Chapter 2: From soviet power to soviet bonapartism

Fri, 05/03/1982 - 16:59

In October 1917 state power in Russia was seized by forces intent on using that state power to effect the transition from capitalism to communism. Never before in world history had conscious revolutionary communists taken state power. The October revolution inaugurated the first attempt to implement and develop the programme of revolutionary communism in the aftermath of a proletarian seizure of power.

State power in Russia lay in the hands of the workers and soldiers organised in workers’ councils – the Soviets – and a workers’ militia. The politically conscious vanguard of the workers was organised in the Bolshevik party – 250,000 strong at the time of the October revolution. That party commanded a majority at the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets that assumed power after the overthrow of the old Provisional Government. In the first Council of People’s Commissars – itself responsible to the Soviet Congress – the Bolsheviks had a majority of posts but shared governmental power with a section of the populist Social Revolutionary party – the Left SRs – who supported the creation of Soviet power.

Enormous material obstacles confronted the Soviet Government’s attempt to begin creating the socialist order. The Tsarist regime had developed industrial capitalism in Russia in conjunction with the major imperialist powers and to a large extent economically subordinate to them. As a result Russia experienced extreme unevenness in the development of her productive forces. Developed capitalist industry fostered by imperialism coexisted with under-development and pre-capitalist relations, particularly in agricultural production. On the eve of the first imperialist war the national income per capita in Tsarist Russia was 8 to 10 times less than in the United States.

Four-fifths of the population earned their miserable livelihoods from agriculture. Although Tsarist Russia was a net exporter of grain, her wheat yield was on a level with that of India and well below that of the European states. Consequently the vast majority of the population eked out a pitiful living in conditions of extreme material and cultural backwardness.

Imperialist capital did however develop pockets of heavy industry amidst the rural squalor of Tsarist Russia. Over half the capital invested in the Donetz coal field in 1914 was foreign, as was over 80 per cent of the capital in iron mining, metallurgy and the oil industry. It was in these industries that the Russian proletariat was formed and grew to political maturity. The Russian working class was small but highly concentrated. In 1914 between two and three million were employed as factory workers, three-quarters of a million in the mines and one million on the railways.

But the concentration of that proletariat in giant plants – enterprises employing over 1,000 workers employed 17.8 per cent of the American proletariat, but 41.4 per cent in Russia – gave it enormous social weight and political strength.

Taken in isolation the material backwardness of revolutionary Russia was striking. Tsarist Russia had
relied on western capitalism for both capital and key manufactured goods—chemicals in particular. Hence, the unquestioned unanimity in the ranks of the Bolshevik party that the construction of the material base for a classless, stateless society could not be achieved in one country alone, let alone in one as backward as Russia.

The key planks of the Bolshevik Party’s programme for transition attempted to relate the programme developed by Marx and Engels to the particular circumstances of Russia and the part to be played by its revolution in the world proletarian revolution.

All the Bolshevik leaders saw their revolution as but an initial act in the world revolution. They saw the fate of their revolution as being tied indissolubly to that of the world proletarian revolution. This was stated clearly and unambiguously by Bukharin and Preobrazhensky in their commentary on the programme of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks):

“...The Communist movement can be victorious only as a world revolution. If the state of affairs arose in which one country was ruled by the working class, while in other countries the working class not from fear but from conviction, remained submissive to capital, in the end the great robber states would crush the workers’ state of the first country.”

At the heart of the Bolshevik programme for transition, therefore, was the struggle to internationalise the revolution. The Russian revolution was but one gain in the struggle for international revolution. The communist programme is a programme for the eventual abolition of classes and the state. Having smashed the armed power and executive bureaucracy of the old regime, Bolshevism was committed to the struggle to replace the old type of administrative and coercive apparatus with one that mobilised and actively engaged the toilers themselves.

In Russia this meant taking sovereign power into the hands of the working class organised in soviets. But it also meant the struggle to ensure that working class rule was not simply formal. A struggle had to be waged to enable the workers themselves to gain the experience and culture (in the first place) to be able to directly hold the administrative apparatus to account. This was a necessary staging post to being able to directly manage the economy and dissolve the administrative apparatus as a form separate from the working class.

In this struggle cultural obstacles as well as material ones confronted the Bolsheviks, not least the problem of illiteracy. The pre-revolutionary census of 1897 found that only 21.1 per cent of the population of the Russian empire (excluding Finland) were able to read and write. As a result the programme for transition in Russia required an increase not only in the social and political weight of the industrial proletarians but also a conscious struggle to raise the cultural level of the masses of Russian society to one commensurate with the tasks confronting them.

The Russian revolution was not, however, simply the work of the industrial proletariat. The proletarian insurrection took place alongside the seizure of land and the breakup of the old estates by the peasantry. It combined elements of a land war against the remnants of feudalism with a working class seizure of power. As a result Russia’s arable land was divided into 25 million peasant farms. Not only did the size of these units present an obstacle to re-building agricultural production on a scale and with a technological level sufficient to ensure a qualitative transformation of agricultural production. It also served to strengthen petty-commodity production and primitive capitalist relations in the countryside.

The programme of transition therefore, had to win those peasants who had gained least from the revolution.
on the land the poor and middle peasants-to an alliance with the proletarian state against the rural capitalists and for cooperative large scale agricultural production, utilising developed technology. The Soviet Government referred to transition proceeding gradually with the consent and confirmation of the majority of peasants following the teachings of their practical experience and of the workers.?

These then were the broad outlines of the Bolshevik programme for effecting a transition to socialism in the aftermath of the Russian revolution. The initial period after the revolution saw an enormous extension of the sovereignty of the masses and, as a result, the break up of the authority and jurisdiction of the apparatus the old state machine. The October revolution immediately decreed that authority in the factories should reside with the workers? committees therefore legitimising workers? control over the capitalists. In December 1917 full power in the army was transferred to soldiers? committees with the right to elect and dismiss officers.

The initial perspective for transition was therefore one of prioritising measures to break the power of the remnants of the old state apparatus, the employers and industrial managers and the officer caste, by subjecting them directly to the sovereignty of the Soviets and factory and soldiers? committees. In February 1918 the old courts were abolished and a decree promulgated to ensure the election of judges.

The July 1918 constitution of the young Soviet republic systematised the achievements of Soviet power. Sovereign power formally resided with the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, whose constitution ensured the predominance of the proletariat?s voice within it. Rural and urban bourgeois were not granted the right to vote.

The franchise was weighted so as to give one seat in the Congress for every 25,000 urban voters and 125,000 provincial voters. In the provincial Soviets the vote was weighted to one seat for 2000 city voters and one for 10,000 rural voters. The Bolshevik programme aimed at combining democracy for the proletariat with proletarian?s dictatorship over the old exploiting classes and hegemony over the peasantry.

The formation of the Red Army

The tempo and nature of the transition was of necessity determined by both the material problems confronting the fledgling Soviet regime and the military/political struggle waged by its internal and external enemies. German imperialism resumed its advance against Soviet Russia until the regime signed the March 1918 Brest Litovsk treaty, ceding the majority of the Ukraine to Germany. Later in 1918, and during 1919, the armies of 14 capitalist states waged a war to overthrow the workers? republic. The Social Revolutionaries and a majority of the Menshevik leaders sided with the White Armies of Yudenich, Denikin and Kolchak in the civil war that ensued. In White-dominated areas, with the backing of the SRs, the Soviets were dissolved and the power of the institutions of the Tsarist state ? the Dumas and Zemstvos ? was reinstated.

In the face of counter-revolutionary attack the Bolsheviks were compelled to make specific tactical retreats in order to ensure the survival of the workers? dictatorship. The Red Terror exercised by the Extraordinary Commission (Cheka) was an indispensable weapon of the proletarian dictatorship. In order to effectively defend the revolution a standing army was re-created, but now to defend the gains of the working class and therefore in an important sense an army of a ?new type?.

The Workers? and Peasants? Red Army was created on 23 February 1918 and grew to be 5 million strong by 1920. 30,000 of the old Tsarist officers were enrolled into that army so that the workers? state could take advantage of their military expertise.8 While political supervision of these officers by the workers? state continued, the form that it now took was the appointment of political commissars to oversee their work.
In the middle of 1918 the right to elect officers in the Red Army was abolished. Such actions were necessary and justified because the military threat against the young workers’ state precluded the peaceful and gradual evolution of a group of capable commanders by way of the elective method. The needs of war in defence of the workers’ state demanded military expertise immediately. Appointment of officers and the Commissar system alone could achieve this.

The refusal of the Mensheviks and SRs to recognise the authority of the Soviet regime led to their expulsion from the Soviets in July 1918. They continued to legally operate outside the Soviets. A left shift by the Mensheviks in October 1918 led to their readmission to the Soviets in November of that year. After an armed attempt to destroy the Bolshevik-led regime, the Left SRs were expelled from the Soviets in July. In the factories the move towards workers’ management was halted and reversed in favour of the single authority of the director appointed by the workers’ state. By the start of 1921 some 2,183 out of 2,483 enterprises were managed in this fashion. All of these measures marked a decisive shift towards the centralisation of political power in the hands of the party that organised the conscious layer of the Russian proletariat. These layers were rightly committed to holding state power for the working class as the prerequisite for the transition to socialism. The proletarian dictatorship in Russia took on the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat’s political party.

Anarchists denounced the dictatorship of the party without explaining how else counter-revolution could have been defeated.

On the other hand, by the early 1920s leading member of the Communist Party Gregori Zinoviev was laying down theoretical foundations for Stalinism. He idealised the dictatorship of the party, and made it synonymous with the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Neither position in any way serves the proletariat in the long term. Revolutionaries recognise that exceptional circumstances demand exceptional measures. The dictatorship of the party was such a measure, entirely justified and utilised correctly by Lenin, as a temporary and emergency method of defending the proletariat’s gains against a vicious counter-revolution.

The Civil War had a devastating effect on the industrial base of the Soviet Republic and therefore on the size and morale of the working class. In the proletarian citadel of Petrograd, for example, industrial production in early 1921 stood at only one-eighth of its 1913 level.9

In 1920 and 1921 the giant Putilov works, the symbolic heart of the Petrograd working class was working at only 3 per cent capacity.10 As a result the industrial workforce of Petrograd dropped from a registered 230,000 in January 1918 to only 79,500 in September 1920.11

Those workers most committed to the transition to socialism were drawn into the Red Army and the state apparatus, those least conscious were either forced back into the villages or forced to survive in appalling and demoralising material circumstances in the beleaguered and economically stagnant cities. By January 1921 there were only 3,462 members of the Russian Communist Party employed in Petrograd’s factories ? comprising only 3.2 per cent of the city’s industrial workers.12 No wonder then that the factory committees and Soviets withered as effective, representative and dynamic instruments of the proletarian dictatorship.

In order to deploy and mobilise scarce resources for the battle front of the class struggle, the workers’ state made decisive revisions in the schedule for expropriating private property. On 28 June 1918 every important category of industry was nationalised. From the spring of 1918 ?food detachments? from the towns were sent into the countryside to forcibly requisition grain from the peasants. The system of War
Communism was deployed to ensure the survival of a regime that, at the height of the Civil War, controlled less than one-quarter of the territory of the old Russian Empire. It meant the virtual abolition of money as a means of exchange and the market as a means of distribution.

It also necessitated temporary measures to militarise the workforce so as to deploy them in the interests of the Red War effort. In November 1919 a decree was issued which placed the employees of state enterprises under military discipline.13

The eventual victory of the Red Army in the Civil War therefore had a contradictory character. On the one hand it marked a victory for forces still committed to the transition to communism. On the other it was achieved at the expense of retarding both the material and political prerequisites of that transition. This retardation was compounded by the defeat of the post-war revolutionary movement of the European working class. The savage betrayal of the German revolution by the social democratic leaders? a betrayal paid for with the blood of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht? and the defeat of the Hungarian Soviet Republic left the victorious workers? republic isolated in backward and ravaged Russia.

War Communism and international isolation gave birth to several alien and unscientific views of the transition, and false estimates of the relations between present political forms and those required of the workers? state at its existing stage in the transition. Some, like Strumilin, who attempted to draw up a plan of production in a moneyless system, and Bukharin, who hailed the collapse of money and the de facto barter economy as advanced forms of the transition to communism, hopelessly overestimated the potential of the regime to effect measures to create an advanced transitional society.

Similarly utopian, and ultimately therefore reactionary, views were in evidence in the struggle of the Workers? Opposition against the party majority in 1920 and 1921. This grouping around Shlyapnikov, Luvinov and Kollontai urged that the party should relinquish its hold over the battered economy and place it in the hands of a Congress of Producers. The reality of the morale, size and organisation of the Russian working class at this time made such proposals utopian in theory and potentially disruptive of the political power of the advanced layers of communists organised in the party.

At the same time however there was a definite tendency towards bureaucratism within the proletariat?s party and in the relation between that party and the state apparatus. At the Tenth Party Congress in 1921 the Secretarial triumvirate of Krestinsky, Preobrazhensky and Serebriakov who urged a relatively tolerant and open regime within the party were ousted and replaced by Molotov. The party also agreed to a temporary ban on the right to form factions within the party. While the party at the same time set out to purge indisciplined and careerist elements ? 24 per cent of the party was expelled during 1921-4 ? these measures served to strengthen the potential for the exercise of bureaucratic power in the party itself.

By the end of the Civil War the possibility of continuing the transition to socialism depended on the vanguard and its ability to comprehend the scale of deformation and retreat in the workers? state, so as to be able to advance. In essence it depended on the commitment of the Bolsheviks to continue a relentless struggle, with the aid of the new Third International, for the international revolution of the working class. Meanwhile inside Russia itself the defence of the revolution and its advance now required a conscious struggle to recreate the working class as a material and political force.

The Kronstadt rebellion of February 1921 and a series of peasant revolts spreading from Tambov to Western Siberia highlighted the problems facing the victorious workers? state. A fuel and food crisis in Petrograd precipitated a strike wave amongst the city?s workers in February. The demoralised and impoverished workers were receptive to Social Revolutionary and Menshevik agitators and only
emergency food supplies and a declaration of martial law in the region secured a return to work. This revealed that forces who had supported the Reds against White counterrevolution were themselves profoundly dissatisfied with the political and economic regime of War Communism. That dissatisfaction amongst the peasant sailors of Kronstadt for example served to increase the potential for counter-revolutionary elements, masquerading as the allies of the toiling masses, to mobilise mass discontent against the revolutionary regime.

**The young workers? state and the New Economic Policy**

It is evidence of Lenin?s supremely concrete understanding of the problems confronting the proletarian regime that, in the face of this upsurge, the Party took specific measures both to strengthen its own monopoly of political power and to affect a retreat from the policies of War Communism. The Kronstadt rebellion was crushed. The alternative would have been to tolerate the opening of a new phase of civil war and the joining of a reactionary peasant war against the regime. But at the same time, with the inauguration of the New Economic Policy (NEP), major concessions were made to the private peasantry by the workers? state. War Communism?s system of requisitions was replaced by a system of taxing the peasantry on the basis of a fixed proportion of each peasant farm?s net produce. The after-tax surplus of the peasants could be traded by the peasant on the free market.

In that it legalised the operation of the law of value, NEP represented a retreat by the regime. In that it served to revive agricultural production and won a breathing space for the internationally isolated regime it was a retreat that granted the regime the potential to make future advances along the road of transition.

Under NEP there existed two fundamental and conflicting elements in the economy of the Soviet Union. In agriculture and other petty commodity production the law of value was absolutely dominant. Yet in the statified economy ? mainly heavy industry and transport ? the law of value could be offset by state direction of investment and was, therefore, susceptible to the planning principle. In this period the major threat to the workers? state and to its ability to extend its control over the economy through extending conscious economic planning was the spontaneous development of primitive capitalist accumulation in the countryside and the potential alliance between it and imperialist capital.

For that reason the state monopoly of foreign trade was an indispensable weapon without which direct imperialist penetration into the economy of the first workers? state could not have been prevented. In the struggle against this threat the young workers? state had accumulated three principle weapons with which to defend itself: the revolutionary expropriation of the industrial sector of the economy; the application and extension of the planning principle; and the state monopoly of foreign trade. These three measures, taken together, anti-capitalist by their very nature, form the characteristic defining property relations of a workers? state.

NEP was a retreat and was recognised as such by Lenin. It made him acutely aware of the need to ensure that it did not pave the way for a rout. In the last two years of his active political life Lenin attempted to concretise and refocus the Bolshevik programme for transition. First, it was necessary to construct the mechanisms of economic planning and extend their authority over the Soviet economy. Enormous problems of experience and culture faced the young regime in its attempts to weld together an apparatus of economic planning in the material circumstances of post revolutionary Russia.

In February 1920 a Commission for the Electrification of Russia (GOELRO) was established with the brief to coordinate an all-Russian plan for electricity production. While the party programme called for ?one general State Plan? the mechanism for creating such a plan had to be constructed gradually and on the basis of the first ever experience of the attempt to create planning mechanisms in the interests of subordinating and, eventually, extinguishing the operation of the law of value.
A Supreme Economic Council (Vesenkha) was established as early as December 1917. By the end of the Civil War it possessed the authority and experience to draw up plans for particular industries with the assistance of the state planning commission (GOSPLAN) which was established in 1921. It produced a Five-year plan for the metal industry in 1922-23 and in 1923 attempted to produce a general plan that would amalgamate Vesenkha’s plans for individual branches of industry. But in this period the planning mechanisms simply provided trusts with forecast ‘control figures’ as dictated by their interpretation of market conditions within NEP. The strengthening and coordination of these mechanisms to a level capable of serious subordinating the law of value remained a prerequisite of effective transitional advance.

But the struggle against the law of value was not simply a struggle between industry and agriculture. Of necessity it involved a conscious struggle to wean the majority of the peasantry away from petty commodity production and from the economic and political dominance of the richer capitalist peasant farmers (the Kulaks). In Lenin’s last writings he advanced the programme of cooperation as the means of effecting an alliance (smychka) between the workers? state and the poor and middle peasants on the road to building a socialist system of agricultural production:

‘By adopting NEP we made a concession to the peasant as a trader, to the principle of private trade; it is precisely for this reason (contrary to what some people think) that the cooperative movement is of such immense importance.’15

Lenin realised that the small and middle peasants had gained insufficient land from the revolution to guarantee them a secure livelihood and to make possible the application of the labour-saving technologies utilisable only in larger agricultural units. Hence through the provision of equipment to the poorer peasants organised in cooperatives the workers? state could both raise the technological level of Soviet agriculture and cement solid political ties with the mass of the peasantry against the layer of rich labour hiring Kulaks.

In On Co-operation Lenin therefore advocated a policy of the ruthless prioritisation of the provision of credits and machinery to those peasants organised in cooperatives as a means of recommencing the transition to socialism in the Soviet countryside.16

Any other policy would unleash the potential within NEP to strengthen the tendency to social differentiation within the peasantry and towards an increase in the social and economic weight of the anti-socialist Kulaks.

Lenin’s last writings also focus on the problem of developing the ability of the working masses to replace the old form of administrative apparatus and to subject the existing state apparatus to the authority of the workers? state.

‘Two main tasks confront us, which constitute the epoch: to reorganise our machinery of state, which is utterly useless, and which we took over in its entirety from the preceding epoch; during the past five years of struggle we did not, and could not, drastically reorganise it. Our second task is educational work among the peasants.’17

Repeatedly in the period after the Civil War Lenin emphasised the bureaucratically deformed nature of the Soviet workers? state and struggled to reform that state apparatus:

‘Our state apparatus is so deplorable, not to say wretched, that we must first think very carefully how to combat its defects, bearing in mind that these defects are rooted in the past, which, although it has been overthrown, has not been overcome, has not yet reached the stage of a culture that has receded into the distant past.’18 . . . ‘The most harmful thing here would be haste. The most harmful thing would be to rely on the assumption that we know at least something, or that we have any considerable number of elements
necessary for the building of a really new state apparatus, one really worthy to be called socialist, Soviet etc.:19

But this perspective of renovating the Soviet workers’ state and recommencing the transition to socialism in alliance with the poor and middle peasants remained part of a programme for internationalising the workers? revolution. The isolation of that revolution necessarily served to retard the development of the material pre-requisites of socialist construction

?The general feature of our present life is the following: we have destroyed capitalist industry and have done our best to raze to the ground the medieval institutions and landed proprietorship, and thus created a small and very small peasantry, which is following the lead of the proletariat because it believes in the results of its revolutionary work. It is not easy for us, however, to keep going until the socialist revolution is victorious in more developed countries merely with the aid of this confidence, because economic necessity, especially under NEP, keeps the productivity of labour of the small and very small peasants at an extremely low level. Moreover, the international situation, too, threw Russia back and, by and large, reduced the labour productivity of the people to a level considerably below pre-war.20

What then were the roots of the bureaucratisation of the workers? state that Lenin perceived and fought against in the early 1920s? The functional roots of the bureaucracy lay in the exhaustion and weariness of the internationally isolated Soviet society in the aftermath of the civil war, together with the material backwardness of the country inherited from Tsarism. In this context a series of ?pre-socialist? and ?non-socialist? tasks faced the young Soviet regime. Trotsky correctly outlined this process:

?No help came from the West. The power of the democratic Soviets proved cramping, even unendurable, when the task of the day was to accommodate those privileged groups whose existence was necessary for defence, for industry, for technique and science. In this decidedly not ?socialist? operation, taking from ten and giving to one, there crystallised out and developed a powerful caste of specialists in distribution...?21

While the armed forces and executive bureaucracy of the old ruling class were smashed, the proletarian state was forced to work with significant remnants of the old Tsarist state machine in order to administer the world?s first workers? state. Lenin described this process-and its impact in the following way:

?We took over the old machinery of state and that was our misfortune. Very often this machinery operates against us. In 1917, after we captured power, the government officials sabotaged us. This frightened us very much and we pleaded: ?Please come back?. They all came back, but that was our misfortune.?22

As we have seen, the Russian proletariat itself was decimated by the experience of the civil war that it fought to defend the workers? state. Its most conscious element was drawn into administering the state machine, its advanced layers suffered death and privation to secure the victory of the Red Army. Of necessity the advance of the proletarian dictatorship in the direction of planning and equality depended on the small conscious vanguard section of the Russian working class organised in the Communist Party. Political degeneration in their ranks, a slackening of their direct commitment to socialist advance ? nationally and internationally ? would serve to undermine the proletariat?s only guarantee of advance towards socialism.

Enormous objective material factors therefore contributed to the process of bureaucratisation. These were strengthened by the operation of NEP within which the state apparatus was called upon to play the role of arbitration between the interests of the peasantry and the industrial working class. This process of bureaucratisation not only led to the continuation of the old form of administrative apparatus and to a considerable continuity of personnel between the old and new apparatus.
It also played an important role in shaping the character and leadership of the Bolshevik party itself. By 1923 less than 10 per cent of the party had pre-revolutionary records and two-thirds of the members and half of the candidates were involved in non-manual jobs. In Lenin’s last years alarming signs of bureaucratic degeneration were apparent in the party’s highest bodies.

In the face of these objective and subjective tendencies the key problem facing the workers’ state was whether the vanguard could regenerate itself and the working class as a whole, in a struggle against bureaucratism, national isolation and complacency. Lenin’s last writings show him to have been increasingly aware of bureaucratism in the party apparatus and that this was serving to render the party powerless in the face of the weight of the old state apparatus.

In turn this presented an obstacle to building a new state apparatus responsive to the vanguard itself and committed to the transition to socialism. In fact bureaucratism in the state was positively strengthening the “old ways” of Great Russian chauvinism, rudeness and bureaucratism within the party itself.

In his last battles Lenin concentrated on the regime in the party and the relation between the party and state apparatus as the key problems without the solution to which the transition to socialism would be retarded. Until his death he remained the most astute of all the party’s leaders as to the realities of Soviet Russia and to the type, nature and tasks of the workers’ state. His last testimony itself – Letter to Congress – contains an implicit criticism of the entire old guard of the party for its failure to grasp the urgency of, and the necessary concrete steps towards, regeneration.

Lenin’s eyes were opened to the degree of bureaucratic degeneration within the party by relations between Dzherzhinsky, Stalin and Ordzhonikidze and leading representatives of the Georgian Communist party. The latter were resisting plans to replace the loose federal structure of the young Soviet republic with a more centralised structure under the name of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. During the controversy Ordzhonikiadzhe struck Kabanidze, a supporter of the Georgian party leader Mdivani. While not in complete solidarity with the political stand of the Georgians, Lenin weighed in against the central leadership.

Lenin conceded that perhaps the unionisation plan had been premature: “There is no doubt that that measure should have been delayed somewhat until we could say that we vouched for our apparatus as our own. But now, we must, in all conscience, admit the contrary; the apparatus we call ours is, in fact, still quite alien to us; it is a bourgeois and tsarist hotch-potch and there has been no possibility of getting rid of it in the course of the past five years without the help of other countries and because we have been busy most of the time with military engagements and the fight against famine.

It is quite natural that in such circumstances the freedom to secede from the union by which we justify ourselves will be a mere scrap of paper, unable to defend the non-Russians from the onslaught of that really Russian man, the Great-Russian chauvinist, in substance a rascal and a tyrant, such as the typical Russian bureaucrat is. There is no doubt that the infinitesimal percentage of Soviet and sovietised workers will drown in that tide of chauvinistic Great-Russian riffraff like a fly in milk.”

Lenin urged exemplary punishment for Ordzhonikidze and that: “The political responsibility for all this truly Great-Russian nationalist campaign must, of course, be laid on Stalin and Dzherzhinsky.” At the same time Lenin urged on the party the strengthening of the accountability of the state machine through raising the political weight of the Workers and Peasants’ Inspection (RABKRIN).

Mindful of the developing bureaucratic regime in the party and Stalin’s evident unsuitability to the post of
Secretary that he had quietly assumed in 1922, Lenin urged the removal of Stalin from his post: "Stalin is too rude and this defect, although quite tolerable in our midst and in dealings amongst us Communists, becomes intolerable in a Secretary General. That is why I suggest that the comrades think about a way of removing Stalin from that post and appointing another man in his stead who in all other respects differs from Comrade Stalin in having only one advantage, namely, that of being more tolerant, more loyal, more polite and more considerate to the comrades, less capricious, etc."25

As Lenin’s letters to Trotsky published first in The Stalin School of Falsification show, Lenin urged a bloc with Trotsky against Stalin on these issues.26

But the tendency towards bureaucratic arbitrary rule within the party continued throughout 1923. There is evidence of the formation of secretly organised opposition groups within the party which called for a struggle against the new bureaucratism.

The most significant — the Workers Truth group — was led by Miasnikov who had been expelled from the party in 1921.27 In response the party leadership responded to the working class discontent that this evidenced with an attempt to strengthen police dictatorship within the party itself. A special commission headed by Dzerzhinsky demanded from communists the immediate denunciation, either to the Control Commission or to the GPU, of illegal groups within the party.28

This crisis coincided with mounting imbalance within the NEP economy to the advantage of the private trader and farmer and to the disadvantage of the proletarian state. By 1922-23, 75 per cent of retail trade was in private hands. By 1923 industrial production stood at only 35 per cent of the pre-war level while the marketed agricultural surplus had reached 60 per cent of pre-war totals.29

This strengthened a tendency towards a "scissors crisis" — rising industrial prices and relatively declining agricultural prices — which threatened to result in a drop in peasant markets if state industry could not provide sufficient manufactured goods at cheap enough prices to encourage the peasants to sell their surpluses. At the 12th Party Congress in 1923 Trotsky showed that industrial prices were at 140 per cent of their 1913 level while agricultural prices stood at only 80 per cent. Only a strengthening of the planned industrial base of the USSR could have provided the material prerequisites of cooperation — for example tractors, manufactured implements and have served thus to isolate the prosperous Kulak layer of the peasantry which commanded the bulk of the surplus. Continued retardation of industry could only serve to strengthen the Kulak and the grip of the law of value within the Soviet state.

The growth of bureaucratism

But 1923 also saw mounting signs of the ossification of the party leadership in terms of its ability to aid and develop the international revolution of the proletariat. Under the direction of Zinoviev the Communist International seriously miscalculated tactics for a revolutionary offensive in Germany in the autumn of 1923. The bureaucratically deformed workers' state remained isolated.

It is in the face of these manifest degenerative processes that Trotsky and the cadre of the Left Opposition launched their struggle against the party leadership in order to reactivate the struggle for socialism. True, Trotsky failed to activate the proposed bloc with Lenin at the 12th Party Congress in April 1923. He left Bukharin to fight alone against the bureaucratism of the party’s leading Troika of Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Stalin — an unholy alliance united by enmity towards Trotsky.

In 1924 he was complicit in the decision of the same party leadership to conceal the existence of Lenin’s call for the removal of Stalin. To this extent he clearly did not share the sense of urgency felt by Lenin as to the threat to socialist advance in the USSR. But the coincidence of Miasnikov’s grouping and Dzerzhinsky’s police tactics stung Trotsky into a war against bureaucratism during the latter part of 1923. In October he wrote to the Central Committee denouncing party administration in general — particularly the
demise of the elective principle? and Dzherzhinsky?s proposals in particular. Trotsky had no doubt that bureaucratism had a profound material roots:

?It is unworthy of a Marxist to consider that bureaucratism is only the aggregate of the bad habits of office holders.

Bureaucratism is a social phenomenon in that it is a definite system of administration of men and things. Its profound causes lie in the heterogeneity of society, the difference between the daily and the fundamental interests of various groups of the population.?30

But Trotsky insisted this bureaucratism posed fundamental problems to the advance of the revolution:

?...bureaucratism in the state and party apparatus is the expression of the most vexatious tendencies inherent in our situation, of the defects and deviations in our work which, under certain social conditions, might sap the basis of the revolution. And, in this case as in many others, quantity will at a certain stage be transformed into quality.?31

For Trotsky only the struggle for democracy in the party could mobilise the vanguard against bureaucratism. The alternative was alienation and demoralisation amongst the ranks of worker communists.

?Not feeling that they are participating actively in the general work of the party and not getting a timely answer to their questions to the party, numerous communists start looking for a substitute for independent party activity in the form of groupings and factions of all sorts. It is in this sense precisely that we speak of the symptomatic importance of groupings like the Workers? Group.?32

As a result ?The task of the present is to shift the centre of party activity towards the masses of the party? because ?There is not and cannot be any other means of triumphing over the corporatism, the caste spirit of the functionaries, than by the realisation of democracy.?33, 34

The offensive of Trotsky was complemented, in October, by the declaration of 46 Old Bolsheviks including Antonov Ovseenko, Serebriakov, Preobrazhensky and Pyatakov. Taken as a whole the two positions represented a platform of extending democracy in the party as the immediate form of extending workers? democracy in the USSR and of developing industrial planning as the means of strengthening the smychka with the poorer peasants against the Kulaks. To this extent it represented an important development and refocusing of the programme of Bolshevism. It contained the key elements, in embryo, of the future programme of the Left Opposition.

The 1923 debate also showed that despite the party?s leadership, the careerists who had entered its ranks and the exhaustion of significant sections of its cadre, there remained a solid core within the party committed to the transition to socialism. Despite the campaign against ?Trotskyism? that was launched by the ruling Troika the platform of proletarian democracy received widespread support in the party. It received strong support in Moscow, the Urals and Kharkov.35

As late as 1929 the Stalinist historian Yaroslavsky was admitting that the opposition won half the votes in certain areas of Moscow.36 The leadership was forced to concede the demand of the 46 for a special Central Committee meeting on the subject and a declaration in favour of democratising the party?s life in return for a Central Committee resolution condemning the activities of Trotsky and the 46. It would clearly be wrong therefore to conclude that the party at this time could simply be described as the property of its central and increasingly bureaucratic leadership.

The death of Lenin in 1924, following on from the first setback for the forces of the Left Opposition (the
Central Committee confrontation), served to intensify the tendency towards revisionism and bureaucratism within the party leadership. Against the struggle for regeneration waged by Trotsky and the Left there were three major groupings all representing specific programmatic revisions and degenerations.

In 1924 and 1925 a definite Rightist tendency increased in confidence and weight within the party apparatus. Represented primarily by Bukharin, Tomsky and Rykov, this tendency reflected the pressure of the richer layers of the peasantry on the party/state apparatus. Its programme involved continued and extended concessions to the richer peasants in the name of building a specifically Russian peasant-based form of socialism. As its principle spokesman, Bukharin, put it:

?We have come to the conclusion that we can build socialism even on this wretched technological level... that we shall move at a snail?s pace, but that we shall be building socialism and that we shall build it.?37

During 1925, at both the 14th Party Conference and Congress Bukharin elaborated a specific new content to Lenin?s call for ?an understanding with the peasantry.? It was to mean concessions to the peasantry in order to encourage their economy, it was to mean tailoring the pace of industrial development to these concessions. The policies of Bukharin were enshrined in the decision of the April 1925 Central Committee meeting to sanction the right to hire labour and extend the rights of land leasing and thus strengthen the operation of the law of value in the USSR. In April 1925 Bukharin delivered his famous speech to a mass party meeting in Moscow calling on the Russian peasants to ?enrich yourselves.?

The Right had another social base within the bureaucratised apparatus of the workers? state. An important section of the Soviet Trade Union leaders particularly Tomsky ? craved an unprincipled alliance with the reformist leaders of the Yellow Amsterdam-based International Trade Union Federation. For them potential alliances with the reformist trade union leaders-particularly in Britain-represented a potential road of protection and stability for the Soviet state in its existing bureaucratised form.

In essence the Right was therefore a tendency committed to strengthening capitalist forces within the USSR and securing peace with world capitalism through the medium of the reformist labour bureaucracies. The Right?s programme was a narrow nationalist one that sought to preserve the status quo ? the bureaucratically deformed workers? state. Objectively, however, the Right were in fact a tendency for capitalist restoration. This was the logical end point of their programme of concessions to rich private peasants. In the mid-1920s their reactionary views accorded with the doctrine of ?Socialism in One Country?, a creed they shared with Stalin. But the Right?s policy of relative freedom for Soviet Trade Union officialdom and compromise with the rich peasant farmers meant that they were not of necessity wedded to the forms of bureaucratic rule later advanced by the group around Stalin.

In concert with this group against the Communist Left, but in material conflict with the Right?s programme, stood a bureaucratic left centre group around Zinoviev and Kamenev. Their social base was the industrial city of Leningrad and the Communist International. For the Rightists the failed German Revolution of 1923 underlined the fact that the proletariat of Western Europe could not be relied on to solve the problems of isolated and backward Russia. For Zinoviev however, it meant that a serious blow had been struck at the ability of the Soviet state to resist the developing bourgeois forces within its own boundaries. Zinoviev expressed this in the following terms:

?An alliance of a proletarian Germany with Soviet Russia would create a new phase of NEPism... would nip in the bud the tendency of a new bourgeoisie to assume a controlling position in the economic life of our republican union.?38

The 5th Congress of the Comintern, meeting in June and July 1924, reflected a profound disorientation in the strategy and tactics of the Communist International. Zinoviev responded to the German defeat and the
appearance of capitalist stabilisation with a call to bureaucratically ?Bolshevise? the Communist Parties and a turn to left rhetoric ? effectively turning the Comintern against the decisions taken at its fourth Congress on the United Front tactic and the Workers? Government slogan. It was at this Congress that the characterisation of Social Democracy as a wing of fascism was first aired ? by none other than Zinoviev himself. In its aftermath Zinoviev probably ordered the abortive uprising in Estonia in December 1924.

Victor Serge described Zinoviev?s bureaucratic leftist response:

> How could Zinoviev have initiated this imbecile adventure? The man terrified us. He refused to acknowledge the German defeat. In his eyes the rising had been only delayed and the KPD was still marching to power. The riots in Krakow were enough for him to announce revolution in Poland. I felt that he was obsessed by the error in his otherwise sensible judgement which had led him in 1917 to oppose the incipient Bolshevik revolution; in consequence, he had now swung into an authoritarian and exaggerated revolutionary optimism.

Under Zinoviev therefore the Comintern veered from ultraleft to opportunist tactics to secure success. The base of Zinoviev in Leningrad also served to shape his response to the Right. The April 1925 concessions to the peasantry included a 25 per cent cut in taxation on the peasantry and the freeing of agricultural prices. This caused serious hardship and discontent amongst the workers of Leningrad. But while this bureaucratic left could, on occasion, reflect workers? hostility to the effects of Rightist policies on the working class, they were themselves hostile to the programme of proletarian democracy waged by the Left Opposition.

The campaign against ?Trotskyism? was particularly virulent in Leningrad. It was Zinoviev and Kamenev who demanded the expulsion of Trotsky from the party at the January 1925 Central Committee. Stalin opposed them! To this extent they were the pioneers of despotism within the party.

Alongside these two groups there existed a centre grouping around Stalin, with its base in the central party apparatus. Its hold on the secretariat of the party made it most wedded to the secretarial form of dictatorship in the party. It stood with the right for concessions to the Kulak to the extent that they presented no threat to the political power and modus vivendi of the central apparatus. The Stalinist group did not oppose industrial planning as such, to the extent that it developed at a tempo and in a form that would not disturb the smychka with the rich peasants.

The most important programmatic hallmark of the Stalin group was the theory of ?Socialism in One Country?.

In an article directed against Trotsky in December 1924 Stalin first put forward his theory of the possibility of constructing ?Socialism in One Country.?

> The victory of socialism in one country, even if this country is less developed in the capitalist sense, while capitalism is preserved in other countries, even if these countries are more developed in the capitalist sense ? is quite possible and probable.

The programmatic logic of the ?theory? was that given a sufficient period of peaceful relations between imperialism and the USSR it would be possible to build ?Socialism in One Country?. In this view the Soviet Union necessarily ceases to be an integral, and necessarily dependent, component of the world proletarian struggle to destroy capitalism. It is capable, from its own resources and in isolation, of building socialism without the assistance of the world revolution. Of necessity, this leads to a revision of the Marxist concept of socialism. Socialism ? as a programmatic goal ceases to mean a developing
classless and stateless society. It comes to mean the stability, order and interests of the USSR as they are construed by those who have political power in the USSR.

This theory, and its chief proponent, accurately reflected the conservatism of the Centre grouping. It was the conservatism of a still-developing bureaucracy keen to defend the marginal, but growing privileges that its role within the Soviet state had provided it with. Stalin and his grouping recognised that through ?Socialism in One Country? i.e. the abandonment of real socialism which is internationalist by definition, and the development of the Soviet economy under their control ? these marginal privileges could be extended and the bureaucracy strengthened. This explains why the Stalin group did not wholly support the programme of the Right, which potentially threatened it with the growth of the Kulaks as a rival for power, or the programme of the Left, which threatened it with the revolutionary rule of the proletariat. Yet it also explains why it could bureaucratically utilise elements of both of these programmes to consolidate its own position and eventually to secure its own victory over both the Right and the Left. The bureaucracy?s programme was eclectic, pragmatic and vacillating, guided centrally by the principle of self-interest.

In 1923 and 1924 Stalin, Zinoviev and Tomsky had a common interest in blocking in order to prevent the implementation of the programme of the Left Opposition. They orchestrated a scurrilous campaign against Trotskyism, introduced new degenerate norms of debate in the party and new levels of caste loyalty between themselves when they conspired to prevent the implementation of Lenin?s testimony and to keep it concealed from the party, (an agreement Trotsky mistakenly, went along with).

Further to this they flooded the party with new recruits via the Lenin Levy of 1924. In two years the party?s size was increased by more than two-thirds.45 Most of the recruits were either raw or careerists and their presence rendered the party far more susceptible to manipulation by the bureaucratic leaders, against the revolutionary left.

These measures, taken together, represent a systematic and conscious attempt to politically isolate and, ultimately decapitate, the revolutionary leadership of the proletariat. However, at this time no faction was, as yet, strong enough to drive it out of the party. This was the beginning of the process of the Thermidorean degeneration of the revolution, first fought under the slogans of ?Socialism in One Country?, ?enrich yourselves? and ?fire to the left?.

When we use the term Thermidor in connection with the Russian Revolution we are using it to describe a process analogous with that which took place after the great French Revolution of 1789. In 1794 power was seized from the radical democratic Jacobins by the most conservative anti-democratic section of the bourgeoisie which proceeded to dismantle those elements of the first French Republic which made it the most thorough going bourgeois democracy in its time.

It marked a shift of power from the democratic and revolutionary to the conservative section of the same class ? the bourgeoisie. It was not the transfer of power from one class to another. While the Zinovievites, Bukharinists, and Stalinists all had Thermidorian aspirations in 1923 and 1924, the form and pace of the victory of Thermidor was not determined at that time. Neither was its eventual triumph inevitable.

Alongside the development of Thermidor we do see a partial advance in the strengthening of the mechanisms of planning. By August 1925 Gosplan was able to produce outline control figures which economic departments were to take into account in structuring their own plans. Trotsky greeted these figures as ?the glorious music of the rise of socialism.?46 But the majority of the party leaders could not comprehend the potential of the development of these mechanisms as a means of effecting transition. Bukharinism was committed to a hybridised populist vision of a small proprietor peasant socialism. Neither Stalin nor Zinoviev evinced enthusiasm for the planning machinery and the potential of planning when they
were discussed at the 14th Party Congress in December 1925. Only the Left Opposition—and in particular Preobrazhensky and Pyatakov waged an unflinching struggle, at this time, for the planned industrialisation of the USSR as the road to rebuild the proletariat and thus its social and political weight, in concert with the poor and middle peasants.

During 1925 a split occurred in the camp of the Thermidorians between the bureaucratic left centrists and the Stalin/Bukharin bloc. Defending their base in the major workers’ city (Leningrad) and the Comintern against the nationalist peasant line of the ?majority?, Zinoviev and Kamenev began a struggle based on formal opposition to ?Socialism in One Country? and the policies of concessions to the rich peasants. It is evidence of the growing grip of the secretariat in the party that the Stalin group were able ? after defeating the Leningraders at the 14th Congress in December 1925 ? to immediately take the Leningrad organisation into their control through the person of Kirov. Kirov moved in to restore ?order? in the party ? that is to consolidate Stalinist control over the local party apparatus. In addition Zinoviev was removed as head of the Comintern.

The defeat of the left centrists pushed them in the direction of an alliance with the revolutionary Left Opposition. At a plenum of the Central Committee and Control Commission in June 1926 Zinoviev openly declared to Ordzhonokidze: ?Yes, on the question of the deviation and on the question of bureaucratic oppression by the apparatus, Trotsky proved to be right against you.? [that is against the Stalinist Ordzhonokidze ? eds]47 In the summer of that year Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev formed the United Opposition to wage what was to be the final, open campaign inside the party for reactivating the struggle for socialism in 1926 and 1927.

What was the balance sheet of transition in the period of the United Opposition campaign? First, social diversification was well developed in the Soviet countryside, giving an enormous bargaining position to the Kulaks. In late 1925 Zinoviev produced figures to show that 12 per cent of peasant farmers were producing 60 per cent of the grain supply.48

The United Opposition platform showed ? quoting the Statistical Review ? that on 1 April 1926 58 per cent of all the surplus grain in the country was in the hands of 6 per cent of peasant proprietors.49 The obverse of this process was the continued existence of 30 to 40 per cent of horseless and toolless properties.50 The regime had manifestly failed to raise the cultural and material level of the poorer peasants against the richer peasants through the medium of cooperation. By 1929, only one-third of the agricultural population were involved in any form of cooperative movement.51 They remained rudimentary, underfinanced and underdeveloped.

In the sphere of planned industrialisation with a view to developing the material base of socialism, and subordinating the law of value to the rule of conscious planning, the transition was similarly retarded. Gosplan recommended figures for a Five Year Plan to last from 1926-7 to 1930-1. It envisaged only a small growth in capital investment in industry (1,142 million rubles in 1928 and 1,205 million in 1931 ? in line with the prevalent Bukharinite orthodoxy of achieving growth through maximising the use of then existing resources. Growth was set at rates between 4 and 9 per cent each year.52

The Soviet regime suffered from the fact that its manufactured goods were too scarce, too badly produced and too expensive (on average 2.5 times world market prices) to encourage the rich peasant to part with his grain. Hence the serious danger of grain strikes and shortages and of increased Kulak pressure to relinquish the state?s monopoly of foreign trade and open up the USSR as a market for imperialist-produced manufactured goods. But the Stalin/Bukharin bloc was proposing a state budget for 1931 of 16 per cent of national income, compared with the pre-war Tsarist budget of 18 per cent of national income.
Wretchedly slow rates of industrial growth were of enormous social and political consequence for the workers? state. Officially registered unemployment in the USSR stood at 1,478,000 in April 1927. Gosplan?s projected Five Year Plan envisaged cutting that total by 400,000! Real wages increased until 1925 but decreased in 1926.

The trade unions were relatively moribund with decisions in the plants being taken by the appointed director and the chief trade union and party officials. The Soviets continued to be lifeless bodies usually subordinated to their executive bodies, meeting rarely for plenary sessions and with the period between elections increased in the mid-1920s. At a time when the working class was once again of pre-war proportions and industrial production was back to its pre-war tempo, only the Left Opposition espoused a programme for reactivating Soviet democracy in the USSR and thus recommencing the battle to construct a state apparatus of a new form.

The process of degeneration and stagnation was evident in the party too. The party underwent a process of deproletarianisation during 1925 and 1926. The 1927 Party Census showed that of those leaving the party in the first half of 1925 60 per cent were manual workers, a figure that reached 77 per cent by 1926.

The census showed that as of January 1927, 42.8 per cent of party members recorded themselves as office employees, 30.0 per cent as factory and transport workers, 1.5 per cent as hired farm workers and 8.4 per cent as private farming peasants.

Alongside this tendency for the party to remain predominantly an organisation of officials grew a marked tendency to bureaucratisation against the workers? vanguard within the party.

The campaign against the Opposition signalled a new and decisive phase of the Thermidorean degeneration of the Bolshevik Party. The bureaucrats and pro-Kulak elements in the party, that is the majority of the party, were separated by their privileges and interests from the authentic representatives of the proletarian vanguard. To them the Opposition?s fight for democracy and industrialisation inevitably meant a curtailment of their privileges and restrictions on the Kulaks. They were not prepared to allow that threat to become a reality. They adopted methods of ?debate? that opened a period of qualitative degeneration of the Communist Party and laid the basis for Stalin?s later regime of terror.

In the place of the honest debates that were characteristic of Lenin?s party, the Stalin/Bukharin bloc stifled the voice of the Opposition. Articles submitted by Trotsky to the party press were rejected. The Opposition?s platform was declared to be ?illegal information? and the Politburo refused to allow it to be printed. When the Opposition tried to print it themselves the OGPU raided the print shop on 12 October 1927 and the leading Oppositionist, Mrachovsky, who was overseeing its production, was arrested and expelled from the party.

The technique of associating the Opposition with the outside counter-revolutionaries, later to become infamous at the Moscow trials, was initiated. One of the printers of the Opposition platform, it was falsely claimed, was in contact with a former member of the White army, Baron Wrangel, who was in turn in contact with a counter-revolutionary group. This whole story was an OGPU fabrication as even Stalin later admitted.

In addition to slander and bureaucratic repression, the Stalinists introduced into the debate that other barbarous hallmark of theirs ? violence against the working class and its vanguard. Evoking anti-semitic sentiments ? Zinoviev, Kamenev and Trotsky were all of Jewish origin ? Stalin ordered hand-picked gangs of hooligans, rightly denounced as ?Black Hundred? gangs by Trotsky, to physically smash up Opposition meetings. When the Opposition took their case to the factories the hooligans followed them, beating up
speakers and inciting backward elements amongst the workers to denounce the Opposition and join in the campaign of physical intimidation against them.

After one factory meeting the hooligans left Preobrazhensky beaten almost lifeless at the factory gates. At the same time the Opposition? s public demonstrations were set upon by police squads.

Indeed one crucial development in the debate was the extension of police rule within the party. Lenin? s Extraordinary Commission (the Cheka) had under the direction of the Stalinist Dzerzhinsky been transformed into the OGPU (Unified State Political Administration) in 1923. The extension of the secret police was inevitable in isolated Russia. Sabotage and espionage were real dangers. However this extension was carried through under the direction of a Thermidorian bureaucrat, free from any meaningful workers? control.

In these circumstances the Thermidorian leadership of the party were able to reverse the role of the secret police. From being a weapon of the state against counter-revolution, the OGPU was transformed into a weapon of the Thermidorsians against their opponents within the party. Dzherzhinsky? s Thermidorian project for a police dictatorship over party oppositions was at last being fully implemented on the orders of General Secretary Stalin.

This process of Thermidorian reaction had major implications for the foreign policy of the Soviet State. In 1926 the British Communist Party tailed behind the TUC lefts of the Anglo-Soviet Committee who feted Tomsky and betrayed the General Strike of that year. The Chinese Communist Party was ordered to enter the nationalist Kuomintang as a subordinate partner to Chiang Kai Shek. It was thus disarmed when Chiang ordered a wholesale massacre of Communist Party-led workers in Shanghai on 12 April 1927. The international friends of ?Socialism in One Country? were given full license to betray and slaughter the advanced guard of the world working class. That the Soviet bureaucracy had not freed itself from the threat of armed imperialist intervention was demonstrated in May 1927 when the British Conservative government raided Soviet trading offices in London and broke off diplomatic and trading agreements with the USSR.

On every front the Thermidorian bloc of Stalin and Bukharin was poised to plunge the economy of the USSR into dislocation at the hands of restorationist forces, and to weaken and isolate the USSR in the face of a renewed anti-Soviet war drive. Hence the bitterness and venom with which the Thermidorsians moved against the forces of the United Opposition during 1927. The leaders of the Opposition were hounded by the secret police, their supporters threatened with dismissal and reprisal on the grounds that they were fostering disunity in the face of danger. In November 1927 Trotsky and Zinoviev was expelled from the party.

Further expulsions followed at the 15th Party Congress in December. The leading figures were exiled from the major centres of the USSR. In driving out the section of the Old Guard still committed to an internationalist programme for transition the Thermidorian elements in the party had completed their task. With the defeat and expulsion of Trotsky, Preobrazhensky, Antonov-Ovsenko, Piatakov, Zinoviev and many other key figures in the Party? s heroic history, the Russian revolution experienced its own Thermidor. It was carried through by a bloc of the bureaucratic centre and rightist proto-restorationists presiding over a severe national and international crisis within which the Right and Centre could still agree to take joint action to politically expropriate the revolutionary vanguard of the working class.

No sooner had the final triumph of the Thermidorians been consolidated than the Thermidorian alliance began to fall apart. The rock on which this unity foundered was the Kulak anger of which the left had
warned in 1926. In the winter of 1927-28, grain sales to the state agencies slumped. The Kulaks hoarded grain, trying to force up prices by starving the cities. From December 1927 through the early months of 1928 the party repeatedly passed resolutions for extraordinary measures against speculators and launched a purge against pro-rich peasant local communist cadres – part of the Bukharin faction’s social base.

The evident danger of Kulak-inspired economic warfare against the Soviet state coincided with renewed imperialist pressure against the Soviet Republic. In 1927 Britain broke off all diplomatic and trading links with the USSR. Bukharin’s policies of conciliating the rich peasants, snail’s pace industrialisation and right opportunism in international policy, had all suffered shipwreck. Stalin, an unoriginal man in all respects except as a brutal practitioner of repression, had been totally complicit in these policies. But the Stalin group acted swiftly to place the blame for the Soviet Republic’s crisis on Bukharin’s shoulders.

On 15 February 1928 Pravda published an article by Stalin entitled The Kulaks raise their heads again. Ten thousand urban cadres were dispatched to the countryside to carry out procurements in the style of war communism.

By the spring it was becoming obvious that a clash was brewing between Stalin, Kuibyshev, Molotov, Rudzutak and Voroshilov on the one hand and Bukharin, Rykov, Tomsky on the other with the Stalin group moving towards a total break with NEP on the industrial and agrarian fronts.

With the bureaucracy and for different reasons, alliance of workers, spurred on to defend the workers’ state against its internal and external foes, the Stalin faction turned violently to the left. It committed itself to rapid industrialisation and the end of NEP in the countryside. But this sharp turn in the direction of policies advocated by the Left Opposition carried with it enormous dangers for the Stalin group. An admission of past errors would have immeasurably strengthened the Left. It would have necessitated opening the highest bodies of the state and party to the revolutionary Left Opposition. Such a course was impossible for the Stalinists.

Instead their policies of break-neck industrialisation and collectivisation were carried out by bureaucratic dictat and massive police repression. This required the construction of the bonapartist Stalinist form of state alongside the industrialisation and collectivisation drives. Stalin’s left turn saw the centrist Stalin faction transformed into a bureaucratic caste committed to a political programme of counterrevolutionary Bonapartism.

The defeat of the Right proved relatively easy. They were already disorientated and demoralized by the collapse of the whole world of NEP. The only further step that they could have taken in pursuit of their own political line was to appeal directly to the Kulak, i.e. directly embrace the bourgeois counter-revolution. Since Bukharin, Rykov, Tomsky and the leading Rights were neither subjectively prepared, nor objectively well-placed, to go this far, they were doomed unless the Kulaks and external counter-revolution came to their alibi by routing the Stalinist bureaucratic offensive.

As co-authors of Thermidor in the party, freshly implicated in the destruction of proletarian democracy in all these organs and centrally involved in the expulsion and persecution of the left opposition, they dared not and could not appeal to the proletariat inside or outside the party. Thus they surrendered position after position without a fight.

Firstly at the Sixth Comintern Congress held in mid-1928, Bukharin’s Comintern Policy was implicitly criticised and replaced with that of the Third Period, an adventurist pseudo-left policy of refusal of the united front from above, i.e. with the reformist leaders. In Germany this policy with its red days,
battles for the street?, its aping of right-wing nationalism, was eventually to prostrate the strongest party of the Third International under the Nazi jackboot.

By 1930 the Stalin Faction of the Thermidorians had triumphed over all their rivals. Kaganovich, Kirov, Rudzutak, Voroshilov, Molotov, Kuibyshev, Kalinin and Kossiov dominated the commanding heights of the party apparatus, the state bureaucracy, the army and the police. The repression meted out against the Right was, however, much milder than that aimed at the Left Opposition.

In February 1929 Trotsky was deported to Turkey. In March 2,000 Bolshevik-Leninists were arrested and deported to the Siberian isolators. In December 1929 Stalin opened what was to become a ?river of blood? between his regime and the Left Opposition. Jakob Blumkin, a prominent Bolshevik since the civil war and an important official in the GPU, visited Trotsky in exile in Istanbul and returned with a political document. On his return he was arrested and shot.

Two other Oppositionists, Silov and Rabinovich, were shot for ?sabotage of the railroad system?. From 1929-30 the left Opposition conducted its debates and published its manuscript organs in the isolators of Verkhne-Uralsk, Suzdal and Yaroslavl. The hunger strike was its principal form of struggle against the mounting Stalinist repression. From 1929 to 1932 a smuggled exchange continued between Trotsky in Turkey and the imprisoned Oppositionists. Then the repression severed the links.

Whilst the Bolshevik-Leninists were subjected to the full rigour of the OGPU, Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky retained their seats on the Central Committee and their followers (albeit demoted from positions of command) retained their status as functionaries as well as their party membership.

Bukharin was put in charge of the research department of the Commissariat for Heavy Industry in 1932 and later edited the official government paper Izvestia.

Stalin?s Brumaire was possible only on the basis of the Thermidorean destruction of the party and merely completed its transformation into a party of functionaries.

The weakness of the Bolshevik-Leninist resistance was partly due to the almost complete changeover of party membership since the heroic days of the Bolshevik Party. By 1929 only 8,000 had been members before February 1917 and only 130,000 out of one and a half million had joined before the end of the civil war.55 In these circumstances the overwhelming bulk of the party had known no other regime than that of the Stalinist apparatus.

Helene Carrere D?Encausse has noted that ?From 1923 onwards, the field of action of the Police Apparatus extended to the party?.56 The Security Apparatus ? renamed GPU in 1922 and OGPU in 1923 ? became an instrument of Thermidorean persecution and violence against the Left Opposition.57 The collectivisation and industrialisation drive of the 1930s was accompanied by a massive increase in the role, powers and size of the OGPU. In 1930 Yagoda took over an expanding apparatus with its own network of transportation and labour camps ? the GUIAG.58

In D?Encausse?s words, ?the most profound change in the status of the police within the political system took place in 1929 with the economic revolution?.59 The Shaknty trial of bourgeois experts in July 1928 (five were executed) marked the onset of terror against ?wreckers?.

Whilst some outright sabotage by bourgeois experts was possible, the main purpose was to silence all objections to the Stalinists? arbitrary and adventurist economic targets and to prevent realistic reports being drawn up. Realistic and accurate reports could have served as a means of holding the Stalin faction to account. Stalin, in 1930, launched a campaign to terrorize and silence any potential source of criticism.
Having defeated the right and left factions of the party, Stalin set out to crush all neutral expert elements whose testimony might be raised against him. In April 1929 he announced that Shakhtyites are now ensconced in every branch of our industry. In 1930, OGPU reported the discovery of an illegal Toiling Peasant Party (TKP) under the leadership of the famous economist N.D. Kondratiev. In the Autumn a plot to disrupt the food supplies was discovered.

In November and December 1930 the OGPU unearthed a so-called Industrial Party (Prompartiia), responsible for wrecking in industry and in direct personal collusion with Raymond Poincare, the President of France! In March 1931 the members of a so-called Union Bureau of the Central Committee of the Menshevik Party were put on trial. In all these cases the accused confessed to the crimes.

The OGPU and Stalin began to strike at prominent non-factional theoreticians and intellectuals. The economist I.I. Rubin and the director and founder of the Marx-Engels Institute, D.B. Riazanov, were expelled from the party, tried, imprisoned and exiled. In these cases the OGPU utilized the full range of their repressive measures, including endless interrogation, torture and the seizure of relatives as hostages in order to extract confessions.

As leader of a factional clique that absolutely dominated the party and the state apparatus by administrative and repressive means, Stalin himself became the object of an obscene personality cult. The Bonapartists had to embellish and glorify the person of their Bonaparte. On Stalin's 50th birthday the State Publishing House published a laudatory anthology wherein one could read that Comrade Stalin was Lenin’s single most reliable aide, who differed from others by never faltering, by always moving hand in hand with Vladimir Ilyich at all the crucial stages of the revolution.

Historians now had to revise and shamelessly falsify their works. Even long-time opponents of Trotsky, like M.N. Pokrovsky, fell in the wave of persecutions. By 1934 the torrent of glorification had mounted to obscene and ludicrous proportions. Pravda carried in January of that year a two page article by none other than the capitulator Radek which in Medvedev's words heaped orgiastic praise on Stalin. Lenin's best pupil, the model of the Leninist party, bone of its bone, blood of its blood...as far sighted as Lenin.

With this article the river of adulation burst its banks. The cult of the all-seeing, all-knowing, wise, father of the peoples? Stalin put even the glorification of Hitler into the shade.

It was between 1927 and 1930 that all the essential elements of the Stalinist system were assembled in their own particular Bonapartist form. The events of 1927 to 1930 saw the establishment of a Bonapartist regime on the ruins of Lenin’s party, the soviet structures of the workers’ state and the ruins of the Thermidorean party.

The state of the mid-1920 Stalin's Eighteenth Brumaire?, like its preceding Ninth Thermidor? was not a single act. It was carried out not by an insurrectionary coupedetat, but by a series of blows that, having already definitively driven the revolutionary communist vanguard out of the party, drove the rightist wing of the Thermidoreans out of the leadership and subjected the entire Thermidorean bureaucracy to a one-man dictatorship. That dictatorship rested, of necessity, on a dramatically increased police apparatus able to intervene within the party.

The collectivisation of agriculture
As we have seen, the Stalin group had co-existed with the restorationist wing of the party tolerating the growth of Kulak farming, low industrial growth targets and ineffective planning machinery. At this stage in its development it was defined as a political tendency by its commitment to holding political power within the isolated Russian state on a programme of politically expropriating the most consciously revolutionary
layers of the working class.

But it differed from the right in that in certain exceptional circumstances, should its political grip on the Soviet state be threatened, it was capable of bureaucratically moving against private property and of developing and extending a form of economic planning in conflict with the operation of the law of value. Its interest in developing forms of planning flowed from its need to hold on to the political power it had usurped, not from a commitment to socialism.

During 1927 the Soviet state faced difficulties in procuring grain from the peasants to the same level that it had achieved in 1926. Similar problems faced the state procurement agencies in 1928. The Thermidoreans were reaping the bitter fruits of under industrialisation and concessions to the Kulak. The centrist Stalin group made its decisive turn against the Bukharin wing and against the policies of late NEP. The prerequisite of the Stalin group being able to make that left turn was that the revolutionary left had been decisively ousted from power.

In December 1927 local Communist Party organisations were ordered, with little success, to step up their efforts to procure grain. At the same time Stalin was still declaring, “The way out is to unite the small and dwarf peasant farms gradually but surely, not by pressure but by example and persuasion, into large farms based on common, co-operative cultivation of the land.” The draft five year plan accepted in 1928 contained 15 per cent as an optimal target for collectivisation of agriculture in its duration.

Forcible collections of grain were carried out under the guidance of key Stalinists – Stalin himself, Zhdanov, Kossior and Mikoyan – during January and March 1928. The inevitable response of the peasants was to cut back on their sowings of wheat and rye in 1928. Either the Stalinists could face a threat to their political power by conceding to the private farmers by raising prices and importing cheap consumer goods from the West or they could move to break the hold of private property in the countryside.

It was in order to preserve their bureaucratic power, rather than because of any long-term plans for collectivising agriculture or expected immediate beneficial results in the agricultural sector, that the Stalinists decided to collectivise Soviet agriculture. The material base of the Soviet economy was hopelessly ill-prepared to provide the required resources to supply collectivised agriculture with the facilities needed to make it capable of achieving qualitatively higher yields.

In 1928 the USSR possessed only 27,000 tractors compared with the 200,000 it needed. The collectivisation of agriculture was undertaken without any formal discussion or decision making in an official party body. It was the work of the triumphant Stalin faction and a measure of their grip over the party at this time.

On 7 November 1929 the press carried an article by Stalin in which he hailed the “spontaneous turn of the broadest mass of poor and middle-peasant households towards collective forms of agriculture.” In December Stalin launched a campaign for the liquidation of the Kulaks as a class? which was underwritten by a decree of 5 January 1930 proclaiming the State’s commitment to total collectivisation.

Within seven weeks of the decree over 50 per cent of the Soviet peasantry were members of rudimentary and ramshackle collectives. Active resistance automatically led to protesting peasants receiving the designation “Kulak” from the party organs. By July 1930 320,000 Kulak families had been expropriated and deported – a number that far exceeded the number of Kulaks claimed by Stalinist statisticians on the eve of collectivisation.

Collective farm membership figures for 1930 show quite how spurious were the Stalinists’ claims that
collectivisation represented a spontaneous movement of the mass of the peasantry. A brief hint of relaxation from Stalin in a March 1930 Pravda article entitled ?Dizzy with Success? precipitated a dramatic exodus from the collective farms. By early March 1930 58 per cent of the Soviet peasantry were enrolled in collectives. That figure had dropped to 23 per cent by June! In the highly fertile Central Black Earth Region membership dropped from 81.8 per cent to 15.7 per cent over the same period.

The uprooted peasantry found no resources or equipment in the new collectives. Neither the tempo of industrial development throughout the 1920s nor the targets of the First Five Year Plan made it possible for collectivisation to do other than simply generalise the want, squalor and backwardness of Russian agriculture. Peasant resistance to this process took on the character of a civil war. To the extent that the peasants were incapable of resisting collectivisation they slaughtered their own livestock as their sole means of thwarting the agencies of the central state. This is evidenced by the dramatic drop in Soviet livestock between 1929 and 1934.

In those years the number of horses and pigs declined by 55 per cent, of cattle by 40 per cent and sheep by 66 per cent. While 1930 was blessed with a good harvest, agricultural output dropped considerably in the first years of collectivisation. In 1932 cereal production was 25 per cent down on the average NEP years and famine re-appeared in the Soviet countryside on a horrific scale.

Faced with this resistance and the disastrous effects of collectivisation on agricultural production, the Stalinists did order a temporary retreat in 1930. But the collectivisation drive was resumed in 1931 as the means by which the Stalinists took a tight grip on the productive forces of Soviet agriculture.

They were prepared to retard the productive capacity of the Soviet countryside in order to achieve this desired effect for the Bonapartist regime. By 1932, 61.5 per cent of cultivated land was collectivised; there were 211,100 cooperative farms (Kholkhozes) and 4,337 State farms (Sovkhozes). While the Kholkhozes were formally established as co-operatives the local party organs appointed their secretaries and leading committees. In 1935 the Kholkhoz system received a definitive form. Agricultural machinery, agronomists, mechanics, educational, veterinary and training personnel were all to be concentrated in state machine tractor stations (MTS). Party and Security (NK VD) supervision of the countryside was also to be based in the MTS.

The Kholkhozes, in their turn, were to hire machinery and expertise from the local MTS. In this way a definite layer of privileged MTS workers was crystallised in the countryside alongside the perfection of an apparatus of repression and scrutiny over the mass of the peasantry.

Peasant income was made dependent on the income of the Kholkhoz after the state had purchased its crops and collected its tax tribute from the Kholkhoz. In 1935 the average household earned 247 rubles a year for Kholkhoz work ? the cost of a pair of shoes! In addition the peasants were now to be allowed a small plot of no more than half a hectare from which the mass of the soviet peasantry gleaned the essentials of their miserable life.

The reintroduction of an internal passport system for the Kholkhozniki in 1933 effectively tied the peasants to the Kholkhoz. A law of 17 March 1933 stipulated that a peasant could not leave his Kholkhoz without a contract from an employing enterprise that had received the sanction of the Kholkhoz management.

The Soviet peasantry therefore experienced collectivisation as the loss of their ?gains of October.? The Bonapartist bureaucracy had preserved its political power and material privileges by destroying the petty-commodity production base of the Kulak and the NEPman. In this way the ability of the peasantry to
challenge the political rule of the bureaucracy through a grain strike was effectively destroyed. But the result was not only the agricultural stagnation and inefficiency which haunts the Soviet bureaucracy to this day. It also created a sullen and rebellious peasantry held down by savage repression. The Stalinist victory over the peasantry created an enormous explosive charge in the very foundations of the workers? state and necessitated a huge apparatus of repression ? including the slave labour camps which grew alongside collectivisation ? to keep the peasantry in the collective farms.

Bonapartism and industrialisation
The left turn of the Stalinists in 1928 also marked the beginning of their drive to industrialise the economy of the Soviet Union. Throughout the period of the First Five Year Plans, up to the outbreak of war with Germany, the Stalin faction grappled with the problem of consolidating and extending their political control of Soviet society at the same time as they attempted to build a modern industrial economy.

At all times their guiding objective was to retain their political power and privileges and only in this context can the zigs and zags of their economic policies be understood. Like all non-revolutionary forces their policies were empirically determined as they searched for a way both to prevent the re-assertion of proletarian control over the soviet state, and to fend off the attacks of imperialism.

As such it was this period which was to provide Stalinism with its formative experience and furnish it with its characteristic methods and politics. The defining feature of Stalinist state power, the attempt to create a bureaucratically planned economy on the basis both of the destruction of capitalist property relations and the political expropriation of the proletariat, took shape in the period of the first two Five Year Plans.

As with all other situations where Stalinists were later to expropriate private capital and organise production on the basis of centralised planning, decisive measures against the remaining power of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie were only taken after the revolutionary leadership of the working class had been politically expropriated.

Up to that moment Stalinism sided with the Rightist pro-capitalist forces against the working class until it could guarantee that the working class did not have the resources to create organs of a healthy revolutionary workers? state. However in order to defend its own privileges and political power it moved to defend and extend non-capitalist property relations but in a manner that ensured, and extended, the destruction of the remaining rights of the toilers themselves.

While opposed to the Marxist programme for the planned construction of socialism in the aftermath of destroying the bourgeoisie, Stalinism can expropriate bourgeois property and create planning mechanisms for its own non-socialist purposes.

As a bureaucratically controlled overturn of capitalist property relations, the First Five Year Plan and collectivisation drive pre-figured the post-second world war overturns in all its essential features save that the first workers? state had as its direct origin the proletarian insurrection of October and the expropriations and nationalisations of 1918.

A politically degenerate a regime such as that represented by Stalinism standing on post-capitalist property forms must possess a highly contradictory character. The property relations, the potential of plannification itself, are stifled and distorted. The fact that the property relations of the USSR remained post-capitalist and that economic policy was the result of central planning, not the working of the law of value, did not mean that this statified property in the USSR had a socialist character.

In the hands of the Stalinist bureaucracy the statified economy was not being utilised to construct a society
implementing a programme of socialist construction? a programme directed to the withering away of inequality and of the state itself. The bureaucracy?s means of administering the planned economy, and the goals they set for it, flowed from their interest in maintaining their rule and privileges. The massive cost of the repressive state machine built up to protect the bureaucracy constituted, in and of itself, an enormous burden on the property relations of the USSR.

The Stalinist form of planning is only possible after the proletariat has been politically expropriated. This means that the self-activity and democratic initiative of the toilers themselves ? the very force that is indispensable to planning and developing the productive forces on the road to socialist construction? cannot be harnessed by the bureaucracy. Because the Stalinists deny the masses all political rights, they must also deny them access to the decision-making machinery of the central plan. In that the plan guarantees the privileges of the bureaucracy it must, in concealing these privileges, shroud the workings of the plan in a veil of secrecy.

As the bureaucracy denies the masses? elementary rights and material needs so the toilers conceal the real workings of the economy from their bureaucratic overlords. Low labour productivity, high absenteeism and labour turnover are evidence of this. At each and every stage in the bargaining process that precedes agreements on plan targets, the bureaucrats and managers themselves conceal their real productive potential from their superiors in order to gain maximum leeway from the central state apparatus. These aspects of the bureaucratic plan were all in evidence in the First Five Year Plans.

They have been present in every plan since. Their cumulative effect is to periodically slow down growth rates, disrupt the economy, create shortages and throw the economy into crisis. Enthusiasm of the masses, evoked by promises of socialism, recedes as does the possibility of socialism or even of real and lasting economic improvement. The bureaucratic plan extends its potential as it increases inequality and fosters disproportionality in the economy. It cannot achieve sustained qualitative growth in the economy.

That is, while it has been able to modernise the USSR by copying capitalism?s highest achievements, it has not, in a rounded and developed way, ever been able to outstrip the economic achievements of the major imperialist powers.

Within the Stalinist regime, planning is necessarily crude and blind. The existence of that regime based on bureaucratic power means that the transition to socialism in the USSR is blocked. Although post-capitalist property forms remain in existence the Stalinist regime from its inception prevents them being consciously developed as a means of implementing the programme of revolutionary Marxism.

Many attempts have been made to challenge the Trotskyist characterisation of the property relations upon which the Soviet state is based. There certainly has been no shortage of pedantic intellectuals who use the published evidence of the non-fulfilment of plan targets as verification of their own heavily ground academic axe that the Soviet economy is planless ? and has always been so.

The journal Critique invests its credibility, and that of its lead editor Hillel Ticktin, in this thesis. After rummaging in the academic bargain basement for what regularly passes as new ideas freed from the ?stale orthodoxy? of the past, the leadership of the British Revolutionary Communist Party have decided they can plug a gap in their own theoretical dyke by opting to attempt to convince us of this same sophistry.

Seizing on the evident expansion of producer goods production at the expense of consumer goods and fortified by the manifest deterioration in the living standards of the working class, the founder of the British Socialist Workers Party Tony Cliff has deduced that the inauguration of the First Five Year Plan, taken in conjunction with the collectivisation of agriculture, signifies the re-introduction of capitalism ? albeit in a
bureaucratic state capitalist form in the USSR.67

Other analysts purporting to stand in the Trotskyist tradition - notably Ernest Mandel - have sought to prove the non-capitalist nature of the property relations extended and fortified by Stalinism by reference simply to their statistically evident growth in comparison with world capitalism.68

None of these schools begin to tackle the fundamental problems presented to Marxists in defining the property relations presided over by Stalinism in the USSR. Whether non-capitalist property relations exist in the USSR depends on whether the fundamental law of capitalist production the law of value determines the nature of production, remuneration and exchange in the USSR.

Even the healthiest of workers’ states, would in a situation of blockade and encirclement be forced to subordinate the consumption of the masses to the production of producer goods to survive in the face of imperialism. Whether the economy is planned or not depends on whether the fundamental laws of capitalist production have been subordinated as the principal laws governing production by a system of rules emanating from the centralised decision-making apparatus of the USSR. It flows from the fact of the political expropriation of the working class in the USSR that the norms of planning in the USSR will not conform to those for which revolutionary Marxists fight. However, the non-existence of the norms of socialist planning is not sufficient evidence to deduce the non-existence of planning per se in the USSR.

It is impossible to talk of Soviet planning as if the outcome of every productive operation was, or is, simply the execution of the will of the central planning bureaucracy. The periods of fastest growth have been during the First Five Year Plan and in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War.

In both cases relatively primitive tasks of construction and reconstruction had to be fulfilled, growth took place primarily in the producer goods sector and the bureaucracy could rely on a significant degree of enthusiasm and self-sacrifice from large sections of the working masses.

However, in general for example at the end of the First Five Year Plan and increasingly in the post-war period the Stalinist bureaucracy has desperately searched in vain for rational methods of administering the plan, of co-ordinating its various branches and measuring needs and output.

Under the capitalist system of production these decisions are taken by the laws of the market itself. In a healthy workers’ state they are the result of the conscious rule of the toilers themselves deciding on their tasks and needs in order to establish a socialist order.

Neither the anarchic laws of capitalism nor the rules of transition are determinant in the USSR. The historically illegitimate bureaucracy has to attempt to make order out of property relations that historically only has validity as the means by which the working class constructs socialism. Hence the particular gross absurdities, irrationalities and failures of Soviet planning.

**The Stalinist model of planning**

The Stalinists sought to expand their industrial base through a drive to both increase the USSR’s heavy industrial base and to extend the operation of centralised production planning in every major sphere of Soviet industrial production. Planning was, therefore, a vital means for asserting and maintaining the hold of the Stalinists over Soviet society as a whole. The Stalin group proceeded, at first, to revise the plan targets upwards in a particularly adventurist fashion and then to call, in December 1929, for the completion of the Five Year Plan in four years.

The target growth rate for 1931 was to be nearly double that originally intended. Over the four and a quarter years from October 1928 to December 1932 actual investment in heavy industry nearly doubled
the original estimates. The Stalinists, breaking with the Right, attempted to establish a dynamic industrial economy through centralised planning.

It is necessary to understand the term “planning” as it can be applied to this stage of the development of the Soviet economy. At least in the early years of the First Five Year Plan the targets were arbitrary to a large extent and played an exhortative rather than an immediately prescriptive role.

For example the maximum variant of the First Five Year Plan called for a quadrupling of investment in state industry, an 85 per cent in consumption expenditure, a 70 per cent increase in real wages and a 30 per cent increase in peasant incomes.

In the realm of consumption expenditure, real wages and peasant incomes in reality bore no resemblance to these figures by the end of the First Five Year Plan.

The results of the first major round of Stalinist planning were uneven. For reasons we have already discussed agricultural production fell far short of planned targets. Similarly the production of consumer goods failed to reach planned targets. Even bourgeois commentators, however, are forced to accept that the production of producer goods increased considerably and on a scale beyond that envisaged by the plan formulators. Alongside this there were significant advances in the construction of an operative apparatus of planning in the USSR. A balance sheet of the achievements and shortcomings of the First Five Plan can be drawn from the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1927-8</th>
<th>1932 Plan Target</th>
<th>1932 Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Source: A. Nove: An Economic History of the USSR p191)

Stalinist planning did achieve notable successes during the First Five Plan period. Achievements were recorded primarily in the sphere of heavy industry, which received 80 per cent of total investments. Some 1,500 new factories were built with metal plants being established at Magnitogorsk, Kusnetsk, Zaporozhe. A new coalfield was built in Kazakhstan. The biggest hydro-electric station in Europe was built on the Dneiper. At a time when world capitalism was reeling under the effects of severe recession the First Five Year Plan increased Soviet production by 250 per cent. In the heavy industrial sphere this momentum was continued, albeit at a slightly slower pace, in the Second Five Year Plan. As a result coal and pig iron production increased five fold between 1928 and 1940, steel fourfold, and chemical production tenfold.

But to what extent can these achievements be attributed to planning? The drafting of plans was the joint responsibility of the party and government with the State Planning Commission – Gosplan. They were responsible for drawing up both a prospective plan for the Five Year period and a series of current plans which, initially, took the form of annual control figures. In 1931 an annual plan was produced for the first time and thereafter yearly. During the 1930s mechanisms were developed with a view to both maintaining an account of what was being produced and a material balance between quantities produced by various branches of industry.
It was not until the very late 1930s that the planning mechanisms were sufficiently well developed to draw up a general balance of the economy of the USSR as a whole. During the Second World War (1939-45) Gosplan was resorting to monthly plans as its means of organising and directing production. The execution of plans was the responsibility of the various Commissariats and other economic authorities under the Supreme Economic Council.

Targets were set in quantitative terms and, in the sphere of heavy industry, were generally fulfilled in the period of the First Five Year Plan. The Stalinist system showed that it could use the potential of a centralised planned economy to direct resources to the front of heavy industry. Figures for consumer goods production demonstrate the bureaucracy’s ability to ensure that available resources were primarily made available to its priority projects.

But quantitative successes should not blind us to the qualitative failures of Stalinist planning during this early period. Alongside the Stalinists’ adventurist upping of all plan targets, productivity was due to rise by 42.1 per cent in 1931 but rose by 20.5 per cent. Production costs in that year rose by 6 per cent rather than a planned 8 per cent reduction.

By the admission of the Stalinists themselves the quality of goods produced deteriorated during the First Five Year Plan. Hence Molotov could declare on January 1933, ‘In the course of the Second Five Year Plan we must focus our efforts not on the quantitative growth of production but on improving the quality of production and on the growth of labour productivity in industry?’.72

Periodic breakdown of planning occurred particularly in the light industrial sector. Textile production, for example, fell in certain years of the First Five Year Plan.73 Rakovsky showed that for light industry during May and June 1931 ‘the plan was little more than 50 per cent fulfilled’.74

The Stalinist planners faced mounting problems both of maintaining proportional balance between the various sectors of the economy and in devising rational means of measuring production, needs and the rate of exchange between goods. These were not simply problems of the consumer goods sector. 16,000 kilometres of new railways were planned for the First Five Year Plan period? the materials were only made available to build 5,500 kms.

Bureaucratic planning, as the plan proceeded, faced mounting problems of distributing? produced goods to the institutions most in need of them. In 1932 and 1933 the planning mechanisms came under considerable strain and disorganisation. The adventurist targets of the Stalinists were only an additional contributory factor rather than the root cause of the disorganisation of the Soviet economy by the end of the First Five Year Plan.

Consistent with the reactionary programme of Socialism in One Country the Stalinists aspired to the building of an autarchic planned economy separated from the operations of the world capitalist economy. In a manner that prefigures the projects of Pol Pot and Leng Sary, Stalinist planners theorised a transition to communism in the USSR through the achievement of complete autarchy and the utilisation of the USSR’s own resources.

But as Trotsky had warned in Towards Capitalism or Socialism in 1925, this attempt to create a planned economy in isolation proved a utopia. Despite the enormous resources of the USSR both the workings of the world market and imperialism’s hostile designs against the USSR periodically and inevitably disrupted the Stalinists? goal of establishing an autarchic planned economy.

During the First Five Year Plan, for example, declining world prices for raw materials occasioned by world
capitalism’s recession, obliged the Soviet planners to export more raw materials in order to purchase machinery and import less, for example, cotton and wool than had been planned.

The targets and priorities of the Second Five Year Plan were to be severely disrupted by the increasing obligation on the Soviet planners to prepare the military defence of the USSR.

Having attempted to send the mechanisms of the market “to the devil?” the Stalinists faced insurmountable problems in devising rational pricing mechanisms within their economy. In 1930 and 1931 Soviet economists were again heard to rationalise the pricing chaos in the USSR as a symptom of the withering away of money!

Bread rationing was re-introduced in 1929 and was extended to most other manufactured consumer goods during 1930. In addition the same commodity could be purchased at five different prices: commercial prices in special restricted access shops for luxuries; open model stores with prices above ?commercial? prices; special shops in workers’ districts that in theory sold goods at between commercial and ration prices; Torgsin stores selling in exchange for precious metals and foreign currency; and ?free prices? on the private and black market.

Prices paid by the state to the Kholkhoz were planned on the basis of the state’s revenue requirements not determined on the basis of the law of value. For example, in the mid 1930s the peasants were paid 5.70 rubles for a centre of rye by state provincial agencies which sold it to state flour mills at 22.20 rubles a centre. The pricing mechanisms made possible a large revenue to the central state in the form of the ?turnover? tax.

Failure to raise labour productivity in line with plan targets posed major problems to the Stalinists as to how the industrialisation was to be financed. The heavy taxation tribute extracted from the peasantry provided half the turnover tax yield to the state budget in 1935.75 But increasingly during the First Five Year Plan new investments were funded from the massive and inflationary expansion of the supply of printed money. In 1928 1.7 milliard rubles were in circulation ? the figure reached 8.4 milliard by 1933.

As the Left Opposition tirelessly pointed out this inflationary spiral made it all the more impossible for the Soviet planners to measure, compare and judge achievement in the Soviet economy. The Stalinist bureaucracy did not have its own alternative rational measuring criteria with which to replace those of the law of value.

These contradictions within the Stalinist system took on an increasingly dramatic form in the last period of the First Five Year Plan occasioning a serious crisis in the planning system in 1932 and 1933. There were serious shortfalls in target achievement for electricity, pig iron, coal and oil in 1932. Steel production which had over-fulfilled its 1928-9 target figure was below the 1930 level in 1932 and the 1933 target was set at 7 per cent below the 1931 target.

Steel production suffered from a major failure to put new facilities into operation. In 1933 there was a 14 per cent drop in investment. In addition to the famine that struck the Soviet countryside that year there was a serious transport crisis and gross industrial production, which had been rising at 20 per cent per annum, rose by only 5 per cent.

The Soviet crisis of 1932 and 1933 had its roots not in the operation of the law of value on an internal or international scale. It was a crisis of a system based on consciously challenging the laws and dictates of market mechanisms by a Bonapartist bureaucracy which could not develop and sustain a planned and balanced growth of the productive forces at its disposal. It represented a crisis of Stalinist planning in a
form that pre-figures the crises of proportionality and stagnation that have regularly interrupted the development of bureaucratic planned economies.

The very existence of this form of crisis was predicted and analysed by Trotsky in his writings on the Soviet economy. Writing in 1931 in Problems of Development of the USSR Trotsky evidenced the tendency to crisis that lurked behind the facade of success:

> ?the industrial successes of recent years in themselves do not at all assure an uninterrupted growth in the future. Precisely the speed of industrial development accumulates disproportions, partly inherited from the past, partly growing out of the complications of the new tasks, partly created by the methodological mistakes of the leadership in combination with direct sabotage.?77

He envisaged the principal elements of the form that the crisis of bureaucratic planning would take:

> ?the substitution of economic direction by administrative goading, with the absence of any serious collective verification, leads inevitably to the inclusion of mistakes in the very foundation of the economy and to the preparation of ?tight places? inside the economic process. The disproportions driven inward inevitably remain at the following stage in the form of disharmony between the means of production and raw materials, between transport and industry, between quantity and quality and finally in the disorganisation of the monetary system.?78

He developed this method of analysis with greater clarity during 1932:

> ?The whole trouble is that the wild leaps in industrialisation have brought the various elements of the plan into dire contradiction with each other. The trouble is that the economy functions without material reserves and without calculation.

> The trouble is that the social and political instruments for the determination and effectiveness of the plan have been broken or mangled. The trouble is that the accrued disproportions threaten more and greater surprises. The trouble is that the uncontrolled bureaucracy has tied up its prestige with the subsequent accumulation of errors. The trouble is that a crisis is impending with a chain of consequences such as the enforced shutting down of factories and unemployment.?79

There was definitely a tendency for the Left Opposition in the early 1930s to envisage a complete collapse of the planning machinery and Stalin?s industrialisation project. Rakovsky?s The Five Year Plan in Crisis written in 1936 is built on a perspective of impending collapse drawn from a sharp and clear analysis of the tendency towards crisis. As the Critique editorial board gleefully points out, Rakovsky and the Mensheviks envisaged a developing and progressive ?planlessness? in the Soviet economy. A similar telescoped perspective can also be found in some of Trotsky?s writings on the economy of the USSR in the early 1930s:

> ?In the sphere of money inflation, as in that of bureaucratic despotism, is summed up all the falseness of the policy of centricism in the field of the Soviet economy as well as in the field of the international proletarian movement. The Stalinist system is exhausted to the end and is doomed. Its break up is approaching with the same inevitability with which the victory of fascism approached in Germany.?80

Reality was, however, to show these perspectives to be too starkly drawn. History allows us, with Trotsky, to recognise that the planned property form did survive the 1932-3 crisis only for the general tendencies towards crisis that we have discussed to re-occur at the latter end of the Second Five Year Plan.

In the face of crisis the Stalinists dramatically re-drafted their plan targets during 1933. The plan targets for
1934-6 were relatively well fulfilled. In steel production, for example, 35 per cent, 22 per cent and 28 per cent of targets were met and marginally over fulfilled. In 1936 cotton cloth production rose 22.3 per cent over its 1935 level.

Again it would be difficult to attribute the relatively stable expansion of the USSR's productive forces in this period either to the operation of the law of value or to the work of ?planlessness?. While the tendency towards planlessness was always part of the Left Opposition?s theory of the roots of crisis, they never attempted to characterise the system as permanently ?planless?. Neither can one seriously begin to explain the relatively stable mid-1950s in the Soviet economy without recognising the existence of and strengthening of, planning mechanisms during this period.

In 1935 the most rounded and even fulfilment of plan targets was achieved. That year also saw the planning agencies relatively free from the adventurist pressure of the Stalinists, chastened by the 1932-3 crisis. To this extent it was a period where the planning mechanisms had the greatest opportunity to prove their real potential. In this year quantitative growth targets were fulfilled, for the first time, by every all-union Commissariat. Labour productivity in heavy industry actually rose more than its planned target. 1936 was even more satisfactory than 1935 in most regards.

How then do we explain this relative success? Firstly it demonstrates the superiority of, and potential of, planned production itself. It pays tribute to the potential of the socialist organisation of production. This was recognised by Trotsky in 1936:

?With the bourgeois economists we have no longer anything to quarrel over. Socialism has demonstrated its right to victory, not on the pages of Das Kapital, but in an industrial arena comprising a sixth of the earth?s surface, not in the language of dialectics, but in the language of steel, cement and electricity.?82

On the basis of material experience, Trotsky?s estimate of the achievements of Soviet planning ? but not of its deformations and tendency to breakdown ? had been developed in the light of previously unobtainable experience. This has led the supporters of Critique to ?accuse? Trotsky of changing his position in the mid- 1930s and breaking with the ?correct? perspective that he and Rakovsky held to in the early 1930s.83

They are right to suggest that Trotsky modified his estimate of the achievements of Soviet planning. But it was Trotsky who was correct to modify his view of plannification in the USSR on the basis of learning from the unique and concrete experience of the USSR in the 1930s. Revolutionary perspectives are of necessity tentative and in permanent need of being tested and re-assessed. Academics can afford the luxury of orthodoxy and of ?never changing their position? whatever may happen in the material world.

Unless revolutionary Marxist perspectives are permanently tested and re-assessed on the basis of living experience the door is open to dogmatism, to schematism and the collapse of the revolutionary programme as an instrument of intervention.

An explanation of the relatively stable mid-1930s period must also base itself upon an understanding of the operation of other contributory factors. A number of the major projects of the First Five Year Plan ? including Magnitogorsk ? only became fully operational during this period. The proportion of machinery imported from the West declined during this period as a result of the achievements of the First Five Year Plan.

A relaxation of rationing was accompanied by an increase in Labour productivity which continued through to 1937. Again it was the achievements of planning and not the operation of the laws of capitalism or the
lawlessness of the USSR as viewed through the eyes of the Critique editorial board that explains this relative stability.

The last year of the Second Five Year Plan in 1937 experienced the onset of significant disequilibrium and stagnation. Steel production rose by only 4 per cent compared with 28 per cent in the previous year.84 It grew by only 2 per cent in 1938 and fell by 4 per cent in 1939. The effects of the disastrously bad harvest of 1936 were felt throughout the USSR in 1937. The Third Five Year Plan ? prepared in 1937-8, inaugurated in 1938 and ratified at the 1939 18th Party Congress ? was in the process of being fulfilled only in an extremely uneven and unsatisfactory manner at the time of Hitler?s invasion of the USSR in 1941. Sugar production declined, oil production was stagnant leading to a serious fuel shortage alongside the miserable performance of the steel industry.

How do we explain this second major crisis of planning in the USSR? Once again we are confronted with the major features of mounting disproportionality and developing stagnation towards the end of a planning period. Again the planning mechanisms were failing to sustain balanced growth and target figures were becoming increasingly fictional. With trade with the West diminishing and the market effectively subordinated within the USSR the root of this crisis cannot be found primarily in the effects of the spontaneous operation of the law of value. However we are once again faced with a tendency for the planning processes of Stalinism to break down.

Contingent and particular factors can be advanced as an explanation of the stagnation of the Soviet economy in the later 1930s. The period saw the dramatic re-organisation of Soviet production to meet the mounting war threat presented by imperialism. While defence expenditure as a percentage total of the Soviet budget stood at only 3.4 per cent in 1933, it grew to 11.1 per cent in 1935, 16.1 per cent in 1936 and 25.6 per cent in 1939.85 This had the effect of forcing the operative planning agencies to divert investment and goods earmarked for consumer good production into prioritised heavy industry and military projects.

This has been adduced by Cliffite theorists of ?State Capitalism? as evidence of the existence of a Permanent Arms Economy which propelled the USSR to become locked into ever larger rounds of arms production in order to produce ?use values? to survive successive rounds of arms-based competition between state capitalist Russia and the West.

But this arms production was organised by the Soviet bureaucracy ? by its own methods ? as a means of defending the planned economy of the USSR (and the privileges of the bureaucracy that depended on it) against the designs of German and Japanese imperialist to turn the USSR into a semi colony once again. Even the healthiest of workers? states would act far more decisively to this end than did the Stalinist bureaucracy that placed its hopes for defence on alliance with one, or another, of the camps of imperialism.

The purges of the mid-30s had a devastating effect on the personnel and morale of the planning apparatus. Similarly relative success in the field of planning saw the recrudescence of the adventurist, arbitrary and bogus norms of Stalinist planning. Increases in labour productivity encouraged the Stalinists to inaugurate a major drive to storm production targets. This was the context of the Stakhanov movement launched in August 1935.

In August 1935 Stakhanov bust his work norm by mining 102 tons of coal in six hours. He did so with the help of a handpicked team and special training and provisions. His ?achievement? was, however, to set the pace for Soviet labour in the next period. In October 1935 Makar Lashtoba fulfilled his work norm by 2,274 per cent when he mined 311 tons of coal in one day!
At the first all-union conference of Stakhanovites the ex-Oppositionist Pyatakov gave voice to the crude adventurism of the Stalinists when he declared:

"We will smash the devil himself and attain unheard of production results of which no one has ever dreamed....One must simply shout 'the devil take it'!" 86

Competing for favour from the central planning agencies, local management showed a definite tendency in this period to keep their acclaimed Stakhanovites fully supplied while shortages and bottlenecks kept the majority of the workforce idle. In its own peculiar way the Stakhanovite movement testified to the inability of the Stalinists to genuinely mobilise the working class to utilise the gains of October and the inability of the Stalinist bureaucracy to effect rational and long term methods to raise the productivity of labour.

But separated from these contingent factors the crisis of the late 1930s stands as evidence of the fundamental contradictions that are to be found at the heart of planning under Stalinist bureaucracies.

**The planned economy as ?state capitalism?**

It is not possible within the confines of the present work to deal with all aspects of Tony Cliff's analysis of the Soviet Union as a bureaucratic state capitalism. It is necessary, however, to point up the inadequacies of his fundamental thesis concerning the creation of Russian state capitalism and to draw out the most important political ramifications of his method.

Cliff interprets the creation of the bureaucratically planned economy of the USSR as a social counter-revolution that inaugurated bureaucratic state capitalism in the USSR. In this analysis the newly emerged ruling bureaucracy is seen as having been transformed into a collective capitalist by virtue of the fact that it undertook the bourgeois task of accumulation. In his attempt to make this theory stick, Cliff has to falsify both the realities of the Soviet economy in the 1930s and, indeed, the Marxist definition of capitalism itself.

Cliff wishes to prove that, at the same time as the working class lost political power, the bureaucracy which replaced it was in the process of developing into a capitalist class because of the economic measures that it was forced to take. Therefore, alongside data establishing the fact that the proletariat lost all semblance of control, direct or indirect, we find in Russia ? A Marxist Analysis a constant emphasis on the parallels between the tasks the bureaucracy undertook and those undertaken by the nascent bourgeoisie.

For Cliff the significance of this lies in the fact that, ?Under capitalism the consumption of the masses is subordinated to accumulation.? 87 He has no difficulty in presenting figures to show that the First Five Year Plan witnessed a significant change in priority from consumption to accumulation. Within the use to which Cliff puts these figures (which are not themselves in dispute) lies a most important element of Cliff's method ? the use of the syllogism: under the First Five Year Plan consumption was subordinated to accumulation; under capitalism consumption is subordinated to accumulation; ergo, the First Five Year Plan was capitalism!

The syllogistic method of formal logic is no substitute for dialectics in the analysis of social phenomena. Being formal it ignores the content of such phenomena, i.e. the class content. This is the tell-tale weakness of Cliff's analysis.

The accumulation of the bourgeoisie is the accumulation of capital which can, of course, be expressed in the accumulation of the means of production such as factories, railways and power stations. However, whether such things are capital in any given circumstances is not determined by the mere fact that they are accumulated. Indeed, this point was one of the first advances made by Marx in his analysis of capitalism.
In Wage Labour and Capital, for example, he argued:

?Capital consists not only of means of subsistence, instruments of labour and raw materials, not only of material products; it consists just as much of exchange values. All the products of which it consists are commodities. Capital is, therefore, not only a sum of material products; it is a sum of commodities, of exchange values, of social magnitudes.?88

He further argued that:

?Capital does not consist in accumulated labour serving living labour as a means for new production. It consists in living labour serving accumulated labour as a means of maintaining and multiplying the exchange value of the later.?89

The accumulation of the means of production in the Soviet Union in no way squared with this definition of capital. Neither the factories, mines, power stations and machinery nor the products made with them were commodities, they were not produced for eventual sale on the market. They were not built in order to, multiply the exchange value? of accumulated labour but rather because they were necessary for the implementation of the industrialisation programme. In other words they were not capital but use values.

A workers? state must, necessarily, accumulate use-values, in particular the means of production, since its task is to expand production on a massive scale. Whether this accumulation preponderates at any given time over consumption cannot be a test of the class nature of the state that presides over the economy. Production of munitions and material for the Red Army was an absolute priority during the wars of intervention against the young Soviet republic, and quite rightly too.

The same formalist method is extended by Cliff to ?prove? that the bureaucracy is a collective capitalist. Basing himself on Lenin?s description of the historic task of the bourgeoisie to ?increase in the productive forces of social labour and the socialisation of labour?, Cliff explains why the First Five Year Plan was the point of transformation of the bureaucracy into a collective capitalist:

?It was now, for the first time, that the bureaucracy sought to realise the historic mission of the bourgeoisie as quickly as possible. A quick accumulation of capital on the basis of a low level of production, of a small national income per capita, must put a burdensome pressure on the consumption of the masses, on their standard of living. Under such conditions the bureaucracy, transformed into a personification of capital, for whom the accumulation of capital is the be-all and end-all, must get rid of all remnants of workers? control, must substitute conviction in the labour process by coercion, must atomise the working class, must force all social-political life into a totalitarian mould...

?Thus, industrialisation and a technical revolution in agriculture (collectivisation) in a backward country under conditions of siege transforms the bureaucracy from a layer which is under the direct and indirect pressure of the proletariat, into a ruling class...?90

Leaving aside the claim that collectivisation, i.e. the expropriation of all rural capital, big and small, was a mere ?technical? question, the bureaucracy that undertook it and directed the Stalinist form of industrialisation on the basis of command planning now somehow becomes the most perfect example of a capitalist class because:

?The fact that the bureaucracy fulfils the tasks of the capitalist class, and by so doing transforms itself into a class, makes it the purest personification of this class. Although it is different from the capitalist class, it is at one and the same time the nearest to its historical essence.? 91
That any social grouping should be defined as a class because it undertakes a task normally associated with a class, let alone a particular class, is incompatible with Marxism. In the greater part of the world the task of industrialisation will fall to the proletariat. In many countries the proletariat will face the problems of economic dislocation and political isolation that were encountered in the Soviet Union in the 1920s if not on the same scale.

The implication of Cliff's analysis of Russia in the years before the First Five Year Plan is that progress, indeed survival, will be determined solely by external factors. Internally, all policies must lead to the restoration of capitalism in one form or another. In the 1920s says Cliff, there were only two realistic economic programmes:

One solution to the conflict between state industry and individualist agriculture would have been to make the development of industry depend on the rate at which agricultural surpluses developed.

Alternatively, the conflict between industry and agriculture might have been resolved by rapid industrialisation based on primitive accumulation by expropriating the peasants and forcing them into large mechanised farms thus releasing labour power for industry and making agricultural surpluses available for the urban population.92

In other words Bukharinism and Stalinism were the only choices that faced the Russian workers, revolutionaries could have had no alternative programme.

For Cliff there was no way forward for the Russian working class other than reliance on the European revolution which never came. The policies of the Left Opposition, designed to regenerate the proletariat via planned industrialisation and the siphoning of a surplus from the rich peasantry to pay for it, were a utopia for Cliff. He singles out Preobrazhensky as an example:

Actually the implementation of Preobrazhensky's socialist primitive accumulation would logically have led to a very different state of affairs from that which he envisaged. Any attempt to squeeze the peasants would be likely to be met by a deliberate reduction in production, so that if the terms of trade between agriculture and industry were in favour of the latter, the amount of trade would fall. There would be only one way to deal with such a strike and that would be to use violence against the peasants, to expropriate them, and to concentrate them on such large farms that it would be possible for the state to control their work and output.93

Thus, the logical outcome of the policies of the Left Opposition would have been Stalinism! No doubt Preobrazhensky and the other capitulators developed similar justifications, that is no reason for today's revolutionaries to argue that Stalin carried out the rational kernel of the Left Opposition's programme.

This tacit acceptance that the proletariat cannot use state power to maintain and extend its interests in an underdeveloped country, that is to say, this rejection of the strategy of Permanent Revolution, is the consequence of Cliff's revision of the nature of capitalist accumulation. It has a Menshevik logic that would leave communists in today's imperialised countries as incapable of charting a way forward for the working class as Cliff believes the Left Oppositionists were in the 1920s.

Cliff's characterisation of the Soviet Union as a state capitalism is founded upon a rejection of what, for Marxists, constitutes the defining feature of capitalism. He develops an economic model in which military competition between industrialised nations takes the place of generalised commodity production and the law of value as the dynamic of social production under capitalism. The model itself is based on a false extension of Bukharin's theoretical prognostications (which themselves suffer from a characteristic one-
sidedness) concerning the development of finance capital. In order to see clearly the scale of Cliff's revisionism on this point it is first necessary briefly to outline the Marxist analysis of the defining characteristics of capitalism.

Capitalism is the mode of production in which both the prerequisites for production, including labour power, and the products themselves take the form of commodities, it is generalised commodity production. That is to say, all goods are produced for the market. On the market they are exchanged, in the last analysis, on the basis of the amount of socially necessary labour contained in each commodity. This is the law of value. It is a law that finds expression in the competition between individual capitals on the market. Through the operation of the law of value, capital tends constantly to flow to those sectors of production which will yield the greatest return on investment. Thus, production is not undertaken to satisfy human need but to create ever greater masses of capital. Within capitalism the division of the total labour of society, that is the determination of what shall be produced and in what quantities, is effected by the operation of the law of value.

It is in the nature of capitalism that on the basis of its own laws of motion, it tends towards the creation of ever greater formations of capital. Success in competition for one capital can only be at the expense of other capitals. Through a process of concentration and centralisation, capital tends towards monopolisation of whole branches of production. The creation of such a monopoly, in which every step of production is controlled by one capital, takes place on the basis of the law of value through a process of competitive destruction of other capitals, thereby removing competition within its own sphere of operation.

However, even the greatest monopoly is itself dominated by the law of value in that its products are destined for the market. The law of value now expresses itself in the competition between monopolies. Despite any rationalisation of production within the monopolies, the anarchy of capitalism dominates between them.

As monopolies develop and merge into an ever smaller number of ever greater capital formations they are able to exert greater and greater control over the societies out of which they develop. By a process of fusion, banking capital and industrial capital create finance capital. So powerful within modern capitalist society is finance capital that its requirements dominate the activity and policies of the state, itself the machinery of oppression which protects bourgeois property relations. The stage at which finance capital reaches this degree of pre-eminence in society is the imperialist epoch of capitalism. The economic order of the imperialist epoch is rightly called, ?state monopoly capitalism?.

To conform to his model, Cliff has to prove that, as a result of its relationship to the world economy, the Soviet Union acts as a single block of capital, USSR Ltd which is, therefore, subject to the laws of capitalism. The problem for Cliff is that there is, effectively, no competition between USSR Ltd and other capital blocks on the world market and, therefore, no means by which to ?execute the inner laws of capital? upon the Soviet Union. It is at this point that Cliff substitutes military competition for capitalist competition in order to provide the vital missing link in the chain between world capitalism and the Soviet economy.

It is worth reproducing the argument used by Cliff, if only to reveal most clearly the sleight of hand method by which logical contradiction masquerades as dialectics.

?If Russia traded extensively with countries outside her empire she would try to produce commodities which would fetch a high price on the world market, and to buy as cheaply as possible commodities from abroad. Thus, she would be aiming, like a private capitalist, at increasing the sum of use-values at her disposal by production of some use-value or other, regardless of what it would be...
But, as competition with other countries is mainly military, the state is interested in certain specific use-values, such as tanks and aeroplanes and so on. Value is the expression of competition between independent producers: Russia’s competition with the rest of the world is expressed by the elevation of use-values into an end, serving the ultimate end of victory in the competition. Use-values while being an end, still remain a means.94

The first of these paragraphs is a complete red-herring? all trading implies the attempt to get the best price possible for one’s own goods and to pay as cheaply as possible for those goods that have to be imported. This would be equally true of a healthy workers’ state and was, indeed, a central element in the economic thinking of the Bolsheviks and the Left Opposition. For them the state monopoly of foreign trade was a device for increasing and manipulating contacts with the world market, not a means to the reactionary end of economic autarchy that it became under Stalin.

The fact that the Soviet state, as a consumer, is interested, among other things, in tanks and aeroplanes is not because of the workings of some ahistorical category called competition but because without these things the state would be unprotected from its enemies. Again, this is, and always has been, a feature of all states, capitalist or not.

In order to equate military competition with capitalist competition, Cliff has to resort to a completely meaningless scrambling of Marxist categories. Value is not the expression of competition between independent producers. It is the measure of socially necessary labour time congealed within a commodity.

By definition a commodity is a product made for exchange and it is through exchange that the owner of the commodity realises its value. The law of value, as discovered by Marx, is a codification of the fact that the exchange of commodities takes place on the basis of the amount of value contained in the commodities to be exchanged, like exchanging with like.

In its most simple form this does not involve any competition between the producers. This only arises where we are dealing with the realisation of the value of commodities in which there is contained surplus value, that is to say, commodities produced by proletarians but owned by capitalists. The competition consists in the various capitalists attempting to increase the proportion of surplus within their commodities which they can realise through sale. The successful capitalist is able to realise a greater amount of surplus value than his competitors and, as a result, increase his capital for the next cycle of production. Thus, the struggle to amass greater volumes of capital is the only way in which the law of value can express itself.

When Cliff argues that, ?Because international competition takes mainly a military form the law of value expresses itself in its opposite, viz. a striving after use values? 95 he is again equating the accumulation of use-values with the accumulation of capital. ?Striving after use-values? is only another way of saying, ?striving to accumulate material wealth? something which has been a feature common to all societies save the most primitive.

This is not to say that there is no kernel of rationality whatsoever within Cliff’s argument. The pressure of military competition does exercise a distorting effect on the soviet economy, as it will on the economy of any workers’ state, healthy or unhealthy. Certainly a degree of symmetry in the matter of military technique is imposed by this imperialist pressure and the limits of this pressure are related to the functioning of the law of value within, most importantly, the US economy. Again, this would be the state of affairs if we were examining quite the healthiest workers’ state and how its economy was affected by imperialist blockade. None of this means for a moment that military competition can take the place, or have the same results, as capitalist competition.

The Five Year Plans
The working class grew considerably as a result of Stalinist industrialisation. During the first Five Year Plan the cities grew by 44 per cent. In 1931 alone 4,100,000 peasants joined the city population. But this swelling army of proletarians was subject to severe dictatorship. The triangle arrangement of management, party and union administration in the plants, that had developed during NEP, was abandoned in 1929 for fierce managerial rule. The Stalinist Kaganovich declared ?the earth should tremble when the director walks around the plant?.

The First Five Year Plan initially saw an enormous turnover of labour. During 1929 the Soviet worker changed jobs, on average, every two months. This figure was down to four months in the coal and iron ore mining industries. In conditions of an acute labour shortage, Soviet workers resorted to defending themselves and their bargaining power through this labour turnover. The trades unions had been transformed into transmission belts for the directives of the Bonapartist state.

During the 1930s the bureaucracy acted to curtail this route of self-defence for the working class. From 1930 labour exchanges were instructed to keep lists of those who had ?arbitrarily? terminated their employment. By September 1930 such workers were to permanently lose their rights to unemployment benefit. During 1931 every worker was issued with a wage book including details of every change of job and discharge from work.

By 1932 all employees had to show an internal passport to obtain work and had to have their place of work entered in their passport. Employees were obliged to discharge workers guilty of truancy (Progul) with one day absence from work being sufficient to justify dismissal. ?Truants? were to be deprived of all food and merchandise ration coupons and to be evicted from any dwelling that went with the plant.

In December 1938 at a time of serious disequilibrium in the Third Five Year Plan new disciplinary provisions were introduced to the Soviet labour code. Arriving more than 20 minutes late for work was to constitute ?unjustified absence?. Full sickness benefits were only to be made available after six years employment at a given plant.

Taken together these measures constituted the means by which the Bonapartist bureaucracy consolidated its political dictatorship over the Soviet working class. They were, however, accompanied by the development of forms of remuneration and retail outlets that enabled the Stalinists to stimulate the crystallisation of a distinct layer of skilled workers in the USSR who had a material interest, through their relative privileges compared with the unskilled, in the maintenance of the Stalinist regime.

The Stalinists have always made sure that a significant section of Soviet society has a material interest in not challenging the rule of the central bureaucracy.

In 1932, Stalin explicitly disavowed the Marxist goal of the gradual progressive abolition of inequality.

?Equalitarianism owes its origin to the individual peasant type of mentality, the psychology of share and share alike, the psychology of primitive communism. Equalitarianism has nothing in common with Marxist socialism. Only people who are unacquainted with Marxism can have the primitive notion that the Russian Bolsheviks want to pool all wealth and share it out equally. That is the notion of people who have nothing in common with Marxism.?98

For the mass of the Soviet workers, the First Five Year Plan led to a serious drop in their real wages. The doubling of labour productivity on which the achievement of the targets depended was not achieved. In industry as a whole, labour productivity grew by 41 per cent by 1934. As a consequence the working class suffered a severe drop in income to pay for the achievement of targets. The fall in living standards
was about 40 per cent between 1929 and 1932. At the same time the range between salaries was increased and the old party maximum, which prevented a party member earning more than a skilled worker, was abolished.

Alongside Stalin’s critique of egalitarianism, wage differentials between skilled and unskilled workers were increased to a ratio of 3.7:1. In addition, Cadres were to receive higher pay and privileges. Shock workers? and management personnel were given access to closed shops, to special clothing allowances, and to top priority in housing lists.

The general dearth of consumer goods highlights the significance of these privileges. In the entire period prior to 1940, the urban population increased by 79.2 per cent, and the urban housing stock by a mere 27.6 per cent. Hence the importance of the seemingly marginal privileges that Stalinism was able to bestow on a skilled aristocratic layer of the Soviet working class.

The Stakhanov movement of 1935 represented a further attempt, on the part of the Stalinists, to create a privileged layer of workers separate from the mass of the working class and beholden to the Stalinists for their distinct and relatively luxurious lifestyle. By 1935 this layer of Stakhanovite shock workers? in the industrial and agrarian work force was receiving on average between 500 and 2000 rubles a month compared with an average wage of 150 rubles. In 1933 20 per cent of urban workers received 40 per cent of the available wage fund.101

The Stalin turn in foreign policy

Up until the victory of Nazism in Germany in 1933, the Comintern, under Stalin, had pursued the ultra-left policies of the Third Period. Adventurism at home was reflected by adventurism abroad. The Third Period was designated the final period of capitalism. Communism was around the corner. As such all bourgeois parties ? social democrats and fascists alike ? were equal enemies of the working class. The Comintern characterised social democracy as ?social fascism? and refused to unite with reformist workers in a struggle against the growing fascist danger. The tactic of the united front, developed by Lenin and Trotsky, was abandoned in favour of the ?red front?.

Fascism, as the last phase of bourgeois rule, was even to be welcomed since their victory would simply mean ?our turn next?! These policies produced tragic results. Hitler came to power in March 1933, and proceeded to butcher the flower of the strongest working class movement in the world. Even the Kremlin bureaucracy could not fail to recognise that his ascension to power represented a dire threat to the USSR. In foreign policy, as in internal affairs, the Stalin group would admit of no mistakes. The Comintern sections continued to affirm the correctness of their line. However, the line was changed in typical bureaucratic fashion. The Comintern, a subservient tool of Soviet foreign policy, received new directives from the USSR.

In order to ward off the Nazi threat, Stalin now attempted to engineer a bloc with those ?democratic? imperialisms that were likely to clash with Germany ? principally Britain and France. In accord with the new diplomatic needs, Stalin flipped 1800 from ultraleftism to the right opportunism that was to become so central to Stalinist strategy.

The united front was embraced only to be turned into a popular front ? an alliance between the workers and liberal, anti-fascist elements of the bourgeoisie in the democratic camp. This alliance could only mean the subordination of the workers? interests to those of the bourgeoisie. The Stalin-Laval pact of 1934 was the first codified operative agreement to maintain peaceful coexistence between the Stalinists and a section of world imperialism ? ?democratic? France. That this bound the French working class hand and
foot to the bourgeoisie became clear in 1936. In that year the Stalinists connived in the defeat of the biggest strike wave that had ever gripped France, in order to maintain the Popular Front.

The development of the Left Opposition's analysis of Stalinism

Faced with the monstrous growth of this bureaucratic tyranny, raising itself above the working class and reducing its already heavily bureaucratised party, trade unions and soviets, to empty ciphers the Bolshevik Leninists (led by Rakovsky within the USSR and by Trotsky abroad) had to analyse these events and the conclusions for strategy and tactics they held.

Trotsky, Rakovsky and the expelled Left Opposition were faced with the task of analysing the results of their own defeat, of assessing the Stalinist ?left turn?, the debacle of the Bukharinites, and the increased bureaucratic tyranny of the early 1930s. They were subjected to pressure from ?left? sectarian positions within the Opposition (the Democratic Centralists) and to right-opportunist forces (the capitulators to Stalinism for example Radek, Preobrazhensky and Pyatakov).

In arguing with the Democratic Centralists, who claimed that the counter-revolution was victorious and that capitalism had been restored, or the capitulators who argued that Stalin had adopted the Left Opposition?s policies, Trotsky, Rakovsky and their co-thinkers were obliged to re-examine both the concrete stages in the development of the bureaucracy and the terminology and analogies they had used throughout the 1920s. Central to this process was the discussion of the question of Thermidor and Bonapartism.

The Left Opposition had operated with an analogy with the French Revolution of 1789-98. The Left Opposition, in combating the Stalin-Bukharin bloc in the years 1926 to 1928 had characterised the threat which the rightist policies posed to the workers? state as one of concealed capitalist restoration. This danger they named Thermidor.

?What does the right danger signify in the present period? It is less the danger of an open, fully-fledged bourgeois counterrevolution than that of a Thermidor, that is a partial counterrevolutionary shift or upheaval which, precisely because it was partial, could for a fairly long time continue to disguise itself in revolutionary forms but which in essence would already have a decisively bourgeois character, so that a return from Thermidor to the dictatorship of the proletariat could only be effected through a new revolution?.102

Trotsky argued that a ?strongly advanced process of dual power? existed in the Soviet Union. That power had slipped out of the hands of the proletariat ?to a considerable degree, but still far from decisively?.103 The decisive question for Trotsky in 1928, and indeed to the end of his life was, had state power passed to the agents of the bourgeoisie, was capitalism being restored?

His answer was categorical:

?No ... the bourgeoisie could seize power only by the road of counterrevolutionary upheavals. As for the proletariat, it can regain full power, overhaul the bureaucracy and put it under its control by the road of reform of the party and the soviets?.104

The retreat of the proletariat on the one hand and the advance of the Kulak and NEPman on the other, in his view, gave the room for the ?monstrous predominance of the bureaucratic apparatus oscillating between the classes?.105 However, in his and the Lefts? use of the analogy, Trotsky mistakenly identified Thermidor with a social counter-revolution.

?Why do we speak precisely of Thermidor? Because, historically, it is the best known and most complete example of a counter-revolution which is masked, which still retains the outer forms and the ritual of
Trotsky saw Thermidor and Bonapartism as differing types of social counter-revolution. In 1931 he expressed it thus:

"By Thermidorean overthrow the Left Opposition always understood a decisive shift of power from the proletariat to the bourgeoisie, but accomplished formally within the framework of the Soviet system under the banner of one faction of the official party against the other. In contrast to this the Bonapartist overthrow appears as a more open, ?riper? form of the bourgeois counterrevolution, carried out against the Soviet system and the Bolshevik party as a whole, in the form of the naked sword raised in the name of bourgeois property?."107

Thus for Trotsky the expulsion of the Left Opposition in 1927 was only a ?party rehearsal for Thermidor?108. Moreover since ?In the Soviet Union only the peasantry can become a force for Thermidor,?109 Trotsky looked to the Bukharinites with their openly pro-Kulak policy as the principal agents of the coming Thermidor even after their defeat in 1924. The Stalinist faction he saw as playing an auxiliary role to the Right.

However, despite the errors of this use of the analogy, Trotsky (and Rakovsky) did methodically analyse, step by step, the growth of Stalin?s Bonapartist power.

In late 1928 Trotsky pointed to the Bonapartist element in the position of the Stalin regime.

"The Master [Stalin - eds] says: ?These cadres can be removed only by civil war?. Klim [Voroshilov, Commissar for War - eds] adds, ?If you workers make too much fuss, remember that a great power stands behind me?. Both these statements point to elements of Bonapartism. In the first case speaks the party-state apparatus, which considers itself higher than everyone else, higher even than the army. In the second case speaks the military apparatus, which tomorrow will feel compelled to ?put the civilians in their place?. A bloodless victory of the centrists? party apparatus over the right would not do away with the Thermidorean-Bonapartist perspective but would only change and postpone it?.110

Whilst for Trotsky, the Bonapartist regime could only be fully actualised as an instrument of social overturn, he described and analysed its ?preparation? in such a way that his self-revision was no sudden or ill-prepared leap. By 1931 Trotsky was talking of the ?plebiscitary degeneration of the party apparatus (which) undoubtedly increases the chances of a Bonapartist form [of counter-revolution - eds]?111

He referred many times in these years to the ?Bonapartist features of the regime in the Soviet Communist party?.112 Furthermore he noted that ?The party, as a party does not exist today. The centrist apparatus has strangled it?.113 Here it might be observed that there was a contradiction.

Trotsky and the Bolshevik-Leninists insisted that the bureaucracy could be ousted on the road of reform and that no new party was necessary. This paradox was more apparent than real.

Trotsky clearly regarded the Left Oppositionists as representing the nucleus of the Bolshevik party. He held that the ?relation between the Left Opposition and the centrist apparatus ... is a substitute for the party and holds the right in check?114

Trotsky advocated that the Left Opposition mount a clear and independent defence of the interests of the working class in line with the Platform of the Opposition. This was to include the leading of struggles, wage struggles for example, against the bureaucracy. This being so, why did Trotsky hold back from the view that a new party was necessary?
The answer to this lies in essence in the international nature of the Opposition’s platform. The Russian party remained a section of the Comintern, an alliance of subjectively revolutionary mass parties albeit subjected to centrist misleadership. The years 1929 to 1933 were years of acute crisis in all capitalist countries. The mass CPs, especially the German Party faced the question of fighting for power point blank. Indeed the latter faced the question of victory or destruction. The Comintern’s tactics, forced on the German Party, were disastrous. A united front with the Social Democracy was vital to obstruct the fascist onslaught.

The Comintern’s proscription of the united front except from below, its ludicrous characterisation of the reformists as ‘social fascists’ created a situation of enormous political tension throughout the communist movement. If the German party managed to adjust its tactics in time i.e. rallied to the Left Opposition’s tactics, then the domination of the Stalin leadership within the Russian party and state would have been called into question. Before the German revolutionary crisis was resolved it was impossible to abandon the Comintern as dead for the revolution. Therefore it was impossible to abandon the CPSU.

Trotsky’s change of analysis hinged not upon events in Russia, but in Germany? the key to the international situation?

The crushing defeat of the German Communist Party (KPD) in early 1933 demonstrated that the road of reform of the Comintern, the KPD and the CPSU was at an end. Trotsky, by October of this year, was drawing decisive new conclusions.

Firstly, he asserted the importance of the German debacle for the Soviet workers. In The Class Nature of the Soviet State, he wrote:

?The Soviet workers would have settled accounts with the despotism of the apparatus had other perspectives opened before them, had the Western horizon flamed not with the brown colour of fascism but with the red of revolution?.115

He concluded that with regard to the internal political situation a decisive shift had occurred, but this did not extend to the social roots of the proletarian dictatorship:

?the bureaucracy has expropriated the proletariat politically in order to guard its social conquests with its own methods. The anatomy of society is determined by its economic relations. So long as the forms of property that have been created by the October Revolution are not overthrown, the proletariat remains the ruling class.?116

Moreover, here for the first time Trotsky began to re-examine the Thermidor/Bonapartism analogy:

?If Urbahns wants to extend the concept of Bonapartism to include also the present Soviet regime, then we are ready to accept such a widened interpretation? under one condition: if the social content of the Soviet?Bonapartism? will be defined with the requisite clarity. It is absolutely correct that the self-rule of the Soviet bureaucracy was built upon the soil of veering between class forces both internal as well as international.

Insofar as the bureaucratic veering has been crowned by the personal plebiscitary regime of Stalin, it is possible to speak of Soviet Bonapartism. But while the Bonapartism of both Bonapartes as well as their present pitiful followers has developed and is developing on the basis of a bourgeois regime, the Bonapartism of Soviet bureaucracy has under it the soil of a Soviet regime. Terminological innovations or historical analogies can serve as conveniences in one manner or another for analysis, but they cannot change the social nature of the Soviet state?.117
Alongside this re-examination of the analogy, Trotsky changed his position on the question of the new party and the possibility of peaceful reform. "No normal constitutional ways remain to remove the ruling clique. The bureaucracy can be compelled to yield power into the hands of the proletarian vanguard only by force."\[118\]

Trotsky insists that "it will be necessary to apply against it, not the measures of civil war but rather measures of a police character."\[119\] In essence Trotsky here presents for the first time the programme of political revolution, though he does not explicitly call it such. His programme is for a programme of political revolution because he continues to insist that no social overturn has occurred. But it remains a revolution nonetheless because no peaceful process of reform will remove the bureaucracy. The full elaboration of this position however took place only in February 1935 in Trotsky's essay The Workers' State, Thermidor and Bonapartism, and in 1936 in The Revolution Betrayed.

It was in these works that Trotsky finally came to terms with the contradictory nature of Stalin's Russia. That it remained a workers' state was evidenced by the fact that the fundamental property relations of the USSR were those created by a workers' revolution which had expropriated the capitalists. The Soviet Thermidor and Stalin's Bonapartism had developed on the basis of these property relations and had not overthrown them.

In July 1935 in The Workers' State, Thermidor and Bonapartism, Trotsky fully revised his earlier position on Thermidor. He recognised it as a form of political counterrevolution that had taken place on the social foundation established by the revolution. The working class had been politically expropriated by the Thermidorian bureaucracy but that bureaucracy still rested on the planned property relations of the USSR.

Trotsky recognised that 1924, and the triumvirate's campaign against himself and the Left, marked the beginning of Thermidor and that, once triumphant, the bureaucracy had resorted to a form of Bonapartism to exercise its rule:

"In the former case [Napoleon I ? eds.] the question involved was the consolidation of the bourgeois revolution through the liquidation of its principles and political institutions. In the latter case [Stalin ? eds.] the question involved is the consolidation of the worker-peasant revolution through the smashing of its international programme, its leading party, its soviets ... What else should this regime be called, if not Soviet Bonapartism??\[120\]

From this point on Trotsky is no longer ambiguous about the nature of Soviet Bonapartism or the tasks of revolutionaries in relation to it. In The Revolution Betrayed Trotsky analyses the material roots of the Soviet Thermidor:

"No help came from the West. The power of the democratic soviets proved cramping, even unendurable, when the task of the day was to accommodate those privileged groups whose existence was necessary for defence, for industry, for technique and science. In this decidedly not ?socialist? operation, taking from ten and giving to one, there crystallised out and developed a powerful caste of specialists in distribution."\[121\]

In this situation "The young bureaucracy, which had arisen at first as an agent of the proletariat, began now to feel itself a court of arbitration between the classes."\[122\] For Trotsky the roots of Soviet Thermidor were to be found in the crystallisation of this agency into a distinct bureaucratic stratum with its own privileges and conservative interests separate from those of the proletariat: "The leaden rump of the bureaucracy outweighed the head of the revolution. That is the secret of the Soviet's Thermidor."\[123\]

The Soviet Thermidor ? spearheaded by Stalin and Bukharin ? had a Bonapartist logic from the start:
The Bonapartist rule grew out of the fundamental contradiction between the bureaucracy and the people, and the supplementary contradiction between the revolutionists and the Thermidorians within the bureaucracy. Stalin rose by supporting himself primarily on the bureaucracy against the people, on the Thermidorians against the revolutionists. But at certain critical moments he was compelled to seek support among revolutionary elements, and, with their assistance, among the people against the over precipitate offensive of the privileged ones. But it is impossible to support oneself on a social contradiction that is turning into an allies. Hence the forced transition to Thermidorian ?monolithism? through the destruction of all vestiges of the revolutionary spirit and of the slightest manifestations of political self-activity on the part of the masses.?124

This led Trotsky to finally reject the term ?bureaucratic centrist? as in any way applicable to the Stalinist bureaucracy in 1937.125 If Trotsky was now no longer ambiguous about either the ?centrism? of Stalinism or the reformability of the Soviet State, he still had to grapple with the problem of developing a characterisation of, and perspective for, a state where post capitalist property forms remained but where all vestiges of proletarian political power had been destroyed by a Bonapartist bureaucracy. Despite its enormous privileges and power, Trotsky rejected the designation of the bureaucracy as a ruling class for reasons which we consider valid.

The Soviet bureaucracy does not have the characteristics of a ruling class in the Marxist sense. Within the Marxist tradition, classes are defined not within the relations of distribution or authority of any given society but by their position in the relations of production themselves. A class be it a ruled or ruling class ? has a distinct, necessary and identifiable relation to the productive forces within the social relations of production. Layers of administrators are not classes in the scientific Marxist use of the term.

While the bourgeoisie under capitalism is a necessary component of the relations of production, the Soviet bureaucracy is not such a necessary element in the planned property relations of the USSR. On the contrary, its monopoly of political power, its control over distribution is, and always has been (even during the most dynamic phases of Soviet economic development) an obstacle to the full realisation of the potential of the property relations of the USSR. In all hitherto existing societies the property relations, and the class structures that necessarily flowed from them, became a brake on the development of the productive forces of mankind. In the USSR it is not the property relations but a layer of administrators and distributors who block the development of the productive forces.

The fundamental contradiction of hitherto existing societies on the eve of social revolution ? that between the forces of production and the class relations of production - does not exist in the USSR. The bureaucracy is in fact unnecessary for the rational and progressive development of the productive forces within the system of planned property relations.

The contradiction at the heart of the Soviet Union is the contradiction between a system of property relations and a layer of administrators and distributors (the bureaucracy) who stand in the way of the working class dynamically developing the productive forces in its own, i.e. socialist, interests.

Because it is therefore a parasite on the property relations, not an indispensable part of them, we reject the view that the bureaucracy is the ruling class in the USSR.

For these reasons it remains the case that even in Stalin?s Russia the working class remained the ruling class because the property forms in existence were those that the working class requires in order to build socialism. The working class had, however, been politically expropriated by a caste of bureaucrats analogous to the caste of bureaucrats in the trade union movement under capitalism.
Along with Trotsky we say that the USSR:

?can be called a workers? state in approximately the same sense ? despite the vast difference of scale ? in which the trade union, led and betrayed by opportunists, that is, by agents of capital, can be called a workers? organisation. Just as the trade unions under capitalism are workers? organisations run by class collaborationist bureaucratic castes in the working class, so the USSR remains a state where the working class is the ruling class but where power is in the hands of a reactionary bureaucratic caste.?126

It follows however, that this parasitic bureaucracy ? as long as it retains power ? blocks the transition to socialism in the workers? states. Trotsky was adamant that in designating the USSR a ?workers? state?, albeit in a bureaucratically degenerated form, did not mean that the USSR could be characterised as socialist. In The Fourth International and the Soviet Union, written in July 1936, he explicitly rejected the attempt to describe the state property of the USSR as socialist property:

?for the latter has as its premise the dying away of the state as the guardian of property, the mitigation of inequality and the gradual dissolution of the property concept even in the morals and customs of society.

The real development in the Soviet Union in recent years has followed a directly opposite road. Inequality grows, and, together with it, state coercion.?127

A workers? state within which the transition to socialism is blocked must prove a highly unstable and contradictory phenomenon. The bourgeoisie historically can tolerate the loss of direct political power within Bonapartist regimes so long as its property and economic life is safeguarded. But its property relations can prosper and expand under Bonapartism as can the bourgeoisie itself.

However the loss of political power by the proletariat undermines the very workings of the property forms established by the working class. Of necessity therefore Stalinist Bonapartism as a political regime has to maintain itself in power with a degree of terror and repression against society at large that testifies to its lack of historical legitimacy. Only ruthless terror and the atomisation of society can maintain the Stalinist bureaucracy in power. That is why the Stalinists have never been able to permanently coexist with independent organisations of the working masses and why all Stalinist regimes have ultimately relied on terror and large scale force to both establish and maintain their rule.

The Stalinist form of Bonapartism was, for Trotsky, unprecedented in the degree of independence from society that it had established for itself.

?The Stalin regime, rising above politically atomized society, resting upon a police and officers? corps, and allowing of no control whatever, is obviously a variation of Bonapartism ? a Bonapartism of a new type not before seen in history.?128

In political form the Stalinist regime and the fascist regimes in Western Europe ?In many of their features they show a deadly symmetry.?129 And this symmetry itself testified to the inability of Stalinism to survive as anything other than a regime of terror.

From this analysis of the contradictory nature of the USSR Trotsky developed a perspective based on its inherent weakness and instability. The social base of the Soviet Bonapartism was particularly fragile. On the one hand, it based itself on the property relations of a workers? state and a small privileged layer of those who prospered from the political expropriation of the working class within that state. This meant that the regime set itself against the overwhelming bulk of the population over which it ruled.

?In the USSR there are 12-15 million privileged individuals who concentrate in their hands about one half
of the national income, and who call this regime ?socialism?. On the other hand there are approximately 160,000,000 people oppressed by the bureaucracy and caught in the grip of dire poverty.?130

On the other hand, it based itself on constructing strategic alliances with sections of the world bourgeoisie as a means of buttressing and maintaining its power. However, the 1930s showed very clearly that imperialism?s alliances with the Stalinists were entered into by the imperialist powers only for tactical reasons. Whatever its hopes or expectations the Bonapartist regime could not eliminate the fundamental contradictions that existed between the property system it presided over and that of world imperialism. It followed for Trotsky that such a regime must, of necessity, prove a regime of permanent crisis and prove to be a short lived episode in the history of the transition to socialism.

He returned to this theme time and time again in the mid to late 1930s and in 1935 in The Workers? State and the Question of Thermidor and Bonapartism he formulated this perspective in the following way:

?Bonapartism, by its very essence, cannot long maintain itself as a ball balanced on the point of a pyramid, it must invariably roll down on one side or the other.?131

The onset of the bloody purges of the mid and late 1930s seemed to provide ample evidence of the inability of the regime to stabilise itself and its rule:

?Severe crisis cannot be a permanent condition of society. A totalitarian state is capable of suppressing social contradictions during a certain period, but it is incapable of perpetuating itself. The monstrous purges in the USSR are most convincing testimony of the fact that Soviet society organically tends toward ejection of the bureaucracy ... symptomatic of his oncoming death agony, by the sweep and monstrous fraudulence of his purge, Stalin testifies to nothing else but the incapacity of the bureaucracy to transform itself into a stable ruling class.?132

The onset of the imperialist war furnished further evidence of the fragility of Stalinism?s base. The war itself opened the road for the final destruction of Stalinism. In his last years Trotsky presumed that either the proletariat would destroy the bureaucracy in the next period or that the bureaucracy, incapable of defending planned property relations, would open the door for the restoration of capitalism in one form or another. This was the immediate perspective upon which the Transitional Programme was based:

?either the bureaucracy, becoming ever more the organ of the world bourgeoisie in the workers? state, will overthrow the new forms of property and plunge the country back to capitalism; or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the way to socialism.?133

It was this perspective that Trotsky considered was confirmed by Stalin?s 1939 pact with Hitler and the Soviet bureaucracy?s humiliatingly unsuccessful bid to seize parts of Finland in 1939.

?Stalin?s apogee is behind him, Not a few fateful tests are before him, With the whole planet thrown out of equilibrium Stalin will not succeed in saving the unsteady equilibrium of totalitarian bureaucracy.?134

For Trotsky the impending destruction of the Stalinist regime either at the hands of the proletariat or of capitalist restoration flowed inevitably from the nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy itself. Hence the confidence with which he could declare,

?if this war provokes, as we firmly believe, a proletarian revolution ... To every single person it will become clear that in the process of the development of the world revolution the Soviet bureaucracy was only an episodic relapse.?135
And again:

?Either the Stalin regime is an abhorrent relapse in the process of transforming society into a socialist society, or the Stalin regime is the first stage of a new exploiting society.?136

We will return later to the problems posed to Trotsky?s perspective and analysis by the stabilisation and expansion of Stalinism in the aftermath of the Second World War. As we have already argued, perspectives must always be put to the test of real experience and adjusted accordingly. What lay at the heart of Trotsky?s analysis of the USSR during this period was the unswerving insistence that only if the proletariat seized political power through revolution in the USSR could the property relations of the Soviet Union be put to their correct historical use in the process of socialist construction.

The full development of Trotsky?s analysis of Soviet bonapartism took place alongside, and indeed made possible, the development of Trotsky?s programme for the degenerate workers? state. When the call for the Fourth International was first made Trotsky did not spell out that the tasks of the new Soviet section would be those of political revolution.

Without a clear understanding of the nature of the political counter-revolution that had taken place this was not surprising. So in 1933 he argued:

?Much more important is the fact that these organisations [parties of the F.I. ? eds.] will acquire an enormous authority in the eyes of the Soviet workers and will thus finally create favourable conditions for the rebirth of a genuine Bolshevik party. It is only on this road that the reform of the Soviet state is possible without a new proletarian revolution.?137

Trotsky was hamstrung by his wrong conception of Thermidor. Germany had convinced him of the need to call for new parties ? though he had effectively recognised that the last congress of the real Bolshevik party took place in 1923. However, he still erroneously held onto the perspective of reform.

Only after the development of the characterisation of the regime as a counter-revolutionary workers? state ruled by a form of Bonapartism, did Trotsky fully appreciate the need for a new proletarian revolution:

?To believe that this state is capable of peacefully ?withering away? is to live in a world of theoretical delirium. The Bonapartist caste must be smashed, the Soviet state must be regenerated. Only then will the prospects of the withering away of the state open.?138

This programmatic position was the decisive outcome of Trotsky?s theoretical analysis of the USSR. By recognising the possibility of a counter-revolutionary workers? state, Trotsky was able to arm his supporters with a programme that dialectically combined defence of the property relations established by October with the most intransigent revolutionary opposition to the bureaucratic caste. That position remains valid today and applies to all of these states which we characterise as degenerate workers? states.

Trotsky?s analysis of the USSR was in a state of constant development. While he was wrong not to have realised that Thermidor had been completed until 1935 his struggle, and that of the Left Opposition was historically justified. The events that unfolded in the USSR were not readily grasped in their complexity by the Left Opposition until the late 1930s. However throughout this entire period Trotsky waged a revolutionary struggle against Stalin?s Bonapartism.

In the end the argument over whether Trotsky was correct in the timing of his call for a new party in the USSR is a formal one. For Trotsky the key question was the best means of approaching the Soviet masses and winning them fighting to win leadership of Lenin?s Party or turning one?s back on it? Furthermore
the possibility of reform of the party and the Comintern was linked to the existence of millions of subjective revolutionaries within the Comintern.

Their revolutionary consciousness made the struggle for reform both viable and politically correct. The defeat of the working class convinced Trotsky that their consciousness could no longer be turned into a material force for reform.

With the collapse of this perspective and amidst the welter of police repression that followed in the USSR, it was clear that Trotsky needed to ground new perspectives in theoretical analysis.

Like Marx and Engels in 1848 he had oriented his followers to pursue a consistent Marxist line. Like them the failure of that line to triumph forced him to consider the problem at a deeper level. His tardiness on the question of calling for a new political revolution is, therefore, explicable in terms of the enormity of the problems posed by the establishment of an entirely new formation – a degenerated workers? state.

It was Trotsky?s genius that he learnt from the failures of his initial analysis and perspective and proved capable of constructing a new analysis and a new programme. His revolutionary genius developed the theory of a degenerated workers? state and that same genius developed the Marxist programme to meet this new and unexpected eventuality.

**Bonapatism in crisis: Stalin?s terror**

All of the essential elements of Stalinist Bonapartism had been constructed by the early 1930s. However, the successes and failures of the Five Year plans and collectivisation and the enormous social contradictions that they created set a distinct limit to the ?golden age? of Stalinist Bonapartism.

The road to untrammeled Bonapartist tyranny led through a series of zig-zags to a struggle, muted and repressed to be sure, within the Stalin faction which now felt the varied social pressures of Soviet society, the effects of collectivisation and the Five Year plan. The Thermidorians had denied to the proletariat and its vanguard the ability to consciously deal with the problems of the direction of the workers? state. The revolutionists were imprisoned and exiled; the Right, who reflected the pressure of the better-off peasantry had been silenced. The pressure of the working class and peasantry now was distantly refracted, through the boorish bureaucrats, the ?rude satraps? (Trotsky?s phrase for men like Kirov) but it could not be totally suppressed.

By 1932 the sufferings of the masses began to tell even on the nerves of their overworked taskmasters. The hard-pressed lower echelons of the bureaucracy?s desire for a halt were expressed in the Ryutin group. M.N. Ryutin, a member of the Central Committee and the man responsible for organising anti-opposition strong-arm squads in Moscow, tried to organise within this body for the removal of Stalin as general secretary. Stalin, informed by the OGPU, tried to order Ryutin and his fellow plotters to be executed. Yagoda, head of OGPU refused unless the Control Commission and the Politburo authorised it. According to George Paloczi Horvath in his book Kruschev, Stalin?s motion to allow this in both the Central Committee and in the Politburo was defeated - twice.

The upper levels of the bureaucracy, although they had initiated and officiated in the Stalin cult for the last two years, refused Stalin licence to terrorise them. Indeed Politburo members Kirov, Rudzutak and Ordzhonikadze led the opposition in this case. All three were dead by 1937.

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The famine of 1933 and the under-fulfilment of much of the Five Year Plan served as a brake on the Stalinist bureaucracy?s adventurist stampede towards industrialisation. The famine in the countryside could not be allowed to spread into the cities. Fearing that the ferocity of the attacks on the peasantry
would intensify the agricultural crisis, Stalin and Molotov circulated an instruction in May 1933 to curb excesses.

They denounced the "saturnalia of arrests" and ordered that future arrests should only be directed against organised resistance.\textsuperscript{140} By 1934 there was widespread desire within the bureaucracy for relaxation for an easing of tempos in agriculture and industry. In the Politburo the three members cited above, often with the support of Kalinin and Voroshilov, resisted Stalin's break-neck policies.

The Congress of Victors in 1934 was the public outcome of those internal Politburo decisions. In January 1934 the XVI\textsuperscript{th} Party Congress confirmed the complete victory of Stalinism over the revolutionary vanguard within the USSR.

At this congress the Stalinists were able to put on display an abject parade of repentant oppositionists from both the Left and the Right. Preobrazhensky declared the incorrectness of the Left Opposition's economic policies, while saluting the far-sightedness of Stalin. Tomsky performed in a similar vein on behalf of the Right. Delighted at the "unity", that is at their total victory over the main opposition, Kirov, on behalf of the Stalinists, declared: "Our successes are really immense. The devil take it, to speak frankly, one so wants to live and live! After all, look and see what is going on around us. It's a fact."\textsuperscript{141}

The other side of the Congress was an attempt by Kirov and his supporters to curb the growth of Stalin's bonapartist rule over themselves. While Stalin was reaffirmed in all of his positions the darling of the congress was undoubtedly Kirov. He had received the ovations. He, according to Roy Medvedev, only had three votes against him in the Central Committee elections, whereas Stalin is supposed to have had 270 cast against him.\textsuperscript{142}

It was in the context of this that Stalin's title was changed from General Secretary to Secretary. Clearly Kirov hoped to use his own enhanced position to curb Stalin's personal rule. However, his unwillingness to fight to remove Stalin (unlike Ryutin) was to prove fatal for himself and for the great bulk of the "victors" who were to fall at the hands of Stalin's regime of one-man Bonapartism.

Kirov's failure to really challenge Stalin or rather his inability to do so meant that Stalin was able to use the Congress to further consolidate his plans for his dictatorship. The secretariat was dominated by his own key men - Zhdanov, Kaganovich and himself, plus Kirov. Yezhov became a full member of the Central Committee and was placed on the Orgburo and, as second in command to Kaganovich, in the Party Control Commission. The Central Committee itself came to be dominated by hand-picked police members, loyal to Stalin. Thus while the Congress of Victors signified the final victory of the Stalinist faction, it heralded the final victory of Stalin himself over his faction.

The moves towards relaxation were continued after the XVI\textsuperscript{th} Congress. The Congress had accepted a proposal from Ordzhonikidze for a slower rate of industrial growth than originally proposed in the draft Second Five Year Plan.

Later, in November 1934, it was announced that bread rationing was to be lifted and peasants on the collective farms were given the right to cultivate private plots. Throughout the year there were pronouncements emphasising raising the standard of life. Agricultural output began to rise for the first time since 1928. Towards the end of the year Stalin declared the slogan for 1935 to be: "Life has become better, comrades, life has become more joyous." This was far from the truth. In 1934 attacks on the party had continued with 340,000 purged from membership. In Leningrad 30,000 Communist and non-party workers were deported.
Only by reforming the security apparatus and placing it under the control of his most trusted henchmen could Stalin hope to exercise the degree of terror necessary to prevent opposition to him from within his own faction. This he accomplished in 1934. In July of that year the OGPU was reorganised and renamed the People’s Commissariats of Internal Affairs (the NKVD). Its head, Yagoda, had proved unreliable in the Ryutin case. While he remained at the head of the NKVD, he was now to be overseen by Yezhov—a key supporter of Stalin who, in 1935, was to succeed Yagoda.

Stalin was able to prepare this machinery without meeting any opposition because in the economic field and in foreign policy he continued to pursue the policies pushed for by Kirov. He appeared united with his political opponents while at the same time preparing to launch a devastating blow against them.

This blow, begun in the last month of 1934 and carried on through the Great Purges of 1936-8, constitute the transformation of Soviet Bonapartism from the Bonapartist rule of a faction into the Bonapartist rule of one man.

On 1 December 1934 Sergei Kirov was assassinated by the young Nikolayev. A degree of mystery surrounds this event. For example the NKVD officer responsible for Kirov’s safety died before anybody was able to question him.

Whether or not Stalin directly organised, or simply withdrew any obstacles to the murder, it served as the immediate signal to launch his full-scale war on the party’s old Bolshevik leaders.

In early 1935 Yezhov took over the Party Control Commission and succeeded Kirov as Secretary of the Central Committee. Khruschev, Malenkov and Beria—all absolutely trusted henchmen of Stalin—were moved into key positions within the party and the state. The murder provided these gangsters with the pretext they needed to exercise their total control. The rights of anyone accused of terrorist acts were suspended.

Thus the NKVD could select who it wished for immediate transportation and execution. From 1935 into 1936 Stalin, true to form, struck first at the Lefts—Zinovievites and the capitulators from the Trotskyist opposition. Zinoviev and Kamenev were tried and imprisoned in January 1935 for complicity in the assassination of Kirov.

Stalin chose his charge well—every bureaucrat from the party cell secretary in the Kolkhoz to the head of a ministry feared the silenced and brutally oppressed masses, they feared the appearance of the avengers? that the Narodnik tradition had implanted in the Russian consciousness. Any sacrifice seemed justified to dispel the long shadow of terrorist revenge.

The bureaucracy raised above its head the guillotine it had for so long feared. After a lull of some eighteen months in August 1936 the great purges and the slaughter began. In the first trial of the terrorist counter-revolutionary Trotskyist Zinovievist bloc?, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Yevdokimo and Ivan Smirnov made grotesque extorted confessions?. At the instigation of Judas Trotsky? they had become the despicable servants and agents of Germano-Polish fascists?.

The defendants—the closest collaborators and comrades of Lenin for many years—were summarily shot. In January 1937 the second wave began, this time centring on the old members of the Left Opposition who had long since capitulated Patakov, Radek, Sokolnikov, Serebryakov, Muralov. In June 1937 Stalin attacked the leadership of the Red Army including Tukhachevsky. The purge was thoroughgoing; three out of five Soviet Marshals, 13 army commanders out of 15, 57 corps commanders out of 80, 70 divisional commanders out of 190, 75 of the 90 members of the Higher War Council—indeed over half the officer
corps was purged. The road to the massive Soviet defeats of 1941 was opened by this holocaust.

That the old ?left? were attacked first can be explained by the nature of Stalin?s bonapartism. The Stalinist Bonapartist state depended on negotiated alliance and co-existence with the governments of the imperialist states. From the time of Hitler?s rise to power the Stalinists sought to cement alliances with democratic imperialism. The Stalin-Laval pact signalled this. The Soviet bureaucracy was prepared to lend its weight, experience and police agents to drowning the Spanish workers? vanguard in blood in order to keep alive this strategic element of international class collaboration in the Stalinist programme. Stalin was keen to make sure that the ?democratic? imperialists were able to point to aspects of Soviet life that corresponded with the values and ideals of bourgeois democracy. The left, despite their capitulations, remained thorns in his side.

Zinoviev, for example, had been the bogey of the European democracies during his period as head of the Comintern in the 1920s. To allay suspicion Stalin aimed to discredit and destroy the ?left?. By linking them with Germany and Japan ? suggesting they were agents ? Stalin was linking them to the enemies of ?democratic? imperialism. At the same time he was linking them to a danger that ordinary Soviet citizens realised was a very real danger.

His Bonapartism also led him to once again ally with the Right, now broken and not a real threat. Bukharin, a symbol of the Right and therefore a symbol of appeasement with imperialism, was allowed to be the editor of Izvestia, the official government paper and was involved in drafting the 1936 Constitution. The Constitution itself was symbolic in that it reproduced bourgeois democratic norms ? such as geographical representation ? but confirmed the absolute supremacy of the Party. It was a piece of paper that liberal friends in the West could point to in their pursuit of the Popular Front, but it was also a tool in the hands of the police dictatorship.

But the terror did not stop at the old ?left?. It was to engulf Soviet society for the last years of the 1930s. How do we begin to explain this particular bloody period of Stalinist Bonapartism?

In the late 1930s internal and external contradictions propelled the Bonapartist regime into deep crisis. In a manner that prefigures the experiences of Stalinist terror in Mao?s China and Pol Pot?s Kampuchea, the Stalinists could only respond to that crisis by unleashing their terror apparatus against every layer of Soviet society. Stalin?s purges represent this extraordinary form of Bonapartism?s response to crisis rather than the essence of Stalinism itself.

The later ?de-Stalinisation? by Khruschev in the 1950s was an attempt to return to the norms of pre-1934 Stalinism rather than any attempt to dismantle the essential machinery of the Stalinist regime itself.

The key elements of Stalinism?s crisis were analysed and predicted by Trotsky and the International left Opposition.

The international position of the USSR deteriorated dramatically in the mid-1930s. On 25 November 1936 Japan and Nazi Germany signed the anti-Soviet anti-Comintern pact. In the face of the fascist offensive the Soviet bureaucracy?s alliance with the ?Western Democracies? proved bankrupt.

The certain victory of Franco in the Spanish Civil War by 1938, the ?Anschluss? of Austria with Nazi Germany in 1938, and the Munich agreement of September of that year whereby the British and French bourgeoisies recognised Hitler?s seizure of the Sudetenland, all testified to the weak and duplicitous nature of the ?democratic? bourgeoisies.

Having slaughtered the left as a means of appeasing the democratic imperialists the Stalinists turned to
slaughter the Bukharinites and Soviet military chiefs who, each for their own particular reasons, were pledged to pro-Western or anti-German policies. The purges made possible the dramatic about-turns in Stalinist foreign policy as the Soviet bureaucracy turned first to the Western bourgeoisie and then to the fascists with the 1939 Stalin-Hitler pact as a prop to sustain them in the accelerating international crisis.

Secondly, the late 1930s saw the increased articulation of the accumulated contradictions of autarchic bureaucratic planning. Even the most limited discussion or accountability proved intolerable for the Stalinist regime in these circumstances. Only massive purges and the expansion of the Gulag economy could plug the gaps and keep the system in operation during the Third Five Year Plan.

In these crisis circumstances the bureaucracy could not tolerate discussion within its own ranks. A recrudescence of factionalism erupted in 1932-34. Unless it was terrorised into submission, the bureaucracy itself threatened to so divide under the impact of internal and external pressure that the right and more dangerously the left stood to gain a hearing once again both within the ranks of officialdom and, more importantly, within the working class itself. Hence Stalin?s resort to extreme terror and the wholesale destruction of nearly all who had any connection with either the heroic or Thermidorian period of the Revolution.

The terror also served another purpose. The grotesque show trials and confessions could serve not only to silence the Soviet masses but also to explain shortages and increased work speeds. The visible shortcomings of Stalinist planning could be blamed on saboteurs and agents. The bureaucratic mis-managers, hiding behind the cloak of police terror, could cover their own incompetence and privileges from the scrutiny of the masses.

A final factor in explaining Stalin?s post 1934 offensive against the Thermidorian party was his terror of a revival of the left, following the German debacle. Trotsky had been proved so signal correct against Stalin and the fate of the German workers might have awakened sections of the Communist movement to this fact. Stalin could not risk such a possibility. This period saw not only the stigmatisation of all the ?old Bolsheviks? as counter-revolutionaries, but also a worldwide campaign to implicate Trotsky and the Trotskyists in the crimes of fascism, In all the trials the ?fascist? Trotsky was the chief defendant ? in absentia. His followers were murdered by the NKVD: Klement, Ignace Reiss, Leon Sedov among them. The Bonapartist terror was aimed at destroying the Trotskyist movement inside the USSR and outside, and preventing it from becoming a challenge to Stalin. As Trotsky rightly pointed out:

?but under no condition is it permissible for the international proletarian vanguard to obtain the opportunity to verify freely and critically the ideas of Leninism through its own experience and to juxtapose Stalinism and so-called Trotskyism in the broad light of day.?143

The net result of the purges was the total destruction, not merely of Lenin?s party (which had occurred much earlier), but of virtually everybody who had been in Lenin?s party. Stalin successfully created a party that was his tool and was made up of his followers.

The XVIII Party Congress in 1939 was the first since the Congress of Victors. The victors had now been vanquished, with the majority of delegates to the 1934 Congress having been killed in the purges. As Molotov pointed out at the XVIII Congress, the party was dramatically transformed under the impact of police terror. Some 80 per cent of republic Party secretaries and 93 per cent of district secretaries had joined the party after 1924, and had known no other party regime than that of Stalin.144 Equally significantly the party dropped in size from 3,500,000 members in 1933 to 1,900,000 by 1937.

The 1937 census for the USSR revealed a population of 164 million ? some 16.7 million less than the
planned forecast. This shortfall gives some indication of the scale of the terror that Stalinism inflicted on Soviet society.

The monstrous barbarity of Stalin’s regime was not the result of his deranged personality. In order to free itself from all social restraint and to destroy any potential base for opposition, Stalinism had to create this apparatus and regime of terror. In its own way this testifies to the illegitimacy of the Stalinists’ usurpation of power and the inability of the Stalin clique to legitimise their regime in the eyes of the mass of Soviet toilers.

Their creation of an army of millions of slave labourers enabled them to both terrorise the Soviet working class with the threat of the camps and complete a series of industrial projects under the bayonets of the NKVD. As Roy Medvedev has explained it:

?State plans assigned an increasingly important role to Gulag. By the end of the thirties GULAG was responsible for much of the country’s lumbering and extraction of copper, gold and coal. GULAG built important canals, strategic roads, and many industrial enterprises in remote regions... The planning agencies frequently put pressure on the NKVD to speed up certain projects. Planning was done not only for projects assigned to GULAG but also for the growth of its labour force. Planning even encompassed the mortality rate in the camps ? and in this respect achievement far exceeded plan goals?145

In the spheres of cultural and family life the Stalinists inaugurated a period of acute reaction. Incapable of legitimising their dictatorship as either socialist or the will of the working class the Stalinist bureaucracy decked out their dictatorship ever increasingly in the colours of Great Russian chauvinism. Medvedev highlights this well when he describes how,

?A symbol of the time was the absence in Moscow of a monument to Marx, to Engels, or even to Lenin, while a statue of Yuri Dolgorukii, a stupid and cruel twelfth century prince, went up on Soviet Square, replacing the Obelisk of Freedom that had been erected at Lenin?s suggestion.?146

Thermidor and the family
The reactionary impact of Stalinism is vividly illustrated by its erosion of the rights won for Soviet women by the October revolution and the proletarian dictatorship. In The Revolution Betrayed, Trotsky correctly stated that ?The October Revolution honestly fulfilled its obligations in relation to women.? The early Soviet government granted women full political, legal and economic equality and took important positive steps towards removing the burden of women’s oppression within the home. All legislation which assumed the subordinate position of women was repealed, and women were written into the constitution with equal rights and obligations. Protective legislation was extended to women, specifically in the areas of night and underground work, and any work considered injurious to a woman’s health. Equal pay for equal work was established as a fundamental principle.

All restriction on women’s movements were lifted ? she no longer had to move with her husband. Inheritance and property laws were revised to weaken the strength of the nuclear family. In December 1917 civil registration of marriage and easy free divorce were granted, abortion was legalised in 1920 and made available free in Soviet hospitals. In Central Asia there were problems with the extreme oppression of Muslim women, and concessions were made on marriage laws, but abduction, forced marriage and the Kalym (bride price) were made criminal offences.

Alongside these legal measures:

?the revolution made a heroic effort to destroy the so-called ?family hearth? ? that archaic, stuffy and
stagnant institution in which the woman of the toiling classes performs galley labour from childhood to death?. 147

The family hearth was to be replaced by socialised institutions for child care, eating, laundry etc. These plans were made, and support for them built, but due to the poverty of the Soviet state and the exigencies of the civil war, they could never be adequately implemented. During the Civil War there were communal dining rooms, as there were during the industrialisation of the early 1930s, their popularity being probably due more to the absence of other sources of food than to a commitment to communal living.

The establishment of the Zhenotdel (Women’s Department in the Party) in 1918 was important as a means of positively mobilising and propagandising among women, but the female membership of the party still remained low? by 1922 only 8 per cent of party members were women.

The period of the NEP curtailed the limited social programmes that had been established, and the unemployment it created amongst women pushed them back into the home and, increasingly, onto the streets. The 1926 family legislation made married and unmarried couples responsible for supporting each other -? a measure dictated by the inability of the state to support the vast numbers of deserted women, and aiming to prevent them from abandoning their children and turning to prostitution.

Thermidor as it affected the family and women can be seen to develop from these early problems, but to then have been actively exacerbated and consolidated by Stalinism.

During the First Five Year Plan, women’s employment increased at a rate that exceeded the expectations of the planners ? the number of women in industry and the national economy doubled from 1928-1932, and continued to rise to 41.6 per cent of the working population by 1939, 56 per cent after the Second World War, 51 per cent in 1970.

During the initial rise in the early 1930s, it was not accompanied by a correspondingly large increase in child-care and communal facilities. Women were simply working longer hours and doing all the housework. Childcare, of necessity, was expanded in the USSR, but it was still inadequate, both in numbers of places and the care received so that many women would prefer to use a ?Babushked? ? an unpaid member of the family, to look after the children. Protective legislation for women, particularly maternity leave, and pay declined proportionately with the increase in female labour. Thus the forced industrialisation policy meant that ?A woman’s place is in the factory and the home?.

Up to the mid-1930s, the soviet government was still declaring that it would abolish the yolk of domestic slavery. ?Down with the Kitchen!? was one of their slogans. In the mid-1930s this was abandoned alongside moves to strengthen the family. An ideological campaign was mounted, and backed up with legislation, to reinforce the family as a bastion of the ?new socialist society?. This was officially justified partly as a response to the ?promiscuity? and breakdown in family life that had been witnessed after the revolution.

The Stalinist state wished to re-establish the family as a performer of domestic labour, but more importantly as an institution for the maintenance of discipline and order, to put a check on the youth and return workers to the isolation of the nuclear family. Homelessness among children, and prostitution were both increasing and the state response was to punish both ? parents who were forced by poverty and destitution to abandon their children were fined and imprisoned, harsh measures were taken for the first time by the Soviet state against prostitutes and homosexuals.

This change in position on the family was consolidated in the new family legislation of 1936, which made
abortion illegal, emphasised the centrality of the nuclear family and made divorce much more difficult. Stalin made other direct attacks on the equality that had been established after the revolution?in education differentiation of male and female roles was emphasised in schools and courses, and in 1943 co-education was actually abolished in many schools.

Still to this day, girls are taught domestic science and needlework in school and an emphasis on the duty of motherhood remains.

The Marxist tradition has always held that the level of culture and emancipation of society as a whole can be gauged by the position of women within it. Just as Stalinism upholds and extends the oppressive apparatus associated with the old type of state. So it struggled to recreate the old forms of oppression in family life. The position of women in the USSR at the end of the 1930s served as a poignant symbol of the profound degeneration that the world?s first workers?state had undergone at the hands of the counter-revolutionary Stalinist regime.

Footnotes
4. L. Trotsky, op.cit. p27.
7. Quoted in Dobb, op.cit.p83.
12. Ibid. p32.
22. Lenin,op.cit.p 428.
24. Ibid. p 610.
25. Ibid, p 596.
31. Ibid. p 46.
32. Ibid, p 18.
34. Ibid, p 23.
36. Quoted in ibid, p 170.
37. Chetyrnadtsaty S'Ezd VKP (b), Stenograficheskii Otchet . (Moscow 1926) p 135.
43. Ibid, p 165.
51. M. Lewin, Russi

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