



Reformism and the workers' movement - Introduction

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The fundamentals of the Marxist critique of reformism were worked out by the founders and developers of scientific communism. Marx and Engels laid the foundations of this at the time of the Communist League in its famous Manifesto. They developed this critique in struggles within the First International and in their exchanges with the leaders of the early German Social Democracy (SPD).

Rosa Luxemburg continued this work in the struggles against Revisionism inside the SPD and the Second International. Lenin did so in the Russian Social Democracy and in the Second and Third Internationals. Trotsky, a participant in these struggles, further developed the critique of reformism in the 1920s and during the building of the Fourth International.

We adhere to this revolutionary heritage which is embodied in the pamphlets, resolutions and theses adopted by these organisations in their revolutionary periods and is exemplified by their practice. The politics and practice of the principal groupings which today claim adherence to Trotskyism, or present themselves as the continuators of Trotsky's Fourth International, in reality embody a quite different tradition, one that originated in the period 1948-53.

This was the period of the centrist degeneration of Trotskyism. In the areas of theoretical analysis, programmatic assessment, political perspective and tactics, this epigone tradition has thoroughly revised the work of Trotsky and his great predecessors. In both an opportunist and a sectarian fashion, the 'Pabloite' and 'anti-Pabloite' wings of degenerate 'Trotskyism' have proved, repeatedly, that they are incapable of rediscovering and re-asserting the central tenets of the Leninist and Trotskyist programme with regard to reformism.

From the late 1940s to the late 1960s, both the International Committee and the International Secretariat factions of the 'Fourth International' pursued a grossly adaptationist and conciliationist attitude towards social democracy. The dramatic events of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the student demonstrations and riots, the militant anti-war movements, the mass strikes by the Italian, British and, above all, French workers, led the degenerate fragments of the Fourth International (FI) to sharply revise their positions on social democracy.

The groupings of Trotskyist origin, almost all of whom had been engaged in 'deep entryism' at some point in the 1950s and 1960s, veered away from their previous policy of political accommodation to reformism and towards the view that the reformist parties had no relationship to the proletariat.

The early and mid-1970s saw a turn to 'building the Party', a turn that was usually accompanied by an attitude to social democracy that was as blind, one sided and tactically inept as their previous one had been supine and liquidationist. In their search for elements that were uncorrupted by reformism, these centrist groupings looked variously to shop-floor militants in the unions, to students, or to the women's movement to provide a base for revolutionary politics.

Social Democracy was proclaimed as being either dead or irredeemably bourgeois. Attempts were made to by-pass it, ignore it altogether or to kill it with curses in a 'Third Period' manner.

Yet reformism survived the storm of spontaneous working class militancy. In France, the 'dead' SFIO rose, phoenix-like, from the ashes of the electoral debacles of the late 1960s in the form of Mitterrand's Socialist Party. In Italy, the Euro-Communist PCI survived the strike waves and the rise of militant shop-floor organisation after 1969. In Britain,

Labour rode to power on the back of the union militancy of 1971 to 1974 and proceeded to demobilise it, robbing it of all its revolutionary potential. Needless to say, reformism also survived the curses and abstract propaganda of left centrism. Moreover, the 'youth vanguards' grew older and 'wiser'.

The 'unofficial movements' were bureaucratised and consequently the revolutionary parties were not built. Indeed, the groups split. Although they had previously imagined themselves on the verge of success, they disintegrated and declined. Like hung-over revellers, the 'Trotskyists' turned their backs on the self-indulgence of their post 1968 tactics and returned to what they now perceived to be the more sober tactics of their pre-'68 past. In turning back to the reformist parties, they often, in fact, tailed behind the middle-ageing youth, the women, the peaceniks and the 'new left' trade union careerists.

This orientation spawned an analysis of social democracy similar to that of the pre-'68 period once again. It proved to be as one sided and useless as the 'Left' abstract propaganda had been. The degenerate 'Trotskyism' of the twenty years after 1948 could only offer a recipe for the liquidation of the 'children of '68' into social democracy.

A radical break with this whole tradition is essential. This, in large measure, involves a return to the old and unfalsified 'tradition' of Bolshevism and Trotskyism whose method, applied to today's conditions, can yield a programme, a strategy and tactics that can defeat reformism in the great battles looming as we approach the crisis torn years at the end of the twentieth century.

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