

OCTOBER REVOLUTION

- ALTERNATIVE ANALYSES

ANARCHIST ARGUMENTS 5



LAURENS OTTER

Such has been the impact on the world of the October 1917 Revolution in Russia that whatever an individual's politics, they are bound to be coloured, - if not actually wrapped up, - by/in the holder's assessment of what happened in Russia; and what has since happened resulting from the impact of the Soviet Union on politics elsewhere.

Though it is often irksome, when one has condemned racism in South Africa, imperialism in East or West, or the dangers of nuclear weapons or power, to have one's views on the Soviet Union immediately called in question; the normal cries of "go back to Moscow" have this much truth, one cannot separate one's attitude on other issues from one's attitude on this event.

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There are many analyses; the better known of which I intend to mention cursorily; to pass through others less well known; in order to describe in more detail alternatives:-

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Tories, Fascists, the SDP, most S&LDs, & many Labour Party members either hold:

that a movement of unjustified & unprecedented barbarity slaughtered an innocent Tsar (or perhaps a guilty Tsar, but an innocent Kerensky,) probably at the behest of the German High Command; that the power hungry maniacs who then came to power have been the main cause of evils that have subsequently beset the world; that all involvement of sympathizers with communism in movements of protest elsewhere in the world is obviously insincere, & that most such protest movements are artificially created by communists;

or that the Russian character, (whether shaped by the previous economic systems, the inheritance of centuries of despotism, or genetic characteristics,) is essentially & peculiarly suited to obeying imperialist despotisms; that therefore though the overthrow of the Tsar was well merited, the revolutionaries promptly built a society which reproduced the old evils; (sophisticated advocates of this theory can find much in the writings of Karl Marx to confirm their view of Russians and **their assessment of what happened;**) these while they may acknowledge the sincere motivation of radicals and even that evils exist against which they protest, assume that the future degeneration of the protest movements is inevitable.

An equally simplistic - and effectively conservative - mirror image analysis is held by the Morning Star wing of the Communists & similar old-line stalinists. Quite rightly pointing to the fact that the great majority of the world socialist movement, having pledged to prevent future wars by mass strike action, caved-in in 1914, & supported their several national governments in a classic capitalist war. To the fact that those who were to make the Russian revolution maintained the traditional socialist policy with a considerable degree of heroism & self-sacrifice. To the fact that when war-weariness caused the masses to swing to them and put them in power, they were faced with a series of military actions, both from Russian former Tsarists, & from Western intervention. To the fact that the

Soviet Union was later to play a major role in the defeat of Nazi Germany, & was to sacrifice more of its nationals' lives to that end than all other countries combined.

I would need to be writing an encyclopaedia, not a pamphlet, to begin to list all the inhumanities at home & barbarities abroad, enacted through the centuries in which we have had party government and an elected (of kinds) parliament. Even if I were to confine myself to the betrayals of the various Labour Governments and the iniquities of the governments led by the present Prime Minister the space needed would be enormous. Anyway, by & large, those prepared to believe ill of governments will remember sufficient examples, those not so prepared would not be convinced however much detail was given; so only a few amongst the very young would be moved by a catalogue of the crimes of the political Right. For them, I will in the course of the pamphlet refer to a number of far left groups (mainly in section three & four;) those with a sufficiently enquiring mind to follow up some references will be amply rewarded with information about the crimes of the Right.

It may on the other hand be a new idea for many that Communists and specifically hard-line communists (Russian Tories as many of us know them) are an essentially conservative force. Though since we have already mentioned resistance to the Nazis, and since it is part of the stock-in-trade of stalinist argument; that they claim that whereas the Right in the West deliberately built up Hitler (he was financed by Rothermere and other such British Tories before he came to power,) as a bulwark against socialism; they also claim that their own party consistently fought against fascism; it is necessary to interject that in fact their record was by no means so consistent as they say.

In Bavaria, for six months in 1927/8, the Communist & the Nazi Parties had reciprocal joint membership; (this was the National Communist phase;) though this ended, the German C.P., like others internationally, launched the next year into a phase of describing all Labour & Socialist parties - particularly the more leftwards leaning ones - as social-fascists who were alleged to be worse than the real Nazis; in pursuit of this policy in 1931 in Prussia

Communists & Nazis allied in a campaign against the Social-Democrat Government, and - through what is known as the Red-Brown Referendum - brought down that Government to open the way for Hitler to power. Brandler a leading member of the Communist Party who objected, & his supporters, were expelled from the party.

Though the C.P., throughout the world, then turned to the Popular Front against fascism, they did not abandon the view that other socialists - specifically left socialists - were the main enemy; for now everything had to be subordinated to an alliance with liberal capitalists, (in Britain the slogan was "Popular Front behind Progressive Conservatives - like Eden & Churchill. Socialist demands were an embarrassment, & those who made them were liable to be labelled agents of Hitler. Then the line again changed with the Stalin-Hitler Pact; this was not just an agreed neutrality, Stalin supplied Hitler with railway coaches for the transport of troops from the Polish to the French front.

During the Pact, the world C.P.s were told to ally with the most powerful forces in any country opposing the war. If this was fascist, or otherwise racist, so be it; so that in South Africa, the Communists were allied at the beginning of the war to the Afrikaner Nationalists; (some party members naturally, perhaps the most famous of whom to the English was Fr. Michael Scott, resigned from the party over this.) In the USA it meant an alliance with Lindbergh.

Then of course the line changed once more. In the Coalition & Electoral Truce the Communists found what they had wanted in the Popular Front, - though most of their then associates, found the Tory influence too strong for their taste, & had either turned to the emergent Common Wealth, or had unhappily reverted to Labour and tried to ignore the Truce. Communists in Britain published leaflets and posters calling for the death penalty for strikers, alleging that all such were Hitler's agents. In India they supported the imprisonment of Congress members. In the States they forced their Black members to call off a protest march that was planned in Washington. Again in Britain they canvassed for Tory candidates in elections.

It is this last phase of their anti-Nazi activity on which

the stalinists expects others to judge him/her. But that was a time when C.P. members often had a deserved reputation amongst strikers, or the discontented in the forces, of being police informers.

So, when not so long ago, to mark the fortieth anniversary of the war's end, we saw - in the Peace Movement & elsewhere - C.P. members promoting a view of history shorn in vital respects. The end of the war we were told was a time of perfect harmony, when the Great Powers stood united. Everyone should wish to get back to this unity & harmony. No mention - even when the stalinist was facing a CND audience - of the little matter of Hiroshima; bombed nearly six months after Japan had first sued to surrender. No mention of the fact that people throughout Europe, whether in countries that had supported Hitler or ones that had been occupied by the Nazis, were left to starve; while - often in the same areas - military authorities destroyed army surplus food. No mention of the hypocrisy of the war crime trials, when the victors were able to charge the vanquished, (or at least those who were not prepared to buy their freedom by cooperating in a new war effort,) often for comparatively trivial offences, that all soldiers commit; while no one from the winning side - whatever his/her war-time conduct - was tried.

I may seem to have travelled far from the subject of an analysis of the soviet union; I am attempting to illustrate my initial contention that anyone who has a simplified black and white view of the regime that arose in Russia in the years succeeding the Revolution; (whether they see that regime as the devil incarnate, or whether they see it as perfection;) will be prepared to subordinate critical judgement and act always at the behest of their particular rulers (whether they be those of the Western Allies or of the Soviets) & will - in consequence - excuse whatever crimes against humanity are committed.

Though, as I have said, space would not permit me even to make a start at listing the crimes committed by the British Right, socially at home, or imperially; and any short list would only praise the Tories with faint damns; it would be worthwhile (since we are already talking of how the

stalinists supported the Tories in the latter years of the war,) to mention that this was reciprocated. During the 1945 General Election the Tories published a book - curiously never reprinted - in which they argued that the most important issue after the War would be getting on with Russia; & therefore with "Uncle Joe". The one thing, they said, that the Soviets disliked more than any other was Trotskyism. They proceeded to argue that all British parties, to the Left of the Tories, - Liberals, Labour, Common Wealth & the ILP, - were influenced by Trotskyism. (As well, of course, as the real British Trotskyists, the R.C.P.) Even the British Communist Party they argued was slightly suspect of Trotskyist influence. They ended by asking people to vote Tory; but if they could not bring themselves so to do, to vote Communist instead.

Older readers may remember the sickening adulation of "Uncle Joe" that through the war-time characterised the Tory Press. When it came to the push the British Right recognized the Russian Tories as their natural allies.

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Reformist Ortodocies -

Labour Leaders, Radical Liberals & Greens;
Gorbachovine & Euro-Communists.

Rejecting the black & white approach. Starting from the belief that not only Tsarism needed to be overthrown to permit Russia & most of Eastern Europe to begin to advance towards freedom; but also that the war needed to be opposed, & that no allegedly democratic government, that attempted to continue fighting the war, could save the Russian people from starvation.

Continuing from the unreserved - however belated - condemnation of the Western invasions ("Intervention") of the new Russian state, which imposed on the infant republic five years of devastating war; the reformist, both those who support NATO & those who support the Warsaw Pact, concedes that a major part of the blame for subsequent stalinist crimes lies with the Western governments.

Both forms, also, accept that the scars of this civil war, at

the very birth of the Soviet Republic, horribly disfigured the society that arose. Was the origin of evils that were later to grow and do untold damage.

Both, too, would add that there can be no doubt that Western politicians, out of fear of the Soviets, deliberately financed, helped and encouraged the rise of fascism in the West. That though the Communist record is by no means blameless, with regards fascism, it stands head and shoulders more honourably than that of the average Rightist politician. Even of many who in the end saw the dangers of Hitlerism, & who have in consequence, a reputation as great anti-fascist politicians. Would argue from this that the threat fascism posed, particularly to the Soviet world, was such as to increase the crippling effects of earlier Western intervention; and was in part responsible for many of the worst horrors of the Stalin regime.

Where the two streams divide is not on the question of responsibility. Those who support NATO would say that however one apportions blame in the past; one has to accept that Communism was so marred by its experience that it has produced a regime as bad as the worst that the West was. (While, by & large, the Western countries have over the years abandoned imperialism; and, -except for the temporary enormity of Thatcherism, - has grown more compassionate & abolished the worst evils of social injustice.) That whether it is judged in terms of respect for the environment, in terms of trade union liberties, in terms of the material well-being of the less well off in society, in those of civil liberties; Russia would appear to fall short of standards to which in the affluent metropolitan countries of the West we are accustomed.

Those who support the Warsaw Pact would say that the privileges of the West were paid for by the peoples of their former empires, and that these are still paying the price. That companies - e.g. RTZ - may be controlled to some extent, so that their despoliation is limited in Europe, & looks better than the Soviet Union; but their actions in Africa are every bit as bad. That British & European trade unionists have been in the past cushioned, have been the aristocracy of labour, & things are different

throughout most of the world, and - to this day - Britain derives vast sums of its income from the greater impoverishment of the "under-developed world".

Those who support, critically or otherwise, the Warsaw Pact, while accepting that under Stalin, gross crimes were committed, would argue that these either have already been, or are being rectified. Many, of course, never admitted such crimes until Khrushchev's 20th Congress Speech; and then immediately assumed that the fact that he had denounced them was proof that they were already rectified; but then, now - as a result of the Gorbachov era - concede that there had been those with power who dragged their feet about rectifying the crimes of stalinism, but, of course, assume that the fact that Gorbachov has denounced them means that everything is now being cleared up satisfactorily. Obviously the line between this uncritical attitude and that of the hard-line stalinist, (while they are apparently opposed to each other,) is narrow; both accept authority unthinkingly.

Similarly amongst reformist members of the pro-NATO block, there are those, who at base might better be classed with the hard Right. Some closely parallel the above. They accept that imperialism, social injustice, abuse of police power, racism, have characterised Western society in the past; but are confident that this is all a matter of the past, the evils have been or will soon be abolished. Some are ex-Communists who have seen that a new ruling elite has arisen in stalinist countries, - Djilas & the New Class, Wittfogel & Oriental (hydraulic society) despotism, and various modifications of Burnham's Managerial Society theories, - but who think this is unique to stalinist countries; consequently argue that the new oppressors are worse than the old, that people should prefer the devil they know to the new threatened satan.

According to the particular interests of the reformer, (as well as to whether he or she takes a pro-Nato or a pro-Warsaw Pact stance,) the analysis will change. For one though violence was permissible to overthrow the Tsar, it was not permissible to overthrow Kerensky. (It is not considered relevant that in fact very little was used for the latter purpose, and that violent confrontation only

came when generals - previously themselves in revolt against the Kerensky Government, but, naturally, from the right, - attempted to overthrow the new soviet government.) This argument holds that, constitutionalism, the preservation of a system of law is essential to the preservation of civil liberties and that therefore, - given the possibility that Kerensky might have introduced & instituted such a system, - that revolutionary action was unjustifiable.

Others

would think in terms of trade union organization as the fundamental guarantee of workers' liberties, (perhaps ignoring the possibility that the soviets in 1917 were if anything more answerable to democratic rank & file control, more responsive to the wishes of the working class than any trade union,) and so the absence of trade union rights is the all important factor.

For yet

others approach to the environment is the crucial issue.

But such is the untrustworthiness of the Media, such the limitations on what the two sides allow to be published; that on each such point there are people on each side of the fence saying: "I agree there are faults on both sides, but on the crucial issue of ... you have to concede that the ... are far worse than the other side." Whether the West is more destructive of the environment (even given Chernobyl) is possible, but by no means certain. Trade unions, as we know them do not exist in the soviet block, but how much more of Thatcherism they could survive here is uncertain. When Fr Popieluzko was murdered by state police they were brought to trial; the authorities still deny that Hilda Murrell was similarly murdered. (April 25, 88: one lives in hopes that the time will come that Britain will show itself, in this respect, as democratic as Poland under Jaruzelski.)

The conspiratorial nature of the bolshevik Party, the over-reliance on full time activists, (resulting in a consequent loss of influence by ordinary workers in the party,) is, understandably, instanced by many pro-Nato social democrats; but all too often these are prepared to excuse the manifest failures, & failures of nerve, on the part of Western reformist parties, and damn only the crimes of the East.

"Mainstream". Revolutionaries

By definition, those for whom the term revolutionary is appropriate are not given to supporting nuclear power blocks & their policies. But as with the contrast between the conventional Right and the Stalinists; the pro-Nato reformists and the Revisionist supporters of the Warsaw Pact; the revolutionary traditions can be grouped into two main streams.

On the one hand groups which from the beginning dismissed the Russian Revolution as an irrelevancy, or those which Lenin regarded as "infantilist" ultra-left, with whom - as developing technology has made war and the destruction of the environment more important, than it was, so that views in the past associated with eccentric figures like Tolstoy, are now the stuff of every day politics - we must class direct actionist pacifists & radical Greens.

On the other a number of vanguardist traditions of which the Trotskyists are the largest - both in terms of the number of competing groups, and in those of the numbers of people within such groups, - but are not alone.

The former traditions, for one reason or another, argue either that there never was a socialist revolution in Russia, or that its gains had been lost, at the very latest by 1921; & that there is therefore no good reason to take sides in any Cold War.

They may - for instance the SPGB - say that Russia was economically not ready for socialism, that the majority of revolutionaries had never considered what socialism entails, & that socialism can only be built when the majority consciously wishes so to do, or that Lenin, anyway, only intended to build a capitalist society, and it was not until Stalin that Russia even claimed to be in the process of building socialism, and he perverted the meaning of the word in order to make that claim.

Or - today mainly anarchist positions, but seventy years ago also posed by Marxists such as the German (& other) Communist Workers' parties, - they may argue either "it was

our revolution, Lenin managed to snatch it from us", or "October was just a coup d'etat that ended the real soviet revolution". To those who have heard only of the February & the October risings, & are not aware that there were a succession of developments in 1917, this will seem to be a mixture of two incompatible arguments. Others will be aware that the initial formation of local soviets was quite independent of changes in central government; that for most of the year the struggle to maximize soviet power was quite independent of the bolsheviks, (at times opposed to them,) that Zinoviev, Kamenev, Stalin & Molotov, (who may well have still commanded a majority on the Bolshevik Central Committee,) opposed the October rising, denouncing the plans for it publicly only just before it took place: & that in consequence, Western observers, - like The Manchester Guardian reporter, - at the time attributed the rising to the smaller Maksimalist Party (maximalist).

Thus the fact that the bolsheviks were able to impose their rule on the soviets after the rising in October; (by getting the majority of the soviets to vote to abrogate their power, vesting it for six months in the bolshevik central committee, by the end of which of course the bolsheviks had consolidated their control, had sent in troops to quell the most fervent revolutionary workers, - the Vyborg Quarter of what is now Leningrad;) was in a sense a coup d'etat, ending the real soviet revolution; while anarchists, Maksimalists & other "ultra-lefts" had certainly been more unanimously & whole-heartedly in favour of the October rising than were the Bolsheviks.

Those who from these basic positions; hold that the Soviet Union is a class divided society, not essentially different from the West; and that this class division stems either from the fact that the revolution was premature, or that the bolsheviks were able to impose their power over the soviets; obviously go on to say "a curse on both your houses", & see no reason to support any movement in which the communists are dominant. On occasions this has the unfortunate side effect that such libertarian revolutionaries distrust forms of action which were before 1917 pioneered by just such libertarians.

Contrasting with these are those who think that the methods of the Bolsheviks were essentially sound, but believe that

the gains of October 1917 have been subsequently lost. The commonest form of this tradition, (both in terms of the number of people who adhere to it, and in the multiplicity of the groups claiming to be the true heirs of the tradition,) is of course the Trotskyist. In the Thirties there were groupings that derived their ideas from other Communist oppositions - such as the Bukharinists; and there were various leftist breakaways from Trotskyism, (of whom the Oehlerites survived until the Sixties.) Immediately after the war there were various dissident "internationalist" stalinists, and a few individual Titoists. The Socialist Humanists who founded the New Left were at their origin Leninists critical of perversions of Leninism; but their belief in rank & file spontaneity either took them further, or vanished letting them relapse into Euro-Communism.

Some vanguardists - notably the groups tracing back to the original Italian Communist Party, (The Italian "Left",) - share the "ultra-left" belief that the soviet union is state capitalist; and also share the belief that it degenerated within the lifetime of Lenin. They believe that what caused the degeneration was Lenin's willingness - in order to defend the soviet union - to make alliances with reformist & progressive western politicians. It was a lack of dedicated firmness in the vanguard party, not the monopoly of power held by that vanguard, which caused the revolution to degenerate.

But it is more common to believe, (as the various Fourth Internationalists & their constituent groups do,) that in some way the soviet union remains a workers' state. But that it has gained a bureaucracy which confines the progressive activities of the workers' state & is parasitic upon it. Though effectively such groups vary from those that are virtually indistinguishable from the more independent minded (Castro-type) stalinists, to ones that insist that while the Soviet Union is the most economically progressive society in the world, it is politically and socially the most reactionary; they all pay lip service to Trotsky's insistence that a revolution would be needed in the soviet union to remove the bureaucracy, but that this would not be a social revolution, merely a political one.

The Trotskyists here refer back to a theory which Trotsky elaborate most fully in the Revolution Betrayed, published in 1936; (Ch. IX.) Trotsky there specified that he was producing a short term analysis for what he believed was a purely temporary phenomenon. Indeed the whole theory was produced as part of a proof that stalinism could not survive for more than a generation, since the bureaucracy has no power to transmit its privileges to its children. It has therefore had to be considerably adapted as a theory, in order to explain that the bureaucracy still survives fifty years later.

So much did Trotsky assume that the bureaucracy was merely a temporary phenomenon, that two years later in "The USSR in War", insisting that the bureaucracy in the soviet union would be proved to be merely an episodic relapse; that he predicted that at the end of the war, then about to begin, world capitalism would be overthrown, and that in the process the soviet bureaucracy would be swept aside.

"If however it is conceded that the present war will provoke not revolution but a decline of the proletariat, then there remains another alternative; the further decay of monopoly capitalism, its further fusion with the state & the replacement of democracy wherever it still remained by a totalitarian regime... . . . lead under these conditions to the growth of a new exploiting class (in the Soviet Union) from the Bonapartist fascist bureaucracy".

Just as Trotsky's assessment of the prospects of world revolution appear in retrospect over-optimistic; so his predictions as to the only alternative were pessimistic. Though when one considers the growth of the military & military-linked power complexes in the West, (which have been enough to frighten a Republican General like Eisenhower,) the fusion of monopoly capitalism with the state did certainly occur; and the growth of secrecy & Secret Service power that this has brought about, while it may not constitute the replacement of democracy where it persists; nevertheless has constituted its corruption.

Of whatever variety the vanguardist aims to reproduce the strategy & tactics, the organizational forms, the transitional stages and demands; and the internal relations that characterised Lenin's party. Naturally they have their disagreements as to the exact nature of what these were, & to the extent that they should be rigidly or imaginatively applied.

This may lead them, (it does with most Trotskyists,) into acting as if they were a particularly militant variant of ordinary Communist Party members; or (as in some cases) as very doctrinaire, but in most ways very conformist, members of the Labour Party. Though the Italian Left groups believe that all collaboration with reformists inevitably leads to an acceptance of reformist mentality, causes them to shun all areas of struggle where they are likely to encounter such corrupting influences.

The "curse on both your houses" (and the groups that will be considered as stemming from Rosmerism) libertarians are not subject to the same inhibitions about whom they might meet in struggle, precisely because they are readier to argue against the politics of the vanguardists. For where the vanguardist would be inhibited, believing that a fellow Leninist - however corrupted by bureaucracy - must be regarded as being on the same side in conflict with the "boss class" and its agents; the Libertarian would see the worst such as open agents of the ruling class, and even the best vanguardists as misguidedly pursuing policies that would facilitate the rise of a new class to power.

One group I have not considered, in Britain the Socialist Workers' Party, largely because though its theories might place either with the Italian Left or the next section; its actions are virtually indistinguishable from activist Europe Communists; and it is impossible to make a rational reconciliation of the two.

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Rosmerism

In using the term Rosmerist for the groups that follow I am

not implying that all the groups I so categorize, describe themselves in this way. The fact is there is no agreed collective term for a number of disparate traditions, the earliest of which, not always acknowledged as the predecessor, being Rosmerism.

Nor by the same token am I depicting an analysis which represents the final judgement of Rosmer just before he died. I am referring to the fact that the earliest analysis of the rise of a new ruling class - not merely in the Soviet Union, though then most notably there, but throughout the world, - was thrashed out in the columns of *Revolutions Proletarienne*, - sparked off by articles by Simone Weil, - under the inspiration of Rosmer.

This ruling class was seen as coming to power throughout the world, Weil, herself, was inspired to the analysis by noting a German paper, much read by civil servants, and minor officialdom of varying sorts, (in the military, in big business, in trade unions, & amongst party officials of a wide variety of parties,) whose editors supported the Nazis on German issues and Stalin on world issues. Her biographer was subsequently to claim that Trotsky wrote the *Revolution Betrayed* as an answer to Weil's essays.

Others notably Castoriadis, Dunayevskaya, C.L.R. James, (and in the immediate aftermath of the war, within the restricted circles of the Common Wealth Movement, W.J. Taylor,) have subsequently developed the theory far further. Generally without acknowledging, (and possibly usually without even knowing of,) Rosmer's pioneering work; which has meant that some of the insights - over-simplifications though they may have been - that Weil & Rosmer first displayed have been lost.

& 1917-23

Any revolution combines two aspects. The objective revolution is about the control of power. The subjective revolution is a matter of the mass desire for change. The October revolution was objectively about workers' power

exercised through the soviets. It was subjectively about the desire for a changed society, a desire that had been fostered over the years by a number of socialist parties.

Though the Mezhrainontii were a major influence amongst the soviets; (they were Trotsky's immediate associates who fused with the Bolsheviks, a couple of months before the revolution;) - though Gorki's immediate following also was influential; and though Lenin personally had enormous prestige; the bolsheviks as a party had not played a significant role in building the soviets. The party rule that only counted activity in a body under the direct control of the party, as constituting party work, (of which all members of the party had to fulfill a quota,) had meant that those party members initially active within the soviets had been (before Lenin's return from exile,) expelled by the Internal Leadership.

Thus though the Bolsheviks, - & indeed the Mensheviks, & other Marxists to the Right of the Bolsheviks, - had played a major, if not predominant, part in spreading revolutionary consciousness; (in the subjective revolution;) they were not the major influence in the actual seizure of power; (the objective revolution.)

It was basic to Marxist theory that a revolution in an economically backward country could not be a socialist revolution. (Though Trotsky partly through the theory of Permanent Revolution, partly through his argument that it was the weak links of capitalism which would first be broken; - specifically countries which had started to industrialize, mainly on a basis of foreign capital, so that industrialisation was unnaturally concentrated within a limited area; - had in some ways moved away from that premise.)

Consequently the dominant sectors of the subjective revolution saw the purpose as being to push through capitalist industrialization; but arguing (or at least Trotsky did) that the Russian bourgeoisie was too pusillanimous to make its own revolution; and that therefore the workers had to do the job for them.

The revolutionary workers themselves had other ideas. In the cities, they disregarded the theories of the Marxist leaders, raised the slogan of all power to the soviets, picketed Bolshevik headquarters when that party failed to support the demand, & swept to power. The smaller groups, - anarchists, Maksimalists (half anarchists, half ultra-left Marxists,) Mezhariontii, & Gorki's "international social democrats"- assumed an importance quite out of accord with their previous strength. An objective revolution took place for which there was no adequate basis in subjective consciousness; and it was for this reason that the soviets were then prepared to vest their power in the bolsheviks

In the countryside the most influential revolutionary party, the Social Revolutionary Party, had always held (and had eventually convinced Marx,) that it was possible for Russia to by-pass the bourgeois revolution. When the Left wing of that party broke away from the main organization to join in the October Rising, it was under the impression that the bolsheviks - under Trotsky's influence - had abandoned their obsessive concern with the prior necessity of economic growth. Here too the objective revolution ran ahead of the subjective as manifest in bolshevik theory.

(The Maksimalists had been an earlier left-wing breakaway from the Social Revolutionaries; while again a party of predominantly rural origins their chief strength was within the armed forces which were of almost exclusively peasant origin. This gave them in the actual rising an high profile, which explains the views of the Manchester Guardian reporter. It also meant that at Kronstadt & elsewhere, where revolutionary troops were to feel they were betrayed, they turned naturally to Maksimalist leaders.)

Lenin, in order to advance economic development rapidly, imposed on-man-management, thereby taking power away from the soviets which had initially taken over control of their respective industries. He introduced Western economic processes, which he, himself, described as the "last refinements of bourgeois cruelty" (Taylorism.) Naturally this bred discontent. He defined the nature of soviet society, as workers' controlled state capitalism, in transition to

Socialism. Later - at the time of a controversy within the party on the role of trade unions - he qualified this as "workers' controlled state capitalism, in transition to Socialism, but with severe bureaucratic deformations".

There is an apparent contradiction for a Marxist to talk of "workers' controlled state capitalism"; and one needs to explain that there is a conscious reference to Lassalle's "Qu'est que c'est qu'une Constitution", (probably the only article by that author wholly praised by Marx,) in which it was said that in the immediate aftermath of a revolution, the masses - despite not controlling the economy - might nevertheless control the political superstructure.

Such a situation it was stressed could not last long, certainly not longer than the revolutionary fervour that made the revolution. For the upper and middle classes in any society directing the lives of others, (the basis of ruling them,) is part of their everyday work & life-style. It is totally alien to the work or life-style of the lower classes; & so for these to rule it must be done outside their working life, & outside their normal home life. While in exceptional circumstances of mass mobilization, the majority may meet together to take direct collective decisions, there is always a tendency for them to leave the executive role to those more used to exercising it.

State capitalism, because the state intervened directly, so as to order capitalists to pursue this or that path. Workers' controlled because the soviets had powers over the state. A concept that by definition could apply only to a very brief transition; which is why Trotsky was later to use the term a "Transitional Workers' state"; ((unfortunately his modern followers have forgotten the significance of that Transitional.))

But Lenin's own actions ensured that the Soviets no longer exercised control. They had delegated state power to the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks had instituted one-man-management, and reduced the role of the soviets to "steering", (the more literal translation of the word used when Trotsky & other Leninists talk of workers' control.) Lenin's regime had (by his own statement) "taken over, almost intact the entire apparatus of Tsarist despotism". Only to the

extent that the Bolsheviks were answerable to the workers, did Lenin leave in existence any element of workers' control.

Objectively, Lenin's death left the soviet union as a capitalist society, where the state exercised tight political control over the capitalists; and the state was controlled by a party that subjectively desired socialism and the furtherance of soviet power. (Only a small proportion of Russian capital was then in the hands of the state.) But there were already - even visible to the head of the regime - severe bureaucratic deformations. The bolsheviks had already suppressed the most militant Leningrad workers, & the Kronstadt sailors, the Moscow equivalents of the Vyborg Quarter, & the revolutionary peasants in the Ukraine and elsewhere, & instituted purges and suppressed two (at least) internal oppositions, as well as their former allies of the Left Social-Revolutionary Party.

Thermidor

Stalin's election, (or rather the suppression of Lenin's Testament, which allowed Stalin to retain the position of party General Secretary after Lenin's death,) marked the triumph of the bureaucracy within the bolshevik party. It matters not whether Trotsky was or was not in fact significantly different. It may well be that, by Lenin's death, things were bound to go the way they did, sooner or later. The significant point is that such elements of internal party democracy as still persisted were destroyed. The autonomy of the trade unions and all other workers' organizations was progressively destroyed, as the party came to appoint the heads of all such institutions.

Yet, after the fall of Bukharin, the Stalin era saw giant strides towards the abolition of private capital. Where Lenin had not greatly changed ownership, taking for the state only the same sorts of powers that in Britain Churchill took during the war, Stalin took over ownership. For those under the misapprehension that socialism is the same as state ownership, that was indeed a social-revolutionary change. But it was a change accompanied by a total suppression of workers' power, and for those who believe socialism is about workers taking power in order to abolish class distinctions,

that was the antithesis of socialism.

This raised problems for the analysis. In Lenin's terminology, Russia was capitalist because private enterprise predominated, state capitalist because the state had the power to direct the owners of capitalist business to pursue party-dictated ideas. Given a transition to state ownership what was the nature of society. Some - in many cases with reluctance - held that whatever the brutality, whatever the bureaucratic distortion, this wholesale nationalisation must constitute socialism. "Objectively, however much it merited distaste and condemnation, Stalinism was revolutionary." (This was the meaning of the comment, initially, that Trotsky was objectively counter-revolutionary.) So many who had supported Trotsky, (& indeed people who had supported the Workers' Opposition, one of the pre-Trotskyist Left Oppositions,) submitted to stalinism.

It was then that Weil wrote and Rosmer published the first articles putting a new interpretation on that term state capitalism. It had been used, previously, in a variety of ways. Both Marx & Bakunin argued that the policies of the other could only replace capitalism with a state variant. Marx also so designated the nationalisation programmes of Lassalle & his followers. Marx in the New York Herald Tribune and elsewhere had predicted that the probable form of capitalism in Russia would be state capitalist; and had (with remarkably prescience) painted a picture of such state capitalism that showed a remarkable resemblance to stalinism.

Yet, elsewhere, Marx had said of state capitalism that it would be a society in which only one neck would stand between the workers and self-liberation; that it would inevitably be unstable and easy to overthrow. That was not the reality that faced opponents of stalinism in the Thirties. Weil & Rosmer had supported Trotsky in saying earlier that because there had been a power stalemate between the petit bourgeoisie & soviet power, a bureaucracy, (of which Stalin was merely the visible head,) had risen to power. But, whereas, until 1933, Trotsky believed that only reforms were needed to change this, and the bureaucratic power had not constituted a counter-revolution; Revolution Proletarienne argued that the bureaucracy had instituted a new form of collectivist capitalism.

Weil's categorization used the term "bureaucratic collectivism" for this, in order to distinguish the state capitalism she was describing from earlier analyses or predictions. But it was essential to the analysis that bureaucratic collectivism was a statist, (or international monopoly,) form of capitalism. Just as Entrepreneurial Capitalism (as defined by Marx) differed from Mercantilism, but both were societies based on the control of Capital; so the bureaucratic collectivist form differed from the entrepreneurial.

She pointed out that though entrepreneurial capitalism was ushered onto the stage of history by the French Revolution, it developed faster in Britain (which had had no revolution) than it did in France; conversely though Mercantilism saw at its birth, the English Civil War, it developed most rapidly in France where the Monarchy had survived and subdued rebellious movements. In both cases the revolutionary wars provoked transformations, in which the old order adapted itself. Though she regarded fascism as a right-wing form of the same bureaucratic collectivist transformation, she denied the normally accepted Marxist belief that a transition from one to another form of class rule could only come as a result of insurrections in each and every country where the transition would take place. A threat - such as the Napoleonic Wars - & the demands such wars made on production, could be ample cause and occasion, for the technological changes that constitute a revolution; and as the Great Reform Bill showed, once the technology is changed, the political transformation may be less dramatic.

One of her theories, later much vulgarised, and debated in the corrupt form, stated simply: "The essence of capitalism is competition. The normal form of competition between states is war. So state capitalism must essentially be geared to war or preparation for war." From which she argued that whereas to the Marxist war was merely an incidental evil of entrepreneurial capitalism; not part of the basic and dominant contradiction, (except insofar as it is the inevitable product of the boom-slump cycle) it was the basic contradiction of state capitalism.

Weil's biographer claimed that Trotsky wrote the Revolution Be-

trayed in answer to this theory. Deutscher in his biography of Trotsky, mentioning Weil only to say that Trotsky thought her a muddle-head, attributes the impetus for the book entirely to Trotsky's shock following the victory of Hitler, & the abject failure (coupled with extreme sectarianism) of the German Communist Party to put up any real opposition. It is a dispute that need not detain us. What is certain is that Trotsky made a total reappraisal of his historical conception of the Jacobin Thermidor; that whereas until 1933 he furiously denied that a Russian Thermidor had taken place, & broke politically with anyone who claimed it had; he now agreed that Stalin's accession to power in 1924 did in fact constitute Thermidor.

Thermidor had been the end of the revolutionary period of the First French Republic. Though recalled in English fiction as the end of the period of the guillotine, in fact far more people died in the counter-revolutionary violence initiated by the Thermidorians, than had died under the revolutionary Convention. It was the check to the revolutionary movement that allowed a new ruling class to rise to power. That class - as Trotsky realized for the first time in 1934 - was not a restoration of the Monarchical old order. Nor even was it the victory of those discontented prominent Mercantilists who had first launched the revolutionary movement, & had then been swept aside by the Convention. From Thermidor onwards there was a stalemate between the masses & the remnant of the dispossessed ruling classes, that allowed Bonaparte & his supporters to come to power balancing the conflicting classes; and from the needs of Bonapartism, arose the new entrepreneurial class.

That far Trotsky's analysis matched Weil's. Trotsky, however could not conceive of a form of ownership that did not contain individual inheritability - the right to pass on goods to children - (the bureaucracy of course passes on a privileged educational system, management-training, an old boy network & consumer goods, but not the ownership of industrial wealth or commercial enterprises.)

But it should be stressed that nevertheless Trotsky's analysis of the degeneration of the bureaucracy went somewhat further than that of those who now claim to be his heirs. Not merely because he insisted that he did not believe this bureau-

cracy to be a new ruling class was that he didn't believe it could survive more than a generation.

Remembering that Lenin had said that Russia was state capitalist .. "but with severe bureaucratic deformations", Rakovski, Trotsky's close confidant (though later broken by Stalinism) had said that it had degenerated from this so that it was now a bureaucratic state with only residual proletarian elements. Trotsky's terminology "a degenerate workers' state" presupposed that it was already deformed by bureaucracy before it degenerated. He would therefore have had little patience with those who claiming to be purist Trotskyists reverted to the designation a "deformed workers' state."

Nevertheless what became the Rosmerite (rather than the Weillist) theory developed essentially in argument with Trotsky, asserting that the bureaucracy could survive longer, and that it was obtaining power on an international scale, not just in Russia.

Incidentally since some have argued that the contemporary New Right reversion to Monetarist policies, - basically opposed to state direction, - contradicts the thesis of a bureaucratic conquest of power, on a world scale; it should be pointed out that despite the Great Reform Bill, the land-owning classes & the Mercantilist remnant found that the Industrial Revolution upgraded the value of their property, & so Toryism had a revival in the middle of the last century, as the party of the pre-capitalist elite, at a time when few would dispute the dominance of capitalism.

aftermath of war

Trotsky argued that to the extent that it was in the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy to defend the Soviet Union against external attack that it was still capable of playing a progressive role. But that that progressive role was confined to the Soviet Union itself. It could not be progressive abroad; for any extension of the socialist world inevitably hastened its own downfall. He noted that, outside Russia, the Stalinists moved from sectarian ultra left policies (the "Third Period") coupled with occasional alliances with the Nazis; to broad front reformism - when they acted as if

the main enemy were those who persisted in calling for workers' action for social change; to outright alliance with Hitler, only partially disguised as a reversion to the sectarian stance of the "Third Period"; to craven submission and alignment with Churchill's war cabinet. Rejecting the belief that the bureaucracy had become a new class he could only make sense of these switches in this way; (& indeed, there was little argument in this between him & the Rosmer faction, which held that the bureaucracy was too new a ruling class to engage in a full scale competitive struggle with the ancien regime in the West.)

Having learnt from Trotsky to assume that the soviet bureaucrac would never play a progressive role outside the borders of Russia; some of his followers had difficulty accepting his support for the Soviet invasions of Finland and Poland in 1939. He pointed out that where the Red Army advanced, there peasants, behind the lines of the Finnish or Polish armies, rose in revolt; forming Soviet-like committees to reorganize society. He rightly argued that the Soviet invasions had made possible risings with definite socialist intention. He was on less firm ground when pointing to the fact that after the Red Army had conquered an area, it brought its economy into line with that of the soviet union and claimed that this was despite the bureaucracy a revolutionary act.

That was to ignore the fact that the revolutionary element of the 1917 Revolution had been Soviet power; (even though this was so soon curtailed by - inter alia - Trotsky himself;) the Red Army re-organized the economy precisely so as to prevent any growth, development or even continuation of soviet power. The imposition of heierarchy went far further than anything Lenin had introduced.

The minority that were shocked borrowed some of the formulations of the Rosmerites, but except for James, Dunayevskaya, & a very few others such, generally moved over to reformist socialism, over the next ten years. The orthodox majority were later to use the precedent of Trotsky's '39 arguments to cover post-war happenings; ignoring the protests of Mme. Trotsky, who furiously denied that there was any parallel.

Stalin, in Spain, Germany, China & elsewhere, had intervened

to prevent his followers pursuing policies that might take them to power. Whether Trotsky's explanation is accepted; or the Rosmerite view that the infant ruling class of an economically backward country, was too frail to compete on the commercial field with a similar & "friendly" bureaucratic collectivism in an economically more advanced, (or, -though backward, - much larger;) hardly matters now. It only matters that Trotsky's insistence that the bureaucracy would never wish to export revolution be remembered.

On the face of it, the post-war world refuted this belief; while it certainly did not tally with Trotsky's prediction of social revolution in all the major capitalist countries.

But Trotsky's rule about Stalinism was not contradicted by the Red Army's defensive war. It was not contradicted by the eventual victory of this; (though it is doubtful if Trotsky foresaw the degree of collaboration between the Western Powers and the Soviet Union.) It was not contradicted by the Yalta-Teheran carve-up of the world into spheres of influence. Nor by the Red Army marching into the lands assigned to the Soviet sphere of influence. Nor; when the West once more resumed its anti-communist stance; was Russia's 1948 imposition of Popular Democracies in those countries that were within her sphere of influence, - necessarily - anything other than a purely defensive action by the bureaucracy.

Though of course all these acts are equally consistent with the actions of a new ruling class; (a ruling class that has not merely been born out of Thermidor, but has survived Fructidor and triumphed in Brumaire,) this would shun bringing too much into its sphere of competition, but would be happy to absorb what it could.

The difficulty for the Trotskyist theory came where the Revolution was brought about not by the Russian Red Army, but by home-grown ones. Trotsky in predicting that Stalin would always intervene to prevent his followers taking power, forgot that war conditions might prevent him so doing. In Yugoslavia and in Albania, under the conditions of the Popular Front, skeletal guerrilla armies had formed. Hitler (despite his pact with Stalin) could not permit these to survive. They for self-defence had to launch a full scale guerrilla campaign. The West needing allies had to help.

Whereas in Poland and Finland the Soviets by instituting social change, prevented the self-mobilization of Polish & Finnish workers going further; but did at the same time integrate areas into the Soviet social system. Whereas in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the rest of Poland, Roumania and Bulgaria, the same integration was done purely as a defensive reaction against Cold Warrior bellicosity. There was no similar explanation for the social systems of Albania & Yugoslavia; especially when - in documents that were released at the time of the Tito split - it appeared that in 43-44, Stalinist theoreticians had laid down a thesis that social revolution was only possible in countries immediately contiguous to the Soviet Union.

Yugoslavia, Albania (& - soon after - China) achieved revolution, of a stalinist sort, because in the mid & late Thirties, in pursuance of Stalin's then policies, their parties had given hostages to fortune, and could not later withdraw and survive; while Stalin was - by 1939 - no longer in a position to ensure that they chose suicide rather than power.

None of these however ever had a soviet revolution; (where, in China, behind Chang Kai Shek's lines, soviets were formed they did not survive after the victory of the Red Army.) The formulation, whereby they became Degenerate & Deformed Workers' transitional states without ever having had workers revolutions was a totally unnatural extension of Trotsky's theory; ignored the whole initial meaning of the term.

Naturally each stalinist state developed its own bureaucracy, & naturally each such bureaucracy collectively had interests that in some ways conflicted with those of Russia. Stalin had - during the war - abandoned all pretence that all communist parties were equally part of the same world party all with a right to a democratic (centralist) say; and had wound up the Third International in order to please his bourgeois allies. While he lived the other countries - with the possible exception of China - were frankly colonies. It was inevitable that when he died, these differing interests would produce conflict. Tarrif walls were not ideologically permissible to a nascent bureaucratic collectivity, so the Chinese achieved the same effect with Maoist ideology.

But that was not the only extent of Stalin's inability to stem the development of forces that his own policies had brought into being. For all the reformism of the slogans ("popular front behind progressive conservatives - like Eden & Churchill"), institutions of the Popular Fronts - such as the Left Book Club in this country - did introduce a new generation to socialist politics. For those that stayed outside the party, (as for those that left, disillusioned by the Stalin-Hitler Pact,) Stalin's powers of control ceased with the winding-up of the Popular Front. (The attempt to build the People's Convention as an anti-war Popular Front was doomed to failure.)

Many former Popular Front activists went on to work in other ways for socialism; in Britain most notably those who founded Common Wealth to keep alive the ideals of socialism through the war. (A party that instituted what may well be the only entirely successful mutiny in British military history; and through the latter half of the war kept a mid-position between the anti-war revolutionary Left, and the pro-Coalition ex-reformists now subservient to the conservatives.)

It is hardly a matter of pride for Common Wealth that it put Labour in power at the end of the war, (despite the reluctance of the Labour Party itself,) not a thing that resembles a revolution, even though the Bevanites so described it. But if it had not been for CW, there could have been no 1945 Labour victory. The stalinist bureaucracy had for its own ends created forces, and these pushed the reformist bureaucracy to power; spreading bureaucratic collectivist power by the ballot box.

Cuba et alia.

The war ended with an honeymoon period between the powers, with Stalin ordering Ho Chi Minh to hand Vietnam back to the French, liquidating the League Against Imperialism, recommending patience to Gandhi, & generally pushing the same policies that had caused him to wind up the Third International. Those who argued against this were apt to be expelled from the Communists. That ended & the Cold War came. But for all the bitterness of the McCarthy anti-communism, the two sides in the Cold War propped each other

up; (as much by their supposed opposition, as they had previously when openly collaborating, when Togliatti was flown back to Italy to prevent revolution (in 44), & when Thorez headed off the revolutionary wave of 46.)

For if you, in the West, called for an end to racism, or to imperialism, if you opposed militarism, demanded better houses or wages, or shorter hours you would then be branded as an agent or dupe of the Communists. (They may try it now, but a little less convincingly.)

Conversely in the East advocating the same things made you a dupe or agent of the capitalists.

It mattered not that either way you would have faced the same sort of relationships at work, the same imperial interventions as foreign policy. These similarities were brushed aside, and the dogma that the world was divided into two socially opposed camps was expected to be given universal adherence. Of course there were (& are) differences of degree, aspects of policy or political life where one or other side's behaviour was less obnoxious than the other. But such aspects generally did (& still do) balance out, if taken over the whole canvass. Both sides in the Cold War used the fear of the other as an excuse to cover up their own misdeeds.

Nevertheless at the height of the Cold War we had the Korean & the Vietnam Wars; (used by both sides to give verisimilitude to their propaganda;) & from the latter there was a new extension of Communist power. Once again a stalinist party having put its neck out, at Stalin's behest, when Russia needed defending, had been unable to pull back when the line changed. Nevertheless in 46 Ho Chi Minh had obediently handed Vietnam back to the French, having first suppressed a workers' rising in Saigon, & liquidated some 40,000 socialists. However, he had once again, exposed his flank, by his former actions, & self-preservation dictated that he renew the fighting, so that North Vietnam became a separate socialist state.

Stalinist successes in Eastern Europe and in Eastern Asia, not only did not take communism into the developed capitalist world, but didn't threaten that world. The first

(post 1917) successful Communist seizure of power to do that was the Cuban. And the notable thing about the Cuban revolution, as about all the anti-imperialist revolutions since that have gone on from anti-imperialism, to take their countries into direct alignment with the stalinist states; that it was organized/led/ or even supported by the Communist party of the country.

The pattern found (pre-eminently in Cuba, but repeated elsewhere) is not unlike the war-time example of Common Wealth. A movement is formed under the episodic interests of the Communists, to campaign vigorously, - often if not invariably, on a broad-front anti-fascist basis; - it is abandoned by the stalinists when such a broad front campaign no longer suits the interests of the rulers of established communist states. The broad movement, however, is not all convinced by the new arguments, & the most active campaigners reform to pursue their militancy in new ways. The Communists have lost all credibility and cannot therefore intervene to prevent the struggle advancing.

Where Cuba, of course differed from the wartime Common Wealth, was that conditions were ripe for revolution. Once achieved the new government desperately needed allies and finance, & the stalinists were able to buy back the good opinion of revolutionaries whose friendship they had formerly lost.

All regimes so formed have been victories of guerrilla movements. Such movements have hardly advanced - in socialist political terms - beyond nationalist anti-imperialism; and have been able to attract small businessmen & quite wealthy peasants. Though after the revolutions they have adopted Marxist terminology, & even (in the Cuban and Algerian cases) attacked the old established communist parties for reformism, (though only for reformism, not for the outright betrayal they undoubtedly manifested,) their regimes have permitted a significant degree of petit bourgeois enterprise; so that they have not been clearly distinguishable from the wider pattern of Third World societies.

There is of course a thrust for development associated with the new bureaucracies, coupled with heroic self-sacrifice shown both by movements and individuals. But that was equally true of nineteenth century capitalist imperialism.

To continue to describe the stalinist countries in the terms **Trotsky** used, oblivious to his insistence that this was a temporary theory designed purely to explain an episodic & transitional society is to make a mockery of the whole theory.

To turn in desperation to the belief that no revolution ever occurred, - while, certainly there are reasonable grounds for denying the **Lenin** regime the revolutionary label, - nevertheless imposes all sorts of historical difficulties needing explanation.

Rosmerism, and the various theories that have grown up from the same theoretical premises, starting by conceding that though with all sorts of inherent flaws, there was a revolutionary conquest of power; that the struggle between residual ruling class power and the soviets, did allow (as Trotsky maintained) a bureaucracy to rise to power; but that this bureaucracy has subsequently maintained power for two or three generations and is therefore a new ruling class; - which like entrepreneurial capitalists and mercantilist ones before it, is in many ways progressive, and which has come to power by other means, outside the stalinist countries, (often to meet the economic, political & military challenges engendered by competition with stalinist power;) - explains the nature of the soviet union in a way consistent with observed fact and with the socialist historical method; & it avoids the double-speak that so often seems to come with other theories and methods.

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