised world? Chiang Kai Shek,
for example? have used non-constitutional methods to achieve power. Hansen?s attempt to distinguish
Castro from other nationalist leaders by referring to his base amongst the rural proletariat is equally
spurious. The rural proletariat was never as well organised as the urban workers and was never as class
conscious as them.

For this very reason Castro was able to utilise them in this guerrilla war in exactly the same way as he was
able to use the poor peasants. That is, their form of struggle under Castro?s leadership was not a specific
proletarian form of struggle. Indeed, against Hansen, we would argue that it was the very absence of the
well organised urban working class led by a revolutionary party from the Cuban revolutionary struggle that
made possible the bureaucratisation of the movement and the creation of a degenerate workers? state.

His attempt to give the Castroites revolutionary proletarian credentials leads Hansen to ignore the popular
frontist character of the J26M. In his Draft Theses on the Cuban Revolution in 1960 Hansen concedes that
the initial government was a ?coalition?, including in it ?bourgeois democratic elements?. However this
feature of the J26M, its limitation to a bourgeois programme, and the class polarisation that resulted when
this coalition was placed under the combined and conflicting pressures of the Cuban masses and US
imperialism, is completely ignored.

Castro can be portrayed as a revolutionary driven left simply by US imperialism:

?The conflict between American imperialism and the Castro forces precipitated a political crisis in Havana.
This was resolved by a decided turn to the left.?46

The J26M becomes simply ?the Castro forces?, an undifferentiated bloc. This is vital for Hansen?s
analysis. This way he can paint Castro as a consistent revolutionary constantly evolving leftwards, albeit
unconsciously. This obscures Castro?s real role as a bonaparte for capitalism in the first nine months of
1959. It also provides Hansen with an explanation of why Castro was eventually able to create a workers?
state. Castro?s liquidation of the J26M into Cuban Stalinism, which was possible because a pro-Stalinist
wing existed in the movement, and the creation of a degenerate workers? state by this force, are ignored in
the interests of Hansen?s capitulationist schema of Cuba as a healthy workers? state not in need of
political revolution.

Hansen observes the anti-capitalist aspects of Castro?s ?workers? government? but assimilates it to the
norm of the Comintern?s revolutionary workers? government. He obscures the fact that the Cuban
workers? and farmers? government was not under the control of or answerable to the proletariat and the
poor peasantry. For it to have been so, democratic workers? militia and workers? and peasants? councils
would have had to have come into being. Such bodies did not come into being and in addition the existing
workers? organisations, especially the trade unions, were purged of their pro-capitalist bureaucracy.

This was immediately replaced with a Stalinist one. Whilst the anti-capitalist measures leading to the
creation of a workers? state are observed even if in a telescoped form by Hansen, the bureaucratic
exclusion from political power of the working class is completely ignored. In fact, if this latter process is
taken into account, one is forced to conclude that Castro?s government was not a revolutionary, but a
The reason Hansen feels able to dismiss the fact that the Cuban proletariat had no real self-organised, armed, democratic bodies, is because he reduces such bodies to mere "forms of proletarian democracy":

If the Cuban revolution were permitted to develop freely, its democratic tendency would undoubtedly lead to the early creation of proletarian democratic forms adapted to Cuba's own needs. 47

Not only can a healthy workers' state be created without a revolutionary party, it can also be created on behalf of the masses, rather than by them, without soviets or a workers' militia. If this is the case, then the task for Trotskyists should simply be to encourage petit-bourgeois nationalists leftwards, to coax them to act on behalf of the masses. There is no need for a party, nor for a programme based on the struggle for the seizure of power by the working class organised in soviets. These things, Hansen assures us, will some day eventually evolve naturally!

Against this distortion of Marxism it needs to be re-affirmed that soviets and a workers' militia are not mere "forms of proletarian democracy". They are the indispensable weapons that the working class has in the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and they are the means by which the working class exercises its direct political rule in a healthy workers' state.

Their temporary atrophy can be offset by the existence of a consciously revolutionary party (e.g. Russia 1920) but not by a petit-bourgeois nationalist movement that assimilated itself to Stalinism. Besides if the evolution of these democratic forms was really possible in Cuba then the followers of Hansen would have to explain why, twenty-two years later, such organs of power still do not exist in Cuba.

Hansen was unable to raise an independent revolutionary programme for Cuba. As happened with Yugoslavia, the SWP (USA), fooled by one of Stalinism's disguises, reduced its own role to that of being friendly advisor to Castro. If this applied to Castro then it would equally apply to a host of other imperialised countries. Hansen's theory, building on and developing the Fourth International's earlier errors, cleared the way for reunification with Pablo and Germain's International Secretariat. The United Secretariat of the Fourth International was founded on a programme that bore no resemblance to authentic Trotskyism's characterisation of Stalinism.

The theory of structural assimilation

The theory of structural assimilation holds that the creation of workers' states in Eastern Europe, Indochina and Cuba was, in essence, the result of the assimilation of these societies into the USSR. For the theorists of structural assimilation - most notably in the recent period, Tim Wohlforth - the process of the creation of new workers' states has ultimately been the process of the extension of the property relations established by the workers' revolution in Russia:

Thus all post-war overturns were in essence extensions of the new property forms thrown up by the October Revolution and the bureaucratic caste which usurped these property forms. 48

The superficial attraction of this theory lies in the fact that, within its terms, neither Stalinist parties nor petit-bourgeoisie nationalist forces are deemed capable of creating workers' states. even of a form degenerate from birth. They can do so only as extensions of the degenerate October Revolution.

The theory of structural assimilation explained a process of the creation of deformed workers' states through the extension of the degenerated workers' state. That is it answered the question of origins without in any sense undermining the revolutionary role of the proletariat. 49

By 'proving' that the agency of social revolution remains, albeit in a highly refracted and degenerate form,
the October Revolution, Wohlforth thought he had discovered a ?theory? which would ward off the opportunistic deviations of Pabloism.

Wohlforth's position has changed significantly over the years, particularly on the question of China and Cuba. But a common thread of an erroneous and non-Marxist position of the state links his positions from 1961 to the present day.

Wohlforth is never absolutely clear as to what precisely happened to the capitalist state in the countries of Eastern Europe following the victories of the Red Army, or in China in 1949 or in Cuba in 1959. One can interpret his position in two ways: either the capitalist state apparatus was never smashed; or it was, but was immediately reconstituted by the Stalinists or petit-bourgeois nationalists. On Eastern Europe he argues:

?(structural assimilation) was not carried through by the destruction of the old bourgeois state in its entirety and the erection of a new working class state apparatus. Not only has much of the administrative structure been kept intact to this day, but a good section of the personnel of the old state administration has been maintained.?50

While on China he states the following:

?Rather it [the CCP ? eds] devoted its efforts to the creation of a coalition government with the remnants of the national bourgeoisie and petit bourgeois forces, guaranteed the sanctity of private property in the immediate period, and set to work to reconstruct the bourgeois state apparatus.?51

The confusion arises because Wohlforth defines the class nature of the state, not on the basis of what mode of production it defends (i.e. its class content), but on the basis of its form. What becomes important to Wohlforth in determining the class nature of these states is the fact that a standing army was recreated, and that the old personnel and administration were maintained. This also explains why he has no conception of the existence of dual power (except as ?territorial? dual power in China) in this period of overturn.

The class nature of the state apparatus becomes subsumed by its form. Having relegated the question of which property form the state presides over to the level of a secondary question, the crucial events leading to the characterisation of these states as deformed workers? states therefore takes place at the level of the superstructure, within the state apparatus:

?The actual social transformation was carried through in the state sector by a process of purging a section of the state bureaucracy, the inundation of the state apparatus with supporters of the Stalinists, and the fusion of the state and Communist Party bureaucracies.?52

This virtual separation of base and superstructure leads Wohlforth into a serious error on the nature of the nationalisations during this period. Wohlforth argues:

?The direct economic power of the bourgeois class in Eastern Europe had been basically eroded with the nationalisations which followed the war. And when it comes to social ownership therefore, the structural transformation process simply completed a process basically finished.? 54

But these nationalisations ? by capitalist states in Eastern Europe in the period 1944-45 ? did not decisively ?erode? the economic power of the bourgeoisie, any more than they did for the Egyptian bourgeoisie under Nasser. What really ?eroded? the power of the bourgeoisie in this period was the smashing of its coercive apparatus. The crucial question for Wohlforth in the creation of workers? states
therefore becomes, "In whose hands is the state power??:

?The completion of the destruction of the economic underpinning of the bourgeois forces in these countries did not represent such a drastic change as the destruction of their political power. In most of these countries, by 1947, the commanding heights of industry were in the hands of the state, thus the critical question was in whose hands the state was, rather than the mopping up operation on the remnants of private capitalist holdings.?55

The introduction of state planning, we should note in passing, must have been part of this "mopping up operation"!

This gives rise to Wohlforth?s concentration on the fusion of the CPs and the Social Democrats and the "interpenetration of the monolithic party with the state apparatus? (tightening of the Stalinists? grip on the state, and that state?s grip on society) as the decisive points that mark the creation of a workers? state albeit of a degenerate form. As Wohlforth himself describes the process:

?Essentially structural assimilation is a combined process of the destruction of the political and social power of the bourgeoisie through administrative means, the consolidation of a monolithic party which is essentially an extension of the soviet bureaucracy, the purging of the state apparatus of bourgeois elements and the fusion of the party and the state bureaucracies into a single ruling bureaucratic caste.?56

Underlying Wohlforth?s theory of structural assimilation is a conception of the state, and therefore of the transition from one type of state to another, which owes more to Kautsky than to Marx.57

For Wohlforth it is possible for the proletariat, or a caste within it, to lay hold of the existing state machine and use it as an instrument for the creation of a workers? state, as a means of carrying through the social revolution. At no point in this process is the bourgeois state ?smashed?; rather it is ?purged?.

There is no qualitative break, rather the bourgeois state grows over through an evolutionary process into a degenerate workers? state:

?The problem of dating, like the problem of the destruction of the bourgeois state through "fusion and purging?, is a reflection of the very process of structural assimilation. Wherever this problem occurs ? as long as it is crystal clear that a social overturn has taken place ? one knows one is dealing with this process.?58

This method stands in sharp contrast to our analysis of the formation of degenerate workers? states which analyses at every point the class nature of the state and the programmatic and tactical implications which flow from it. For Wohlforth, and presumably for any party which adhered to his theory, they could only know a workers? state had come into existence, or even that the process had started, after the event!

Wohlforth?s explanation of the creation of new workers? states is also based on an erroneous analysis of the nature of Stalinism and the Stalinist parties. In his original 1963 essay, the Communist parties were described as being in all essentials, extensions of the Kremlin bureaucracy. Hence it is the Kremlin bureaucracy, based upon the property relations established by a workers? revolution, that is laying hold of these state machines and using them as a means for the transformation of bourgeois states into workers? states through a process of "purgation".59

The degenerated workers? state, which emanated from the October Revolution, has extended itself through its agents into large contiguous areas surrounding the USSR ? a process we call "defensive expansionism".59 And again, in argument with the bureaucratic collectivists:
But Stalinism did not expand in the post-war world on this basis. It did not grow out of the managerial strata of capitalist society at all. Rather it extended itself from the USSR. Thus the identity of Stalinism with the USSR its extension through its own agents and in opposition to all strata of the countries in which the transformation took place cannot be explained through the theory of bureaucratic collectivism. 60

This analysis is extended, but only with difficulty, to Yugoslavia and China. On the Yugoslav Communist Party he argues:

Once the buffer in general is really understood there are no theoretical problems connected with the Yugoslav developments in particular. The basic point is to recognise the nature of the domestic CPs as essentially an extension of the Soviet bureaucracy itself. Once this is recognised then social transformations of a more ?indigenous? character like Yugoslavia can be comprehended. Yugoslavia differed only in degree in this respect ? this was not a qualitative difference. 61

While on the question of the Chinese Communist Party the following analysis is put forward:

To the extent that the CCP was and is independent of domestic social classes, it is dependent upon ? is essentially an extension of ? the bureaucratic caste of the USSR, the distorted product of a workers? revolution. 62

This is a fundamentally undialectical and therefore false characterisation of the national communist parties. Ever since the beginning of the bureaucratic thermidor in the USSR which was carried through under the nationalist slogan of ?socialism in one country?, the Comintern underwent a process of disintegration along the lines of national chauvinism. The national CPs accommodated to specific strata of the petit-bourgeoisie in the imperialised countries and to the labour bureaucracy in the imperialist countries. This process of accommodation took an accelerated form in the civil wars in Yugoslavia and China. As Wohlforth himself in his second document points out, this process led to the crystallisation of a bureaucratic caste in those societies, with its own distinct interests, separate from, and counter posed to, not only the masses of its particular society, but also to the national interests of the Soviet bureaucracy.

The timing and speed of the social overturn in Yugoslavia, the very seizure of power in China, took place contrary to the immediate interests and desires of the Kremlin bureaucracy.

These Stalinist bureaucracies have been capable of making their own alliances with imperialism, against the Soviet bureaucracy, up to and including breaking from the Soviet bloc and entering into military alliance and cooperation with imperialism (for example, Yugoslavia and the Korean war, China?s relations with the USA in the late 1970s).

In a more recent document, Wohlforth appears to recognise the untenability of his previous analysis of Stalinism, as he attempts to grapple with the problems of the Chinese and Cuban revolutions. He states:

I have proven that all the post-war social overturns have been initiated from on top by military-bureaucratic means and have led to the establishment of deformed workers? states identical in all essentials with the USSR. However the path which led to these social transformations differed significantly in the case of the Chinese Variant and the Cuban Variant. Yet none of these processes were totally independent of the Soviet Stalinist State. 63

Historical reality has pushed Wohlforth from a position where these parties were seen as little more than extensions of the Kremlin bureaucracy? to one where they are seen as not ?totally independent? of the Kremlin. The theory of structural assimilation, which argued that Stalinist and petit-bourgeois nationalist
movements were incapable of creating deformed workers? states except as extensions of the Kremlin bureaucracy, has been stretched to breaking point!

It is false to see the Stalinist parties as simply extensions of the Soviet bureaucracy. The logic of this very argument led Pablo to conclude that the Yugoslav Communist Party had ceased to be a Stalinist one once it broke with the Kremlin! However, the ability of the forces of Stalinism to carry through bureaucratic social revolutions cannot be abstracted historically from the existence of the USSR and its strength vis-a-vis imperialism. In the case of Yugoslavia, China and Cuba, the bureaucratic revolutions were carried through in a situation where the world bourgeoisie was insufficiently strong in relation to the USSR to directly and successfully intervene to protect the native bourgeoisie and the capitalist property relations.

The very existence of the USSR can, of course, serve to materially aid the native Stalinist forces directly. That this will not always be the case, should those forces not be advancing the interests of the Kremlin bureaucracy, is demonstrated by the Greek events of 1944-45.

The USSR can, by its very existence and armed might, undermine the possibility of internationally-backed capitalist retaliation and counter-revolution. It can serve as an alternative source of economic aid and cooperation to forces struggling to break the stranglehold of imperialism over their national economies, as in the case of Cuba. But such assistance will only ever be forthcoming from the USSR should the overturn potentially strengthen the bargaining position of the Kremlin bureaucracy without upsetting the Kremlin?s strategy of peaceful co-existence with imperialism.

Within Wohlforth?s theory of the state is a reformist political logic which stands outside the tradition of the Third and Fourth Internationals. This is most clearly seen in Wohlforth?s most recent article, Transition to the Transition in New Left Review.

Defining the class nature of the state according to its superstructural form rather than on the basis of what property forms it defends, has led him to question, like Kautsky before him, the soviet system itself. Hailing looked more closely at the ?Soviet type of the early period of the USSR?, Wohlforth is obviously no longer sure as to whether it was ?fundamentally different? from and superior to, the bureaucratic East European or Mussolini state types, which were both, for him, capitalist in form.

In this article, Wohlforth contents himself with attacking Soviet democracy as ?undemocratic? and proposes instead a good dose of bourgeois democracy for the early Soviet State. If the early Soviet Union also has a ?capitalist state form?, then it is only logical to argue for capitalist forms of democracy. Thus the ?failure? of the early Bolshevik government to transform the Soviets into a ?practical government structure? exposed the impossibility of directly combining the decentralised Soviet system with the needs of a modernised centralised state, as well as revealing the ambiguities (sic) in the Leninist counter position of ?proletarian? versus ?bourgeois democracy.?64

Wohlforth believes it is ?utopian? to imagine the establishment of direct democratic rule and is only willing to defend ?the vision and possibility? of such a system.65 The Bolsheviks were forced to use ?much of the old administrative personnel? and were forced to watch over ?what was in many respects the reconstitution of the old state apparatus.?66

Rather than the ?expansion of democracy? (class character not given), democracy was ?restricted.?67 Once again Wohlforth is allowing his preoccupation with the ?form? of the state to totally blind him to the content of Soviet democracy. The early Soviet state represented the dictatorship of the proletariat; that was why the bourgeoisie were excluded from the suffrage, why the working class was given greater weight than the peasants in the soviets. Wohlforth, like Kautsky before him, empties democracy of its class content,
protests against the violations of democracy in general.

Lenin had this to say when Kautsky complained of restrictions in democracy in the young Soviet Republic:

> It is natural for a liberal to speak of democracy in general; but a Marxist will never forget to ask, for what class??68

Undaunted, the liberal Wohlforth continues:

> It is hard to view the young Soviet state as structurally superior to the systems of parliamentary bourgeois democracy excoriated in Leninist doctrine.69

He then proceeds to recommend a constituent assembly as a stage on the road to soviets after the seizure of power by the proletariat:

> The specific function of representative democracy, therefore is to ensure that the power that still rests at the centralised summit of the state is elected directly through pluralistic competition, universal suffrage and the secret ballot. Representative Democracy is necessary to mediate the contradiction between Sovietism and centralism, and to guarantee the space for, the gradual transfer of power from centralised, representative institutions to decentralised, participatory bodies of a Soviet or communal type.70

All this is nothing new of course; these were exactly the points on which Kautsky attacked the dictatorship of the proletariat in the young Soviet Republic.

Wohlforth now has agreement with Kautsky not only on the question of the state but also on rejecting the dictatorship of the proletariat. In 1919 in Terrorism and Communism Kautsky defined the USSR as a bureaucratic dictatorship where the bureaucracy represented a new ruling class presiding over a state capitalist economy. Having long had theoretical agreement on the state, it will undoubtedly not be long before Wohlforth reaches agreement with Kautsky on the class nature of the Soviet Union!

The Spartacist school of Stalinophilia

The Cuban Revolution created a new basis for agreement between the two principal camps of world Trotskyism. It enabled Joseph Hansen and the SWP (USA) and Ernest Mandel and the International Secretariat to reunite around similar positions on Cuba, that stemmed from their shared erroneous assessment of the Yugoslav revolution in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The SWP’s positions on Cuba did not, however, go unchallenged within that organisation.

During the latter half of 1960, a minority tendency within the SWP (USA) led by Mage, Wohlforth and Robertson, developed an alternative position to the SWP majority on the Cuban revolution. This led, in 1961, to the formation of the Revolutionary Tendency (RT) later to become the international Spartacist tendency iSt. Wohlforth was quickly to abandon the positions he helped to develop within the opposition and, in alliance with Healy, was to side with the SWP majority in the bureaucratic expulsion of the RT.

The initial positions were further developed within the iSt and have by implication rather than through theoretical elaboration, been extended to cover Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia and China. (Indeed it is astonishing that over twenty years later barely a few lines have been written by the iSt on the Eastern European overturns). Motivated initially by a desire to avoid the chronic opportunism and liquidationism of the Hansen majority, the RT/iSt proceeded to make a series of major revisions of the Marxist theory of the state, which in their implications for the Marxist programme are no less erroneous and dangerous than those made by either Hansen or Wohlforth.
The core of the iSt’s error lies in the characterisation of the nature of the state that existed in Cuba between January 1959 and late 1960. For them the government which controlled Cuba was:

?an inherently transitory and fundamentally unstable phenomenon ? a petitbourgeois government which was not committed to the defence of either bourgeois private property or the collectivist property forms of proletarian class rule.?71

The government came to power in a situation where

?a capitalist state, namely armed bodies of men dedicated to defending a particular property form, did not exist in the Marxist sense.?72

The armed force on which this state rested was led by commanders who had had their

?previous direct connections with oppositional liberal elements broken and had become episodically autonomous from their class...the Cuban bourgeoisie?73

Despite the attempts to distance themselves from the original Mage/Wohlforth position of a ?transitional state? with no defined class character ? a position defined as ?indefensible? in Cuba and Marxist Theory ? this is precisely the characterisation the iSt itself used. Cuba and Marxist Theory declares: ?at no point was there a classless ?transitional? state in Cuba?, there was ?a petit-bourgeois government ? not a class neutral one.? The use of the term ?petit-bourgeois government? does not get round this problem. Does this mean we have a petit-bourgeois state, based on a petit-bourgeois mode of production?

The iSt recoils from this further revision of Marxism by remaining silent on this interesting new state form. Instead it prefers to define this state negatively, as one which neither defends bourgeois private property nor proletarian property forms.

Either this is a ?class neutral? state, or the iSt is trying to breed a unicorn. Such a position directly overthrows the Marxist analysis of the state as elaborated from the Communist Manifesto onwards, that the state is a machine for maintaining the rule of one class over others. It is an organ of class rule which defends, even in its bonapartist form, one set of property forms.

A state which defends neither capitalist nor proletarian property forms is therefore a classless state, a state which is no longer an organ of class rule, and a contradiction of the Marxist theory of the state!

The iSt further argue that a state is defined as ?armed bodies of men dedicated to defending a particular property form? 74 [our emphasis]. This IS an idealist notion of the relationship between property relations and the state machine. We judge the class nature of a state by its actions, not by the ?dedication? of the individuals who make up its apparatus. This revision is essential for the iSt in giving a theoretical gloss to their notion of a ?petit-bourgeois government?, in which the property relations the state chooses to defend at any given time, depends upon indecision in the minds of those in political power.

This fundamentally false analysis has been extended to Nicaragua, where we are expected to believe that (at the time of writing) a government that has been in existence since the summer of 1979, presiding over an economy overwhelmingly in the hands of private capital, does not defend capitalism. It is, rather, not yet decisively ?committed? to capitalism or to proletarian property forms!

Such an analysis of the Cuban events is unable to explain the class character of the popular front which came to power in January 1959, which the iSt assures was not capitalist. It ignores the pro-capitalist, bourgeois aspect of the July 26th Movement. When this aspect was dominant (i.e. during the popular
front), the J26M crushed all attempts by the workers and peasants to go beyond the bourgeois limits set by the Castro leadership. Further, this analysis sows illusions in the petit-bourgeois leadership of the Rebel Army, declaring them to be somehow committed to no class interests, implying that the Army was somehow ?neutral? between workers and peasants on the one hand and the capitalists and landowners on the other.

It therefore cannot explain the struggle in the form of dual power between the bourgeoisie and its supporters in the army on the one side and the petit-bourgeois leadership around Castro representing, however a distorted form, the demands and pressure of the aroused workers and peasant masses. The programmatic conclusions of such analysis are necessarily vague because the Spartacists could not perceive the dual power situation, they had no programme for resolving it.

The basis on which Cuba is characterised as a ?deformed workers? state? by the iSt is also wrong:

?Cuba became a deformed workers? state with the pervasive nationalisations in the summer and fall of 1960.?75

The equation put forward here: ?Nationalisations = deformed workers? state? is completely false. The monopoly of foreign trade, and most vitally the introduction of planning on the basis of the suppression of the law of value, as well as nationalisations, are the features which, taken together, define an economy as post-capitalist. Further, this position implies that a ?petit-bourgeois government? can overturn capitalism and construct a ?deformed? workers? state merely through massive nationalisations.

On this basis, no real distinction can be made between Cuba and other ?petit-bourgeois governments? which have followed a similar course, such as Algeria, Egypt, Burma, etc? expect on the basis of the percentage of the economy nationalised. Were all of these capitalist states ?deformed workers? states in the process of formation?? By answering ?No?, the Spartacists are forced to contradict their own methodology.

The Spartacists also do not recognise in any form the essential role played by Stalinism in the Cuban Revolution. They do not recognise the proto-Stalinist wing of the pre-1959 J26M.

They do not recognise the alliance of Castro with the Cuban Stalinists from November 1959. They do not recognise the essential assimilation of Castroism to Stalinism, and the reliance on the PSP bureaucratic apparatus during the period of the bureaucratic workers? government, complete by the onset of planning in 1962. Nor do they recognise that such a process would have been impossible without the economic and military support of the Kremlin. Consequently, they assign to the petit-bourgeoisie the ability. to form a ?deformed? workers? state ? a revision of Marxism with regard to the fundamental characteristics of this class.

The fragmentary references of the iSt to the formation of ?deformed? workers? states in Eastern Europe imply the existence of similar periods of ?classless states? or ?workers? states in the process of formation.? From the entry of the Red Army, the class nature of the state is indeterminate. The only flaw which the iSt sees in the Vern-Ryan tendency?s equation of entry of Red Army with formation of ?deformed? workers? state, is that in some cases the soviet forces withdraw ? e.g. in Austria, leaving behind a capitalist state.76 But the preferred term ?workers? state in the process of formation? is a designation of no use. It can only be used after the event, as a description.

This is a position which, as in Cuba, will not define the class character of the state, its government, or what property forms its army defends at each stage, and thus fails to provide any coherent revolutionary
programme during the period of dual power, or the period of an anti-capitalist bureaucratic workers? government.

Not only a revisionist position on the state emerges from this analysis. In echoing the positions of the Vern-Ryan tendency, the iSt have made a fundamental revision of the Trotskyist understanding of Stalinism. For the iSt, Stalinism has a ?dual character? it has a ?bad?, counter-revolutionary side, and a ?good?, progressive one. Its bad side involves it in crushing workers? democracy, expropriating the proletariat from political power; its good side is that it can overturn capitalism, and the two weigh equally in the balance.

This position is evidenced in the increasingly Stalinophile programme of the iSt, particularly with regard to Afghanistan and Poland. In these countries, the ?dual? character of Stalinism is reflected in the supposed ability of the Stalinists to act as ?liberators in a social as well as national sense? in particular countries, and in its inability to carry through the proletarian revolution on a world scale.77 Both Mandel (in his "Ten Theses" 1951) and the Vern - Ryan tendency (in their description of Stalinism as centrist) articulated a similar position. This position is absolutely false. It has nothing in common with genuine Trotskyism.

Stalinism does not have two competing aspects, one of which at anyone time predominates over another. Rather, it has a contradictory character because its privileged caste existence in the USSR is based on the post-capitalist property forms established by the October Revolution. To defend these property forms, the very basis of this caste?fs existence, the Stalinist bureaucracy is sometimes forced to carry through measures which, if taken in isolation from the way they are carried out and the effects they have on the international class struggle, would be considered progressive.

But these measures are never carried through in isolation, they are always carried through in a counterrevolutionary manner, and always involve the political expropriation of the working class in the country concerned. The Stalinist bureaucracies have a contradictory character, but form a predominantly counter-revolutionary whole. This caste does not have the potential for fulfilling the mission of the proletariat ? genuine proletarian revolutions are the prerequisite for building world socialism.

The retreat from the revolutionary programme that the Spartacist position involves can be accurately gauged from the answers that they have offered to the Afghan and Polish masses.

In Afghanistan the iSt reject the perspective of permanent revolution for that country, because of its backwardness. They make a false analogy between the healthy Soviet workers? state of the early 1920s that assimilated certain backward Asian countries, and the counter-revolutionary international designs of the bonapartist clique in the Kremlin. Events in Afghanistan are viewed not from the standpoint of international class struggle (which would link the struggle of progressive Afghans with that of their fellow Afghan workers resident in Iran, Pakistan etc as part of a struggle for a socialist federation of south west Asia), but from the abstract standpoint of ?progress? now led by Russian tanks?, versus ?backwardness.?78

The Spartacists call on the bureaucracy to extend the social gains of the October revolution. They ?Hail the Red (sic) Army? as the agent of this process. That is, behind the radical verbiage, they call for, as part of their own programme for Afghanistan, the establishment of a degenerate workers? state. This is not a tactical united front, it is an abandonment of an independent programme. This reliance on the Soviet bureaucrats as second best given the weakness of the Afghan working class, leads inexorably to a strategic bloc with Stalinism.

On the events in Poland 1980-81, the iSt have gone from simple hostility to the Polish workers? movement right up to a bloc with the Stalinists to help crush that movement. They started their analysis of Poland not
from the revolutionary possibilities that existed, but from a supposed threat posed by the Polish workers? action to the property relations in Poland and the USSR. Their excuse for this stance was their exaggerated view of the immediacy of the Catholic church?s restorationist intentions.

After trying to square the circle ? giving limited support to the misled Polish workers, and opposing a Russian invasion (by ?hissing at tanks? as Workers Vanguard advised), by late 1981 the iSt gave up and decided that Solidarnosc was counterrevolutionary to the core, and should be crushed, by Kremlin tanks if necessary:

?Solidarity?s counter-revolutionary course must be stopped! If the Kremlin Stalinists, in their necessarily brutal, stupid way, intervene militarily to stop it, we will support this. And we take responsibility in advance for this; whatever the idioties and atrocities they will commit, we do not flinch from defending the crushing of Solidarity's counterrevolution.? 79

When the Jaruzelski coup was launched on 13 December 1981, when Polish tanks moved to crush the 10 million strong movement of Polish workers, the Spartacists were quick to offer their support. They warned the Polish workers against any resistance, and cynically described the crackdown as a ?cold shower? for the Polish proletariat. Upset by over a year of class struggle, these miserable pedants, who can only imagine winning the working class to their cruel caricature of Trotskyism in the sterile atmosphere of the propagandists? school room (separate from the actual struggles of workers), called for a return to Gierek?s 1970s? style of government:

?If the present crackdown restores something like the tenuous social equilibrium which existed in Poland before the Gdansk strikes last August, a tacit understanding that if the people left the government alone, the government would leave the people alone ? conditions will be opened again for the crystallisation of a Leninist-Trotskyist party.? 80

The iSt have blood on their hands. The ?good? side of Stalinism?s ?dual nature?, the side that the iSt call on revolutionaries to support, has become its willingness and ability to crush the independent activity of the working class. Programmatic confusion on Cuba in 1960 has become metamorphosed into Stalinophile clarity in 1982. At no stage in this evolution did the Spartacists represent a revolutionary challenge to the bankrupt centrism of the USFI.

Footnotes

3. ibid. p.255
5. ibid. p.16
22. E.Mandel, Marxist Economic Theory, op. cit. p.565
23. E.Mandel, Revolutionary Marxism Today, (London 1979) p.120
28. E.Mandel, Revolutionary Marxism Today, OR. cit. p.136
31. ibid. p.35
32. ibid. p.31
33. J.Hansen, Dynamics of the Cuban Revolution,(New York 1978) p.73
34. ibid.p.73
35. ibid. p.74
36. ibid. p.74
37. ibid. p.74
38. ibid. p.74
39. ibid. p.85
40. ibid. p.75
41. ibid. p.75
42. ibid. p.75
43. ibid. p.76
44. ibid. p.202-3
45. ibid. p.73
46. ibid. p.74
47. ibid. p.75
50. T Wohlforth, ?The Theory of Structural Assimilation?. This 1963 essay was reprinted in, Communists Against Revolution, (London 1978). All references are from this book, henceforth referred to as Wohlforth-1978
51. T Wohlforth 1963,p.28 51. ibid. p.71 (our emphasis)
52. ibid. p.47
53. ibid. p.23
54. ibid. p.31 (our emphasis)
55. ibid. p.24-5 (our emphasis;
56. ibid. p.35 (emphasis in original)
57. It is clear that Wohlforth’s position on the state both predates and underpins the theory of structural assimilation. Thus, he argues in 1961 in a document that predates structural assimilation: “It (the concept of the transitional state) is said to be in contradiction with the Marxist theory of the state as at all times the instrument of the ruling class of a particular society... I will expand on the challenge and state categorically all the emerging deformed workers’ states - Eastern Europe, Yugoslavia, China, North Korea, North Vietnam, Cuba - went through transitional periods of more or less extended periods of time during which a bonapartist state apparatus administering a capitalist economy was transformed into a state apparatus, still bonapartist, administering a nationalised economy. (T.Wohlforth, ‘Cuba and the Deformed Workers? States? 1961, p.12 in, Cuba and Marxist Theory (Spartacist League Pamphlet). Again we see a state which, because it is not defined in Marxist terms, i.e. in terms of property relations that it defends, is able to ?float free? from its economic base and become, ‘transformed’ from a bonapartist (capitalist) state into a bonapartist (degenerated workers?) state without that state ever being smashed. (This is, of course, also the origin of the iSt’s ‘transitional state’ which owes more to the ‘Kautskyite Wohlforth? than they care to admit.)

58. T Wohlforth 1963, p.87 (emphasis in original)
59. ibid. p.82
60. ibid. p.85 (emphasis in original)
61. ibid. p.62
62. ibid. p.75 (emphasis in original)
63. T Wohlforth 1979, p.79
64. T. Wohlforth, ‘The Transition to the Transition?’ in New Left Review No. 130, p.69
65. ibid. p.68
66. ibid. p.76
67. ibid. p.78
68. V I Lenin, Collected Works (Moscow 1965) Vol.28,p.235
69. T Wohlforth, New Left Review op. cit. p.80
70. ibid. p.79
71. ‘Guerillas in Power?’ in Workers Vanguard No. 102
72. ibid.
73. Cuba and Marxist Theory op. cit.
74. cf. section of this volume on the Fourth International after the Second World War.
75. ‘Whose Poland?’ in Spartacist Britain No. 32
76. Spartacist (Theoretical journal of the Spartacist League) Winter 1979/80
77. ‘Stop Solidarity?’s Counter-Revolution?’ in Spartacist Britain No.36
78. ‘Power Bid Spiked?’ in Workers Vanguard No. 295

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