

**THE "INTERNATIONAL  
SOCIALISTS" & THE  
RUSSIAN REVOLUTION**

**british and irish  
communist organisation**

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AND THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

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TROTSKYISM: AN EVASION OF REALITY

There are those on the left who, having constructed for themselves a stereo-type of the "Stalinist" as a vulgar and unthinking dogmatist - a person who, (probably being a worker), has got from Stalin a few pre-digested Marxist generalisations, which he understands in their Stalinist form because Stalin himself was such a dull uninspired person, but cannot understand in their more live and brilliant trotskyist or New Left forms, and which he must hang onto for dear

life as comforting articles of faith in a world that passes his comprehension - are bewildered by the British and Irish Communist Organisation, which has uncompromisingly described itself as Stalinist in locating its views on the divisions in the Communist movement subsequent to the death of Lenin, and yet which produces theoretical material which they are compelled to take account of. The B&ICO, on the other hand, has assumed from the outset that the anti-Stalinist Marxists are incapable of making coherent social analyses, or of obtaining coherent political conclusions from any accurate analyses which they do happen to make, and we have no cause to revise that opinion.

Since these are mere introductory remarks to another subject, this phenomenon cannot be gone into in detail here. Suffice it to say that the opponents of Stalin in the early '20s had no coherent programme to oppose to his. His programme related to the actuality in which the Russian revolution found itself after the defeat of the European revolution. His opponents were opposed not so much to his programme for the situation confronting the Soviet government, as to the situation confronting the Soviet government. They were opposed to the course which world history had taken. Their hopes had been disappointed, and their revolutionary spirit showed itself in a refusal to accept that their hopes had been disappointed and to deal with actualities. They were an opposition without a programme that would enable them to assume the government of the country. It wasn't fair that the revolution should have been isolated in such a backward country, and they would not soil their beautiful souls by assuming governmental responsibility for it in such circumstances. Following Matthew Arnold, they refused to recognise and take practical account of "accomplished fact".

They would neither candidly admit that they thought the Soviet government was in an impossible situation in which "degeneration" was inevitable, nor accept as socialist the measures necessary to ensure economic and social development. They saw themselves as the bearers of the revolutionary spirit in a situation in which they thought that the revolutionary spirit could not engage itself in the government of society without degenerating.

Trotsky could never finally decide whether Stalin had led the revolution astray, or whether he was the result of circumstances which had made the degeneration of the revolution inevitable. There is a fundamental difference between describing Stalin as a cause and as a consequence of the failure of the revolution. And if the opposition maintained a position of ambiguity between the two positions, that obviously can't be put down to mere intellectual incapacity.

A Communist party, after the defeat of the revolution in the industrial centres, finds itself in government in an isolated pre-capitalist society. If it is to remain in power it must tackle tasks that the Communist movement had never anticipated having to deal with. It must begin to do what it assumed capitalist economy and culture would have done for it: it must carry out basic industrialisation, it must cope with a pre-capitalist peasant agriculture that constitutes nine-tenths of the society, and it must undertake the dissemination of basic literacy. It must do what capitalism had done in Eastern Europe. And while it is doing this, doing something which is more appropriate to capitalism than to socialism, it must act in a way that Communists never expected to have to act. Many of the ideals of socialism, and even basic democratic standards, must be suspended. A kind of degeneration, (by comparison with all that socialists had ever imagined socialist government as being), cannot be avoided.

The coherent alternatives before such a government are to govern in accordance with actualities, or to resign power to the bourgeoisie on the ground that it is impermissible for a socialist government to undertake measures more appropriate to capitalism, and that the attempt to maintain working class political power in such conditions would do great damage to Communism.

Lenin was intent on maintaining working class power, and coping as a Communist government with the historic tasks of capitalism. He made the remarkable statement that he was prepared to "fight barbarism with barbarism".

Stalin was equally intent on doing so. The Oppositionists used to console themselves with the reflection that Lenin's widow said in one of their meetings in 1926 that if Lenin had not died he would by then have been in one of Stalin's political prisons. Which only goes to show how fundamentally the Opposition misunderstood Lenin, and how they romanticised him after his death. (During his lifetime they had usually been opposed to him, and their beautiful souls were regularly shocked by his frank statement of realities.)

If Lenin had lived, what would have happened would have been that the hard core Opposition would have said much the same things about him that they said about Stalin, (and he would have reduced them to impotence even more effectively than Stalin did), and that he would have lured many more of the vacillating elements into the practical work of building socialism in an isolated and backward country, (into "Stalinism"), than Stalin did.

(If Lenin had lived it is quite probable that Trotsky would never have found the moral courage to revert to trotskyism. Trotsky's experience in 1917 of the utter bankruptcy of the politics with

which he had opposed Lenin since 1903, and his decision consequent on this to join the Party which he had spent fourteen years trying to smash - because only thus could he become politically effective in the revolution - left him with a very intricate inferiority complex with relation to Lenin. On two subsequent occasions, (the Brest Litovsk Treaty issue in 1918, and the trade union issue in 1920), he had tried to develop a distinctive political position against Lenin, and had experienced not only political rout, but a very incisive political ridicule, at the hands of Lenin. He would have experienced great personal difficulty in launching his campaign against socialism in one country, and his demagogic campaign against bureaucracy, if Lenin had lived. He had acquired the habit of being defeated by Lenin - and that is a discouraging habit. The conflicts over Brest Litovsk and the trade unions were not such that defeat would result in exclusion from the Party: the conflict over socialism in one country was.

For Trotsky to have raised against Lenin the kind of campaign that he raised against Stalin would have been an act of political suicide. He had ample grounds for expecting to be defeated, and to be excluded from the Party - which meant to be excluded from all effective politics. Therefore if Lenin had lived Trotsky would have had ample grounds for being a diligent "Stalinist". He could have had no hopes of being an influential Oppositionist politician. Lenin had declared that Opposition politics would not be tolerated, and that the development of the Revolution depended on the Bolshevik Politburo being the only free centre of politics and the only centre of political power. And he was expert at ensuring that political defeat would be followed by political rout. In the event Stalin routed Trotsky in a comprehensive Leninist manner, (though after a longer battle than Lenin would have needed). But Trotsky had no grounds for anticipating utter defeat at the hands of Stalin, and therefore had an incentive to do battle in the hope of establishing viable Oppositionist politics.

The Opposition chose to adopt neither of the coherent alternatives open to them. They neither proposed the resignation of power to the bourgeoisie, nor accepted the necessary measures as socialist. (Formally they did not accept that these measures were necessary, but in practice they did.)

Trotsky repeatedly declared that he had not lost out in a power struggle with Stalin. This can be interpreted as a manifestation of egregious, insane, vanity. Superficially, that is what it appears to be, and there is undoubtedly a fair amount of vanity in it: but there is much more to it than vanity.

In 1917/23 Trotsky was second only to Lenin in popular prestige, as

he never tired of repeating. Stalin by comparison was a minor figure, as Trotsky also liked to recall, "a grey blur". Trotsky overdoes the degree of Stalin's insignificance. In popular estimation Stalin was a minor figure compared with Trotsky. Behind the scene, as it were, in the centres of government, Stalin and Trotsky were more or less on a par - which Trotsky did not like to recall. Lenin, in his "Testament", treats them as equals, as the two most capable men in the Politburo.

By Trotsky's account, the betrayal of the revolution by Stalin began about 1923, which was the year when Lenin became incapable of day-to-day politics. Here, then, are these two powerful men confronting one another at a critical stage in the development of the revolution. One of them sees himself as embodying the spirit of the revolution, and sees the other as betraying it, stifling its spirit, leading it into bureaucratic and degenerate ways. You would expect the "revolutionary" to fight tooth and nail for power: you would expect him to do everything possible to erode the power of the "traitor". If he did not do so, you would consider him a politically worthless person. And if his failure to fight for power was explained by him as being caused by a disdain to soil his hands fighting a person whom he considered his inferior, (i.e., if it was explained as the disdain of an aristocrat to contend with a serf), you would not only consider him to be a politically worthless person, but a person of criminally insane vanity.

This is exactly how Trotsky represents himself. His account of his behaviour in 1923/4 shows him to be a contemptible person. He was meditating, on a transcendental plane, on the spirit of the revolution while, an infinity beneath him, on the vulgar plane of practical politics, the nasty, brutish, mediocre Stalin was gathering all the levers of political power into his hands.

But Trotsky paints an unbelievable picture of himself in this period. He was not merely an Olympian poseur.

It is true that he did not fight tooth and nail to drive Stalin out of power and to assume power himself. If he had been successful he would have had to deal practically with the problems of leading the socialist government in an isolated pre-capitalist country - and that is what appalled him, paralysed him, and turned him into an Olympian poseur.

Trotsky could not afford to win a struggle for power. There were these "high un'erleaped mountains of necessity" to be coped with, and the revolutionary spirit would be compromised if it attempted to cope with them.

But what if the Stalinist, bureaucratic, government dealt with a necessity, accomplished the bourgeois tasks of the revolution, and drew on itself the blame for the unavoidable harshness and inequity of this phase, leaving the revolutionary spirit pure and intact in a critical, oppositionist role, awaiting to overthrow the bureaucracy when the time was ripe.

Of course, if the revolutionary state of mind was to be properly preserved, this could not be set out as a definite programme. Necessity could not be acknowledged to be such. (The agitational line would be: "The Revolution Betrayed".) Nor could necessity be altogether denied, since a feeling of Marxist objectivity had to be preserved. The revolutionary state of mind had to be an ambiguous state of mind.

This is trotskyism at its best. It matters little whether Trotsky constructed this ideology with full consciousness of what it was, or whether he constructed it more or less blindly in response to the contradictory situation with which he was trying to cope. All that matters is that this was the function of his ideology. Trotskyists have more or less awareness of its subtleties, it can relate to various levels of understanding, and its essential ambiguity provides material for ideological disputes that can never be resolved.

\*

"Last night, ah yesternight, between her lips and mine  
There fell the shadow, Cynara, they breath was shed  
Upon my soul between the kisses and the wine,  
And I was desolate and sick of an old passion...  
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion."

Bukharin, at his trial, describes the state of mind of the opposition as a divided mind. It is a state of mind in which conclusions do not follow from analyses.

"Between the desire and the act, there falls the shadow", said T.S. Eliot, describing the Western intellectual of the twenties. This shadow falling at a crucial point was familiar to the opposition intelligentsia in Russia. An extraneous element intervened <sup>between</sup> analysis and conclusion. Relevant programmes, therefore, could not be devised. Desire was irretrievably divorced from action. Necessity could neither be recognised nor denied. If it was denied the Opposition became totally irrelevant; if it was accepted, the Opposition became dissolved in Stalinism, and the "revolutionary spirit" was lost. The "revolutionary spirit" of the Opposition preserved itself like the memory of Cynara, which kept turning up in the midst of other affairs. The next verse of

Ernest Dowson's poem might have been the theme song of the Russian Opposition after the initiation of the Five Year Plan:

"All night against my heart I felt her warm heart beat,  
Night long within mine arms in love and sleep she lay;  
Surely the kisses of her bright red mouth were sweet:  
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion  
When I awoke and found the dawn was grey.  
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion."

\*

When a movement began in the West corresponding to the position of the Russian Opposition, it shared to the full the divided mind of the Oppositionists. The "left" can sometimes produce a useful piece of description of reality: it can never go on to draw coherent political conclusions from these descriptions.

The difference between Stalinism and the trend on the left which derives ideologically from the Russian Opposition goes far beyond differences in particular political analyses or lines. Trotskyism is an enormous evasion of reality. Stalinism is an attempt to cope with reality. The ideology of the anti-Stalinist left results in a psychological incapacity for consecutive thought about what actually exists, and for the devising of programmes relevant to what exists. (And, in fact, one finds Lenin describing the same phenomenon in pre-October Trotskyism.) Stalinism might make particular mistakes in analysis and policy, but it arose, against trotskyist evasions and ambiguities, as a form of politics which took account of realities, and devised policies which were intended to be functional in social reality for the purpose of achieving definite aims. And it obviously retains that virtue.

The inability of the anti-Stalinist left to draw consistent conclusions from accurate descriptions of reality, in such a way as to relate political practice to social reality, is very well illustrated in "International Socialism".

## I. S. AND IMPERIALISM

"International Socialism" published, in the early sixties, a number of articles on imperialism by its leading theorist in matters of political economy, Michael Kidron. Kidron dealt with the inadequacy of Lenin's "Imperialism" as an analysis of modern capitalism. He argued that capitalism had entered a post-



imperialist phase of development, which he described as "international capitalism". (The articles are: "Imperialism, Highest Stage But One", Summer 1962 and "International Capitalism", Spring 1965.)

These two articles dealt coherently with contemporary capitalism. But when the point was reached at which he had to go beyond criticising Lenin's theory to formulate an alternative theory, and derive a political strategy from it, I.S. lost its nerve.

"Mankind cannot bear much reality", said T.S. Eliot. Whatever about mankind, the remark is true of the trotskyist intelligentsia. Kidron's next article was "A Permanent Arms Economy" (Spring 1967). It marks I.S.'s retreat into economic fantasy. Capitalism survives the loss of its colonies, we are now told, because of increasing arms expenditure. The point of arms expenditure is said to be to get rid of surplus value. There is a reversion to Luxemburgist political economy, according to which capitalism cannot invest its surplus productively. On Luxemburg's view, the acquisition of colonies enabled capitalism to survive by exporting its surplus. With the colonies gone, an increasing arms budget provided an internal plug-hole down which surplus value could be poured. Arms were obsolete as soon as produced. Arms spending had a necessary economic, rather than military, function. But no sooner was this fantasy elaborated than the British government showed itself very anxious to cut back on its arms budget, once decolonisation and the thaw in the cold war permitted it to do so.

The "permanent arms economy" was economic fantasy. And when the Catholic-Protestant conflict in Northern Ireland blew up, I.S. immediately reverted to an old-fashioned theory of imperialism where it had no relevance. It had taken up a neutral position on the Korean War, but supported the Provisional I.R.A. as an "anti-imperialist" force! You will find nothing surprising in this if you are familiar with the theoretical origins of this gutless wonder.

## TONY CLIFF ON RUSSIA

The theoretical basis of International Socialism was Tony Cliff's book, "Russia: A Marxist Analysis", published in the early fifties. Cliff broke with the traditional trotskyist view of the Russian state as a "degenerate workers' state", and the Russian economy as a "transitional economy". He characterised both the state and the economy as capitalist. His theoretical commentary on the development of the Russian revolution is quoted at length below:

"The October Revolution was the fusion of two revolutions

"The October Revolution was the the fusion of two revolutions: that of the Socialist working class, the product of mature capitalism, and that of the peasants, the product of the conflict between rising capitalism and the old feudal institutions." (p93)

"Soon after the revolution, it became clear to a number of Bolshevik theoreticians - and primarily to the economist Eugeni Preobrozhensky - that the surplus produced in industry would not by itself be enough for capitalist accumulation, especially as 'from the moment of its victory the working class ...cannot treat its own labour power, its health and working conditions in the same way as the capitalists did. This is a decisive impediment to the tempo of socialist accumulation, an impediment which capitalist industry did not know in the period of its development'. In opposition to 'socialist accumulation' (defined as an addition to the functioning means of production as a result of the surplus produced in the socialist economy itself) Preobrozhensky postulated the 'primitive socialist accumulation', which he defined as 'the accumulation in the hands of the state of material resources obtained chiefly from sources lying outside the state economic system'. This accumulation will, necessarily, in a backward agrarian country, play a colossal role... 'Primitive accumulation will predominate during the period of industrialisation...' This 'source lying outside the state economic system' was agriculture... He proposed the partial suppression of the law of value by changing the terms of exchange between industry and agriculture in favour of the former and against the latter, so that a unit of labour in state industry would be exchanged for more than a unit of labour in agriculture...

"Actually, the implementation of Preobrozhensky's 'socialist primitive accumulation' would logically have led to a very different state of affairs from that which he visualised. Any attempt to 'squeeze' the peasants would be likely to be met by a deliberate reduction in production... there would be only one way to deal with such a 'strike', and that would be to use violence against the peasants, to expropriate them, and to concentrate them on such large farms that it would be possible for the state to control their work and output. If the state used these methods, it would also be faced with serious opposition from the workers, many of whom, in a backward country such as is under consideration, being newly recruited to industry, would, naturally, still have close family ties with the villages...

"One solution to the conflict between state industry and

individualist agriculture in a backward country would have been to make the rate of development of industry depend upon the rate at which agricultural surpluses increased. As a result of the agrarian revolution there was a great decline in the surpluses of agriculture coming on to the market, because the large landowners and the kulaks had been the main contributors of those surpluses. The distribution of the land, by increasing the share of the middle peasant, who worked mainly for subsistence, reduced the sources of marketable agricultural produce.

"Larger surpluses could certainly have been obtained by increasing the proportion of land held by rich peasants. But to make the development of state industry dependent upon that of kulak agriculture it would have been necessary to have held the tempo of industrial development down to a snail's pace, and thus have weakened the industrial working class in relation to the kulaks. It would inevitably have led to a victory of private capitalism throughout the economy.

"Alternatively, the conflict between industry and agriculture might have been resolved by rapid industrialisation based on 'primitive accumulation' - by expropriating the peasants and forcing them into large mechanical farms, thus releasing labour power for industry and making agricultural surpluses available for the urban population. Such a method of 'primitive accumulation' must also, ultimately, led to the subordination of the industrial workers to the needs of capital accumulation

...

"In both cases it is ridiculous to expect socialist democracy to flourish. On the contrary, in the first case, the state must necessarily come under increasing pressure from the kulaks and therefore must become more and more divorced from the workers. In the second case, the state must become omnipotent, and, it follows, its officials will become autocratic in their relationships with both workers and peasants.

(These two methods of dealing with the problem were actually tried out, the first during the period of the 'New Economic Policy' - 1921/8 - and the second with the Five-Year Plans".  
(p95-97)

That piece of argument is perfectly coherent: a working class political party has taken state power in a predominantly peasant country in which the capitalist class, having been aborted at the outset of its career by a socialist revolution, had not performed its historical function of capital accumulation and industrialisation.

The working class has taken power in a society in which capitalism has not prepared the way for it. A developed capitalist economy is the pre-requisite for the building of socialism. The working class which has taken political power in this pre-capitalist society cannot itself do what capitalism has not done for it. It cannot undertake the industrialisation which is a necessary pre-requisite for the building of socialism. In the first place it cannot treat its own labour-power in the way the capitalists treated it in the industrialising of West European economies. In the second place, industrialisation is dependent on agricultural surplus. If the rate of industrialisation is geared to the marketed surplus of kulak agriculture it will result in a victory of private capitalism. If a more rapid industrialisation is attempted, based on a larger agricultural surplus gained by expropriating the kulaks and establishing large collectivised and mechanised farms, this will result in the subordination of the working class to autocratic state officials.

That argument is perfectly coherent, and would seem to lead necessarily to the conclusion that the Russian revolution was a pointless affair, a dead end, a false start. But Cliff cannot reach that conclusion. It is axiomatic for him that the October revolution was an affair of world-historic importance and that it was betrayed by the Stalinists. He must therefore attempt to complicate the argument so that he can draw these conclusions in a way that will not be too obviously inconsistent with the description of the facts of the matter as quoted above.

## THERMIDOR

*"In the introduction to "The Critique of Political Economy" Marx formulates concisely the main conclusions of historical materialism. He writes that*

*"No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces, for which there is room in it, have been developed, and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society."*

*"The Mensheviks quoted this sentence in order to prove that capitalism in Russia was not yet ripe for the socialist revolution, and that it was assured of a long future until it would reach such a stage. This simple conclusion, however, neglects a whole series of factors..."*

*"What determined the development in Tsarist Russia was, on the*

one hand, the relation of forces between classes within Russia itself, and, on the other, Russia's dependence vis-a-vis world capitalism. These two factors are dialectically knit together. If not for the unity of the world, the uneven, combined, development of the different countries could not be explained: why the class struggle should take the deepest and most extreme form in such a backward country as Russia... these phenomena are evidence of the high level of social production which the world economy had reached, and the maturity of the world for the substitution of socialist relations of production for capitalist ones. The First World War which accelerated the downfall of Tsarism was no proof of the high level of the productive forces in each of the belligerent countries, but it did show that the material conditions were ripe for the socialist revolution on a world scale... the fact that Marxism ...was imported to Russia when the workers' movement was still in its cradle, is evidence of the spiritual unity of the world. On the other hand, the fact that opportunism and revisionism struck much weaker roots in the Russian labour movement than in the countries of the West reveals the backwardness of Russia in a world ripe for socialism...

"The fact that the productive forces develop within the framework of national and international social relations and not, as they would have it, in a vacuum, entirely invalidated the Mensheviks' dream of the tremendous possibilities of development open to Russian capitalism. On the contrary, the continued existence of Russian capitalism in the concrete national and international relations then extant would have conserved the burden of feudalism...

"The above quotation from the "Critique of Political Economy" applies to the world system, not to a country in isolation. The very fact that the first proletarian revolution broke out in a backward country affirms this, it is the best witness to the ripeness of the world for the socialist revolution.

"One of the fundamental causes of the insoluble crisis in the modern world is the fact that, with the international division of labour, national boundaries have become too narrow a framework for the development of productive forces...

"The Russian revolution can be explained by the law of uneven development, which is one facet of the unity of world development. But this law allows two possibilities of development: firstly, that the Russian revolution, being evidence of the maturity of the world for socialism, would be the prelude to a series of new revolutions which would break out immediately or

after a certain interval: secondly - and this is a reformulation of the first possibility - because of the unevenness, that this 'certain interval' would lengthen into years and leave the Russian revolution isolated in a capitalist world. Before October 1917, it was impossible to determine which path humanity would follow by basing oneself simply on general considerations relating to the universality of world history; the contradictions contained in this universality, i.e., the law of uneven development, must also be considered. Human practice alone can decide which way history will go...

"Seeing that the destruction of the social order of Tsarist Russia was an expression of the maturity of the world for socialism, there is no doubt that, had the revolution spread, the social order that would have taken its place would have been the first stage of communist society. But as the October revolution did not spread, what social order could appear in Russia?" (p99/101)

The Rule of the Working Class Where the Material Conditions For The Abolition of Capitalist Relations of Production Do not Exist

"Marx and Engels dealt more than once with the question of what would happen if the working class took power before the historical prerequisites for the substitution of capitalist relations of production by socialist ones were present. They concluded that in such an event the working class would lose power to the bourgeoisie. The working class would be in power only temporarily and would blaze a path for the developing capitalism. Thus, for instance, Marx wrote in 1847:

"...if the proletariat overthrows the political domination of the bourgeoisie its victory will only be temporary, a point in the process of the bourgeois revolution itself, and will serve its cause as it did in 1794, so long as the 'movement' of history has not created the material conditions which make it necessary to abolish the bourgeois mode of production ..."

"Engels wrote in similar vein.

"The worst thing that can befall a leader of an extreme party is to be compelled to take over a government in an epoch when the movement is not yet ripe for the realisation of the measures which that domination would imply... he necessarily finds himself in a dilemma. What he can do is in contrast to all his actions as hitherto practised, to all his principles and to the interests of his party; what he ought to do cannot be achieved. In a word he is compelled to represent not

his party nor his class, but the class for whom conditions are ripe for domination. In the interests of the movement itself, he is compelled to defend the interests of an alien class, and to feed his own class with phrases and promises, with the assertion that the interests of that alien class are their own interests. Whoever puts himself in this awkward position is irrevocably lost." (p103-4).

To summarise Cliff's argument: even though the working class could not undertake the industrialisation of Russia which was a prerequisite for the building of socialism, and even though industrialisation is the historical function of capitalism, the Menshevik deduction from this, that "capitalism in Russia was not yet ripe for the socialist revolution", was false, because the world economy, of which the Russian economy formed part, was ripe for socialism. The World War was proof that the whole world economy, though not each national part of it, was ripe for socialism. The socialist revolution in Russia, which was not ripe for socialism, was evidence that the world as a whole was ripe for socialism. The "universality of world history" allowed for two possibilities. The first was that the Russian revolution, which was a sign of the ripeness of the world for socialism, would be followed quickly by socialist revolutions throughout the world which was ripe for socialism: the second was that it would not. In the event it did not. And since it did not, Russia ended up with a socialist government, whose social base was the world, isolated in a country in which socialism could not be built. So "what social order could appear in Russia"? Marx and Engels said that if revolutionary representatives of the working class take power in circumstances where the building of socialist society is impossible, they will be compelled to realise the objectives of the bourgeoisie instead of those of the working class.

## THE JACOBIN FUNCTION

Allowing all of this to be so, a perfectly good case could still be made out for the October revolution. The fact that it had reached a dead end four or five years later as far as socialism is concerned need not mean that it was a futile event.

It is said that it was seen by Bolshevik leaders as the first of a series of European revolutions which would happen in conjunction with the world war, and that they realised that if the European revolution did not follow the Russian socialist revolution could not sustain itself. The European revolutions did not follow.

But there is another aspect to the matter. Cliff says: "the

continued existence of Russian capitalism in the concrete national and international relations then extant (in 1917) would have conserved the burden of feudalism." That is probably so: the government resulting from the March revolution had not carried through the democratic revolution consistently, (especially with relation to the abolition of landlord property), and it insisted on keeping Russia in the war. As a result it suffered a loss of popularity, and at the end of the summer it was threatened by a landlord counter-revolution led by General Kornilov. The October revolution therefore had the aspect of defending the gains of the March revolution which the weak Provisional Government was incapable of defending, and of carrying through bourgeois democratic measures which that government had held back from, as well as the aspect of overthrowing the bourgeoisie in a new revolution.

The October Revolution, therefore, had a justification quite apart from the prospects of a general European revolution which would sustain it as a socialist revolution. It was justified as an event in the bourgeois democratic revolution which rooted out landlordism, established peasant private property in land, broke the landlord counter-revolution, and took Russia out of a futile European war. Leaving aside the socialist aspect, the October revolution had the same justification as the Jacobin regime in the French revolution: the defence and extension of the democratic revolution by more radical measures than the more moderate and orthodox bourgeois parties were prepared to take, or were capable of taking: the consolidation of the bourgeois revolution by the action of the masses of the people acting under the influence of an ideology that was anything but bourgeois.

But such events carry the revolution to an extreme where it is incapable of stabilising itself. And what happens when the swing to that extreme has carried out its function of rooting out feudalism? There must then be a swing back from the extreme, which the extreme part is unlikely to be able to enact voluntarily, and which is therefore likely to take the form of the overthrow of the extreme party by a more moderate party. (This is known by the shorthand of "Thermidor", from the month of "Thermidor" in the new calendar introduced by the French revolution, the month when the Jacobins were deposed.)

The Jacobins came to the defence of the revolution with energetic and decisive radical measures, and having defended the revolution it didn't know what to do next. Robespierre lost his bearings and vacillated while a reign of terror that had lost all positive content was persisted in on an increasing scale. The eventual senselessness of the terror brought it to an end. Robespierre



did not end it, and move towards a more moderate position. Therefore it was inevitable that the terror should be brought to an end by being directed against Robespierre himself.

Trotsky brooded over the parallels between the French and Russian revolutions, and the prospects of a Russian Thermidor. But he never made a coherent investigation of the original Thermidor, and there were endless disputes among trotskyists about whether and when the Russian Thermidor had occurred. Lenin too allowed certain parallels between the two revolutions, without, however, brooding on them. Trotsky acted in the manner described by Marx in the opening pages of The 18th Brumaire, looking backwards the whole time, and always re-enacting former events in his imagination. Lenin had no nightmare weighing on his brain. He remarked in 1921 that the Bolsheviks had achieved their own Thermidor. This remark was made with reference to the Kronstadt rebellion of March 1921, and the retreat to the New Economic Policy that followed it.

What Lenin meant was that in 1921 the Bolsheviks gave up an extreme policy of direct Communist economic organisation, which had developed to meet the needs of the Civil War, but which could not be sustained after the end of the war emergency. Not only did the Bolsheviks retreat from an extreme policy: they suppressed an extremist military revolt in Kronstadt.

## THE BOURGEOISIE AND THE BOURGEOIS REVOLUTION

*"What Marx and Engels say about a revolution which brings the proletariat to power before the historical premises for the transition from capitalism to socialism exist, does not apply directly to the October revolution. This is so not only because the material historical premises were present on an international scale, but also because of the specific conditions obtaining in Russia. Not only was the Russian bourgeoisie overthrown politically, but it was also expropriated economically a few months after October. The rural bourgeoisie that remained did not succeed in overthrowing the proletariat, and its social weight, especially from the time of the Five Year Plan, was almost negligible. The isolation of October did not make it "a point in the process" of the development of the Russian bourgeoisie because the Russian bourgeoisie was annihilated. (Cliff. p104)*

Marx did not say that such a revolution would be a point in the process of development of the bourgeoisie. He said it would be a point in the process of the bourgeois revolution. If Cliff had grasped the substance of Lenin's writings on the Russian bourgeois

revolution he would understand that the two are not the same thing. In a highly concrete and purposeful application of Marx's theory of permanent revolution, beside which Trotsky's remarks on the question are journalistic waffle, Lenin aimed to bring about a thorough bourgeois revolution which would be anything but a development of the existing bourgeoisie. His programme for the bourgeois revolution was to root out all traces of feudalism and Tsarism through the activity of the masses of peasants and workers. In one sense this would establish the ideal conditions for the development of capitalism. But in another sense these conditions would tend to prevent the development of capitalism. The high degree of political participation and expectation on the part of the masses that such a bourgeois revolution would entail would hardly be compatible with the early stages of capitalist development. If under Tsarism there was too little democracy for capitalist development, after such a revolution there would be too much.

What would happen then? Lenin did not write blueprints. He developed a policy that would enable the socialist movement to make the most of the bourgeois revolution - or to make too much of it, according to certain opinions.

It follows from Cliff's analysis that Lenin made far too much out of the bourgeois revolution, and came to power as a leader of the proletariat "before the historical premises for the transition to socialism exist." But Cliff must deny that this is implicit in his analysis, because he hasn't the moral courage to follow through the logic of his analysis on this issue any more than on the question of imperialism. So he resorts to the metaphysical quibble that, for the purpose of characterising the October revolution, the fact that the conditions for a transition to socialism were present on an international scale over-rides the fact that on a Russian scale they were not present. That argument would only be valid if the October revolution had actually been the first episode in an international socialist revolution which occurred at the end of the war. Since the October revolution was the only successful socialist revolution, it cannot materialistically be given its character by the European revolution which did not occur.

This quibble is supported by another: the October Revolution was not a point of development of the Russian bourgeois revolution because it was not a point in the process of development of the Russian bourgeoisie, which it overthrew politically and expropriated economically. But it is a comparatively simple matter in revolutionary times to overthrow the bourgeoisie politically and expropriate them economically. When society is in turmoil such things are easily done. The Jacobin regime defended the French revolution, but did not involve a kind of political overthrow of the

bourgeoisie? And it might easily have expropriated bourgeois property. The difficulty lies in developing a socialist economy. And, if that cannot be done, the overthrow of a particular lot of the bourgeoisie is no more than an extreme variant within the bourgeoisie revolution. Bourgeois property relations must develop, and what does it matter which individuals are the bourgeoisie? In such a development the liquidation of a weak and superficial bourgeoisie only clears the ground for the growth of a more vigorous and deeply rooted bourgeoisie.

Cliff maintains that state capitalism eventually developed in Russia, and that conditions did not allow the development of socialism; and he has to resort to metaphysics and intellectual trickery to avoid Kautsky's conclusion that the October revolution was a point in the process of the bourgeois revolution.

## METAPHYSICS IN A CUL-DE-SAC

*"If so, what relations of production could come after October?"*

*"The establishment of socialist relations of production demands a much higher level of productive forces than was the heritage of Tsarism. Engels' explanation of the reason for class division in society, for the division into exploiters and exploited, entirely fitted Russia's conditions even after October:*

*"The division of society into an exploiting and an exploited class, a ruling and an oppressed class, was the necessary outcome of low development of production hitherto. So long as the sum of social labour yielded a product which only slightly exceeded what was necessary for the bare existence of all; so long, therefore, as all or almost all of the time of the great majority of the members of society was absorbed in labour, so long was society necessarily divided into classes."*

*"The historical mission of the bourgeoisie is summed up in Lenin's two postulates: "Increase in the productive forces of social labour and the socialisation of labour". On a world scale this task had already been fulfilled. In Russia the revolution got rid of the impediments to the development of the productive forces, put an end to the remnants of feudalism, built up a monopoly of foreign trade which protects the development of the productive forces of the country from the devastating pressure of world capitalism, and also gave a tremendous lever to the development of the productive forces in the form of state ownership of the means of production. Under such conditions*

all the impediments to the historical mission of capitalism - the socialisation of labour and concentration of the means of production, which are necessary prerequisites for the establishment of socialism and which the bourgeoisie was not able to provide, are abolished. Post-October Russia stood before the fulfilment of the historical mission of the bourgeoisie.

"Even in an advanced country there will be certain bourgeois tasks which a victorious proletarian revolution will have to accomplish. For instance, in certain parts of the U.S.A. (mainly agriculture) the development of the productive forces is impeded under the capitalist system... But because the productive forces of the USA as a whole are very well developed, these bourgeois tasks will be only accessories, subordinates to the work of building a socialist society... In contrast to this, the fulfilment of the bourgeois tasks was the central problem in post-October Russia... In the U.S. the addition of new means of production necessary for the socialisation of labour can be accompanied by a rise in the standard of living of the masses, by a strengthening of the element of conviction in production discipline, by the fortification of workers' control, by the progressive dwindling of the differences in income between manual and mental workers, etc. But can this be achieved in a backward country under conditions of siege? Can labour discipline based mainly on conviction prevail when the level of production is very low? Can a quick tempo of accumulation, necessitated by the backwardness of the country and the pressure of world capitalism, be accomplished with the separation of society into the managers of the general business of society and the managed, the directors of labour and the directed... can a workers' revolution in a backward country isolated by triumphant international capitalism be anything but "a point in the process" of the development of capitalism, even if the capitalist class is abolished?" (p103/6)

"They thought the Five-Year Plans would take Russia far in the direction of socialism. However, this is not the first time in history that the results of human actions are in outright contradiction to the wishes and hopes of the actors themselves.

"...Why was the First Five-Year Plan such a turning point?

"It was now, for the first time, that the bureaucracy sought to realise the historical mission of the bourgeoisie as quickly as possible. A quick accumulation of capital on the basis of a low level of production, of a small national income per capita, must put a burdensome pressure on the consumption of the masses, on their standard of living. Under such conditions, the

bureaucracy, transformed into a personification of capital, for whom the accumulation of capital is the be-all and end-all, must get rid of all remnants of workers' control, must substitute conviction in the labour process by coercion, must atomise the working class, must force all social-political life into a totalitarian mould. It is obvious that the bureaucracy, which became necessary in the process of capital accumulation, and which became the oppressor of the working class, would not be tardy in making use of its social supremacy in the relations of production in order to gain advantages for itself in the relations of distribution." (p106/7)

"Is The Stalinist Regime Progressive?"

"A social order which is necessary to develop the productive forces and prepare the material conditions for a higher order of society, is progressive.

"Were the backward countries isolated from the rest of the world, we could certainly say that capitalism would be progressive in them. For instance, if the countries of the West declined and disappeared, Indian capitalism would have no less long and glorious a future than British capitalism had in the 19th century. The same is true of Russian state capitalism. Revolutionary Marxists, however, take the world as our point of departure, and therefore conclude that capitalism, wherever it exists, is reactionary." (Our emphasis: B&ICO) "For the problem humanity must solve today, under pain of annihilation, is not how to develop the productive forces, but to what end and under what social circumstances to utilise them.

"This conclusion as regards the reactionary character of Russian state capitalism, notwithstanding the rapid development of its productive forces, can only be refuted if one could prove that world capitalism has not prepared the material conditions necessary for the establishment of socialism, or that the Stalinist regime is preparing further conditions necessary for the establishment of socialism than those prepared by the world at large. The former contention leads one to the conclusion that we are not yet in the period of the socialist revolution. The most one can say to the latter is that Stalinist Russia will bequeath to socialism a higher concentration of capital and of the working class than any other country. But this is only a quantitative difference: if we compare the economics of the USA and England we find that the concentration of capital and socialisation of labour is much higher in the former than in the latter, but this does not make present-day capitalism in the USA historically progressive...

*"The very fact of the existence of the Stalinist regime declares its reactionary nature, as without the defeated October revolution the Stalinist regime would not have existed, and without the maturity of the world for socialism the October revolution would not have broken out." (p129/31)*

The peculiar thing is that Cliff and his kind like to sneer at Stalin as a scholastic. Whatever Stalin was, he was not a scholastic or a metaphysician, (taking these terms in the sense in which they are usually meant these days, and without prejudice to men like Peter Anselm who actually extended the range of human thought in the middle ages). He did not circulate elaborate intellectual systems for the purpose of remaining in the same place. He drew up programmes of action that enabled actions to be taken by masses of people on a scale unprecedented in human history.

But is not Cliff a true scholastic? His conclusions are given, are axiomatic: the October revolution was a world historic event, and the revolution was betrayed by reactionary Stalinism. If he failed to reach these two conclusions he would be excluded from the fashionable 'left'. But he is allowed to reach them by any means he pleases. He displays great virtuosity in reaching them by unorthodox means. The faithful are enthralled and excited. It seems at every moment that he will be compelled to reach the wrong, prohibited, conclusions. But no - the journey, though exciting, is safe. And what matter that crucial connections in the argument are contrived by means that would embarrass a Jesuit?

In sophistry, the "style" is the argument. Take away the rhetoric, and nothing is left. Trotsky, it is generally admitted, had "style". Stalin's matter-of-fact reasoning grates on those who are responsive to Trotsky's "style". (Ask any bourgeois intellectual who grates the "left" with his presence.) The function of Trotsky's 'style' is to induce a state of mind that could never be induced by matter-of-fact reasoning. He never in his life formulated a political programme and carried it through in practice. His sole period of effective political practice was when he was Lenin's super-orator and bureaucrat. He had his place in the Bolshevik revolution, but it was not that of either a theorist or a political leader. Once a framework was provided for him he could do some things very well. He worked up the masses with his rhetoric in 1917, he cut a dash in diplomatic circles in 1918 (but was a catastrophe when it came to determining the policy that diplomacy was to implement), and he organised Tsarist officers into the Red Army. He contributed nothing of significance to the theory of the revolution, the formulation of political programmes, or the organisation of the advanced workers. After 1923 he came increasingly to resemble a brilliant exponent of Catholic apologetics,

using sophistry to preserve a state of mind that is at variance with social reality. The style becomes the reconciling medium for contradictions which there is no hope of resolving in social development; it becomes the refuge for a particular social vision, a particular form of the "revolutionary spirit", which cannot sustain itself in political practice.

"Capital" has been said to be stylishly written. It certainly has its runs of eloquence even in the most abstract passages. But Marx's style is nothing like Trotsky's. It is not a substitute for hard reason. Marx's flourishes were always thrown in as extras, and you could take them or leave them. His argument in no way depended on them. It could be taken apart, the pieces subjected to scrutiny, and put together again in the most pedestrian style, and it still worked. It will work at any speed, and in any sequence, as will any coherent and objective analysis. But let us submit this last stretch of Cliff's analysis to a matter-of-fact "Stalinist" scrutiny and see how it fares. The reasoning proceeds as follows:

Socialist production relations require a much higher development of the productive forces than existed in Russia after the October revolution: it is the historical mission of capitalism to increase the productive forces and socialise labour: capitalism had already done this on a world scale, but not on a Russian scale: therefore "post-October Russia stood before the fulfilment of the historical mission of the bourgeoisie": this cannot be accomplished without the division of society into a class of managers and a class of managed: "the bureaucracy" attempted to achieve the historical tasks of capitalism as quickly as possible in order to break the deadlock in which the revolution found itself, but in doing so it transformed itself into the personification of capital: thus the bureaucracy, in doing what was necessary for the development of the productive forces in Russia, (without which socialism was impossible), developed capitalism instead of socialism; and this was not the result of political mistakes but the inevitable result of conditions.

Does it follow that this bureaucracy which organised the industrialisation of Russia, which was necessary to the advance of society, and which inevitably became the personification of capital in the process, was progressive even though it failed to be socialist? By no means. We Marxists take the world as our starting point, and the world was ripe for socialism. Even though the Russian government could not take the world as the starting point, or the sphere of operation, of its economic policies, its policies must nevertheless be judged as if it was part of a socialist world government. Because the world as a

whole is ripe for socialism, the development of capitalism cannot be considered to be progressive in any particular part of it, no matter how backward, and no matter how impossible the implementation of socialist policies in it. The Bolsheviks rightly took power in Russia, but their policies must not be judged in terms of their effectiveness in advancing the sixth of the world in which they exercised power, but in terms of what might have been done in conjunction with <sup>the</sup> five-sixths of the world over which they did not exercise power. "The most that can be said is that Stalinist Russia will bequeath to socialism a higher concentration of capital and of the working class than any other country." Nevertheless, Stalinism was reactionary because things could have been different if there had been a world socialist revolution.

What is this but metaphysics? An entirely metaphysical standard of judgement is used. A government is judged to be reactionary because it fails to do something which is said not to be within its power to do. A standard relevant to a state of affairs which does not exist is used to judge a state of affairs which does exist. (Has anything closer to the doctrine of original sin ever been peddled in this modern age?) This flies in the face of historical materialism, which judges policy and achievement with reference to the actual circumstances in which they operate. The Kantian system of philosophy postulates two worlds, the one historical and materialistic, the other idealist, transcendental, eternal: a practical world and a moral world, which interact. But Kant would never have made his two worlds interact in the way that Cliff makes the moral standard of the non-existent world socialist government interact with the practical and existing socialist government of Russia.

The famous sentence from the Preface to the Critique of Political Economy quoted by Cliff ("No social order ever disappears" etc.) is followed by another very relevant one:

*"Therefore, mankind always takes up only such problems as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, we will always find that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions necessary for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation."*

But, according to Cliff, mankind in Russia set itself a problem that was insoluble under the conditions in which it was actually posed, while attempts to solve it in Russian conditions were to be judged according to conditions that existed elsewhere. Kant, encountering a virtually insoluble problem in the harmonising of duty, arising from the moral sphere, and desire, arising from



practical life, postulated eternity as the necessary condition for resolving the "antimony": and, pending the harmonisation of duty and desire in eternity, he said that in the meantime no good would come of denouncing desire from the viewpoint of abstract duty, because if a conflict of the two were precipitated, desire would be bound to win. Cliff poses antinomies, or insoluble contradictions, no less than Kant, but is entirely lacking in Kantian horse-sense.

## THE "RIPENESS OF THE WORLD"

The world is ripe for socialism; but not all the constituent parts of the world are ripe for socialism; nevertheless the activity of a socialist government in an unripe part, while all the rest remains capitalist, is to be judged by the ripeness of the whole!

But what does the "ripeness of the world for socialism" mean? One can see its meaning with relation to Europe, North America, and the white colonies, in 1918. In these areas there was a certain level of capitalist industrialisation predominating over all pre-capitalist economic forms, and the mass of the workers had a certain amount of political experience. But what about Asia, Africa and South America? Capitalism was still an alien, colonial, intrusion into Africa. Africa was still tribal in substance, and Asia was still a long way from having an internal dynamic of capitalist development. European, North American and Japanese capitalism and imperialism were the force binding the world together and compelling its development. A world socialist revolution was hardly conceivable, unless a revolution in the metropolitan centres of the colonial empires was to count as a revolution in the colonies in Africa and Asia. What would a European socialist revolution have done with Africa? Maintain a colonial policy, or end the colonial system and allow the greater part of Africa to fall back under tribalism?

Imperialism too had its "historical mission", which was to break up the pre-capitalist modes of production throughout the earth and replace them with the bourgeois mode of production.

Three main stages in the development of capitalism can be distinguished. The initial stage of its development in a few countries in Northern Europe: the stage of capitalist imperialism, in which it spread across the earth: and the stage in which capitalism has taken root everywhere and sloughed off the colonial scaffolding. Only in the last stage can it be said that the world is ripe for socialism, in the sense that capitalism has an internal dynamic in all the main regions of the earth, and that

its development is giving rise to the contradictions that make for socialism. To speak of the ripeness of the world in the imperialist stage implies the maintenance of the colonial system, (that is, it means that Britain is ripe on behalf of itself and its Empire, because the Empire itself was not yet ripe for even bourgeois nationalist revolution in 1918).

Of course, by these enquiries into the facts of the case, in typical uninspired Stalinist fashion, the "dialectical" sweep of the idea is lost. It is not by any commonplace process of factual reasoning that such an idea is grasped. Cliff did not arrive at the idea of "the ripeness of the world for socialism" through any mere factual investigation of the world. This idea is a feeling to be engendered by rhetoric. Its function is to provide a fantasy condition for the resolution of the contradictions of the Russian revolution, as eternity provided Kant with the condition for harmonising duty and desire. In 1919 Kautsky jeered that the World Revolution would become the Messiah to which the Bolsheviks would turn to get them out of the impossible situation that they had got themselves into. Insofar as the Trotskyist tendency in the revolution was concerned, that jeer was completely justified.

The "ripeness of the world for socialism" is not, for Cliff, an empirical truth. It is an a priori assertion, preceding experience and providing the standard for assessing experience. His vision doesn't work without it, therefore it is true. A canny metaphysician will not be over-hasty in making logical deductions from a priori generalisations. But Cliff is not wise in his generation. It is a logical deduction from "the ripeness of the world for socialism" that capitalism is everywhere reactionary, but it conflicts with commonsense when applied in concrete cases.

In 1918 the Arabian peninsula was in the grip of the Wahhabi movement, a fanatical tribal-religious movement. Ibn Saud was attempting to evolve a weak feudal kingship out of this movement, and to consolidate it through encouraging the settlement of nomads. Judged by the only standards that applied to Arabia, Ibn Saud was a social and political revolutionary of unparalleled ability and boldness, comparable to Charlemagne. Imperialism had not interfered in central Arabia. A Christian, not to mention a socialist, had scarcely ever been seen there. When Ibn Saud made himself Lord of Arabia he accomplished a very remarkable feat. The time was out of joint, as Hamlet said, (and as Althusser repeats in his inimitable way), and Arabia got its Charlemagne in the 20th century. And where Ibn Saud can only be described as a revolutionary, what sense does it make to describe capitalism as reactionary? Ibn Saud's regime would probably, like Charlemagne's, have fragmented after his death if it had not been for the discovery of oil in Arabia. Imperialism stabilised it. (And what is true of Arabia is true also of Africa and Asia in the 20th century: the development of capitalism is

true also of Africa and Asia in the 20th century: the development of capitalism is progressive.)

Cliff asserts that the problem facing humanity is no longer "how to develop the productive forces, but to what end and under what social circumstances to utilise them". A transcendental idealist intellectual in London can lay down standards by which progress and reaction are to be judged throughout the world, and the world can ignore those standards, as it ignores all Utopian standards, and use entirely different standards, standards which are relevant to the problems of development of these societies. The development of the productive forces to the stage that is historically associated with capitalism remains the major economic problem over large areas of the earth, and no state in an economically backward society which actually organises that society to industrialise itself is going to appear reactionary to its people, or is going to be viewed historically as reactionary. To describe the industrialisation of Russia as reactionary, because it did not accord with Cliff's view of what socialism is, is to deprive the term "reactionary" of all specific meaning.

## "FIGHTING BARBARISM WITH BARBARISM"

*"Peter the Great will go down in history as one of the fighters against barbarism using barbaric methods. Herzen wrote that he 'civilised with a knout in his hand and knout in hand persecuted the light'. Stalin will go down in history as the oppressor of the working class, as the power which could have advanced the productive forces and culture of humanity, without the knout, because the world was mature enough for it, but which nevertheless advanced them 'knout in hand', simultaneously endangering all humanity with the threat of decline through imperialist wars" (Cliff, p123). But which of the Bolshevik leaders said that he would fight barbarism with barbarism? Unfortunately for Cliff's argument, it was Lenin. But didn't Lenin know that the world (world, world, WORLD) was ripe for other things?*

### NIGEL HARRIS ON LENIN

Cliff, of course makes a misty Utopia out of the Lenin period. But one of his followers, Nigel Harris, began to apply to Lenin the kind of approach that Cliff had adopted towards Stalin. (*Marxism: Leninism-Stalinism-Maoism*. International Socialism: Autumn 1966):

*"Once power was gained in Russia, the withering-away of the State had to begin if Lenin was to vindicate his entire position. In May 1918, he promised his audience that those who were not over 30-35 years old would see the dawn of communism... But the winter of 1917-18 saw the administrative machine in ruins, the continuation of the war, the collapse of all authority and the*

exhaustion of food supplies. The peasantry no longer sustained the revolution, and there was no European revolution filling the sails of the new Soviet craft. Lenin began slowly retracing his steps; he did not withdraw in explicit theoretical terms, but became increasingly immersed in day-to-day administration, in mere survival. His statements have a rising note of pessimism, a refusal to speculate on what had been achieved and what could be achieved, an explicit denunciation of increasing abuses but without any solutions. The civil war dealt a further staggering blow to the economy and the new Government was compelled to take back into employment thousands of Tsarist officials...

"Plekhanov once taunted Lenin with a quotation from Engels, and it became, from 1918, increasingly relevant as the claimed social basis of the Party seeped away:

"The worst that can befall the leader of an extremist party is to be compelled to take over the government at a time when the movement is not yet ripe for the rule of the class he represents..."

"The great hopes disintegrated in increasing gloom, only heightened by the Kronstadt revolt, the wages of strikes and peasant revolts: it was clear that the Bolsheviks no longer represented a majority of even the working class. Yet what alternative existed? Only the clear threat that if the White armies were victorious they would institute the first fascist regime in Europe. He did not offer an explanation for Bolshevik power in an undeveloped country in the absence of European revolution. And in such a forthright man, that is a significant lapse - for no peace with integrity was possible. He made do with piecemeal, pragmatic responses, with attacks on "bureaucracy", with increasing pessimism:

"Can every worker know how to administer the State. Practical people know that this is a fairy tale... How many workers have been engaged in administration? A few thousands all over Russia, no more."

"The great trade union debate of 1921-2, where Trotsky's demand for the militarisation of labour (i.e. for an explicitly tyrannical regime) faced the demand of the Workers Opposition for the abolition of the State and control by Soviets, is significant as an exhibition of Lenin's purely pragmatic tacking between two extremes. He seems to have lost his moorings, to be aware of the problem but see no social force capable of solving it:

"If we take that huge bureaucratic machine (the State), that huge file, we must ask: Who is leading whom? To tell the truth, it is not they (the Communists) who are leading, they are being led."

"Or again:

"...our State apparatus...has only been slightly repainted on the surface, but in all other things, it is a typical relic of our old State apparatus."

"In his final testament, it is remarkable that Lenin makes no attempt to offer a general theoretical feature of the situation and a perspective; he is reduced to discussing the relatively trivial personal characteristics of individual leaders as a substitute.

"From 1918, the validating conditions of his own position broke down in a way that offered no possibility of solution - his honesty and integrity prevented him offering some substitute for such a solution. As dusk fell, no Owl of Minerva took flight, and the tragedy of Lenin remained unrelieved. Around him, he could see clearly an entirely new and unenvisaged order beginning to emerge. The proletariat had gone, leaving the Party alone and isolated as its substitute. The immense struggle by the Russian proletariat to achieve freedom gave way to an even more implacable tyranny than before."

People who are not familiar with I.S. of the mid-sixties may not realise what a terrible thing it is when the Owl of Minerva fails to fly at dusk. The Owl is a figure from Hegel. The meaning is that a rounded knowledge of an event only comes after the event. Kidron maintained that Lenin in his "Imperialism" described a state of affairs that was ceasing to exist when he wrote it. So, on imperialism, Lenin's Owl of Minerva flew at dusk, but with regard to the revolution which he led it never flew at all. And how well does it fly for Harris? It flutters a bit, but doesn't really fly. For I.S., the flight of the Owl must lead either to a recognition that Stalinism was progressive, or to the conclusion that the October revolution deserved Kautsky's criticism of it in 1918; that it was a false start, a blind alley: and that it began to go off the rails after a few months. I.S. cannot afford to let the Owl fly: if it does fly it will certainly be dusk for the I.S. Harris's article left the matter hanging in the air, and since then I.S. has avoided the dangerous line of thought that he opened up. I.S. is now theoretically stagnant.

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