

editorial

WE PUBLISH PERMANENT REVOLUTION, a Trotskyist discussion and theoretical quarterly, to help the working class in Britain prepare for its biggest battles in 50 years. The Labour movement, constructed over two centuries by the dedicated activity of millions of proletarian fighters, will in the coming period either be tamed, broken and completely subordinated as never before in its history, to the interests of British capitalism and its state. Or, in the course of fighting back, it will reorganise and reconstruct itself, completely - ideologically, politically and organisationally. It must turn self-defence against the Tory onslaught into an offensive against capitalism, or be forced to accept the consequences of the fact that this is a capitalist system, ruled by the capitalists in the interests of the capitalists. Only the programme of revolutionary communism, built up out of the experience of the whole international working class, can show the working class how to win finally and completely. The construction within the working class of a combat organisation armed with this programme and with a Marxist understanding of capitalist society - that is the burning need of the moment.

The Working Class

In 1905 Lenin wrote: "The working class is instinctively, spontaneously social democratic (i. e. in modern usage "communist" ed.). The revolution has justified the work done by us social democrats, it has justified our hope and faith in the truly revolutionary spirit of the proletariat... The heroic proletariat has proved by deeds its readiness to fight, and its ability to fight consistently and in a body for clearly understood aims, to fight in a purely social-democratic spirit." (Collected Works vol. 10, p. 32)

In Britain over the past year the struggle never reached the proportions of the 1905 revolution in Russia. But it reached tremendous heights, unknown in Britain this half-century. If the ruling class has despite this eased the NIRC into place as the new legal framework for "industrial relations", it is because the right-wing trade union leaders capitulated, and the "left" refused to actually fight back, to hit out at the government.

The militants of the working class have had a better, surer instinct. Time after time in the last year they have mobilised in their sections or have begun to move in very broad masses in response to the fundamental character of the conflict over the issue of trade union freedom, eager for a frontal assault on the government of Heath. The underlying tendency of every major struggle since the miners' strike at least has been for the mass strikes and mass solidarity actions to escalate into a general strike, an across the class mobilisation - and one with an open-ended perspective. In July the spontaneous drive was clearly in that direction.

Had the one day general strike called by the TUC (in order to keep the initiative in its own hands) actually occurred, had the government not released the five jailed dockers, then the strike would probably have been a British May 10th. It would then, like the events of May 1968 in France, have in fact shown its own real strength to the working class. And beyond doubt a mass industrial mobilisation would have succeeded in smashing the act.

Now as the first issue of PERMANENT REVOLUTION is printed the imposition of Phase Two of the wage freeze means that in the period ahead convulsive clashes and sudden upsurges will continue - and probably reach new heights. But the antics of the trade union and Labour leaders will also continue. The outcome so far - with the NIRC now almost established as the norm - would have been unthinkable had there been a genuine clash between the real forces on either side of the class line over the past year. It was those ruling class agents "on the workers' side" who ensured this outcome, splitting up the strength of the working class, deflecting its blows against the government, as in July. The activities of these people, and not any other strength the ruling class has, frustrated the workers.

Its 'Leadership'

The role of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy, their perfidious connection with the capitalist state, their disloyalty to the working class - these, in the year 1973, cause no surprise. They are the habitual betrayers of workers' struggles; treason against the working class is their trade to which generations of bureaucrats have served a long apprenticeship. And even a Scanlon cannot escape from bureaucratic inertia, from limited trade union horizons, and simple ingrained fear of action.

Nor are we surprised at the incapacity of the Communist Party to build a revolutionary party and a communist rank-and-file movement in the trade unions: a parallel leadership of the working class, armed with the revolutionary communist politics which answer the needs of the working class in this period. It is after all forty years now since Trotskyists - after a ten-year struggle to reform the world communist movement - reached the unavoidable conclusion that the communist parties were dead for the purposes of revolution. The need to construct a revolutionary communist organisation not only against the Labour and trade union bureaucracies but also against the "official" Communist Party has long been understood. Many attempts to build it have been made in Britain and internationally over the last forty years.

For us the operative question is why in Britain today, after decades of Trotskyist activity, and thirty-five years after the founding of the Fourth International, is there no revolutionary communist (Trotskyist) organisation rooted within the working class movement capable of giving adequate scientific, programmatic and practical expression to the combativity of the working class? Why are the forces of revolutionary Marxism in Britain in political and organisational disarray, impotent to affect the struggle, divided into a plethora of groups, and largely irrelevant to the working class? This is a question which concerns not only the still small forces of the "Trotskyist" movement. Without the creation of an adequate organisation within the working

class and based on the Trotskyist programme, the working class will, ultimately, face defeat.

The "Marxists"

"The role of the subjective factor in a period of organic development can remain quite a subordinate one. Then diverse proverbs of gradualism arise, as: 'slow but sure!', and, 'one must not kick against the pricks!', and so forth, which epitomise all the tactical wisdom of an organic epoch that abhorred 'leaping over stages'. But as soon as the objective prerequisites have matured, the key to the whole historical process passes into the hands of the subjective factor, that is, the importance of the party and the revolutionary leadership." (Trotsky: Third International After Lenin).

Our problem in Britain to-day is illustrated in the contrast between our situation and that described in 1905 by Lenin, who argued at that time for large-scale recruitment of workers into the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolshevik fraction). He could then truly assert that the Russian Marxists already had an organisation, a party tradition, a worked out programme and tactics, a mature, experienced and stable cadre. But there has been no comparable achievement in Britain. No sizeable party or group worthy of the name "Trotskyist" exists...not to speak of existing within the working class movement. One absolute precondition for altering this situation is to recognise that this is the situation, and therefore the inescapable starting point.

Marxism was always weak in Britain from the 1880's onwards. Compensating by a habitual sectarianism for that weakness and primitiveness and for the wide-spread indifference towards it of a proletariat partly reconciled, then, to capitalism, it only increased its weakness and isolation. The CP was never large, never fully escaped the sectarian tradition and from the end of the 1920's onwards was basically a negative factor in the British labour movement. Trotskyism in Britain was the child of this sickly parent, combining these defects with the problems of Trotskyism as an international ideological current. After a brief and transitory "flowering", the movement collapsed into the Labour Party and scattered into a variety of tendencies. In the 'fifties and after, as the effect of the capitalist boom was felt in the metropolitan countries, the labour movement stagnated and moved rightwards - with all the Trotskyist groups inside the belly of the Labour Party whale. Despite sporadic activity of a peculiar sort by the SLL, Trotskyism was very weak and anyway marginal to the working class. The infusion of blood into the movement in 1968 and after could only be the beginning of the process of political clarification for the fragments of the movement, a process of reworking the political and organisational problems which have beset the Trotskyist movement since at least the 'forties. The great and inspiring working class upsurges have burst upon us while this process is still in its beginning, and the revolutionary groups are nowhere near adequate to the political tasks thrown up by the tremendous combativity of the working class.

Of the British Trotskyist groups bigger than Workers' Fight, the RSL is far-gone in an osmosis into the Labour Party, content to "demand" that the Labour Party carry out...socialist policies! The IMG (official British section of the USFI) is best described as a quasi-Bordigist sect cut off from the working class. On almost every single issue of major importance to the working class of the last tumultuous year it has been inadequate or wrong; on how to fight the NIRC; how to fight racialism; on how the working class's attitude towards the bosses' great debate (?) on the common market should be... In the July crisis over the jailing of the dockers it served up the entire Transitional Programme as a pot-pourri of maximalist propaganda. Fundamentally it had nothing to say to workers thronging the streets on the specific events that had mobilised them. All it had were general truisms about smashing capitalism and building soviets. The tragedy of this organisation and the many fine militants within it attracted by the banner of the Fourth International has been that just as the labour upsurge started the IMG was disorientated by the sectarian, abstentionist positions taken by its last conference.

If previously the SLL had appeared ultra-left because of its ultimatism and attempts to substitute itself for the masses of the working class, its organically right-wing character was now revealed in the light of the actual appearance of that mass movement. Had a full general strike developed last July the SLL's proposal that its goal should be a general election would have lined that organisation up plainly and unambiguously with the reactionaries.

IS, the biggest and most serious self-proclaimed revolutionary group is not Trotskyist in either its ideas or its structure. It is building itself as a tendency which tacks somewhat to the left of the left social democracy. It claims some connection with the ideas of Marxism - but rarely allows that alleged connection to determine its politics. It does not recruit its militants on a hard, clearly Marxist political basis. It habitually buckles under reactionary pressure, particularly when this finds sharp expression within the working class itself; on the common market question its leadership changed its "line" with the unconcern of an advertising agency technician; on Ireland it oscillates with the wind of public opinion, now defending the Republican fighters, now distancing itself from them in a manner which appears scandalous to even whole layers of its own membership.

That this loose centrist tendency which will surely crumble under the blows of decisive class actions is nevertheless the most serious of the bigger groups is a measure of the problem facing the British working class in constructing a revolutionary leadership. In addition there are smaller, scattered groups of revolutionaries, including some "Maoist" and anarcho-spontaneist groups, not all of whose members can by any means be dismissed as 'non-revolutionaries'.

The long post war boom and relative stagnation of the labour movement is not the only (or even the decisive) cause of the crisis and lack of preparedness of the revolutionary left. There has also been

a political crisis which has beset the Fourth International movement since the War, scattering groups at every turn and leading in Britain to a long chain of organisational/political abortions.

The Crisis of Trotskyism

"Reactionary epochs like ours not only disintegrate and weaken the working class and its vanguard but also lower the general ideological level of the movement and throw political thinking back to stages long since passed through. In these conditions the task of the vanguard is above all not to let itself be carried along by the backward flow; it must swim against the current." (Trotsky: Stalinism and Bolshevism).

These words, written in 1937, sum up the great historical role and merit of pre-war Trotskyism. It defended the theoretical conquests of Bolshevism and the early Comintern. And it added to this heritage analyses of Stalinism and fascism, and drafted a Transitional Programme - based fundamentally on the positions of the first four Congresses of the Comintern. Through the 1920s and 1930s it was armed with a programme and basic analyses adequate to the period and to the real drives of the working class. But, isolated and ghettoised by pseudo-revolutionary stalinism, it was impotent to affect events - either, for instance, to stave off the working class defeat it saw looming in Germany, or to ensure the victory possible in a situation like Spain 1936-7.

With the beginning of the Yugoslav Revolution in 1943, and up to the FI's 3rd World Congress in 1951, Trotskyism entered a crisis. This was provoked not by the defeat of the movement, (this, in itself, could not be a major criterion: in Germany both the movement's correctness and its defeat had been total) but by the growth of forces outside it which, as in Yugoslavia and China, and later Cuba and Vietnam, carried through a major part of its Programme.

The task now was to analyse the new events like the Stalinisation of East Europe and the Chinese revolution and to integrate the conclusions into a theory which, understanding the laws of motion of the real world, could function as a guide to revolutionary action in that world, including the Stalinist states.

This was never adequately done. Analyses - we think correct analyses - were made leading to the designation of East Europe and China etc. as deformed workers states. (They rejected the various attempts to explain these developments in terms of "New Class" societies - bureaucratic collectivist or state capitalist - on the grounds that they were a) internally incoherent and unsatisfactory and b) implicitly revisions of some of the fundamental bases of Marxist theory.) These analyses were codified at the Third World Congress in 1951, and form the basis of all modern Trotskyism. But, as Trotsky explains in the following passage, codification, fundamental though it be, is not enough to answer the concrete questions posed in the building of a real revolutionary workers movement.

"The importance of a Programme does not lie so much in the manner in which it formulates

general theoretical conceptions (In the last analysis, this boils down to a question of 'codification', i. e. a concise exposition of the truths and generalisations which have been firmly and decisively acquired); it is to a much greater degree a question of drawing up the balance of the world economic and political experience of the last period, particularly of the revolutionary struggles . . ." (Third International After Lenin).

It is the persistent failure (often for 'objective' reasons outside the control of the Trotskyists) to answer competently the problems beyond the 'codifications' of 1951 and after, problems of analysis, tactics and orientation, that has created the existing chaos in the world Trotskyist movement. It is the mistakes in economic analysis, linked with misapplied tactics such as long term deep entry with (de facto) no public Trotskyist presence, and the various tactical zig-zags, that have combined with the very real objective difficulties and pressures on the Trotskyists to produce the present situation.

Two very broadly distinct tendencies, represented in Britain by the SLL and the IMG, have emerged from the movement that issued from the 'Refounding' Congress of 1951.

The first, formally accepting the 1951 conclusions, displays utter dogmatism towards the world around it, and acts as though the historical clock stopped in 1938. They refuse to attempt to draw conclusions from the immense events of the last third of a century, instead reiterating basic truths. Implicitly and logically this is a tendency to liquidate "Trotskyism" from being a doctrine resting on a scientific grasp of the real world into a form of crude utopian socialism based on belief, panaceas and timeless dogmas. On the question of 'Third World' struggles their policies and record would shame even the pre-1914 Second International.

The second tendency, now the USFI, while reiterating many of "the truths" about the need for revolutionary parties etc., has been concerned above all not to be 'unreceptive' or to be cut off from new living developments: it has a remarkable record of chameleonism towards other movements - social democratic, Maoist, etc. This receptiveness has in a sense allowed it to keep its roots in the soil of the real problems. But it behaves as a tendency which has suffered an inner collapse of doctrine. It doesn't know, and never has known, how to relate the 'doctrine' (the basic Programme of Trotskyism) to the world it operates in: just as its inversion doesn't know how to relate the world to its version of 'the doctrine'. The current public division within the USFI between the minority around the SWP and the majority (exemplified by the Ligue Communiste) on their assessment of the Vietnam situation is, at root, a programmatic disagreement, related to the whole post war problem of the assessment of Stalinism.

The crowning expression of ideological confusion is to be found in the concept of "Pabloism", given very wide currency in Britain by the SLL. This name, separate and apart from any man whose pseudonym

It was and is, is given by the SLL and its co-thinkers to most of a very wide range of post-war shortfallings, allegedly a tendency to "capitulate" to Stalinism/social democracy/Nationalism/the petit bourgeois etc etc. and "to liquidate". In fact "Pabloism" is a myth created by one section of the "Trotskyist" movement after 1951 to "explain" all the errors, inadequacies and faults common to the whole movement by ascribing them to a section of it which it defined factionally, organisationally and arbitrarily. Yet with one exception (the attitude to guerilla warfare) not a single one of the alleged traits of "Pabloism" is absent from one or other of the anti-Pabloites - usually in a more crass form, crassness being their speciality!

The "Anti-Pabloites", who have filled the air of the British left with the sulphur of their indignation against the "betrayers and liquidators" of Trotskyism do not clarify or explain any of its actual problems. They merely cover them in a sticky irrational mess of lies, half-truths, myths and distortions that blot out the light from any rational understanding. (The extreme example of "Pabloite capitulation" to Stalinism is that "the Pabloites" are alleged to have supported the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956 - which is unquestionably and blatantly a lie.) They are the Ian Paisleys of the "Trotskyist" movement - ignorant bible-thumpers who try to substitute quotations (not to mention misquotations) for analysis and self-righteousness for genuinely revolutionary practice.

That Trotskyists, committed to build an organisation within the working class on the Programme of the Fourth International, feel it necessary to say this is a measure of both the caricature that has passed for "Trotskyism" in Britain, and the work of regeneration that must be undertaken.

Tasks of Permanent Revolution

That the present USFI is the mainstream of post war Trotskyism is demonstrated negatively by the IC (SLL, OCI) alternatives. As such WORKERS' FIGHT has given the USFI "critical support" - support indicating a general ideological orientation in contradistinction to the ICs (where the WF group had its roots) and the new class tendencies. Any development of Trotskyist politics and theory will take place on the basis of what that mainstream tendency has achieved - in dialogue, discussion, and even in negation: it is the only tendency that, armed with the ideas of the Comintern and the 1938 FI, has tried to understand the events of the last 25 years. The others have not even succeeded in keeping the real world under review this last quarter century.

But that tendency is itself in a state of crisis. The IMG (to go back no further) proves its incapacity to build an adequate organisation in Britain to fight within the working class for the programme of communist internationalism. To accept, in the name of an adherence to "the FI", the discipline of that Tendency, with all its implications for the work we are able to do in the working class move-

ment here, would be to sacrifice the real communist internationalist work we can do on the altar of an organisational fetish. And, after all, the fact that there is such a contradiction between affiliation with the best FI tendency, and work in the British working class - that is not unconnected with the general political inadequacies that have beset the movement since the 1940s.

Our decision made in 1969 to give critical support to the USFI reflected our basic agreement with the codifications for which it was primarily responsible. Our conviction that it would be a dereliction of our duty to the working class struggle to accept its discipline and fuse with what is now the IMG - that defines the inadequacy of codification per se, as a guide.

After over a year's discussion, a special Workers' Fight Conference on January 27th/28th unanimously decided to reiterate the political substance of the previous declaration of critical support for the USFI; but to eliminate the organisational ambiguities by adopting instead, as a definition of our stance, the call for a fight to regenerate the FI. (see '41 Theses' as advertised on p. 79.)

We will build a communist internationalist organisation where we have forces. Notwithstanding the problems and the crises of the Trotskyist movement, the political and ideological basis for our work in building such an organisation exists - in the fundamental programme of that movement. There exists no other Programme for the conquest of power by the international working class and the creation of workers' states on the model of the Paris Commune and the early Soviet state. We will develop our roots in the working class movement, fighting to unite the internationalist communist Programme with the developing struggles of the working class. We will unite with other political tendencies in any common action that is in the working class interest. And we will seek dialogue where there are differences.

We will 'think' - that is, we will study the problems and history of the movement and republish basic texts and translations from the masters of Marxism. We will polemicise. We will clarify our understanding of the real meaning of Trotskyism in relation to the problems arising from the developing working class struggles. Permanent Revolution is our weapon here, and will necessarily be linked closely with the tasks of building a group. "Theory" in a revolutionary workers' organisation is neither the possession of mandarins nor preparatory material for the latest discussion in a discussion club. Trotsky compared it to a tool room of the party.

In tackling the complementary and interlinked tasks of building a revolutionary communist organisation and of attempting to resolve theoretical problems of the movement we hope to contribute to that regeneration of the Fourth International which has yet to be accomplished; and to contribute to the resolution of the problems of the British working class in the present period which we outlined in the first part of this editorial.