



Chapter 5 - The rise of Stalin

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Today the word communism conjures up images of a grey world in which everyone is the same, where endless queues form for shoddy, scarce goods, no one can speak their mind for fear of the secret police, and everyone wears boring clothes.

It is an image of uniformity, repression and sterility.

Since the collapse of the Eastern European states in 1989 and the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, the word communism has carried with it another, even more negative, image ? the image of failure.

Hundreds of thousands of working class militants had regarded the Soviet Union as an alternative to capitalism. Whenever socialism was criticised as a pipe-dream, they would point to the USSR as an example of a ?really existing socialist country?.

They were cruelly deceived. When the USSR collapsed, they were devastated ? for many, their hopes collapsed with it.

Millions more drew the conclusion that if the USSR was socialist, then they wanted nothing to do with socialism.

The collapse of the Eastern Bloc convinced them that socialism was a failed experiment that brought misery to the countries that have attempted it.

Trotskyists reject both of these pessimistic views. The USSR was not socialist ? it was Stalinist.

Leon Trotsky and his supporters warned that Stalinism was a sickness within the Soviet Union and the socialist movement. Stalin?s regime blocked the road to socialism, and without working class democracy, genuine Soviets and socialist revolution around the world, the Soviet Union could not survive indefinitely.

Unless the working class could transform the USSR, it would collapse, leaving the way open for capitalism to return.

In the 1920s and 1930s, when millions of workers supported the leaders of the USSR and regarded them as socialist heroes, the Trotskyists alone opposed those leaders and branded them as traitors to the working class.

The founders and earliest members of the Trotskyist movement were slandered, persecuted, jailed and murdered by the Stalinists for refusing to be silenced.

Trotskyists are not disillusioned by Stalinism?s collapse because we have been proved right. Now that Stalinism has been fatally wounded, the job of rebuilding genuine communism will be a thousand times easier in the years to come.

The Bolsheviks forced to retreat

Russia emerged from the civil war in a terribly weakened state. In Petrograd, for example, industry in 1921 was producing only an eighth of its 1913 output. The number of industrial workers actually dropped from 230,000 to under 80,000 between 1918 and 1920.

The desperate military struggle against the Whites had left the Bolsheviks with little chance to broaden and extend working class democracy. On the contrary, real sacrifices had to be made to be sure the war was won.

In the factories the power of local workers' committees had to be limited by the Bolsheviks to ensure that production was co-ordinated across government-controlled territory.

Grain had to be seized from the peasants to make sure the cities were fed. Military weaknesses had led the Soviet government to limit the right to elect officers in the army.

Experts had to be appointed in industry to raise production. The Soviets themselves became smaller and less representative as millions of workers and peasants were drafted into the Red Army.

Lenin and Trotsky never tried to cover up what was going on, or to paint these measures in socialist colours. Lenin himself wrote that they were 'a step backward on the part of our socialist Soviet state power'. He even warned that:

'To conceal from the people the fact that the enlistment of bourgeois experts by means of extremely high salaries is a retreat from the principles of the Paris Commune would be sinking to the level of the bourgeois politicians and deceiving the people.'

How could Lenin say this at the same time as carrying these policies out? Because he saw them as temporary necessities. During and shortly after the war, special measures had to be taken to ensure the survival of the workers' state. But they were retreats - if socialism was to be established, these measures would not and could not last for long.

NEP and the ban on factions

By 1921 the Russian peasants were withholding supplies in protest against grain seizures. The Bolsheviks had to avoid a new civil war against the peasants.

The workers' state needed a period of peace in which the economy could be rebuilt. To get this there had to be an economic compromise with the peasants. This took the form of the New Economic Policy (NEP).

Instead of seizing their grain, the state now taxed the peasants, taking a fixed part of the produce of each peasant farm. The remainder could be sold on the market by the richer peasants in the old manner common to capitalism.

This would avoid the danger of a peasant war and boost production. But it would encourage competition, exploitation and all the sharp practices typical of capitalism. It was a risk, and the leading Bolsheviks knew it.

At the same time the Soviet government took measures to prevent NEP turning into a fully fledged restoration of capitalism across Russia. State subsidies to poor and middle peasants were given to promote co-operatives as a counterweight to the rich peasants.

The main industries remained in the hands of the state, as did foreign trade. Instead of producing for profit, the Soviet government began the attempt to plan production to meet the needs of the people. A state planning commission was set up in 1921 to carry out this socialist task.

NEP succeeded in boosting output in agriculture, and it won the Soviet Union a vital breathing space at a time when the population was exhausted by famine and war.

But NEP also allowed a particular layer of people to secure privileges for themselves. The rich peasants, or Kulaks, benefited directly from producing for profit. They grew ever richer, sharpening class divisions in the countryside.

And a layer of so-called NEP-men grew up within the Communist Party and the state apparatus. Their job was to organise the distribution of products and to act as middle-men between the Kulaks and the state.

Lenin and Trotsky did try to make sure that the growth of the Kulaks' wealth and power did not lead to the corruption of the Communist Party itself.

In particular, they feared that a section of the party might start to represent the interests of the Kulaks rather than the

working class.

The Communist leaders decided to prevent this by means of a ban on organised factions within the party. This was introduced at the 10th Congress of the Party in 1921.

This did not mean the end of political discussion and debate in the party. The 10th Congress declared that criticism of the party was 'absolutely necessary', and that these criticisms should be 'submitted immediately, without delay, in the most precise form possible', so that local and central bodies of the party could make any necessary corrections.

But party members were not to organise factions or political platforms based on their differences.

This was a mistake. It achieved the opposite of what Lenin and Trotsky had intended. A privileged bureaucracy was already growing up within the party.

It was made up of and supported by people who owed their position in society to the leading role of the party and to their power under NEP. By 1923 less than one in ten party members had joined up before the revolution.

This emerging layer of bureaucrats 'a caste', as Trotsky was later to designate them 'found a champion within the party leadership: Joseph Stalin. After becoming General Secretary of the party in 1922, Stalin concentrated tremendous power in his hands. The ban on factions increased his control still further.

A vast apparatus of appointed officials in the party replaced the old regime of freely elected officials within both the party and the Soviets. Any dissent, any criticism was soon ruled out of order.

The bloc against Trotsky

In March 1923 Lenin had a serious stroke 'his third. This brought his active political life to an end and provoked a power struggle in the leadership of the party, which ended in a vicious scramble when Lenin eventually died in January 1924.

Stalin, Zinoviev and another 'Old Bolshevik', Kamenev, formed a secret alliance. Its aim was simple 'to prevent Trotsky from succeeding Lenin as the leading figure in the Communist Party. They knew this would be a difficult task.

Trotsky was the best known Soviet leader apart from Lenin. He had played a leading role in the Petrograd Soviet, had organised the insurrection that overthrew the Provisional Government and had led the Red Army in the civil war. Lenin's testament described him as the most able man in the party.

And yet many in the party, particularly long-standing Bolsheviks, were suspicious of Trotsky. He had sided with the hated Mensheviks in 1903, and had conducted a long struggle prior to 1917 against Lenin's concept of the revolutionary party. Certainly Trotsky renounced his role in that struggle now, but many 'old' Bolsheviks had not forgotten it.

The bureaucratic faction in the party leadership played on these suspicions when it launched its drive to isolate Trotsky after Lenin's death.

Danger of bureaucracy

In a series of letters dictated from his sick-bed, Lenin warned again and again about the growth of bureaucracy within the party, about the structures of the state and how remote they were becoming from the workers.

He described the new state as being not completely socialist, but a hybrid between the workers' new regime, and the old Tsarist state, whose officials the Bolsheviks had been forced to use during the civil war and the period of economic reconstruction:

'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.'

Despite his grave condition, Lenin warned ? with increasing urgency ? about the role of Stalin. He urged that he be removed 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 this 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.?

To put his advice into effect, Lenin approached Trotsky with an offer of a political bloc to oppose Stalin and his faction at the 12th Congress of the party in April 1923. Trotsky delayed putting this into practice ? something he would live to regret.

By the autumn of 1923, the party leadership clamped down on oppositional groups within the party. They demanded that factions should be reported either to the leadership or to the secret police (now called the GPU). In place of democratic debate, the party was now to be subjected to a regime of police repression.

By October, Trotsky could delay no longer. He launched a fight against Stalinism that would last for the rest of his life.

The fight for party democracy

In October 1923, Trotsky and 46 other leading party members signed a letter to the Central Committee, protesting against the growing bureaucracy within the party and at the worsening economic situation. The ?Platform of the 46? painted an accurate picture of the state of affairs inside the party:

?Members of the party who are dissatisfied with this or that decision of the Central Committee or even of a provincial committee, who have this or that doubt on their minds . . . are afraid to speak about it at party meetings, and are even afraid to talk about it in conversation, unless the partner in the conversation is thoroughly reliable from the point of view of ?discretion?; free discussion within the party has practically vanished; the public opinion of the party is stifled. Nowadays it is not the party, not its broad masses, who promote and choose members of the province committees and the Central Committee of the RCP (Russian Communist Party). On the contrary, the secretarial hierarchy of the party to an ever greater extent recruits the membership of conferences and congresses . . .

The regime established within the party is completely intolerable; it destroys the independence of the party, replacing the party by a recruited bureaucratic apparatus . . .?

The Platform pointed out that the ban on factions had failed and that the party leadership was dominated by a centrist faction led by Stalin. The social base of this faction lay in the thousands drafted into the state apparatus after the Civil War.

Trotsky argued that by removing the pressure of the working class on the bureaucracy the Stalin faction was opening itself up to pressures from pro-capitalist forces in the countryside.

The Opposition demanded a ?regime of comradely unity and internal party democracy?, so that political differences could be properly debated out, without fear of repression by the leadership or the secret police.

The economic crisis facing Russia was the other main theme of the platform. NEP had boosted output from the farms ? food prices had fallen. The backwardness of Russian industry, on the other hand, caused a shortage of manufactured goods, whose prices kept rising. Workers and peasants alike could not get hold of cheap manufactured products.

Trotsky and many of the Platform?s signatories wanted the party to work towards an overall economic plan, as Lenin had suggested. This would build up large-scale modern industry, bringing industrial and agricultural prices closer together, and step by step reducing the power, wealth and importance of the Kulaks.

Agriculture itself could be modernised, and steady improvements made towards the organisation of real socialist production for need rather than profit.

These proposals were ignored by the new bureaucracy until the growing crisis reached breaking point towards the end of the 1920s. Despite winning a great deal of support within the party, especially among the youth, the students and in Moscow, the 1923 Opposition was defeated.

The absence of real party democracy allowed the Stalin faction to misrepresent Trotsky's views and prevent party members ? in Russia and abroad ? from looking at what he was really saying.

The Communist International, set up in 1919 as a world party uniting revolutionary communists in countries all over the world, was now subjected to the same bureaucratic regime as the Russian party. The Stalinists demanded that every party vote against 'Trotskyism' and reject Trotsky's arguments ? and they used their control of the apparatus to make sure hardly anybody had read what he had really written.

The defeat of the 1923 Opposition signalled another step in the party's degeneration.

From 1923 onwards Trotsky and the Opposition warned of the dangers posed to the workers' state by the growth of the wealth and power of the Kulaks. The Opposition advanced detailed proposals to build up Russian industry on a planned basis. In turn, this would help develop the agricultural collectives.

They could be supplied cheaply from the cities and subsidised when necessary. This way the hold of the rich peasants could be gradually undermined and a bond forged between the working populations of the cities and the countryside.

Stalin seemed blind to the threat posed by the Kulaks. His ally, Bukharin ? a former 'Left' Communist who had opposed the Brest-Litovsk peace ? had swung straight over to the right of the party. He and his supporters reflected and fought for the interests of the richest peasants.

His slogan for the peasants was 'Enrich Yourselves' ? the very opposite of a socialist approach. The President of the USSR, Kalinin, even made speeches praising the 'economically powerful peasant' at the same time as attacking the poor peasants for being lazy!

In Petrograd ? now renamed Leningrad ? the working class, with its long revolutionary traditions, grew alarmed at the rise of 'Kulak socialism'. Zinoviev, the party leader in the city, came under great pressure from these workers. In 1925, this former persecutor of Trotsky and opponent of party democracy broke with Stalin.

A year later he set up a United Opposition with Trotsky. They pressed for a planned economy, industrialisation, higher taxes and compulsory loans to be paid by the Kulaks. They opposed the reactionary theory of socialism in one country. And they demanded the right to be heard.

The Stalinists responded in two ways. The first was to use jeers and smears instead of arguments. The Opposition were 'counter-revolutionaries' who wanted to 'rob the peasants?'. The threat from the Kulaks had been 'exaggerated?.

The second method used by the Stalin-Bukharin bloc was police repression against the Opposition. Zinoviev was removed from his posts in Leningrad and as head of the Communist International. In November 1927 he and Trotsky were expelled from the Communist Party, one month before the conference.

The Platform of the Joint Opposition was declared illegal. The secret police ? the GPU ? raided the print shop that was producing copies of the platform for party members. One of the printers was accused of being an agent of the White Guard generals ? a total lie.

The leaders of the Joint Opposition ? Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev ? all came from Jewish backgrounds. Stopping at nothing, the Stalin-Bukharin leadership whipped up an anti-semitic campaign against them. Gangs of thugs were recruited to smash up Opposition meetings. The police attacked Opposition demonstrations.

By 1928 the key leaders of the Opposition were all expelled. Trotsky was sent into exile. The bureaucracy had defeated the representatives of the tradition of October 1917 and socialism. From now on, the true inheritors of Lenin's socialist programme would conduct their struggle against Stalin isolated in the prison camps.

Stalin takes sole control

No sooner had the Opposition been defeated by Stalinist repression than the Kulaks moved against the workers' state. In the winter of 1927-28 the rich peasants refused to sell their grain unless the state raised prices.

They had been encouraged by Bukharin to 'enrich themselves' - now they were determined to do so at the expense of the working class itself. Trotsky's warnings had proved to be correct.

The Stalin-Bukharin alliance now came under great pressure. Bukharin's right-wing were pursuing a course which would result in the restoration of capitalism and the market.

This was something that a major part of the Communist Party bureaucracy - the social base of Stalin's centrist faction - could not accept. After all, they owed their power, their privileges and their positions to the existence of the workers' state.

Now that the Opposition had been defeated, the threat to the bureaucracy from the working class had receded. But the threat from the Kulaks had to be confronted. If the grain strike succeeded, who was to stop the rich peasants from going further and overthrowing the bureaucracy itself?

Stalin turned on the faction of Bukharin - 10,000 party members were sent from the cities to seize grain, while supporters of the right were purged.

The NEP was over. Bukharin himself was removed from the core of the leadership, though he stayed on the Central Committee. Meanwhile shootings of members of the Left Opposition began.

The Left Opposition was based on the revolutionary working class. Its programme was for genuine international socialism. The Bukharinites' class basis was amongst the richest peasants, NEP-men and emerging capitalists. Their programme led back to capitalism.

But Stalin's 'Centre' faction were in the middle, perched at the top of the class pyramid. Their only base of support was the bureaucracy of the workers' state and the party.

This explained their antagonism to working class democracy and world revolution, which would have made them redundant. It also explained their refusal to follow Bukharin all the way back to capitalism.

But Stalin's was a deeply unstable position. The bureaucracy was not an independent class in its own right - it played no essential role in society, whether under capitalism or socialism.

It was a parasite on the workers' state, born from its isolation, retreat and defeat. It obstructed the transition to socialism, but could erect no independent social system in its place. Its sole role was to pervert the course of the revolution and feather its own nest.

As the representative of the bureaucracy, Stalin could find no other base of support within the USSR. This instability terrified him and his bureaucratic supporters. There was only one way to keep control - terror. But this was no Red Terror against the bourgeoisie and its agents.

The GPU aimed its blows at every semblance of opposition, wiping out millions of old Bolsheviks, workers, enemies of bureaucracy, minorities and even independent scientists and experts in the process.

The Windmill

George Orwell's famous book *Animal Farm* is a fairy story based on the history of the Russian Revolution. The

animals take over the farm and throw out the capitalist humans.

Two rival pigs emerge at the head of the animals ? Snowball, who represents Trotsky, and Napoleon, who is the Stalin of the tale.

At one point Snowball brings forward plans for the building of a windmill, which could lessen the workload for all the animals. Napoleon, without saying a word, urinates on the plans. He trains a pack of vicious dogs to drive Snowball off the farm. Then he sets out to build a windmill of his own, driving the other animals to incredible sacrifices to get it finished.

Stalin had scoffed at the Opposition?s plans for industrialisation, planning and the collectivisation of agriculture. Now, like Orwell?s pig, after the defeat of the Kulak threat, he launched a drive based on the Opposition?s former policy.

Yet in place of a sensible, democratically managed plan for steady progress, Stalin used force, command from above and brute terror to carry out his plans.

Whereas Lenin and Trotsky had argued for encouraging voluntary collectives on the land to undermine the Kulaks, the Stalinists now collectivised agriculture by force.

By the end of February 1930 over half of the Soviet peasantry were in collective farms.

Anyone who resisted the new policy was suddenly described as a Kulak in official propaganda ? 320,000 were deported in the first months of the new turn.

But without a proper plan for industrial development, without even the support of the peasants themselves, the forced collectivisation left the rural population impoverished and alienated. To resist, they slaughtered their cattle.

Between 1929 and 1934 the number of cattle fell by 40%, sheep by over 65%; production of cereal crops fell by a quarter. The Kulaks had certainly been defeated, but at the price of severely disrupting Soviet agriculture.

In industry the Stalinists also adopted the plans of the Opposition but in a warped and distorted form. After mocking the whole idea of an economic plan, the Stalinists now planned each industry, setting targets and fixing an overall five year goal. But the planning was all carried out by command, from above.

Real advances were made, as the Opposition had predicted. The First Five Year Plan saw 1,500 new factories built. A new coal field was opened and the Dneiperstroï power station was built ? the largest in Europe.

But these gains were due to the self sacrifice of the workers who struggled hard to build an alternative to capitalism.

The enormous potential of the planned economy was actually being distorted and held back by Stalinism, its dynamism undermined by the bureaucracy.

The plan was set by unaccountable officials. Their aim was never to increase the living standards of the masses and to lighten their workload.

Targets were fixed without regard to whether they could be reached. To meet these targets the quality of products was ignored. Vast resources were squandered on the bloated machinery of repression.

The bureaucrats pillaged the state ? clawing ever greater privileges and wealth for themselves and fiddling the figures to conceal their robbery. Eventually, Stalin renounced the whole aim of socialism ? the elimination of inequality and the building of a classless society ? declaring that:

?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.?

The Revolution Betrayed

By 1932 Stalin's rule was total. Trotsky described it as a form of Bonapartism. This concept had first been developed by Karl Marx to explain how in periods of crisis a 'strong man' could arise, assume all powers in society, and balance himself atop the contradictions between the classes in society.

Stalinism was a form of Bonapartism within a workers' state: the dictator was perched above the contradiction between the USSR and its capitalist rivals. But it was unstable. 'A sphere balanced on the point of a pyramid must invariably roll down on one side or the other', as Trotsky put it.

To secure its rule, the caste of bureaucrats would have to lash out at all other possible sources of opposition.

The Great Purges of the 1930s were the result. Millions died in a frenzy of persecution and oppression. Oppositionists were threatened, tortured, and forced to 'recant' their views. They were framed with ludicrous charges, forced to confess with the promise of leniency, and then shot after grotesque 'Show Trials.'

Former members of the Left Opposition, like Piatakov and Rakovsky, issued forced confessions and under pain of torture called for their own movement to be eliminated. Zinoviev, Kamenev and Smirnov confessed on Stalin's promise that they would be spared if they did. Then the guards came to take them away for execution.

The purges were unrestrained. Anyone who posed a hint of a threat to Stalin was killed. Bukharin was shot - the entire remaining old guard of Bolshevism was eliminated. Generals and officers of the Red Army were wiped out leaving it beheaded and weakened immeasurably.

Economic and scientific experts who could point to defects in the Five Year Plans were wiped out. The prison camps were full to the brim. Hundreds of thousands died as Stalin used his captives for massive slave labour projects.

In every one of the succession of Show Trials, the main defendant was absent. Trotsky had been exiled - in his absence he was found guilty of being in a block with Hitler and the Japanese, with carrying out terrorism and sabotaging industry. Every failing, every weakness of the bureaucratic system was blamed on the former leader of the revolution.

Trotsky's youngest son - an engineer with no involvement in politics - was murdered by the GPU. His most trusted collaborators in the West, his secretaries and assistants, were hunted down and assassinated. In Paris, Trotsky's eldest son Leon Sedov was murdered in his hospital bed by Stalin's henchmen.

No stone could be left unturned to wipe out the gravest threat that Stalin still faced: the survival of the revolutionary programme of Bolshevism, with its promise of world revolution and the destruction of the power and privileges of the bureaucracy for good. Only by wiping out this alternative could Stalin hope to present his new reactionary USSR - in which every great gain of the October 1917 revolution was smashed - as 'really existing socialism'.

The Degenerated Workers' State

Trotsky - alone of the former Bolshevik leaders - did not capitulate to Stalin. He struggled on to the end. He was the only anti-Stalinist to use Marxism to understand the degeneration of the Russian revolution.

He analysed every stage of the rise of the bureaucracy, and every shift in its policy, the better to understand it, and the better to arm the working class with the programme to defeat it.

In reality, there were profound material and historical reasons for the degeneration of the Russian revolution and the rise of Stalinism. The personalities involved in the struggles within the USSR at each stage reflected and acted in accordance with class pressures and interests.

Trotsky explained how:

'No help came from the West. The power of the 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 a powerful caste of specialists in distribution.?

The backwardness and isolation of Russia were the main causes of the retreat of the revolution and the rise of the bureaucracy.

How then could the Soviet state be defined? The Stalinists insisted that it was socialist. Trotsky argued the opposite. A socialist state, he explained:

'... 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 with it, state coercion.?

Socialism had been the aim of the early Soviet republic. But the goal had not been reached ' for that workers? democracy and world revolution were necessary.

Both in the USSR itself and through its programme for the international Communist movement, Stalinism had blocked the road and thrown the transition to socialism into reverse.

Was the USSR capitalist then? This seemed to many ' then as now ' an easy solution to the whole problem. Trotsky disagreed.

Capitalism is a system in which everything is produced for sale on the market. Labour power ' the ability of working people to work ' is also bought and sold on the market like any other commodity. Production goes through sharp cycles of boom and slump.

Unemployment and inflation ravage the economy. The ruling class draw enormous profits ' legally ' by exploiting the workers.

In the USSR all this was different. Goods were not produced to make a profit when sold on the market but, rather, production was organised according to the requirements fixed by the bureaucrats in their central plan.

In place of private property, all property was in the hands of the state. Labour power was not bought and sold but was allocated by planning officials; wages were fixed.

The economy developed without being subjected to the booms and slumps of the capitalist economy. In place of mass unemployment there was, if anything, overmanning of major industries. For decades inflation was almost unknown.

The bureaucracy grew rich, but illegally, by robbing the state and twisting the figures. They had no legal right to own factories and farms, to buy them and sell them, or to pass them on to their children when they died.

Were the Stalinists a new ruling class, like the old bourgeoisie? Trotsky believed not. Without closing his eyes for a moment to their reactionary nature, Trotsky pointed out that the bureaucracy was actually less than a class.

A ruling class plays a necessary role in the social system it heads, and for a time will take society forward, until it exhausts its system and must give way to another class and a new society. But the Stalinists' role was not at all necessary for the development of the USSR:

'The historical justification for every ruling class consisted in this ' that the system of exploitation it headed raised the development of the productive forces to a new level. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, the Soviet regime gave a mighty impulse to the economy. But the source of this impulse was the nationalisation of the means of production and planning, and by no means the fact that the bureaucracy usurped command over the economy. On the contrary, bureaucratism, as a system, became the worst brake on the technical and cultural development of the country . . . the bureaucracy is not the bearer of a new system of economy peculiar to itself and impossible without itself, but is a

parasitic growth on a workers' state.?

Thus it was not a new ruling class, but a bureaucratic caste. Without the capitalists there can be no capitalism. Without the Stalinists however, the planned economic base of the USSR would not only survive, it would go forward at an ever greater rate. Indeed, getting rid of the bureaucracy was a condition of unleashing the true economic potential of the workers' state.

For these reasons, Trotsky defined the USSR as a 'degenerated workers' state.' The capitalists and their system had been overthrown.

The economic foundations necessary to advance towards socialism had been established: state ownership of industry and agriculture, central planning of production, and sole state control over foreign trade to prevent Russian capitalists and merchants from arising again through deals with foreign capitalists.

But the transition to socialism had been blocked by the Stalinist bureaucracy, who had taken political power out of the hands of the working class and kept power from the workers by means of massive repression.

A workers' state not run by the workers? To many this seemed like a contradiction. Yet history knows all manner of such contradictions ? every political movement, organisation or regime in history has involved a conflict between contending hostile forces within their ranks or boundaries.

The real, living contradiction of the USSR was one between the workers' forms of property established by the Russian revolution, and the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy that held back their development.

Trotsky used a good example to demonstrate this. He explained that the USSR could be called a workers' state:

? . . . in approximately the same sense ? despite the difference in 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.?

The question is not simply 'either/or' ? the USSR was neither a fully fledged socialist society nor a capitalist state. It was a transitional state between capitalism and socialism, in which the transition had been thrown into reverse: a workers' state in a process of bureaucratic degeneration. That degeneration was certainly back towards capitalism.

The bureaucracy used the theory of Socialism in One Country to make its peace with world imperialism, and on the basis of that peace acted ever more as an agent for world imperialism inside the USSR and in the arena of the world class struggle.

But it was still only an agent, not yet a part of that world bourgeoisie. It was overseeing the degeneration but had not completed it.

At first Trotsky had argued for the reform of the USSR, hoping that the Communist Party could be won back to revolutionary communism, and that Soviet democracy could be regenerated. With the Great Purges and the total destruction of the Opposition, he revised this view, pointing out that:

'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.?

Trotsky had concluded that a new revolution would be necessary, to smash the Stalinists and their forces of repression. This would not be a social revolution in the sense of creating a new social system, like the revolution of October 1917.

He called it a political revolution, because it would preserve the gains of the Russian revolution and state planning,

putting them under the political control of the working class. That, however, was the only difference that this term was meant to imply. The political revolution would be no less a workers' revolution for that.

Defending the USSR

Trotsky was fighting not only for the revolutionary destruction of Stalinism, but for the defence of the USSR itself. In the event of war between imperialist armies and the Soviet Union, he called on the working class movement of the whole world to rally to the side of the USSR because the imperialists – if victorious – would not restore workers' democracy and establish democratic planning.

On the contrary, they would smash up and sell off the planned and state-owned economy, just as they are trying to do in Eastern Europe and Russia today. They would bring back capitalism, with mass unemployment, factory closures, crime and hyper-inflation following closely in its wake.

Trotsky had not spent his life fighting capitalism only to side with the capitalists against the USSR: his defence of the Soviet Union was unconditional.

Did this mean supporting Stalin? Not for a moment! He wrote:

‘We have promised to defend only the USSR as a workers' state and solely those things within it which belong to a workers' state.’

Stalinism did not ‘belong’ to the workers' state any more than a cancer ‘belongs’ to the body it is killing. Trotsky saw it as a dangerous enemy of the workers' state, a counter-revolutionary regime preparing its eventual destruction.

Explaining how anti-Stalinist revolutionaries could at the same time defend the USSR, Trotsky used another example. Two years before Hitler's invasion of Soviet Russia, Trotsky explained that if this were to happen, then revolutionaries in the USSR:

‘... without changing in any way their attitude towards the Kremlin oligarchy, will advance to the forefront, as the most urgent task of the hour, the military resistance to Hitler. The workers will say: ‘We cannot cede to Hitler the overthrowing of Stalin; that is our own task.’ During the military struggle against Hitler, the revolutionary workers will strive to enter into the closest possible comradely relations with the rank and file fighters of the Red Army. While arms in hand they deal blows to Hitler, the Bolshevik-Leninists will at the same time conduct revolutionary propaganda against Stalin preparing his overthrow at the next and perhaps very near stage.

This kind of ‘defence of the USSR’ will naturally differ, as heaven does from earth, from the official defence which is now being conducted under the slogan: ‘For the Fatherland! For Stalin!’ Our defence of the USSR is carried out under the slogan: ‘For Socialism! For the World Revolution! Against Stalin!’

Alongside his defence of the economic and social gains of 1917, Trotsky saw the defeat of Stalinism as the precondition for winning the workers of the world back to the struggle for genuine socialism. In this task, the revolutionary workers of the world were his only allies.

He never surrendered either to the imperialists or to their agency of reaction within the USSR – the Stalinists.

Without a working class seizure of power, the USSR itself would never survive. There were only two directions on history's road – on to socialism or back to capitalism. By 1936 Trotsky well understood that the Stalinist bureaucracy was the main agent of restoration in the USSR.

Its economic policies drove the economy towards stagnation and shortages; its repressive policies drove the workers into cynicism and passivity and in the end a belief that capitalism could not be any worse. Trotsky's predictions were borne out when in 1991 Boris Yeltsin shot to power in Russia.

As Trotsky anticipated, the new pro-capitalist government – ... would find no small number of ready servants among

the present bureaucrats, administrators, technicians, directors, party secretaries and privileged upper circles in general.?

While recognising that 'a purgation of the state apparatus would, of course, be necessary?', mainly of die-hard Stalinist party chiefs, '... a bourgeois restoration would probably have to clean out fewer people than a revolutionary party.?' How right Trotsky was! Under Yeltsin, many old Stalinist bureaucrats, such as his Prime Minister, Victor Chernomyrdin, successfully profited from the turn back towards capitalism.

Again, as though anticipating the mass privatisation programme undertaken by Yeltsin in 1992/93, Trotsky predicted:

'The chief task of the new power would be to restore private property in the means of production . . . the new regime would have to introduce in the matter of forms of property and methods of industry not a reform, but a social revolution.?'

With remarkable foresight Trotsky anticipated the fact that although the planning agencies could be 'abolished' overnight by decree the market would take time to set up and regulate the workings of the economy. Hence:

'The planning principle would be converted for the transitional period into a series of compromises between the state power and individual 'corporations'? 'potential proprietors, that is, among the Soviet captains of industry, the emigre former proprietors and foreign capitalists.?'

Over 50 years after they were written these words retain their freshness when set against the unfolding process of capitalist restoration in Russia in the years after 1991.

Did Trotsky lose?

Light-minded critics suggest that if Trotsky had really understood what was going on, he would never have lost power. This insight can be roughly translated as meaning that Stalin was right because he won.

If this is true, then justice is on the side of every tyrant on the face of the earth and the whole history of the USSR and the world revolution can be reduced to a struggle between personalities.

To be sure, in 1940 Trotsky died at the hands of a Stalinist assassin. To many it must have seemed as if his struggle against the betrayal of the Russian revolution had been in vain.

It was Trotsky, not Stalin, who was denounced and reviled as a counter-revolutionary and a traitor to socialism throughout the Communist Parties of the world.

But history is a stern judge. Stalin's monstrous edifice has collapsed, built as it was on pillars deeply cracked by insoluble contradictions.

The true history of waste, poor quality goods, misery, poverty and mass murder is now known 'the mounds of official Stalinist statistics, records and propaganda lie mouldering unread in Moscow's vaults. The ideas and politics of Stalin have failed.

But socialism has not failed. The great attempt of the Russian Revolution has shown that there is an alternative to capitalism, and that the working class is a revolutionary force that can change the world when armed with the right ideas.

Struggles against capitalism have not ceased, will not cease and cannot cease, for as long as exploitation exists, and for as long as there is a working class to fight it.

The ideas of the early years of the Soviet Republic, of class struggle, Soviets, permanent revolution, internationalism and democratic planning will find a new audience among fresh layers of workers and youth all over the world as we enter the 21st century.

These are the ideas that Leon Trotsky kept alive ? the ideas that will triumph in the future. In this decisive sense Trotsky?s victory over Stalin is total and guaranteed.

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