

Study Guide to

The Fate of the Russian Revolution:

Lost Texts of Critical Marxism Volume 1

This Study Guide aims to help you work through the main ideas in the book (it does not attempt to cover everything) in ten instalments, listing key ideas and key questions for discussion under each one.

There are two main themes to the book. (1) What was the nature of the Stalinist USSR? Was it a degenerated workers' state or was it an unexpected new system of class exploitation? (2) What were the implications for would-be Trotskyist politics of maintaining the unchanged form of words, "the USSR is a degenerated workers' state", while the reality of the USSR developed from beleaguered revolutionary pariah state into world superpower?

The first question is important enough, given that every serious socialist today has to confront the argument that the collapse of the USSR shows that socialism – or, some would say, any alternative to capitalism – is an unworkable failure. Exploring the second suggests that many everyday arguments on the revolutionary left today – about what a revolutionary party should be, how revolutionaries should relate to the mass labour movement, the importance of democratic questions (for example consistent democracy in national and communal conflicts), about habitually "writing yes where the bourgeoisie writes a no" – are, in unexpected ways, linked with each other and with the basic theoretical question for 20th century socialism, the nature of Stalinism. It should thus help us better understand (and, let's hope, develop) our politics as a whole, not just a bundle of unconnected "positions".

These connections are obscured for us in Britain today by the fact that the main representative of the "orthodox Trotskyist" culture is the SWP, which has long rejected the idea that the Stalinist USSR was a "workers' state". The short explanation for this paradox is that the SWP is inconsistent and eclectic: its ideas are a mish-mash of borrowings from many sources, but the root political culture they are grafted on to is the "orthodox Trotskyist" one of the 1940s, from which the SWP tendency originated.

To understand the debates presented in the book you need some knowledge of the basic perspectives of Marxism, at least to the extent of having carefully read and discussed the *Communist Manifesto* or *Principles of Communism* (the latter is included in *How Solidarity Can Change The World*, WL46-47).

Basic companion reading: *Revolution Betrayed* by Trotsky, the collection of Trotsky's 1939-40 articles entitled *In Defence of Marxism*, and *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* by James P Cannon. These present the "other side of the argument" to the texts in our book; they also contain much material of enormous value in addition to the points we might consider them in error on. To make this Study Guide more self-contained, it includes two key chapters from *Revolution Betrayed* and a key article from *In Defence of Marxism*, but the excerpts are no substitute for the whole.

On millenarianism, one of the central concepts in the book, you will find Norman Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium* an illuminating, and probably fascinating, read. To take the argument about defining the Stalinist social system further, read *Workers' Liberty* nos. 12-13 (pp.25-33), no. 14 (pp.42-44); no. 16; and the debate in *Workers' Liberty* nos. 43, 44, 45 and continuing. You might also find two novels helpful: *The Mandarins* by Simone de Beauvoir, and *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand. They present the intellectual choices of the formative years of the Cold War vividly, de Beauvoir in a very fine piece of writing by an author critically sympathetic to Stalinism, and Rand in a wild diatribe by a last-ditch defender of capitalism.

Key Dates

1917

February (March by the western calendar): workers' demonstrations in Russia overthrow the Tsar (king). Prince Lvov leads Provisional Government; Petrograd workers set up a "Soviet" (workers' council).

March: First All-Russian Conference of Soviets. Moderate socialists dominate.

April: Lenin returns to Russia, publishes April Theses proposing "All Power to the Soviets", wins Bolshevik party over to this idea.

July: Big street demonstrations in Petrograd against Provisional Government.. Bolsheviks restrain the movement, believing that if the workers take power in Petrograd they will quickly be crushed because the rest of the country is still much more conservative. Kerensky replaces Prince Lvov as prime minister.

August: General Kornilov leads attempted right-wing coup against Provisional

Government. Bolsheviks lead successful resistance.

September: Bolsheviks gain majority in Petrograd and Moscow Soviets.

October 25 (November 7 by western calendar): Key points in Petrograd occupied by revolutionaries; Winter Palace stormed. Congress of Soviets opens, with a Bolshevik majority, and takes power.

November: Counter-revolutionaries begin civil war. In late 1917 and early 1918 British, French and other foreign forces begin intervention to help the counter-revolutionaries.

1918

March: As German troops advance, Bolsheviks sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, ceding vast areas in return for peace.

summer: civil war stepped up. The 'peasant socialist' SR party openly supports counter-revolution; the Mensheviks (an avowedly Marxist party who consider the revolution premature) dither. Both are banned.

November: Revolution in Germany: Emperor overthrown, workers' councils set up. Mensheviks swing round to critical support for Soviet government and are re-legalised.

1919:

January: revolutionaries crushed in Berlin; Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht murdered by troops working with the Social Democratic government. Most intense period of the civil war in Russia. But there are revolutionary uprisings in Europe.

April: Soviet Republic in Bavaria (southern Germany).

March-August: Soviet Republic in Hungary. Workers put pressure on Western governments to abandon anti-Bolshevik intervention. By the end of the year the Red Army is in a strong position.

1920

March: Poland invades Russia.

late in year: Poles defeated ~~and civil war ends.~~

September: Mass factory occupations in Italy.

1921

early: Collapse of industry in Soviet Union: overall it is producing less than one-fifth of its 1913 output. From spring, millions starve to death. Under the 'communism', with economic allocation by military command, the Soviets have withered. With the removal of the immediate threat from imperialists, workers and peasants are less patient.

February: mass economic strikes in Petrograd. Georgia, previously under a Menshevik with the Soviet government, is forcibly annexed under Stalin's direction (and against Trotsky's protest). Menshevik party banned again in Russia.

March: rebellion by sailors at the naval base of Kronstadt, near Petrograd. Bolshevik Party congress brings in New Economic Policy to ease 'war communism' by controlled reintroduction of free market. A debate on trade unions ends in victory for Lenin, who argues for trade-union independent from this "workers' state with bureaucratic deformations". Party puts a ban (intended to be temporary) on factions. Uprising by German CP ends in fiasco. *peasant uprisings (last phase of civil war)*.

June-July: At the 3rd Congress of the Communist International, the Bolshevik leaders call for an orientation to "the conquest of the masses in the west, as the necessary preliminary to "the conquest of power".

1922

March: Stalin becomes general secretary.

May: Lenin suffers a stroke. He is out of action almost all the time from now until his death in January 1924.

Late 1922 to early 1923: "Lenin's last struggle". He tries to form a bloc with Trotsky to fight Stalin and the growing bureaucratism, but the party and state machine falls into the hands of the "troika" of Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Stalin.

1923

October: First Trotsky opposition manifesto, the "Platform of the 46", argues for more democracy and more industrialisation. In Germany, the CP, following the advice of Zinoviev and Stalin, muffs a revolutionary opportunity and is heavily defeated.

December: Trotsky publishes "The New Course", calling for more democracy.

1924

February-May: "Lenin levy". Core of Bolshevik party swamped in a mass of 240,000 new recruits, many of them careerists, easily manipulated by the growing bureaucratic machine.

Summer: 5th Congress of Comintern, under Zinoviev's leadership, promotes a blustering ultra-left course. Trotsky polemicises against this. Western CPs "Bolshevised" — given more efficient organisation, but also bureaucratic regimes and bans on factions.

Autumn: Trotsky publishes "Lessons of October", drawing the lessons of the defeat in Germany. Bureaucrats respond with an international slander campaign against him.

December: Stalin comes out for "Socialism in One Country", previously considered an absurdity by all Marxists.

1925

Growing tensions between Zinoviev and Kamenev, on one side, and Stalin, on the other. Stalin shifts towards an alliance with the right wing led by Bukharin, who advocate a longer-term

policy based on the richer peasants. The split between Zinoviev-Kamenev and Stalin comes out into the open in December 1925.

1926

Early in year: Joint Opposition (Trotsky-Zinoviev-Kamenev) formed. Intense political battle from summer 1926 to end of 1927, over democracy, industrialisation and planning, and international issues. Comintern is shifting towards seeking powerful bourgeois and bureaucratic friends, rather than relying on workers' struggle; this leads to missed opportunities in the British General Strike, and bloody defeat in China.

1927

December: Defeat of the Opposition. Trotsky and Zinoviev expelled from the party. Zinovievites immediately capitulate; Trotskyists sent into exile in remote parts of the USSR.

1928

January: "Strike of the kulaks"; richer peasants refuse to supply the cities. Stalin resorts to force to get supplies, and begins to turn against Bukharin and the right wing. Pyatakov and a few other Trotskyists capitulate.

1929

January: Trotsky deported from USSR.

July: Preobrazhensky, Radek and some other Trotskyists capitulate.

Late 1929-early 1930: Stalin's wavering policy lurches into a full-scale drive against the peasantry. By February 1930 over 50% of peasants are in collective farms. Then there is another lurch backwards, but after that Stalin's change of policy becomes stable. By 1936 90% of peasants are in collective farms. Together with this goes a vast mobilisation of resources for forced-march industrialisation. Results: Number of livestock drops by about two-thirds, as panicked peasants slaughter their beasts. There is severe famine in 1932. Social inequality and bureaucratic privilege increase. Industrial labour forces doubles between 1927-8 and 1936. All independent trade union activity crushed. Savage labour laws punish 'economic sabotage' by death and absenteeism or leaving your job by jail. Real wages fall by over 50% between 1928 and 1935. Between 1927-8 and 1937, output of electricity increases by a factor of 7; of steel by a factor of 31/2; of coal by a factor of 31/2. Output of industrial consumer goods stagnates. Consumption per head of meat, lard and butter fall by over 50% between 1928 and 1932.

1932

late: All communication cut off between Trotsky and his co-thinkers in the USSR.

1933

January: The Comintern's "third period" policy, pursued since 1928-9—of breakaway 'red' unions, no united front, etc.—finally leaves the way open for Hitler to take power. Within a few months all the organisations of the German working class, the most powerful in the world, are crushed. Trotsky abandons the perspective of fighting for reform of the Communist Parties and calls for a new International. Soon afterwards he calls for revolution rather than reform in the USSR.

1934

Over the year, the Comintern shifts from the "third period" policy to one of "popular fronts" with bourgeois forces against fascism.

December: The assassination of Kirov (the local supremo in Leningrad) becomes the signal for the start of the Great Purges. Not only oppositionists, but also the great majority of the delegates to the solidly Stalinist "party" congress of 1934, are purged, jailed, or executed. By 1940-2 ten million people are in labour camps.

1935

May: USSR signs military pact with France.

1936

July: Fascist revolt against Popular Front government in Spain opens the Civil War. The Republican side is sabotaged by bourgeois-Stalinist repression of workers' and peasants' struggles, and by Stalinist terror against leftists. Fascist victory in March 1939.

August (to 1938): Moscow Trials: almost all the surviving Bolshevik leaders are brought before show trials and sentenced to death.

1938

March: Hitler seizes Austria.

October: Hitler seizes the German-speaking part of Czechoslovakia.

1939

March: Hitler seizes the rest of Czechoslovakia.

August 23: Hitler-Stalin pact, including agreement on:

September 1: simultaneous German and USSR invasions of Poland, which lead to World War 2.

November: USSR invades Finland; finally signs peace in March 1940 on the basis of Finland ceding a lot of territory.

1940

June: USSR invades Baltic states.

July: Stalinist agent murders Trotsky.

1941

June: German troops invade USSR, advance to Leningrad (September) and Moscow (October).

1942

November: USSR counter-offensive begins at Stalingrad.

1943

January: Germans defeated at Stalingrad. Tide of war turns against Germany.

July: American troops land in Italy.

November: Tito establishes a Stalinist government which over the following months wins full power in Yugoslavia.

1944

January: Siege of Leningrad broken.

June: D-Day: British and American troops land in France.

July: USSR army advances into Poland.

August-October: People of Warsaw rise up against Nazis; are defeated while Russian army stands by just outside the city.

1945

early: USSR conquers most of Eastern Europe.

February: Yalta conference between US, Britain and USSR.

May: Germany surrenders.

July-August: Potsdam conference finalises deal worked out at Yalta: partition of Germany, shifting both eastern and western borders of Poland far to the west, deporting 15 million Germans from Eastern Europe, effectively ceding Eastern Europe to Stalin.

August: Atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japan surrenders.

1947

"Cold war" between USSR and West begins. Stalinists in Eastern Europe move to take full control using the 'salami tactic'.

1948

February: "Prague coup"—elimination of non-Stalinists from government in Czechoslovakia backed by big Stalinist-organised workers' demonstrations.

March: Second Congress of Fourth International.

April: Stalin imposes blockade to stop traffic from west to Berlin.

May: Britain withdraws from Palestine, new state of Israel declared, war between Israel and Arab forces led by British officers.

July: Open break between Stalin and Tito.

August: McCarthyite witch-hunt in USA begins to gather force.

1949

January: Stalinist forces led by Mao Zedong enter the Chinese capital, Beijing.

May: Mao's forces take Shanghai.

1950

June: Korean war starts.

Glossary

Bolshevik-Leninist: the term used to describe itself by the Trotskyist movement in Trotsky's lifetime.

Bonapartist: dictatorial, after Napoleon Bonaparte, who ruled France from 1799 to 1812, and his nephew Napoleon III, Emperor of France from 1852 to 1870.

Brest-Litovsk: treaty signed between Russia's revolutionary government and Germany, gaining peace for Russia at the expense of ceding vast areas to German conquest. The Left SRs, and many Bolsheviks, opposed the signing of the treaty.

Constituent Assembly: was convened in January 1918, and dissolved the next day, without any mass protest.

Czar: The Emperor, or King, of the Russian Empire. The Czar was overthrown by the February 1917, in favour of the bourgeois Provisional Government, which was then in its turn overthrown by the workers in October 1917.

Kaiser: The Emperor of Germany.

Mensheviks: The more moderate of the two Marxist parties in the Russian Empire. Unlike the Bolsheviks, they argued that the workers must first support the bourgeoisie in making a "bourgeois revolution", and that socialism would be a far-off second stage.

Paris Commune: After Prussia (the biggest of the then divided German states) invaded France in 1870, the French government collapsed; the workers took over Paris and ran it for ten weeks until they were crushed.

Soviets: 'Soviet' is simply the Russian word for 'council'. The 'Soviets' in 1917 (and in the earlier Russian Revolution of 1905) were uniquely democratic. They were made up of delegates accountable to the workers in their workplace and recallable at any time; they represented the most direct and responsive form of workers' democracy, not distorted by any privileged and unelected bureaucracy.

SRs: Social-Revolutionaries, a socialist party which based itself not on the working class but on "the people" in general. By the time of the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917 they were completely split into "Right SRs", allied to the Mensheviks, and "Left SRs", allied to the Bolsheviks.

Third World War: In the late 1940s, almost everyone, across the political spectrum, thought that a Third World War was likely between the USA and the USSR.

Transitional programme: a programme of working-class action drafted by Trotsky and adopted by the Trotskyist movement in 1938, which developed the idea (coined by the Communist International in 1921) of a system of "transitional demands" which, by developing the logic of working-class struggle, could provide a bridge between immediate "minimum" demands and the "maximum" programme of socialism.

SRs
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1. The 1917 Revolution

Read: chapter 1, pp.11-24 of Introduction.

Key ideas:

- A. October 1917 was a genuine workers' and democratic revolution.
- B. The alternative to the workers' revolution was not gentle bourgeois progress, but violent reaction. The Provisional Government had proved incapable of dealing with the main democratic issues, let alone the social issues.
- C. The revolutionaries' perspective was not to build an ideal society in backward Russia, but to establish a bridgehead for workers' revolution that would spread across Europe.

Key questions:

- A. In what way was the revolution democratic, more democratic than the Provisional Government or indeed than any parliamentary regime?
- B. If the revolutionary regime was democratic, why did it dissolve the Constituent Assembly? Why did it go on to ban opposition parties and publications? Should those measures be a model for future revolutions?
- C. We now know that the Russian workers' republic was left isolated, driven to maintain itself as best it could in impossible conditions, with terrible results. Does this mean that the revolutionaries' perspective was always false?

2. "Socialism In One Country"

Read: introduction, 1.III and 1.XIII; also *Revolution Betrayed* chapter 12, included as an appendix to this Study Guide.

Key ideas:

- A. Socialism – working-class socialism, anyway, the "free association of producers" as Marx called it – presupposes a higher level of technology and culture than capitalism. Since capitalism's technology and culture is international, and any one country cut off from the rest would fall a long way backwards, socialism must be international. The workers can win power in a single country, but they can develop their victory into a functioning socialist society only by extending the revolution to other countries.
- B. Stalin proclaimed "socialism in one country" (and that country the USSR) as the programme of the bureaucracy in 1924. That implied that workers in countries outside the USSR should be mainly admirers and defenders of the socialism being built in the USSR, rather than fighters for their own revolution.
- C. It also implied debasing the ideal of socialism so that the USSR (even glossed-up) could be seen as an example of it.

Key questions:

- A. Why does socialism presuppose advanced technology and culture? Why can't you organise socialism – defined as economic planning and economic equality – in a backward economy?
- B. If a workers' revolution in one country cannot build socialism, then what can it build? Plainly it can build something "socialistic" in the broad, general sense. Why then is the argument about "socialism in one country" more than a matter of insisting on exact definitions of words?
- C. What did the Left Opposition advocate as policy for economic and social development in the USSR until workers' revolution elsewhere came to its aid?

3. The Stalinist counter-revolution

Read: chapter 2, and introduction pp.24-45.

Key ideas:

- A. The Russian workers' revolution was isolated because of the lack of Bolshevik parties outside Russia.
- B. Then backwardness took its toll, as the Bolsheviks had expected but not in the way they expected. The exigencies and economic disarray of civil war had already generated an authoritarian state and dispersed the industrial working class. A bureaucracy rose out of the Bolshevik party and merged with elements of the old Tsarist state machine. It became more cohesive, more self-confident, more weighty.
- C. In 1928-30 it turned decisively on the workers, smashing the Bolshevik party and the trade unions.

Key questions:

- A. Did the activist discipline of Lenin's Bolshevik party generate the bureaucratic state? Was Stalin just the continuator of Lenin?
- B. How can what happened be called a counter-revolution when there was no violent overthrow of the government?
- C. Why couldn't Trotsky simply use the prestige he had as leader of the Red Army in the civil war to forestall the bureaucratic counter-revolution?

4. Trotsky's arguments for considering the Stalinist USSR to be still a workers' state, although degenerated

Read: chapter 2, p.225-9 (a summary by

Shachtman in 1938 of Trotsky's argument), chapter 9 of *Revolution Betrayed* (included with this Study Guide), and introduction pp.46-81. The whole of *Revolution Betrayed* and *In Defence of Marxism*, and Cannon's "speech on the Russian question" in *Struggle for a Proletarian Party*, are relevant here.

Key ideas:

A. "Dissolving being into becoming". Trotsky views the USSR as in extreme crisis – a radically unstable momentary combination of incompatibles. Thus, to his mind, the USSR cannot be analysed on the assumption that a current "snapshot" represents even a temporarily ongoing, integrated "whole", but only by seeing it as a moment of flux between its past and its future. Trotsky takes this approach because the USSR is something new and unexpected, and also because there are facts to make the idea of the system being on the verge of breakdown plausible (economic convulsions in the early 1930s, enormous purges in the middle and later 1930s). Trotsky's "snapshot" picture of the USSR is that of a "system of Bonapartist gangsterism", or a "bureaucratic economy", but he takes this "snapshot" as representing only a fleeting, effervescent manifestation of a process whose fundamentals are different.

B. *Nationalised property*. The USSR originated in a workers' revolution. That workers' revolution expropriated capitalist property and nationalised the commanding heights of the economy. The world bourgeoisie (and the dispossessed Russian capitalists) desire a return to private ownership. That has not happened yet. The USSR, in the 1930s, shows great industrial growth contrasting with a huge slump in the West. Trotsky attributes this to the inherent merits of nationalised property. The nationalised property thus defines a more progressive economic form. In world-historic terms, that is linked with the working class. In short: past = workers' revolution; future = capitalist restoration or working-class regeneration, freeing the full potential of the nationalised property; present = nationalised property gravely corrupted by autocracy, but not yet abolished.

C. "The gatekeeper of the social conquests". In 1921 the Bolshevik Old Guard held power fundamentally as a hierarchy of state officials ruling over a dispersed and exhausted working class and a discontented peasantry. It was a "gatekeeper", "watchman", or "locum" for the working-class conquests of 1917-21, holding on until revolution in other countries (and also, in part, economic revival in the USSR) brought better times. After 1921 the hierarchy of state officials grew enormously in social weight, and in social distance from and opposition to the working class – Trotsky analyses this all concretely, to the point of declaring that the state bureaucracy has all the vices of a ruling class – but Trotsky still sees an element of continuity, inasmuch as the state hierarchy still acts as "gatekeeper" of the nationalised property.

Key questions:

It was a commonplace of classical Marxism that nation-

alised property alone did not define a workers' state. (Why not?) Trotsky knew that. In Trotsky's mind, three special features of the nationalised property in the USSR nevertheless made it the defining basis of a workers' state. What is the argument on each one, and what light does the empirical test of the half-century after Trotsky's death cast on it?

A. Origins

B. Flux – radical incompatibility between economic base and political regime

C. Progressive development of forces of production.

5. The Stalinist USSR as new exploitative class system: why was 1939-40 a decisive turning point for theory?

Read: chapters 3, 4, 5, 14; introduction pp.82-114. Also, *In Defence of Marxism; Struggle for a Proletarian Party*.

Key ideas:

A. In 1939-40 the presumed positive relation between the working class and the nationalised property (supposed residue of workers' revolution and basis of future progress after working-class regeneration) is put to the test: direct conflict between the extension of the Stalinist nationalised-property system and the living working class, specifically in Finland.

B. The idea that the nationalised property can be considered as an "economic base" of the USSR separable from and in opposition to the Stalinist autocracy is also put to empirical test. Despite attempts by Trotsky to perceive a separation between a "revolutionary impulse" given by attempts to extend the nationalised property, and a subsequent counter-revolutionary role of the autocracy, the evidence – as Trotsky eventually comes to admit – is of the counter-revolutionary and "revolutionary" activities being simultaneous and inseparable. The nationalised property is the autocracy's.

C. In 1939-40 the argument among the Trotskyists is not, despite later myth, about the summary theoretical formula to apply to the USSR. All the main disputants agree, at least for the sake of argument, that the USSR is a degenerated workers' state. The dispute is about concrete political responses. Adequate working-class political responses in 1939-40, however, push Trotsky's much-revised theoretical system to the point of open self-destruction and a fundamental shift towards the idea that the Stalinist USSR is a new system of class exploitation, and indeed has been one for several years.

Key questions:

A. In 1939-40 two strands in Trotsky's thought develop to the point of open self-contradiction. What are the "two

Trotsky's"?

- B. Which class owns the means of production in the USSR?
- C. Are the social relations in the Stalinist USSR defined by nationalised property?

6. The new Russian Empire: the verdict of the 1940s on the dispute of 1939-40

Read: chapters 6, 10, 11, 12; Introduction pp. 115 to end.

Key ideas:

- A. The element of Russian imperialist expansion, which maybe in 1939-40 could still arguably be dismissed as marginal and secondary, became big and plain in the 1940s (thus the two-superpower world of 1945-89).
- B. In trying to see these events through the spectacles of "workers' state" theory, the "orthodox" Trotskyists disabled themselves politically.
- C. They also transformed the content of the "workers' state" theory, within the same old verbiage, into something very different from Trotsky's ideas.

Key questions:

What do you make of these arguments?

A. "Yes, Trotsky in 1939-40 predicted the imminent collapse of the USSR. But that was a matter of activist revolutionary perspectives, like Marx's expectation of a workers' revolution coming soon in 1848. Yes, the revolutionaries were defeated, and the USSR proved more stable. But that does not prove Trotsky's theory wrong. Anyway, Trotsky was proved right in the longer term. The bureaucracy restored capitalism. The fact that Trotsky was wrong about the number of years it would take proves nothing".

B. "The minority in the Trotskyists' dispute in 1939-40 were an unprincipled and incoherent combination, who had no definite theory. They thus fell victim to the pressure of middle-class opinion hostile to the USSR, as represented most forcefully in their ranks by James Burnham. This is proved by Burnham's subsequent rapid move to the right, and Shachtman's similar though slower move".

C. "Lenin explained that those who look for a 'pure' socialist revolution, with the workers and the bosses each neatly lined up on their own side, will never see one. The 'Shachtmanites' turned themselves into people who were all in favour of revolution – except when and where it actually happened...."

7. The revolutionary party

Read: chapter 7, introduction section 3.XII.

Key ideas:

A. The job of a revolutionary party – that is, of activists who combine and organise long-term, in both stormy times and quiet – in the working-class movement is to develop, sustain and advocate a coherent set of ideas. Everything organisational is subordinate to that political and ideological role.

B. "The significance of the programme is the significance of the party; the significance of the party is the significance of the programme". The revolutionary programme is never "finished" any more than the party or the workers' movement are "finished".

C. As James P Cannon remarked much later, summarising an idea expounded by Shachtman in these texts, "polemics are the mark of a revolutionary party". A revolutionary organisation cannot carry out its main job of promoting and developing ideas if it just presents its conclusions ready-made, without debate, or propped only by straw-man "debates" against the most crass bourgeois opponents.

Key questions:

A. Why did the "orthodox Trotskyists" drift away from this notion of the party? And towards what different notion, or range of notions?

B. All this emphasis on education and polemic – isn't it over-intellectual and elitist? Isn't it better just to have a catch-all activist organisation which gets on with activity without bothering too much about theoretical quibbles?

C. What is democratic centralism?

8. Democracy

Read: chapters 8 and 13, introduction sections 3.VI and 3.XII.

Key ideas:

A. The working class can own the means of production only collectively and therefore democratically. Therefore democracy is integral to socialism. The working class can arouse itself, educate itself, and organise itself only collectively and democratically, and only through taking up immediate political questions, many of them to do with democratic rights. Thus democracy is also integral to the struggle for socialism. A socialist party, and especially a small socialist party, cannot rally workers to itself by counterposing socialist revolution to the immediate democratic concerns of those workers.

B. The difficulties of civil war, and of "holding on" in the years immediately after the civil war, pushed the Bolsheviks into making virtue out of necessity and downgrading democratic concerns. Those beginnings were expanded into a whole system of contempt for democratic concerns ("rotten liberalism",

"middle-class", "anti-Soviet") by the Stalinists, who passed off bureaucratic manipulation as militant working-class resoluteness and realism.

C. Especially in the 1940s, this downgrading of democracy also infected the "orthodox Trotskyists". Why? Because their adherence to the "workers' state" formula committed them to the idea that socialist revolution (in "deformed" variants) could be extended indefinitely without democracy; and their adherence to the picture of a world in universal "death agony", where however the advance of the Russian Army would bring proof that "the strangled and desecrated October Revolution was still alive", committed them to an apocalyptic perspective of an ever-imminent all-out confrontation between capitalism in final decline and workers driven to revolution by the highest pitch of desperation, leaving no room for mere democratic questions.

Key questions:

A. How does the attention to democratic concerns which we advocate here (and in our arguments about Ireland, Israel-Palestine, etc.) differ from the old Menshevik and Stalinist stages theory ("democratic revolution" first, then workers' socialist revolution at a later stage)?

B. If the US-led bloc in the Cold War was more democratic than the USSR-led bloc – which, despite McCarthyism, open race discrimination in the Southern USA, and many horrific US-backed military dictatorships in the Third World, it was – why wasn't Shachtman right to rally (critically) to US imperialism in his old age?

C. In the SWP-IS's pamphlet on the 1967 Israeli-Arab war – one of their most widely circulated and influential publications of the time – Tony Cliff makes this comment on Gamal Abdul Nasser, then leader of a quasi-Stalinist regime (one party, all trade unions and "mass organisations" run by the state, etc.) in state-capitalist Egypt. "Of course, Marxists agree with Nasser on many points, for a start his opposition to bourgeois democracy. However..." What's wrong here? And how do you think the SWP-IS could write such things?

9. Millenarianism

Read: chapters 8 and 9, intro. 3.V, 3.X, 3.XII, and pp.110-114.

Key ideas:

A. The term "millenarianism" comes from Christian movements in the Middle Ages which looked for social revolution through the Second Coming of Christ (after which, according to the Bible, Christ would rule on Earth for a thousand years – the "millennium"). More generally, it refers to radical movements which look for social revolution through the intervention of superhuman forces. For the neo-Trotskyists after the 1940s, that superhuman force was "the process of world revolution" or "the

laws of history".

B. The neo-Trotskyists were driven to millenarianism by the view that the extension of Stalinist nationalised property signified deformed socialist revolution. If they denied that the Stalinists were working-class revolutionaries – and they did, otherwise they would not have remained Trotskyists of any sort – then they could maintain that view only by the idea of a superhuman force, somehow connected to nationalised property, which maintained and made workers' states without requiring any action by the workers.

C. Millenarianism first emerged during World War 2 in the notion that the Russian Army was, despite a reactionary leadership which the Trotskyists knew about and wrote about, still somehow deep down "Trotsky's Red Army". Its advance would give a great boost to socialist revolution in Europe, despite Stalin. Then the neo-Trotskyists retreated from millenarianism for a while, and tried to reassess. After 1948, when they concluded that the Stalinist systems in Eastern Europe were "workers' states", they returned to millenarianism full-blast.

Key questions:

to look at the connections between the drift to millenarianism and...

A. The problems we have discussed on democracy and the party.

B. The frequent reliance of neo-Trotskyist propaganda on the idea that an immense economic crisis is about to happen, or is already happening, and will produce, or is already producing, great political convulsions.

C. The idea that our answer to divisions in the working class created by national conflicts – in Ireland and in Israel-Palestine, for example – should be to look to "the logic of permanent revolution" to resolve them.

10. Summary and conclusions

Read: Introduction sections on the Communist Manifesto and on Trotsky and the Future of Socialism, and the Communist Manifesto.

Key ideas:

summarised point by point in 3.XII.

Key questions:

A. How do we answer the argument that the experience of the USSR fatally discredits socialist revolution?

B. What do we mean by saying we are Trotskyists? In what way are we different from other Trotskyists?

C. How does what we do now as a small propaganda group contribute to a socialist future?