

December, 1940

THE NEW INTERNATIONAL

A Monthly Organ of Revolutionary Marxism

Is Russia A Workers' State?

PROPERTY IN RUSSIA

WHAT KIND OF REGIME

PERSPECTIVES

A DISCUSSION ARTICLE

By **MAX SHACHTMAN**

AMERICAN LABOR POLITICS *David Coolidge*

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Manager's Column

Due to unforeseen technical obstacles, it was necessary to omit the November issue of THE NEW INTERNATIONAL. For our subscribers this does not mean that they will not receive the number of issues that they subscribed for. If a subscription runs out in December, for instance, a subscriber will receive the January issue before his sub is renewable.

As to the branches, it is unfortunate that the continuity of the N.I. sales had to be interrupted. But without going into detail, the branches themselves are in a great measure responsible for the condition that prevented the November publication.

Ever more pressing becomes the need to utilize every means at the disposal of Revolutionary Marxists and their sympathizers for the enlightenment and education of the masses who inherently are opposed to imperialist war. The anti-war sentiment of the American people is a living fact as shown by the Gallup and other polls. Before it becomes too late, this sentiment must be channelized and coordinated or we will find ourselves participating rather than staying in that vague state described as 'short of war'. 'Short of', in the imperialist language has already become 'the drive for'.

Listening to the radio; reading (anything but Marxist literature); listening to speeches of liberals, Browders, Thomases and those who give distorted versions of Trotskyist theory should have by now impressed our readers with not only the duty but the desire to make THE NEW INTERNATIONAL a real force in molding the opinion of increasing numbers of people.

THE NEW INTERNATIONAL is already such a force. All it needs is the 'push' of its present readers to expand its influence. If you think it over and come to the realization that THE NEW INTERNATIONAL is the *only* theoretical organ of Revolutionary Marxism published in this country; and that *only* Revolutionary Marxism can produce October Revolutions; and that *only* October Revolutions can produce Socialism; and that *only* Socialism can solve the contradictions of capitalism and its imperialist wars; then you must come to the realization that your role is to help THE NEW INTERNATIONAL in every way you can. There are many ways to help—new subscribers, greater group distribution with increased bundle orders, contributions, word of mouth advertising, etc.

Speaking of contributions, we need money for foreign mailings. Last month this column mentioned how eagerly THE NEW INTERNATIONAL is waited for by comrades and sympathizers in foreign countries. It is becoming increasingly difficult to send it due to the terrific expense involved. For instance, no bundles can be sent to any part of the British empire—only single copies—which means postage on each copy and its no small item. Anything from a nickel up earmarked for foreign mailing will be used for this purpose only.

We would like to hear from more of our readers. Comments, suggestions, criticisms—favorable and otherwise. It helps us if we know how you react to each issue.

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By David Coolidge

There has been some improvement in bundle order payments since the October issue made its appearance. But there will have to be a great deal more if THE NEW INTERNATIONAL is to be sustained. Again we repeat that bundle orders are the only source of income that can and should be stabilized. The number of subscriptions that come in vary from month to month. Donations are sporadic. There is *no* income from advertising. We must insist again that bundle orders be paid for promptly if the theoretical income on which we operate is to become actual. Our editorial department is well equipped to dispense theory but unfortunately they cannot support the press with what it takes to make it up, to print it, to buy the paper and to run it on the press. This task and duty remain with our readers who, we feel sure, will come through.

We are able to report an increase in bundle orders from: Boston, who pays its bill promptly; Washington, D.C.; the Debs branch in Akron has ordered a new bundle of 75 but unless it is paid for we'll have to take drastic action.

We are sorry to report that Lynn has reduced its bundle by 5, Newark by 10.

Reading, Pennsylvania has sent in money in advance for a new modest sized bundle. The same with Kansas City, Mo.

New York has just appointed a new literature agent from whom we expect great things. We firmly believe that he can double the sales of the N.I. in a very short time. We'll tell the rest of the country how he does it—if he does.

Another plea for subscriptions. They can be had with very little effort. One additional subscription from each reader will change the entire picture of the business end of the N.I.

THE MANAGER

THE NEW INTERNATIONAL

A Monthly Organ of Revolutionary Marxism

VOLUME VI

DECEMBER, 1940

NUMBER 10

Is Russia A Workers' State ?

Developments in the world situation occasioned by the Second World War raises the forefront once more, the Russian Question. Russia's role in the war on the side of German Imperialism only emphasizes fundamental trends inherent under Stalin's Regime which leads the writer to abandon the position that Russia is a workers' state.

A DISCUSSION ARTICLE

THAT THE "RUSSIAN QUESTION" should continue to occupy the attention of the revolutionary movement is anything but unusual. In the history of the modern socialism, there is nothing that equals the Russian Revolution in importance. It is indeed no exaggeration to write—we shall seek to reaffirm and demonstrate it further on—that this revolution does not have its equal in importance throughout human history.

For us, the historical legitimacy of the Bolshevik revolution and the validity of the principles that made its triumph possible, are equally incontestable. Looking back over the quarter of a century that has elapsed, and subjecting all the evidence of events to a soberly critical re-analysis, we find only a confirmation of those fundamental principles of Marxism with which the names of Lenin and Trotsky are linked, and of their appraisal of the class character and historical significance of the revolution they organized. Both—the principles and the appraisal—are and should remain incorporated in the program of our International.

Our investigation deals with something else. It aims to re-evaluate the character and significance of the period of the degeneration of the Russian revolution and the Soviet state, marked by the rise and triumph of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Its results call for a revision of the theory that the Soviet Union is a workers' state. The new analysis will be found to be, we believe, in closer harmony with the political program of the party and the International, fortifying it in its most important respects and eliminating from it only those points which, if they corresponded to a reality of yesterday, do not correspond to that of today.

In our analysis, we must necessarily take issue with Leon Trotsky; yet, at the same time, base ourselves largely upon his studies. Nobody has even approached him in the scope and depth of his contribution to understanding the problem of the Soviet Union. In a different way, to be sure, but no less solidly, his work of analyzing the decay of the Soviet Republic is as significant as his work of creating that Republic. Most of what we learned about Russia, and can transmit to others, we learned from Trotsky. We learned from him, too, the necessity of critical re-examination at every important stage, of regaining, even in the realm of

theory, what was once already gained, or, in the contrary case, of discarding what was once firmly established but proved to be vulnerable. The garden of theory requires critical cultivation, re-planting, but also weeding out.

What new events, what fundamental changes in the situation, have taken place to warrant a corresponding change in our appraisal of the class character of the Soviet Union? The question is, in a sense, irrelevant. Our new analysis and conclusions would have their objective merit or error regardless of the signature appended to them. In the case of the writer, if the question must be answered, the revision is the product of that careful re-studying of the problem urged upon him by both friends and adversaries in the recent dispute in the American section of the International. The outbreak of the second world war, while it produced no fundamental changes in the Soviet Union in itself, did awaken doubts as to the correctness of our traditional position. However, doubts and uncertainties cannot serve as a program, nor even as a fruitful subject for discussion. Therefore, while putting forward a position on those aspects of the disputed question on which he had firm opinions, the writer did not take part in what passed for a discussion on that aspect of the question which related to the class character of the Soviet Union. The founding convention of the Workers Party provided for the opening of a discussion on this point in due time, and under conditions free from the ugly atmosphere of baiting, ritualistic phrasemongering, pugnacious ignorance, and factional fury that prevailed in the party before our expulsion and the split. The writer has, meanwhile, had the opportunity to examine and reflect upon the problem, if not as much as would be desirable, then at least sufficiently. "Theory is not a note which you can present at any moment to reality for payment," wrote Trotsky. "If a theory proves mistaken we must revise it or fill out its gaps. We must find out those real social forces which have given rise to the contrast between Soviet reality and the traditional Marxian conception." We must revise our theory that Russia is a workers' state. What has up to now been discussed informally and without order, should now be the subject of an ordered and serious discussion. This article aims to contribute to it.

Nationalized Property and the Workers' State

Briefly stated, this has been our traditional view of the character of the Soviet Union:

The character of the social régime is determined first of all by the property relations. The nationalization of land, of the means of industrial production and exchange, with the monopoly of foreign trade in the hands of the state, constitute the bases of the social order in the U.S.S.R. The classes expropriated by the October revolution, as well as the elements of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois section of the bureaucracy being newly formed, could reestablish private ownership of land, banks, factories, mills, railroads, *etc.*, only by means of a counter-revolutionary overthrow. By these property relations, lying at the basis of the class relations, is determined for us the nature of the Soviet Union as a proletarian state. (Trotsky, *Problems of the Development of the U.S.S.R.*, p. 3, 1931.)

But it is not a workers' state in the abstract. It is a degenerated, a sick, an internally-imperilled workers' state. Its degeneration is represented by the usurpation of all political power in the state by a reactionary, totalitarian bureaucracy, headed by Stalin. But while *politically* you have an anti-Soviet Bonapartist dictatorship of the bureaucracy, according to Trotsky, it nevertheless defends, in its own and very bad way, the *social* rule of the working class. This rule is expressed in the preservation of nationalized property. In bourgeois society, we have had cases where the social rule of capitalism is preserved by all sorts of political régimes—democratic and dictatorial, parliamentary and monarchical, Bonapartist and fascist. Yes, even under fascism, the bureaucracy is not a separate ruling class, no matter how irritating to the bourgeoisie its rule may be. Similarly in the Soviet Union. The bureaucracy is a caste, not a class. It serves, as all bureaucracies do, a class. In this case, it serves—again, badly—to maintain the social rule of the proletariat. At the same time, however, it weakens and undermines this rule. To assure the sanitation and progress of the workers' state toward socialism, the bureaucracy must be overthrown. Its totalitarian régime excludes its removal by means of more or less peaceful reform. It can be eliminated, therefore, only by means of a revolution. The revolution, however, will be, in its decisive respects, not social but political. It will restore and extend workers' democracy, but it will not produce any fundamental social changes, no fundamental changes in property relations. Property will remain state property.

Omitting for the time being Trotsky's analysis of the origin and rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy, which is elaborated in detail in *The Revolution Betrayed*, we have given above a summary of the basic position held by us jointly up to now. So far as characterizing the class nature of the Soviet Union is concerned, this position might be summed up even more briefly as follows:

To guarantee progress towards socialism, the existence of nationalized property is necessary but not sufficient—a revolutionary proletarian régime is needed in the country, plus favorable international conditions (victory of the proletariat in more advanced capitalist countries). To characterize the Soviet Union as a workers' state, the existence of nationalized property is necessary and sufficient. The Stalinist bureaucracy is a caste. To become a ruling class, it must establish new property forms.

Except for the slogan of revolution, as against reform, which is only a few years old in our movement, this was substantially the position vigorously defended by Trotsky and the Trotskyist movement for more than fifteen years. The big article on Russia written by Trotsky right after the war broke out, marked, in our opinion, the first—and a truly enormous—contradiction of this position. Not that Trotsky abandoned the theory that the Soviet Union is a degenerated workers' state. Quite the contrary, he reaffirmed it. But at the same time, he advanced a theoretical possibility which fundamentally negated his theory—more accurately, the motivation for his theory—of the class character of the Soviet state.

If the proletariat does not come to power in the coming period, and civilization declines further, the immanent collectivist tendencies in capitalist society may be brought to fruition in the form of a new exploiting society ruled by a new bureaucratic class—neither proletarian nor bourgeois. Or, if the proletariat takes power in a series of countries and then relinquishes it to a privileged bureaucracy, like the Stalinist, it will show that the proletariat cannot, congenitally, become a ruling class and then "it will be necessary in retrospect to establish that in its fundamental traits the present U.S.S.R. was the precursor of a new exploiting régime on an international scale."

The historic alternative, carried to the end, is as follows: either the Stalin régime is an abhorrent relapse in the process of transforming bourgeois society into a socialist society, or the Stalin régime is the first stage of a new exploiting society. If the second prognosis proves to be correct, then, of course, the bureaucracy will become a new exploiting class. However onerous the second perspective may be, if the world proletariat should actually prove incapable of fulfilling the mission placed upon it by the course of development, nothing else would remain except openly to recognize that the socialist program based on the internal contradictions of capitalist society, ended as a Utopia. It is self-evident that a new "minimum" program would be required—for the defense of the interests of the slaves of the totalitarian bureaucratic society.

But are there such incontrovertible or even impressive objective data as would compel us today to renounce the prospect of the socialist revolution? That is the whole question. (Trotsky, "The U.S.S.R. in War," *The New International*, Nov. 1939, p. 327.)

That is not the whole question. To that question, we give no less vigorously negative a reply as Trotsky. There is no data of sufficient weight to warrant abandoning the revolutionary socialist perspective. On that score, Trotsky was and remains quite correct. The essence of the question, however, relates not to the perspective, but to the theoretical characterization of the Soviet state and its bureaucracy.

Up to the time of this article, Trotsky insisted on the following two propositions: 1. Nationalized property, so long as it continues to be the economic basis of the Soviet Union, makes the latter a workers' state, regardless of the political régime in power; and, 2. So long as it does not create new property forms, unique to itself, and so long as it rests on nationalized property, the bureaucracy is not a new or an old ruling class, but a caste. In "The U.S.S.R. in War," Trotsky declared it *theoretically possible*—we repeat: not probable, but nevertheless theoretically possible—1. for the property forms and relations now existing in the Soviet

Union to continue existing and yet represent not a workers' state but a new exploiting society; and 2, for the bureaucracy now existing in the Soviet Union to become a new exploiting and ruling class without changing the property forms and relations it now rests upon.

To allow such a theoretical *possibility*, does not eliminate the revolutionary perspective, but it does destroy, at one blow, so to speak, the *theoretical* basis for our past characterization of Russia as a workers' state.

To argue that Trotsky considered this alternative a most unlikely perspective, that, indeed (and this is of course correct), he saw no reason at all for adopting it, is arbitrary and beside the point. At best, it is tantamount to saying: At bottom, Russia is a workers' state because it rests on nationalized property and . . . we still have a social-revolutionary

world perspective; if we abandoned this perspective, it would cease being a workers' state even though its property forms remain fundamentally unaltered. Or more simply: it is not nationalized property that determines the working-class character of the Soviet state and the caste character of its bureaucracy; our perspective determines that.

If Trotsky's alternative perspective is accepted as a theoretical possibility (as we do, although not in quite the same way in which he puts it forward; but that is another matter), it is theoretically impossible any longer to hold that nationalized property is *sufficient* to determine the Soviet Union as a workers' state. That holds true, moreover, whether Trotsky's alternative perspective is accepted or not. The traditional view of the International on the class character of the U.S.S.R. rests upon a grievous theoretical error.

Property Forms and Property Relations

In his writings on the Soviet Union, and particularly in *The Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky speaks interchangeably of the "property forms" and the "property relations" in the country as if he were referring to one and the same thing. Speaking of the new political revolution against the bureaucracy, he says: "So far as concerns property relations, the new power would not have to resort to revolutionary measures." (P. 252.) Speaking of the capitalist counter-revolution, he says: "Notwithstanding that the Soviet bureaucracy has gone far toward preparing a bourgeois restoration, the new régime would have to introduce into the matter of forms of property and methods of industry not a reform, but a social revolution." (P. 253.)

When referring to property forms in the Soviet Union, Trotsky obviously means nationalized property, that is, state ownership of the means of production and exchange. It is just as obvious that, no matter what has been changed and how much it has been changed in the Soviet Union by Stalinism, state ownership of the means of production and exchange continues to exist. It is further obvious that no Marxist will deny that, when the proletariat takes the helm again in Russia, it will maintain state property.

However, what is crucial are not the property forms, *i.e.*, nationalized property, whose existence cannot be denied, but precisely the relations of the various social groups in the Soviet Union to this property, *i.e.*, *property relations!* If we can speak of nationalized property in the Soviet Union, this does not yet establish what the property relations are.

Under capitalism the ownership of land and the means of production and exchange is in private (individual or corporate) hands. The distribution of the means or instruments of production under capitalism puts the possessors of capital in command of society, and of the proletariat, which is divorced from property and has only its own labor power at its disposal. The relations to property of these classes, and consequently the social relations into which they necessarily enter in the process of production, are clear to all intelligent persons.

Now, the state is the product of irreconcilable social contradictions. Disposing of a force separate from the people, it intervenes in the raging struggle between the classes in order to prevent their mutual destruction and to preserve

the social order. "But having arisen amid these conflicts, it is as a rule the state of the most powerful economic class that by force of its economic supremacy becomes also the ruling political class and thus acquires new means of subduing and exploiting the oppressed masses," writes Engels. Under capitalism, "the most powerful economic class" is represented by its capitalist class state.

What is important to note here is that the social power of the capitalist class derives from its "economic supremacy," that is, from its direct ownership of the instruments of production; and that this power is reflected in or supplemented by its political rule of the state machine, of the "public power of coercion." The two are not identical, let it be noted further, for a Bonapartist or fascist régime may and has deprived the capitalist class of its political rule in order to leave its social rule, if not completely intact, then at least fundamentally unshaken.

Two other characteristics of bourgeois property relations and the bourgeois state are worth keeping in mind.

Bourgeois property relations and pre-capitalist property relations are not as incompatible with each other, as either of them are with socialist property relations. The first two not only have lived together in *relative* peace for long periods of time but, especially in the period of imperialism on a world scale, still live together today. An example of the first was the almost one-century-old cohabitation of the capitalist North and the Southern slaveocracy in the United States; an outstanding example of the second is British imperialism in India. But more important than this is a key distinction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The capitalist class already has wide economic power before it overthrows feudal society and, by doing so, it acquires that necessary political and social power which establishes it as *the* ruling class.

Finally, the bourgeois state solemnly recognizes the right of private property, that is, it establishes juridically (and defends accordingly) that which is already established in fact by the bourgeoisie's ownership of capital. The social power of the capitalist class lies fundamentally in its actual ownership of the instruments of production, that is, in that which gives it its "economic supremacy," and *therefore* its control of the state.

How do matters stand with the proletariat, with its state, and the property forms and property relations unique to it? The young bourgeoisie was able to develop (within the objective limits established by feudalism) its specific property relations even under feudalism; at times, as we have seen, it could even share political power with a pre-capitalist class. The proletariat cannot do anything of the kind under capitalism, unless you except those utopians who still dream of developing socialism right in the heart of capitalism by means of "producers' cooperatives." By its very position in the old society, the proletariat has no property under capitalism. The working class acquires economic supremacy *only after* it has seized political power.

We have already seen (said the *Communist Manifesto*) that the first step in the workers' revolution is to make the proletariat the ruling class, to establish democracy. The proletariat will use its political supremacy in order, by degrees, to wrest all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralize all the means of production into the hands of the State (this meaning the proletariat organized as ruling class), and, as rapidly as possible, to increase the total mass of productive forces.

Thus, by its very position in the new society, the proletariat still has no property, that is, it does not own property in the sense that the feudal lord or the capitalist did. It was and remains a propertyless class! It seizes state power. The new state is simply the proletariat organized as the ruling class. The state expropriates the private owners of land and capital, and ownership of land, and the means of production and exchange, becomes vested in the *state*. By its action, the state has established new property forms—nationalized or state-ified or collectivized property. It has also established new property relations. So far as the proletariat is concerned, it has a fundamentally new relationship to property. The essence of the change lies in the fact that the working class is in command of that state-owned property *because* the state is the proletariat organized as the ruling class (through its Soviets, its army, its courts and institutions like the party, the unions, the factory committees, *etc.*). There is the nub of the question.

The economic supremacy of the bourgeoisie under capitalism is based upon its ownership of the decisive instruments of production and exchange. Hence, its social power; hence, the bourgeois state. The social rule of the proletariat cannot express itself in private ownership of capital, but only in its "ownership" of the state in whose hands is concentrated all the decisive economic power. Hence, its social power lies in its political power. In bourgeois society, the two can be and are divorced; in the proletarian state, they are inseparable. Much the same thing is said by Trotsky when he points out that in contrast to private property, "the property relations which issued from the socialist revolution are indivisibly bound up with the new state as their repository" (*The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 250). But from this follows in reality, what does not follow in Trotsky's analysis. The proletariat's relations to property, to the new, collectivist property, are indivisibly bound up with its relations to the state, that is, to the political power.

We do not even begin to approach the heart of the problem by dealing with its juridical aspects, however. That suffices, more or less, in a bourgeois state. There, let us remember, the juridical acknowledgment by the state of private ownership corresponds exactly with the palpable economic and social reality. Ford and Dupont own their plants . . . and their Congressmen; Krupp and Schroeder own their

plants . . . and their Deputies. In the Soviet Union, the proletariat is master of property only if he is master of the state which is its repository. That mastery alone can distinguish it as the ruling class. "The transfer of the factories to the state changed the situation of the worker only juridically," Trotsky points out quite aptly. (*Op. cit.*, p. 241.) And further: "From the point of view of property in the means of production, the differences between a marshal and a servant girl, the head of a trust and a day laborer, the son of a people's commissar and a homeless child, seem not to exist at all." (*Ibid.*, p. 238.) Precisely! And why not? Under capitalism, the difference in the relations to property of the trust head and the day laborer is determined and clearly evidenced by the fact that the former is the owner of capital and the latter owns merely his labor power. In the Soviet Union, the difference in the relations to property of the six persons Trotsky mentions is not determined or visible by virtue of ownership of basic property but precisely by the degree to which any and all of them "own" the state to which all social property belongs.

The state is a political institution, a weapon of organized coercion to uphold the supremacy of a class. It is not owned like a pair of socks or a factory; it is controlled. No class—no modern class—controls it directly, among other reasons because the modern state is too complicated and all-pervading to manipulate like a 17th century New England town meeting. A class controls the state indirectly, through its representatives, its authorized delegates.

The Bolshevik revolution lifted the working class to the position of ruling class in the country. As Marx and Engels and Lenin had foreseen, the conquest of state power by the proletariat immediately revealed itself as "something which is no longer really a form of the State." In place of "special bodies of armed men" divorced from the people, there rose the armed people. In place of a corrupted and bureaucratized parliamentary machine, the democratic Soviets embracing tens of millions. In the most difficult days, in the rigorous period of War Communism, the state was the "proletariat organized as the ruling class"—organized through the Soviets, through the trade unions, through the living, revolutionary proletarian Communist party.

The Stalinist reaction, the causes and course of which have been traced so brilliantly by Trotsky above all others, meant the systematic hacking away of every finger of control the working class had over its state. And with the triumph of the bureaucratic counter-revolution came the end of rule of the working class. The Soviets were eviscerated and finally wiped out formally by decree. The trade unions were converted into slave-drivers cracking the whip over the working class. Workers' control in the factories went a dozen years ago. The people were forbidden to bear arms, even non-explosive weapons—it was the possession of arms by the people that Lenin qualified as the very essence of the question of the state! The militia system gave way decisively to the army separated from the people. The Communist Youth were formally prohibited from participating in politics, *i.e.*, from concerning themselves with the state. The Communist party was gutted, all the Bolsheviks in it broken in two, imprisoned, exiled and finally shot. How absurd are all the social-democratic lamentations about the "one-party dictatorship" in light of this analysis! It was precisely this party, while it lived, which was the last channel through which the Soviet working class exercised its political power.

"The recognition of the present Soviet state as a workers' state," wrote Trotsky in his thesis on Russia in 1931, "not only signifies that the bourgeoisie can conquer power in no other way than by an armed uprising but also that the proletariat of the U.S.S.R. has not forfeited the possibility of submitting the bureaucracy to it, of reviving the party again and of mending the régime of the dictatorship—without a new revolution, with the methods and on the road of *reform*." (*Op. cit.*, p. 36.)

Quite right. And conversely, when the Soviet proletariat finally lost the possibility of submitting the bureaucracy to itself by methods of reform, and was left with the weapon of revolution, we should have abandoned our characterization of the U.S.S.R. as a workers' state. Even if belatedly, it is necessary to do that now.

That political expropriation of the proletariat about which the International has spoken, following Trotsky's analysis—that is nothing more nor less than the destruction of the class rule of the workers, the end of the Soviet Union as a workers' state. In point of time—the Stalinist counter-revolution has not been as cataclysmic as to dates or as dramatic in symbols as was the French Revolution or the Bolshevik insurrection—the destruction of the old class rule

may be said to have culminated with the physical annihilation of the last Bolsheviks.

A change in class rule, a revolution or counter-revolution, without violence, without civil war, gradually? Trotsky has reproached defenders of such a conception with "reformism-in-reverse." The reproach might hold in our case, too, but for the fact that the Stalinist counter-revolution was violent and bloody enough. The seizure of power by the Bolsheviks was virtually bloodless and non-violent. The breadth and duration of the civil war that followed were determined by the strength, the virility, and not least of all by the international imperialist aid furnished to the overturned classes. The comparative *one-sidedness* of the civil war attending the Stalinist counter-revolution was determined by the oft-noted passivity of the masses, their weariness, their failure to receive international support. In spite of this, Stalin's road to power lay through rivers of blood and over a mountain of skulls. Neither the Stalinist counter-revolution nor the Bolshevik revolution was effected by Fabian gradualist reforms.

The conquest of state power by the bureaucracy spelled the destruction of the property relations established by the Bolshevik revolution.

The Bureaucracy: Caste or Class?

If the workers are no longer the ruling class and the Soviet Union no longer a workers' state, and if there is no private-property-owning capitalist class ruling Russia, what is the class nature of the state and what exactly is the bureaucracy that dominates it?

Hitherto we called the Stalinist bureaucracy a caste, and denied it the attributes of a class. Yet, Trotsky admitted September a year ago, the definition as a caste has not "a strictly scientific character. Its relative superiority lies in this, that the makeshift character of the term is clear to everybody, since it would enter nobody's mind to identify the Moscow oligarchy with the Hindu caste of Brahmins." In résumé, it is called a caste not because it is a caste—the old Marxian definition of a caste would scarcely fit Stalin & Co.—but because it is not a class. Without letting the dispute "degenerate into sterile toying with words," let us see if we cannot come closer to a scientific characterization than we have in the past.

The late Bukharin defined a class as "the aggregate of persons playing the same part in production, standing in the same relation toward other persons in the production process, these relations being also expressed in things (instruments of labor)." According to Trotsky, a class is defined "by its independent rôle in the general structure of economy and by its independent roots in the economic foundation of society. Each class . . . works out its own special forms of property. The bureaucracy lacks all these social traits."

In general, either definition would serve. But not as an absolutely unflinching test for all classes in all class societies.*

The Marxian definition of a class is obviously widened by Engels (*see footnote*) to include a social group "that did not take part in production" but which made itself "the indispensable mediator between two producers," exploiting them both. The merchants characterized by Engels as a class are neither more nor less encompassed in Trotsky's definition, given above, or in Bukharin's, than is the Stalinist bureaucracy (except in so far as this bureaucracy most definitely takes part in the process of production). But the indubitable fact that the bureaucracy has not abolished state property is not sufficient ground for withholding from it the qualification of a class, although, as we shall see, within certain limits. But, it has been objected.

If the Bonapartist riffraff is a class this means that it is not an abortion but a viable child of history. If its marauding parasitism is "exploitation" in the scientific sense of the term, this means that the bureaucracy possesses a historical future as the ruling class indispensable to the given system of economy. (Trotsky, "Again and Once More Again on the Nature of the U.S.S.R.," *The New International*, Feb. 1940, p. 14.)

Is or is not the Stalinist bureaucracy "a ruling class indispensable" to the system of economy in the Soviet Union?

This question—begs the question! The question is precisely: what is the given system of economy? For the *given* system—the property relations established by the counter-revolution—the Stalinist bureaucracy is the indispensable ruling class. As for the economic system and the property relations established by the Bolshevik revolution (under which the Stalinist bureaucracy was by no means the in-

*Although, for example, the merchants would fail to pass either of the two tests given above, Engels qualified them as a class. "A third division of labor was added by civilization: it created a class that did not take part in production, but occupied itself merely with the exchange of products—the merchants. All former attempts at class formation were exclusively concerned with production. They divided the producers into directors and directed, or into producers on a more or less extensive scale. But here a class appears for the first time that captures the control of production in general and subjugates the producers to its rule, without taking the least part in production. A class that makes itself the indispensable mediator be-

tween two producers and exploits them both under the pretext of saving them the trouble and risk of exchange, of extending the markets for their products to distant regions, and of thus becoming the most useful class in society; a class of parasites, genuine social ichneumons, that skim the cream off production at home and abroad as a reward for very insignificant services; that rapidly amass enormous wealth and gain social influence accordingly; that for this reason reap ever new honors and ever greater control of production during the period of civilization, until they at last bring to light a product of their own—periodical crises in industry." (Engels, *The Origin of the Family*, p. 201.)

dispensable ruling class)—these are just what the bureaucratic counter-revolution destroyed! To the question, is the bureaucracy indispensable to "Soviet economy"? one can therefore answer, Yes and no.

To the same question put somewhat differently, Is the bureaucracy an "historical accident," an abortion, or viable and a necessity, the answer must be given in the same spirit. It is an historical necessity—"a result of the iron necessity to give birth to and support a privileged minority so long as it is impossible to guarantee genuine equality" (*The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 55). It is not an "historical accident" for the good reason that it has well-established historical causes. It is not inherent in a society resting upon collective property in the means of production and exchange, as the capitalist class is inherent in a society resting upon capitalist property. Rather, it is the product of a conjunction of circumstances, primarily that the proletarian revolution broke out in *backward* Russia and was not supplemented and thereby saved by the victory of the revolution in the *advanced* countries. Hence, while its concrete characteristics do not permit us to qualify it as a viable or indispensable ruling class in the same sense as the historical capitalist class, we may and do speak of it as a ruling class whose complete control of the state now guarantees its political and economic supremacy in the country.

It is interesting to note that the evolution and transformation of the Soviet bureaucracy in the workers' state—the state of Lenin and Trotsky—is quite different and even contrary to the evolution of the capitalist class in its state.

Speaking of the separation of the capitalist manager into capitalists *and* managers of the process of production, Marx writes:

The labor of superintendance and management arising out of the antagonistic character and rule of capital over labor, which all modes of production based on class antagonisms have in common with the capitalist mode, is directly and inseparably connected, also under the capitalist system, with those productive functions, which all combined social labor assigns to individuals as their special tasks. . . . Compared to the money-capitalist the industrial capitalist is a laborer, but a laboring capitalist, an exploiter of the labor of others. The wages which he claims and pockets for this labor amount exactly to the appropriated quantity of another's labor and depend directly upon the rate of exploitation of this labor, so far as he takes the trouble to assume the necessary burdens of exploitation. They do not depend upon the degree of his exertions in carrying on this exploitation. He can easily shift this burden to the shoulders of a superintendent for moderate pay. . . . Stock companies in general, developed with the credit system, have a tendency to separate this labor of management as a function more and more from the ownership of capital, whether it be self-owned or borrowed. (*Capital*, Vol. III, pp. 454ff.)

Even though this tendency to separate out of the capitalist class (or the upper ranks of the working class) a group of managers and superintendents is constantly accentuated under capitalism, this group does not develop into an independent class. Why? Because to the extent that the manager (*i.e.*, a highly-paid superintendent-worker) changes his "relations to property" and becomes an owner of capital, he merely enters into the already existing capitalist class. He need not and does not create new property relations. The proletariat in control of the state, and therefore of owning class remains the ruling class; the managers remain its agents.

The evolution has been distinctly different in Russia. economy, soon found itself unable directly to organize economy, expand the productive forces and raise labor productivity because of a whole series of circumstances—its own

lack of training in management and superintendence, in bookkeeping and strict accounting, the absence of help from the technologically more advanced countries, *etc., etc.* As with the building of the Red Army, so in industry, the Russian proletariat was urged by Lenin to call upon and it did call upon a whole host and variety of experts—some from its own ranks, some from the ranks of the class enemy, some from the ranks of the bandwagon-jumpers, constituting in all a considerable bureaucracy. But, given the revolutionary party, given the Soviets, given the trade unions, given the factory committees, that is, given those concrete means by which the workers ruled the state, *their* state, this bureaucracy, however perilous, remained within the limitations of "hired hands" in the service of the workers' state. In political or economic life—the bureaucracies in both tended to and did merge—the bureaucracy was subject to the criticism, control, recall or discharge of the "working class organized as a ruling class."

The whole history of the struggle of the Trotskyist movement in Russia against the bureaucracy signified, at bottom, a struggle to prevent the crushing of the workers' state by the growing monster of a bureaucracy which was becoming increasingly different *in quality* from the "hired hands" of the workers' state as well as from any kind of bureaucratic group under capitalism. What we have called the consummated usurpation of power by the Stalinist bureaucracy was, in reality, nothing but the self-realization of the bureaucracy as a class and its seizure of state power from the proletariat, the establishment of its own state power and its own rule. The *qualitative* difference lies precisely in this: the bureaucracy is no longer the controlled and revocable "managers and superintendents" employed by the workers' state in the party, the state apparatus, the industries, the army, the unions, the fields, but the owners and controllers of the state, which is in turn the repository of collectivized property and thereby the employer of all hired hands, the masses of the workers, above all, included.

The situation of the young Soviet republic (the historical circumstances surrounding its birth and evolution), imposed upon it the "division of labor" described above, and often commented on by Lenin. Where a similar division of labor under capitalism does not transform the economic or political agents of the ruling class into a new class, for the reasons given above (primarily, the relations to capitalist private property), it does tend to create a new class in a state reposing on collectivized property, that is, in a state which is itself the repository of *all* social property.

Trotsky is entirely right when he speaks of "dynamic social formations (in Russia) which have had no precedent and have no analogies." It is even more to the point when he writes that "the very fact of its (the bureaucracy's) appropriation of political power in a country where the principal means of production are in the hands of the state, creates a new and hitherto unknown relation between the bureaucracy and the riches of the nation." For what is unprecedented and new hitherto unknown, one cannot find a sufficiently illuminating analogy in the bureaucracies in other societies which did not develop into a class but remained class-serving bureaucracies.

What Trotsky calls the indispensable theoretical key to an understanding of the situation in Russia is the remarkable passage from Marx which he quotes in *The Revolution Betrayed*: "A development of the productive forces is the absolutely necessary practical premise (of communism),

because without it want is generalized, and with want the struggle for necessities begins again, and that means that all the old crap must revive."

Both Lenin and Trotsky kept repeating in the early years: in backward Russia, socialism cannot be built without the aid of the more advanced countries. Before the revolution, in 1915, Trotsky made clear his opinion—for which Stalinism never forgave him—that without state aid of the western proletariat, the workers of Russia could not hope to remain in power for long. That state aid did not come, thanks to the international social democracy, later ably supplemented by the Stalinists. But the prediction of Lenin and Trotsky did come true. The workers of the Soviet Union were unable to hold power. That they lost it in a peculiar, unforeseen and even unforeseeable way—not because of a bourgeois restoration, but in the form of the seizure of power by a counter-revolutionary bureaucracy which retained and based itself on the new, collectivist form of property—is true. But they did lose power. The old crap was revived—in a new, unprecedented, hitherto-unknown form, the rule of a *new bureaucratic class*. A class that always was, that always will be? Not at all. "Class," Lenin pointed out in April 1920, "is a concept that takes shape in struggle and in the course of development." The reminder is particularly timely in considering the struggle and evolution of the Stalinist bureaucracy into a class. Precisely here it is worth more than passing notice (because of its profound significance), that the counter-revolution, like the revolution that preceded it, found that it could not, as Marx said about the seizure of power by the proletariat in the Paris Commune, "simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes." The Russian proletariat had to *shatter* the old bourgeois state and its apparatus, and put in its place a new state, a complex of the Soviets, the revolutionary party, the trade unions, the factory committees, the militia system, *etc.* To achieve power and establish its rule, the Stalinist counter-revolution in turn had to shatter the proletarian Soviet state—those same Soviets, the party, the unions, the factory committees, the militia system, the "armed people," *etc.* It did not and could not "simply lay hold of" the existing machinery of state and set it going for its own ends. It shattered the workers' state, and put in its place the totalitarian state of bureaucratic collectivism.

Thereby it compelled us to add to our theory this conception, among others: Just as it is possible to have different classes ruling in societies resting upon the private ownership of property, so it is possible to have more than one

class ruling in a society resting upon the collective ownership of property—concretely, the working class and the bureaucracy.

Can this new class look forward to a social life-span as long as that enjoyed, for example, by the capitalist class? We see no reason to believe that it can. Throughout modern capitalist society, ripped apart so violently by its contradictions, there is clearly discernible the irrepressible tendency towards collectivism, the only means whereby the productive forces of mankind can be expanded and thereby provide that ample satisfaction of human needs which is the pre-condition to the blooming of a new civilization and culture. But there is no adequate ground for believing that this tendency will materialize in the form of a universal "bureaucratic collectivism." The "unconditional development of the productive forces of society comes continually into conflict with the limited end, the self-expansion of the existing capital." The revolutionary struggle against the capitalist mode of production, triumphing in those countries which have already attained a high level of economic development, including the development of labor productivity, leads rather to the socialist society. The circumstances which left Soviet Russia isolated, dependent upon its own primitive forces, and thus generated that "generalized want" which facilitated the victory of the bureaucratic counter-revolution, will be and can only be overcome by overcoming its causes—namely, the capitalist encirclement. The social revolution which spells the doom of capitalist imperialism and the release of the pent-up, strangled forces of production, will put an end to the want and misery of the masses in the West and to the very basis of the misery of Stalinism in the Soviet Union.

Social life and evolution were slow and long-drawn-out under feudalism. Their pace was considerably accelerated under capitalism, and phenomena which took decades in developing under feudalism, took only years to develop under capitalism. World society which entered the period of world wars and socialist revolutions, finds the pace speeded up to a rhythm that has no precedent in history. All events and phenomena tend to be telescoped in point of time. From this standpoint, the rise, and the early fall, of the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union necessitates an indication of the limits of its development, as we pointed out above, precisely in order to distinguish it from the fundamental historical classes. This is perhaps best done by characterizing it as the ruling class of an instable society which is already a fetter on economic development.

Stalinist Bureaucracy—Fascist Bureaucracy

What has already been said should serve to indicate the similarities between the Stalinist and Fascist bureaucracies, but above all to indicate the profound social and historical difference between them. Following our analysis, the animadversions of all species of rationalizers on the identity of character of Stalinism and Fascism, remain just as superficial as ever.

Trotsky's characterization of the two bureaucracies as "symmetrical" is incontrovertible, but only within the lim-

its with which he surrounds the term, namely, they are both products of the same failure of the Western proletariat to solve the social crisis by social revolution. To go further, they are identical, but again within well-defined limits. The political régime, the technique of rule, the highly-developed social demagogy, the system of terror without end—these are essential features of Hitlerite and Stalinist totalitarianism, some of them more fully developed under the latter than under the former. At this point, however, the similarity ceases.

From the standpoint of our old analysis and theory, the Soviet Union remained a workers' state despite its political régime. In short, we said, just as the social rule of capitalism, the capitalist state, was preserved under different political régimes—republic, monarchy, military dictatorship, fascism—so the social rule of the proletariat, the workers' state could be maintained under different political régimes—Soviet democracy, Stalinist totalitarianism. Can we, then, even speak of a "counter-revolutionary workers' state"? was the question posed by Trotsky early this year. To which his reply was, "There are two completely counter-revolutionary workers' Internationals" and one can therefore speak also of "the counter-revolutionary workers' state. In the last analysis a workers' state is a trade union which has conquered power." It is a workers' state by virtue of its property forms, and it is counter-revolutionary by virtue of its political régime.

Without dwelling here on the analogy between the Soviet state today and the trade unions, it is necessary to point out that thoroughgoing consistency would demand of this standpoint that the Soviet Union be characterized as a *Fascist workers' state*, workers' state, again, because of its property forms, and Fascist because of its political régime. Objections to this characterization can only be based upon the embarrassment caused by this natural product of consistency.

However that may be, if it is not a workers' state, not even a Fascist workers' state, neither is it a state comparable to that of the German Nazis. Let us see why.

Fascism, resting on the mass basis of the petty-bourgeoisie gone mad under the horrors of the social crisis, *was called to power deliberately* by the big bourgeoisie in order to preserve its social rule, the system of private property. Writers who argue that Fascism put an end to capitalism and inaugurated a new social order, with a new class rule, are guilty of an abstract and static conception of capitalism; more accurately, of an idealization of capitalism as permanently identical with what it was in its halcyon period of organic upward development, its "democratic" phase. Faced with the imminent prospect of the proletarian revolution putting an end both to the contradictions of capitalism and to capitalist rule, the bourgeoisie preferred the annoyance of a Fascist régime which would suppress (not abolish!) these contradictions and preserve capitalist rule. In other words, at a given stage of its *degeneration*, the *only* way to preserve the capitalist system in any form is by means of the totalitarian dictatorship. As all historians agree, calling Fascism to political power—the abandonment of political rule by the bourgeoisie—was the conscious act of the bourgeoisie itself.

But, it is argued, *after* it came to political power, the Fascist bureaucracy completely dispossessed the bourgeoisie and itself became the ruling class. Which is precisely what needs to be but has not been proved. The system of private ownership of socially-operated property *remains basically intact*. After being in power in Italy for over eighteen years, and in Germany for almost eight, Fascism has yet to nationalize industry, to say nothing of expropriating the bourgeoisie (the expropriation of small sections of the bourgeoisie—the Jewish—is done in the interests of the bourgeoisie as a whole). Why does Hitler, who is so bold in all other spheres, suddenly turn timid when he confronts the "juridical detail" represented by the private (or corporate) ownership of the means of production? Because the two cannot be counterposed: his boldness and "radicalism" in all spheres

is directed towards maintaining and reinforcing that "juridical detail," that is, capitalist society, to the extent to which it is at all possible to maintain it *in the period of its decay*.

But doesn't Fascism control the bourgeoisie? Yes, in a sense. That kind of control was foreseen long ago. In January 1916, Lenin and the Zimmerwald Left wrote: "At the end of the war a gigantic universal economic upheaval will manifest itself with all its force, when, under a general exhaustion, unemployment and lack of capital, industry will have to be regulated anew, when the terrific indebtedness of all states will drive them to tremendous taxation, and when state socialism—militarization of the economic life—will seem to be the only way out of financial difficulties." Fascist control means precisely this new regulation of industry, the militarization of economic life in its sharpest form. It controls, it restricts, it regulates, it plunders—but with all that it maintains and even strengthens the capitalist profit system, leaves the bourgeoisie intact as the class owning property. It *assures* the profits of the owning class—taking from it that portion which is required to maintain a bureaucracy and police-spy system needed to keep down labor (which threatens to take away *all* profits and *all* capital, let us not forget) and to maintain a highly modernized military establishment to defend the German bourgeoisie from attacks at home and abroad and to acquire for it new fields of exploitation outside its own frontiers.

But isn't the Fascist bureaucracy, too, becoming a class? In a sense, yes, but not a new class with a new class rule. By virtue of their control of the state power, any number of Fascist bureaucrats, of high and low estate, have used coercion and intimidation to become Board Directors and stockholders in various enterprises. This is especially true of those bureaucrats assigned to industry as commissars of all kinds. On the other side, the bourgeoisie acquire the "good will" of Nazi bureaucrats, employed either in the state or the economic machinery, by bribes of stocks and positions on directing boards. There is, if you wish, a certain process of fusion between sections of the bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie. But the bureaucrats who become stockholders and Board Directors do not thereby become a new class, they enter as integral parts of the industrial or financial bourgeoisie class which we have known for quite some time!

Private ownership of capital, that "juridical detail" before which Hitler comes to a halt, is a social reality of the profoundest importance. With all its political power, the Nazi bureaucracy remains a bureaucracy; sections of it fuse with the bourgeoisie, but as a social aggregation, it is not developing into a new class. Here, control of the state power is not enough. The bureaucracy, in so far as its development into a new class with a new class rule of its own is concerned, *is itself controlled* by the objective reality of the private ownership of capital.

How different it is with the Stalinist bureaucracy! Both bureaucracies "devour, waste, and embezzle a considerable portion of the national income"; both have an income above that of the people, and privileges which correspond to their position in society. But similarity of income is not a definition of a social class. In Germany, the Nazis are not more than a bureaucracy—extremely powerful, to be sure, but still only a bureaucracy. In the Soviet Union, the bureaucracy is the ruling class, because it possesses as its own the state power which, in this country, is the owner of all social property.

In Germany, the Nazis have attained a great degree of independence by their control of the state, but it continues to be "the state of the most powerful economic class"—the bourgeoisie. In the Soviet Union, control of the state, sole owner of social property, makes the bureaucracy the most powerful economic class. Therein lies the fundamental difference between the Soviet state, even under Stalinism, and all other *pre-collectivist* states. The difference is of epochal historical importance.

Of epochal historical importance, we repeat, for our analysis does not diminish by an iota the profound social-revolutionary significance of the Russian proletarian revolution. Starting at a low level, lowered still further by years of war, civil war, famine and their devastations, isolated from world economy, infested with a monstrous bureaucracy, the Soviet Union nevertheless attained a rhythm of economic development, an expansion of the productive forces which exceeded the expectations of the boldest revolutionary thinkers and easily aroused the astonishment of the entire world. This was not due to any virtues of the bureaucracy under whose reign it was accomplished, but in spite of the concomitant overhead waste of that reign. Economic progress in the Soviet Union was accomplished on the basis of planning and of the new, collectivist forms of property established by the proletarian revolution. What would that progress have looked like if only those new forms, and property relations most suitable to them, had been extended to the more highly developed countries of Europe and America! It staggers the imagination.

Fascism, on the other hand, has developed to its highest degree the intervention of the state as regulator, subsidizer and controller of a social order which *does not expand but contracts* the productive forces of modern society. The contrary view held by those who are so impressed by the great development of industry in Germany in the period of war economy, is based upon superficial and temporary phenomena. Fascism, as a motor or a brake on the development of productive forces, must be judged not by the tons of war-steel produced in the Ruhr, but on the infinitely more significant policy it pursues in the conquered territories which it seeks to convert, from industrially advanced countries, into backward agricultural hinterlands of German national economy.

Both bureaucracies are reactionary. Both bureaucracies act as brakes on the development of the productive forces of society. Neither plays a progressive rôle, even if in both cases this or that act may have an abstractly progressive significance (Hitler destroys Bavarian particularism and "liberates" the Sudetens; Stalin nationalizes industry in Latvia). In the Soviet Union, however, the Stalinist bureaucracy is the brake, and its removal would permit the widest expansion of the productive forces. Whereas in Germany, as in other capitalist countries, it is not merely the Fascist bureaucracy who stand in the way, but primarily the capitalist class, the capitalist mode of production.

The difference is between increased state intervention to preserve capitalist property and the collective ownership of property by the bureaucratic state.

How express the difference summarily and in conventional terms? People buying canned goods want and are entitled to have labels affixed that will enable them to distinguish at a glance pears from peaches from peas. "We often seek salvation from unfamiliar phenomena in familiar terms," Trotsky observed. But what is to be done with unprecedented, new, hitherto-unknown phenomena, how label them in such a way as to describe at once their origin, their present state, their more than one future prospect, and wherein they resemble and differ from other phenomena? The task is not easy. Yet, life and politics demand some conventional, summary terms for social phenomena; one cannot answer the question—What is the Soviet state?—by repeating in detail a long and complex analysis. The demand must be met as satisfactorily as is possible in the nature of the case.

The early Soviet state we would call, with Lenin, a bureaucratically deformed workers' state. The Soviet state today we would call—bureaucratic state socialism, a characterization which attempts to embrace both its historical origin and its distinction from capitalism as well as its current diversion under Stalinism. The German state today we would call, in distinction from the Soviet state, bureaucratic or totalitarian state capitalism. These terms are neither elegant nor absolutely precise, but they will have to do for want of any others more precise or even half as precise.

The Defense of the Soviet Union

From the foregoing analysis, the basis is laid not only for eliminating the discrepancies and defects in our old analysis, but for clarifying our political position.

Political or Social Revolution? Here too, without falling into a game of terminology or toying with abstract concepts, it is necessary to strive for the maximum exactness. As distinct from social revolution, Trotsky and the International called up to now for a political revolution in the Soviet Union. "History has known elsewhere not only social revolutions which substituted the bourgeoisie for the feudal régime, but also political revolutions which, without destroying the economic foundations of society, swept out an old ruling upper crust (1830 and 1848 in France, February 1917 in Russia, etc.). The overthrow of the Bonapartist caste will, of course, have deep social consequences, but in itself

it will be confined within the limits of political revolution." (*The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 288.) And again, on the same page: "It is not a question this time of changing the economic foundations of society, of replacing certain forms of property with other forms."

In the revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy the nationalization of the means of production and exchange will indeed be preserved by the proletariat in power. If that is what is meant by political revolution, if that is all it could mean, then we could easily be reconciled to it. But from our whole analysis, it follows that the Stalinist counter-revolution, in seizing the power of the state, thereby changed the property relations in the Soviet Union. In overturning the rule of the bureaucracy, the Soviet proletariat will again raise itself to the position of ruling class, organize its own

state, and once more change its relations to property. The revolution will thus not merely have "deep social consequences," it will be a social revolution. After what has been said in another section, it is not necessary to insist here on those points wherein the social revolution in Germany or England would resemble the social revolution in Russia and wherein they would differ from it. In the former, it is a question of ending capitalism and lifting the country into the new historical epoch of collectivism and socialism. In the latter, it is a question of destroying a reactionary obstacle to the development of a collectivist society towards socialism.

Unconditional Defense of the U.S.S.R.? The slogan of "unconditional defense of the Soviet Union" assumed that, even under Stalin and despite Stalin, the Soviet Union could play only a progressive rôle in any war with a capitalist power. The Second World War broke out, with the Soviet Union as one of the participants, now as a belligerent, now as a "non-belligerent." But, "theory is not a note which you can present at any moment to reality for payment." Reality showed that the Soviet Union, in the war in Poland and in Finland, in the war as a whole, was playing a reactionary rôle. The Stalinist bureaucracy and its army acted as an indispensable auxiliary in the military calculations of German imperialism. They covered the latter's eastern, northern and southeastern flank, helped in the crushing of Poland (and along with it, of the incipient Polish Commune), and for their pains, received a share of the booty. In the conquered territories, it is true, Stalin proceeded to establish the same economic order that prevails in the Soviet Union. But this has no absolute value, in and of itself—only a relative value. One can say with Trotsky that "the economic transformations in the occupied provinces do not compensate for this by even a tenth part!"

From the standpoint of the interests of the international socialist revolution, defense of the Soviet Union in this war (*i.e.*, support of the Red Army) could only have a negative effect. Even from the more limited standpoint of preserving the new economic forms in the Soviet Union, it must be established that they were not involved in the war. At stake were and are what Trotsky calls "the driving force behind the Moscow bureaucracy . . . the tendency to expand its power, its prestige, its revenues."

The attempt to exhaust the analysis of the Stalinist course in the war by ascribing it to "purely military" steps of preventive-defensive character (what is meant in general by "purely military" steps remains a mystery, since they exist neither in nature nor society), is doomed by its superficiality to failure. Naturally, all military steps are . . . military steps, but saying so does not advance us very far.

The general political considerations which actuated the Stalinists in making an alliance with Hitler (capitulation to Germany out of fear of war, *etc.*) have been stated by us on more than one occasion and require no repetition here. But there are even more profound reasons, which have little or nothing to do with the fact that Stalin's master-ally is German Fascism. The same reasons would have dictated the same course in the war if the alliance had been made, as a result of a different conjunction of circumstances, with the noble democracies. They are summed up in the lust for expansion of the Stalinist bureaucracy, which has even less in common with Lenin's policy of extending the revolution to capitalist countries than the Stalinist state has with the early workers' state.

And what is the economic base of this lust for expansion, this most peculiar imperialism which you have invented? we were asked, sometimes with superior sneers, sometimes with genuine interest in the problem. We know what are the irrepressible economic compulsions, the inherent economic contradictions, that produce the imperialist policy of finance capitalism. What are their equivalents in the Soviet Union?

Stalinist imperialism is no more like capitalist imperialism than the Stalinist state is like the bourgeois state. Just the same it has its own economic compulsions and internal contradictions, which hold it back here and drive it forward there. Under capitalism, the purpose of production is the production of surplus value, of profit, "not the product, but the surplus product." In the workers' state, production was carried on and extended for the satisfaction of the needs of the Soviet masses. For that, they needed not the oppression of themselves or of other people but the liberation of the peoples of the capitalist countries and the colonial empires. In the Stalinist state, production is carried on and extended for the satisfaction of the needs of the bureaucracy, for the increasing of its wealth, its privileges, its power. At every turn of events, it seeks to overcome the mounting difficulties and resolve the contradictions which it cannot really resolve, by intensifying the exploitation and oppression of the masses.

We surely need not, in a serious discussion among Marxists, insist upon the fact, so vehemently denied a year ago by the eminent Marxologist at the head of the S.W.P., that there are still classes in the Soviet Union, and that exploitation takes place there. Not *capitalist* exploitation—but economic exploitation nonetheless. "The differences in income are determined, in other words, not only by differences of individual productiveness, but also by a *masked appropriation of the product of the labor of others*. The privileged minority of shareholders is living at the expense of the deprived majority." (*The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 240. My emphasis. M.S.) The driving force behind the bureaucracy is the tendency to increase and expand this "masked [and often not so masked] appropriation of the product of the labor of others." Hence, its penchant for methods of exploitation typical of the worst under capitalism; hence, its lust to extend its dominion over the peoples of the weaker and more backward countries (if it is not the case with the stronger and more advanced countries, then only because the power, and not the will, is lacking), in order to subject them to the oppression and exploitation of the Kremlin oligarchs. The *de facto* occupation of the northwestern provinces of China by Stalin is a case in point. The occupation and then the spoliation of eastern Poland, of the three Baltic countries, of southern Finland (not to mention the hoped-for Petsamo nickel mines), of Bessarabia and Bukovina, tomorrow perhaps of parts of Turkey, Iran, and India, are other cases in point. We call this policy Stalinist imperialism.

But are not imperialism and imperialist policy a concomitant only of capitalism? No. While crises of overproduction are unique to capitalism, that does not hold true either of war or imperialism, which are common to divers societies. Lenin, insisting precisely on the scientific, Marxist usage of the terms, wrote in 1917:

Crises, precisely in the form of overproduction or of the "stocking up of market commodities" (comrade S. does not like the word overproduction) are a phenomenon which is *exclusively* proper to capital-

ism. Wars, however, are proper both to the economic system based on slavery and the feudal. There have been imperialist wars on the basis of slavery (Rome's war against Carthage was an imperialist war on both sides) as well as in the Middle Ages and in the epoch of mercantile capitalism. Every war in which both belligerent camps are fighting to oppress foreign countries or peoples and for the division of the booty, that is, over "who shall oppress more and who shall plunder more," must be called imperialistic. (*Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. XXI, pp. 387f.)

By this definition, on which Lenin dwelled because comrade S. had made an "error in principle," it is incontestable that the Stalinists in partnership with Hitler have been conducting an imperialist war "to oppress foreign countries or peoples," "for the division of the booty," to decide "who shall oppress more and who shall plunder more." It is only from this standpoint that Trotsky's statement late in 1939—"We were and remain against seizures of new territories by the Kremlin"—acquires full and serious meaning. If the Soviet state were essentially a trade union in power, with a reactionary bureaucracy at its head, then we could not possibly oppose "seizures of new territories" any more than we oppose a trade union bureaucracy bringing unorganized workers into the union. With all our opposition to their organizing methods, it is we, the left wing, who always insisted that Lewis or Green organize the unorganized. The analogy between the Soviet state and a trade union is not a very solid one. . . .

The theory that Soviet economy is progressive and therefore the wars of the Stalinist bureaucracy against a capitalist state are, by some mysticism, correspondingly and universally progressive, is thus untenable. As in the case of a colonial or semi-colonial country, or a small nation, we defend the Soviet Union against imperialism when it is fighting a progressive war, that is, in our epoch one which corresponds to the interests of the international socialist revolution. When it fights a reactionary, imperialist war, as did "little Serbia" and China in the last world war, we take the traditional revolutionary position: continue implacably the class struggle regardless of the effects on the military front.

Under what conditions is it conceivable to defend the Soviet Union ruled by the Stalinist bureaucracy? It is possible to give only a generalized answer. For example, should the character of the present war change from that of a struggle between the capitalist imperialist camps into a struggle of the imperialists to crush the Soviet Union, the interests of the world revolution would demand the defense of the Soviet Union by the international proletariat. The aim of

imperialism in that case, whether it were represented in the war by one or many powers, would be to solve the crisis of world capitalism (and thus prolong the agony of the proletariat) at the cost of reducing the Soviet Union to one or more colonial possessions or spheres of interest. Even though prostrated by the victors in the last war, Germany remained a capitalist country, whose social régime the Allies did their utmost to maintain against the revolutionary proletariat. In the present war, we find victorious Germany not only not undertaking any fundamental economic changes in the conquered territories but preserving the capitalist system by force of arms against the unrest and revolutionism of the proletariat. There is no reason to believe that victorious imperialism in the Soviet Union would leave its nationalized property intact—quite the contrary. As Germany now seeks to do with France, imperialism would seek to destroy all the progress made in the Soviet Union by reducing it to a somewhat more advanced India—a village continent. In these considerations, too, the *historical significance* of the new, collectivist property established by the Russian Revolution, again stands out clearly. Such a transformation of the Soviet Union as triumphant imperialism would undertake, would have a vastly and durable reactionary effect upon world social development, give capitalism and reaction a new lease on life, retard enormously the revolutionary movement, and postpone for we don't know how long the introduction of the world socialist society. From this standpoint and under these conditions, the defense of the Soviet Union, even under Stalinism, is both possible and necessary.

To revise one's position on so important a question as the class character of the Soviet Union, is, as the writer has himself learned, no easy matter. The mass of absurdities written against our old position only served to fix it more firmly in our minds and in our program. To expect others to take a new position overnight would be presumptuous and unprofitable. We did not arrive at the views outlined above lightly or hastily. We neither ask nor expect others to arrive at our views in that way. It is, however, right to ask that they be discussed with the critical objectivity, the exclusive concern with the truth that best serves our common interests, and the polemical loyalty that are the best traditions of Marxism.

December 3, 1940.

MAX SHACHTMAN

American Labor and Politics

IN THE FIRST ARTICLE in this series on "American Politics" we posed certain significant questions related to the development of independent working-class political action in England, expressed in the formation of the Labour Party, and contrasted the British experience with the absence of such developments in the United States. We presented as relevant factors: the difference in the structure of the two governments, the comparative lateness in the full development of capitalism and the proletariat in the United States, the relatively high standard of living of

workers in this country, the fact that in the U. S. the working class won the franchise before the English workers, the difference in the quality of working-class leadership in the two countries, the important consideration that independent working-class political action did not arrive until after the organization of the unskilled workers, and finally the influence of the teachings of Marx and Engels.

In the present article we will develop in more detail, the application of these observations to the labor movement in the United States.

A Twentieth Century Problem

The problem of independent working class politics and the formation of a national labor party in the United States is, in reality a problem of the twentieth century. It was only after the victory of industrial capitalism, its extension to monopoly finance capitalism and the establishment of the United States as leader of world imperialism, that the stern necessity for independent political action could be presented to the working class in clearly delineated and definitive form. That is, the events of the past forty years made it objectively possible to present the real face of United States capitalism and imperialism to the workers.

These events are chiefly, the formation of vast monopolies, through concentration and centralization of capital, the extension of control over the government by finance capitalism and the bid of United States finance capitalists for domination of the world market. This was best exemplified by the entry of the United States in the first world war and now by participation in the second world imperialist war. This means that capitalism has reached its peak in all the imperialist countries, that it is not the virgin society of an earlier day, that it has lost every shred of progressive character, and most important of all, that the working class in the United States is completely enclosed within capitalist productive relations, and bound irrevocably, so long as capitalism is accepted, to the ups and downs, the caprice and the anarchy of capitalist production.

Neither the working class in the United States nor the progressive trade-union leaders have understood either the past nor how it functions today. This can be demonstrated by an examination of the functioning of the organized labor movement in relation to the question of independent political action.

The working class very early understood the necessity for some sort of political action. At the time, that is toward the end of the first quarter of the 19th Century, it conceived of organized working-class politics as action toward fulfilling the principles of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. It was concerned with winning for itself "the promise of American life." This was the period of the struggle for immediate *political* demands: for the franchise, for free schools, for the abolition of imprisonment for debt, for shortening the work day, for protection of the worker against being robbed of his pay. These and many more concessions the workers sought to gain from the government by act of Congress and the state legislatures.

The workers of course had many other grievances. These were largely due to the harsh conditions under which they worked: extremely low wages, inordinately long hours, child labor, corporal punishment of women and children in the factories, factory fines, being mulcted of part of their wages to pay the salary of the preacher provided by the employer to bring salvation to his employes.

These and many other political and economic grievances laid the base for the formation of the first labor parties. We should not be misled, however, into thinking that these early labor parties were organizations dedicated to independent political action as we understand this term today. This is true despite the fact that some of their pronounce-

ments sound as though the working class of that period was ready to begin the final struggle against capitalism. For instance, Frances Wright, one of the founders of the New York Labor Party in 1829 wrote that "what distinguishes the present from every other struggle in which the human race has been engaged, is, that the present is evidently, openly and acknowledgedly a war of class and that this war is universal." Oneal (*The Workers in American History*) points out that "declarations of the class struggle may be found in the early labor journals of America at least twenty years before Marx and Engels proclaimed it in Europe in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848."

In no instance however did conscious class-struggle ideas penetrate the labor movement nor were they embodied in the thinking and programmatic conceptions of the leaders. None of these labor parties was based on the idea of class and class struggle. They were not parties of wage-earners as wage-earners. They were parties of the poor, struggling against the rich. But neither the rich nor the poor were distinct classes existing in a certain historical type of society. They were fighting for general human rights. Their chief aim was to accomplish the integration of the working class into United States democratic society with full rights, privileges and immunities. That is, they wanted to become full-fledged American citizens.

This was a normal attitude for the working class of the first half of the 19th Century to assume. The material basis for the coming of "wage-consciousness" had not been laid. The factory system was not yet born and there was no distinct proletariat. This is true despite the fact that from the very beginning there were clear class divisions in the United States. The commercial ruling class understood its role and fought consistently to establish its hegemony. But the workers did not understand this and even if they had they were not strong enough to challenge the rule of the commercial bourgeoisie.

The Tradition of "Classlessness"

The workers could not develop the idea of "class" which is a necessary prerequisite for independent political action, left to themselves; especially in the "rights of man" ideology of the 19th Century. Furthermore there has been a conscious and deliberate effort from the very beginning in this country to obscure the existence of classes and class distinctions. The concept of "classlessness" was expounded and this continues today unabated. Liberals accepted this propaganda of the bourgeoisie and added to the confusion in the ranks of the working class. Theoretical political equality, or more precisely, voting equality added its bit to keeping the workers chained to the "regular" political parties. The fact also that there was a certain fluidity of class relations, making it actually possible for transfers from the working class to the ruling class gave the equality myth a grand opportunity to function in the interest of the no-classes ideology.

As we have said, the political and commercial fathers of the country, fully understanding their class interests, never had in mind to submit to the demands of the "lower orders." Their attitude was fully demonstrated in their attitude on the franchise, free public education and the right of the workin class to organize into trades unions. That hallowed and honored statesman of the Republic, Daniel

Webster was a violent opponent of universal suffrage. Chancellor Kent, of New York, said that "this democratic principle cannot be contemplated without terror" . . . "universal suffrage jeopardizes property" . . . "the poor man's interest is always in opposition to his duty, and it is too much to expect of human nature that interest will not be consulted."

The bourgeoisie of the day said that legislative provision for public schools would be "class legislation." The public school would be a promotor of idleness. The ruling class of all ages has been willing to make all manner of sacrifices to keep the working class from "idleness."

The high crime of course was the efforts of the workers to organize for improving their condition. They were indicted, tried and convicted for organizing "a combination to raise their wages." Such actions were conspiracies under the common law which had been brought over from England.

These grievances were the main causes for the organization of the labor parties. The ruling class itself, however, did not remain united on these questions. They split; the Federalists applying the common law rigidly and keeping the screws down while the Republicans (Jeffersonians) made a gesture of defense of the workers. This drew the workers nearer to the Republicans and did not tend to promote independence of political action. This process of befriending the working class was accentuated during the era of Jacksonian democracy when the "left wing" of the rising bourgeoisie rendered some aid to the workers, farmers and the middle class in their struggle for democratic rights.

The outstanding factor, in slowing down the development of independent political organization of the working class was the development of capitalism itself and a change in the outlook of the bourgeoisie. Legally, the workers won virtually every demand that they had made on the ruling class. They got the franchise. Not only were free public schools established but attendance was made compulsory. Trade unions were legalized. These juridical and parliamentary grants to the workers have increased down through the decades on through the New Deal.

How was this change connected with the development of capitalism? Free public education, the franchise and trade union organization accompanied by collective bargaining were seen to be absolutely necessary if rising and expanding capitalism was to have at hand the type of worker necessary for machine production. The bourgeoisie of the North finally envisaged the future of their own system as they had not in the earlier days. Also it must be remembered of course that the "impending conflict" with the South hastened the extension of bourgeois democracy to the workers in the North. Also as the bourgeois became more "enlightened," he realized more and more that the working class was completely manacled by capitalist productive relations. The extension of democratic rights, the granting of concessions and softening up a little would not allow the working class to escape from the net that had been woven around it.

The above considerations do not ignore the effects of the constant struggles of the workers through strikes and other means to better their condition. These struggles were effective and interacted with the factors mentioned above to produce the final results. The point though that we

want to emphasize is that the very success of the struggles of the workers produced the effect on the working class that the bourgeoisie desired: namely, that constitutional democracy would work; that it was possible for workers to acquire their rights by legal and parliamentary means, within the framework of capitalism and through support of the existing bourgeois parties.

A Liberal Capitalism

It must also be kept constantly in mind that capitalism in the United States since the very beginnings of the factory system has been in a position to make concessions to the working class. Not only was it necessary to grant concessions for the reason pointed out above but the ruling class was in a position to do something in a practical way. The exploitation of the tremendous natural resources of the United States through advanced technology produced such fabulous wealth that the standard of living could be raised far above that of any other country in the world. The production of wealth was also increased by the United States remaining virtually free from the ever recurring wars that devastated European countries and consumed their wealth in such degree that even a relatively high standard of living was impossible for the working class.

The workers contemplated the economic and political concessions they had wrested from the bourgeoisie, their relatively high standard of living, the absence of militarism in the United States, their general well-being and became completely integrated into the national life. They do not understand even today that with the triumph of finance capitalism the "promise of American life" has been fulfilled.

All of these things have militated against the formation of a national labor party in the United States. We have contrasted the United States with England. In a previous article we discussed what we called the decisive factor: political leadership was developed in England, while in the United States there has been no such leadership. Here the trade-union leadership came under and remained under the complete political domination of bourgeois politics. The trade-union leaders either consciously or naively were as fully tied to the bourgeois parties as the mass of the workers. In a future article we will go into some detail on the role and program of those who attempted to assume the political leadership of the working class. We want to close this part of the discussion with an aspect of the question that has never been given the weight that it deserves.

We said in the first article in this series that, "the English workers did not begin independent political action until the organization of the unskilled workers began. Before this the English trade-union leaders had ideas similar to those later adopted by Gompers in the United States." That is, not only political activity but even economic activity was colored by the narrow interests of craft unionism.

In England the trade unions were not faced with the harassing situation caused by the attitude of the public and its own membership toward the "foreign" worker. The English movement had no *internal* race problem to deal with. Above all it had no *internal* "Negro problem" as in the United States. In organizing and fighting for the inter-

ests of the unskilled worker the British movement was organizing and demanding rights for Englishmen. The demand for higher wages was a demand for more for Englishmen. The demand for the suffrage was a demand for the right of Englishmen to vote. There was no chance of the British movement being distracted, disrupted and split over a "race question."

The Negro Problem

This is not and has never been the case in the United States. Our labor movement has always had a race problem to deal with and its record in this matter is anything but glorious. If independent political action is to be a mass movement of the working class and if the hub of the movement is the unskilled and semi-skilled workers then the very core of the agitation must be the struggle for the rights of the Negro people. That is, Negro rights would have to occupy a prominent place in the list of demands of the national labor party. To talk about independent political action of the working class while it ignored that part of itself most oppressed, would be quite a grim farce.

Not only did the labor movement fail to fight for the political and social rights of the Negro; it failed even to fight for the Negro's economic rights. Above all and to begin with the Negro was barred from the unions themselves. The record of the labor movement before the com-

ing of the C.I.O. was miserable enough throughout the present century, in the matter of organizing the millions of unskilled workers, but in the case of the Negro worker its record is completely disgraceful.

The race situation and the attitude of the labor movement to this question has been and is a prime factor in damming up and wiping out any tendency toward concrete independent political action in the form of the national labor party. Such a party if it were not a tool of the bourgeois parties would be compelled to include Negroes, foreigners, women and other oppressed elements and struggle for their full rights. Up to now the labor movement has not been willing even to apply these principles within its own trade union ranks.

Here again the question of leadership arises. And not only the question of leadership but also the question of program. While not attempting to answer now we pose something interesting and significant. In view of the racial heterogeneity of the working class in the United States, the historic race and color distinctions, the whole fabric of national thinking and practice on these matters, combined with the other national factors and characteristics we have presented—is it likely that a labor party similar to the Labour Party of Great Britain will be formed in the United States.

DAVID COOLIDGE

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