

# 50 years after the founding of the Fourth International

**5**0 years ago, in September 1938, 30 Trotskyists met in Paris and declared that the 'World Party of Socialist Revolution' was now in existence, the fourth Marxist International, in the direct line of succession from Marx and Lenin.

*Workers' Liberty* bases itself on the politics personified by Trotsky until 1940. Yet we find ourselves at odds on many issues with almost all the wide spectrum of groups which today call themselves Trotskyist. We have recently concluded that we can no longer give even the most qualified assent to one of the central dogmas of modern (post-1951) Trotskyism: that the societies of the Eastern Bloc are some form of workers' state. They are in fact new exploiting societies; they are not progressive compared to capitalism.

What did Trotskyism mean in 1938? Was the declaration of the Fourth International a futile gesture? What has happened to Trotskyism over the last half-century, and what does Trotskyism mean today?

The First International, the International Working Men's Association (1864-72) had organised the earliest working-class movements of a handful of European countries. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were active within it, and their work laid the theoretical foundations of a scientific labour movement.

The Second International (the Socialist International, 1889-1914) had organised an immense growth of the labour movements of Europe, and a few countries outside Europe, and had been formally Marxist. But its upper layers in almost all countries became enmeshed in the bourgeois parliamentary system and in routine trade unionism within the capitalist framework. The Second International collapsed when war broke out in August 1914. Its leading sections supported their own bourgeoisies and helped incite their own workers to slaughter the workers of enemy nations, yesterday's comrades in the Socialist International.

The Third, Communist, International (1919-1933) was set up by those who had led the Russian Revolution of October 1917. It rallied workers all over the world and bound them into a militant army of the revolution. Red Russia was its citadel, the headquarters of its general staff. But the USSR was isolated. The revolutionary workers in the West, in Italy, Germany and elsewhere, were defeated by the bourgeoisie, aided by the old reformist working-class parties. The workers who had made a socialist revolution in a backward country were left isolated, with immense problems, in conditions where socialism was impossible.

A new bureaucratic ruling elite grew up, led by Stalin, and seized power in the USSR. Still proclaiming themselves communists, they took control of the Communist International. In defiance of the ABCs of Marxism, they declared that it was possible to build socialism in one country, and that country none other than backward, war-ravaged Russia.

But they held power in the state created by the workers' revolution. They said that they were the communists and the Leninists, and that those who opposed them were 'Mensheviks' and counter-revolutionaries. They used the massive resources of the USSR's state to corrupt sections of the Communist International and bamboozle the rest. They purged the Communist International of the genuine Leninists. They transformed the Communist International from being a revolutionary International into a movement subordinated to Russian foreign policy.

A whole series of revolutionary possibilities in Europe and Asia were destroyed because of the bunglings of the Communist International led by Stalin and Bukharin, which talked



Leon Trotsky

communist revolution but pursued other goals: the German revolution of 1923; the British General Strike of 1926; the Chinese revolution of 1927. The isolation of the USSR was deepened and perpetuated, the bureaucracy strengthened.

In 1933 the powerful German labour movement — the reformist Social Democracy with eight million votes, and the Communist Party with four million, both with their own militias able to drive the Nazis off the streets of Berlin — surrendered peacefully to the Nazis, who had been called to power by the bourgeoisie. When the Communist International did not rise in revolt against those responsible for what had happened in Germany, Trotsky concluded that the Communist International was dead for the socialist revolution, murdered by Stalin. "The Third International is dead, long live the Fourth International!"

Trotsky had already by that time spent ten years fighting the Stalinist bureaucracy, inside the USSR and in the Communist International. He had criticised the official Communist International policy on Germany (1923), Britain, China, and then again Germany in the years during which Hitler rose to power. No more tragic and terrible literature exists in the history of politics than the writings on Germany produced by Trotsky between 1930 and 1933. Trotsky saw and foresaw with great accuracy exactly what was happening and would happen. He warned the German labour movement — warned in good time, while it was still possible to crush the fascists. But Trotsky's comrades in Germany numbered a few hundreds. Trotsky could do nothing but warn.

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It was the pattern of the 1930s, and it would be repeated in France and Spain later. Trotsky understood and analysed and argued for what the working class needed to do to win; but he was isolated and powerless, and the labour movement was defeated and crushed in country after country.

In the USSR, the bureaucracy was strengthened by the defeats of the European labour movement. The bureaucracy had balanced between the working class and the residual or reviving bourgeoisie throughout the 1920s. In 1928-30 it eliminated the bourgeoisie and made itself the sole master of society, enslaving the working class. It moved from confused bunglings in Britain and China — albeit bunglings rooted in the logic of its anti-Marxist doctrine of socialism in one country — to outright treachery in Germany, France and Spain. It shifted from the ultra-leftism it had fomented in Germany — where it had declared the Social Democrats to be worse enemies of the working class than the fascists were — to advocacy of alliances with bourgeois parties 'against fascism', that is, against Germany. In France, party secretary Maurice Thorez would go so far as to advocate a common front with patriotic — that is, anti-German — French fascists..

It was against this background of defeat and gross degeneration of the communist movement that Trotsky in 1933 broke definitively with the Communist International and called for a Fourth International.

Trotsky did not declare the existing Trotskyist movement to be the new International. The Trotskyist organisation was its pioneer, but the new International could only come about by regroupment of the forces of the working-class movement, just as the Communist International had regrouped sections breaking out of the Second. To do its work, the Fourth International had necessarily to be a mass International. In this spirit, Trotsky in 1934 greeted the publication of a new US journal as follows: 'Its name, 'The New International', is the programme of an entire epoch'.

This was a period of ferment in the international labour movement, as socialists responded to the threat of fascism and the experience of Stalinism. The Trotskyists set about seeking regroupments and new alliances. They entered socialist groups moving to the left in France, America, and other countries. But the movement for a new International faced tremendous difficulties. The reformist and Stalinist parties survived and grew and brought new defeats on the working class, defeats which weighed down on the whole international working-class movement. The movement for the Fourth International remained essentially the Trotskyists.

Central to the impossibility of a wider regroupment were major political differences, on the USSR, for example. Trotsky analysed the degeneration of the USSR stage by stage. Soon after the call for a new International, the Trotskyist movement decided that the road to reform

was blocked in the USSR, and that only a new revolution would defeat Stalin. They called it a 'political revolution' because it would preserve the existing state property, while eliminating the specifically bureaucratic features imposed on it by and in the interests of the bureaucracy. By contrast, the Right Communists (Brandlerite) groups which had also split from the Communist International (and which were numerically stronger than the Trotskyists) criticised the policies of the bureaucracy and advocated more democracy, but refused to identify the bureaucracy as a distinct caste and rejected the call for a new revolution.

In 1936 — the year of the great French General Strike and the initial victories of the Spanish workers against the insurgent fascist armies of General Franco — Trotsky proposed to the Trotskyists' international conference that it there and then declare itself the Fourth International. The conference rejected this proposal, holding to the old view that there would first have to be a substantial reorientation of the forces of the existing labour movement towards revolutionary politics.

In 1938, on the very eve of war, the Trotskyists did finally decide to proclaim themselves the Fourth International. Trotsky wrote:

"Sceptics ask: but has the moment for the creation of the Fourth International yet arrived? It is impossible, they say, to create an international 'artificially'; it can arise only out of great events... The Fourth International has already risen out of great events: the greatest defeats of the proletariat in history. The cause for these defeats is to be found in the degeneration and perfidy of the old leadership. The class struggle does not tolerate an interruption... The Fourth International... has no need of being 'proclaimed'. It exists and it fights..."

The objective situation was now much worse than in 1936. The Spanish revolution had been strangled by the Stalinists, and the final victory of Franco's armies was only months away. Europe was visibly heading towards the war which broke out exactly a year later. The savage purges which killed millions in the USSR led Trotsky, in the programmatic document of the 1938 conference, to declare that Stalin's political regime "differed from fascism only in more unbridled savagery".

The new International was organisationally feeble. The 30 delegates deliberated for one day only. The only groups with significant numbers were the Belgian and US organisations, the latter having about one thousand members. The chair was Max Shachtman, who was to lead half the US organisation out of the International 18 months later. The 'USSR section' — in fact already liquidated by the GPU — was 'represented' by a Stalinist police agent.

There was implicit in the declaration of the Fourth International a shift from the ideas of the previous period. Before, everything had been seen as resting on a reorientation of sections of the existing

movement, on the creation of mass parties as the prerequisite for revolution. The perspectives of Trotskyism now, while continuing to conceive of the reconstitution of mass communist working-class parties as the central goal of their activities, stressed the element of mass spontaneous working-class upsurge, bringing a new vanguard, rather than the reorientation of the given vanguard. If the stress of the Trotskyists up to 1933 had been on the "1902" side of Leninism, the need for inner-party rectification, now it was the "1905" side, the perspective of the revolutionaries being able to put themselves at the head of a mass "spontaneously socialist" revolt that would break through the bureaucratic crust.

These were in fact *fundamentally* correct perspectives — as perspectives, as a guide to action, though not as crystal-ball prediction. The programme and analyses of Trotskyism were still fundamentally adequate to the world the Trotskyists operated in — except for the limited forces at the disposal of the Trotskyists, in 1938 as in the preceding 15 years.

Trotsky's perspective was utterly defeated. In retrospect what has happened seems to have been *necessary* given all the conditions which in fact made for it. It might seem nonsense to say that a perspective that failed to take full and accurate account of the specific weight of certain factors that were later to render it inoperable was nevertheless a correct perspective for those who fought for it. It is a matter of the historical time scale, and of what a Marxist perspective is.

As the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci argued:

"'Too much' (therefore superficial and mechanical) political realism often leads to the assertion that a statesman should only work within the limits of 'effective reality'; that he should not interest himself in what 'ought to be', but only in what 'is'. This would mean that he should not look farther than the end of his own nose..."

In reality one can 'scientifically' foresee only the struggle, but not the concrete moments of this struggle, which cannot but be the result of opposing forces in continuous movement, which are never reducible to fixed quantities, since within them quantity is continually becoming quality. In reality one can 'foresee' to the extent that one acts, to the extent that one applies a voluntary effort and therefore contributes concretely to creating the result 'foreseen'. Prediction reveals itself thus not as a scientific act of knowledge, but as the abstract expression of the effort made, the practical way of creating a collective will".

The Trotskyists did *predict* accurately the mass working class upsurge which came at the end of World War 2. They could not *predict* their own defeat in the struggle for the masses, except at the cost of simply eliminating themselves as a factor in the situation. In fact, at no point at least up to the middle or late 1940s was it possible for revolutionaries to have a perspective of capitalist and Stalinist

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reconsolidation, without submitting to a premature admission of defeat. The logic of such an admission would have been that the Trotskyists should have *given up* as soon as they decided, in 1933, that the mass Communist International was dead for revolutionary purposes.

When Trotsky was killed by a Stalinist assassin in August 1940, the Fourth International was organisationally more feeble than it had been in 1938, having just suffered a major split. It soon collapsed organisationally in Europe, with some incidental political confusion, as the Nazis conquered France and the Low Countries. The centre was moved to the USA, from where Trotskyist seamen went around the non-fascist world to maintain contacts.

In the occupied countries, Trotskyists maintained their activities underground, suffering many casualties. Among the most heroic achievements of that underground was the production of a clandestine newspaper in France aimed at German soldiers, a voice of internationalism in that world of national hatred and mad chauvinism. In 1944 the Trotskyists were able once again to organise a European conference, and began to put the organisation back together again. The organisational reconstruction would culminate in the Second World Congress of February 1948, representing substantially bigger forces than the first congress, ten momentous years earlier. A number of groups were now several hundred or a few thousand strong.

But by 1948 the Trotskyist movement was in a tremendous political crisis. The working class had risen in a series of revolts throughout Europe, in France, Italy and Greece. But the bourgeoisie and the reformist and Stalinist bureaucracies held control, quelling the workers' movement.

The root of the crisis of Trotskyism was not just the defeat of the Trotskyist attempt to win the masses, and the defeat of the mass upsurge. Clear ideas had never been a guarantee against defeat. The Trotskyists had been defeated often before. What was new was the emergence of *forces outside Trotskyism carrying through a part of its programme*. The Russian army and its agents in Eastern Europe, and independent Stalinist forces in Yugoslavia and China, carried through social overturns. Although the Stalinists stifled or crushed the working class in these countries, they also achieved as much — essentially, the nationalisation of industry and the destruction of the old capitalist class — as the Trotskyists recognised as surviving from the October Revolution in Russia.

Either those overturns defined the new Stalinist states as "deformed" workers' states, similar to the "degenerated" workers' state of the USSR except that they were bureaucratised from the start — or the whole assessment of the Soviet Union since the political triumph of Stalinism had to be changed.

Up to 1943, and with increasing doubt until the end of the '40s, the Fourth International could regard itself as a movement based on a given 'Marxism', which guided

practice and interpreted reality in the present and clearly indicated alternatives for the future. But from the mid-'40s, and especially after 1948, it became a matter of increasingly desperate efforts to catch up with events which appeared to contradict all expectations.

The movement was thrown into a great debate as to how, and in what sense, the Stalinist movements could be 'revolutionary'. It had to assess the expansion of Stalinism and, later, a great revival of capitalism.

It never resolved the crisis satisfactorily. As the post-war working-class upsurge receded, and the Cold War developed, the Trotskyists became isolated politically. Their numbers dwindled. In France, where the Fourth International now had its centre, the Trotskyist group shrank from over 1,500 in early 1948 to 150 members in 1952. These losses increased the disorientation, and made the political problems harder to resolve.



Mao Zedong

The core problem was understanding Stalinism. For Trotsky, Stalinism was a transitory regime of crisis, a social structure in which the bureaucracy was in agonising contradiction with the nationalised economy because it was in sharp conflict with the working class. The bureaucracy balanced unstably between the working class and pressure from world capitalism.

But Stalinism survived the war, and Stalin expanded his system into vast areas of Eastern and Central Europe, right into the heart of Germany. Independent Stalinist organisations, peasant-based, took power in Yugoslavia and China. These countries all had replicas of the USSR's society imposed on them. The new ruling Stalinist bureaucracies could not be said to be in agonising contradiction with the new nationalised economies; they had created them.

In his last writings on Stalinism, Trotsky had argued that the Kremlin bureaucracy had all the essential features of a ruling class — except the stability, substance, and basis in an economic system of its own which would allow it to play a big historic role. (See the introduction to 'The essential Shachtman', p.18).

The only logical conclusion that could be drawn from the facts of the 1940s was that it was no longer possible to consider the Stalinist societies workers' states in any sense, however residual.

After much thrashing around, however, the mainstream Trotskyist movement arrived between 1948 and 1951 at radically different conclusions, codified at the Third World Congress of August 1951. They concluded that the new Stalinist states were "deformed workers' states". They denied that Stalin had created an empire. Trotsky had recognised the element of imperialism, in the broad sense, in the USSR's actions in 1939-40, though he still then believed that the basic defining fact was conflict between Western capitalism and the USSR's nationalised economy, and thus thought it best to confine the term 'imperialism' to finance-capital. Now the Trotskyists used that idea of conflict between finance-capital and nationalised economy to blur over or define away the Kremlin's vast land-grab. They maintained as a dogma the idea that the defence of the USSR against (Western) imperialism was a core principle of working-class politics, and in a world dominated by two imperialist blocs that lined them up with the USSR-dominated bloc.

After 1950 they welcomed the expansion of Stalinism as 'the Revolution' (albeit in deformed shape), and began to look for good things from the Third World War which many people then reasonably thought to be inevitable. This, they said, would be a War-Revolution: the Russian advance into Western Europe would compel the big European Communist Parties to act as revolutionaries.

They failed, in a world in which all sorts of capitalist regimes used extensive nationalisations, to break with the increasingly untenable idea that a given quantity of nationalisation in an economy necessarily aligned that economy with the working class in the long view of history. They did not register one of the key facts of modern history: that Stalinists can be revolutionary against the old order, but simultaneously counter-revolutionary against the working class. In their attitude to the *revolutionary* Stalinists — in Yugoslavia, China, and so on — they dropped backwards a whole historical period to the standpoint Trotsky rejected in 1933, that of critic and advocate of reform rather than revolution. They inserted into the Trotskyist movement the politics of the Right Communist (Brandlerite) opposition of the 1930s — applied not to the USSR, towards which they maintained the politics of Trotsky, but to the new autonomous state-monopoly systems like Yugoslavia and China. It took the post-1951 mainstream 20 years to come out for a working-class revolution against Mao!

The 'Trotskyism' redefined at the 're-founding' Congress in 1951 was thus an unstable and broken-backed affair, incoherently amalgamating contradictory politics, the politics of the Right Communists of the 1930s and of Trotsky. In all

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the strands that have resulted from the multifarious splits since 1951, post-war Trotskyism has been dominated by an incoherent dialogue between the ghosts of Brandler and of Trotsky. But it has not been an equal dialogue: the face of the movement has been turned with Brandlerite attitudes and expectations towards the "developing" and "rising" "process of world revolution" — in practice, towards various Third World struggles led by Stalinist forces and to the newly-emerging state-monopoly systems.

The mainstream of this Trotskyism has been the current led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel. Groups like the British Socialist Labour League/Workers' Revolutionary Party and the French Organisation Communiste Internationaliste/Parti Communiste Internationaliste have been their embittered 'heretics', sometimes being far cruder in their Brandlerite politics and sometimes recoiling incoherent from the Brandlerite politics of the mainstream, but also operating within the shared framework of the world view outlined in 1951.

One other characteristic of post-1948 Trotskyism needs to be sketched in: its millennialism. Millennial movements are religious or quasi-religious movements which desire great changes in the world, yet look not to their own activity but to some outside force — usually Christ in his Second Coming. Often they rally behind some bandit, madman, or warlord, believing that God acts through him. Millennial-type movements and sects are characteristic of peasant revolts and of the earliest labour movements. They do not or cannot work out a coherent concept of means to achieve their ends.

The Trotskyist movement under Trotsky was a rational movement: its means was working-class action, its method building revolutionary parties, its perspective that capitalism by its convulsions would force millions of workers onto the revolutionary road. Post-1951 Trotskyism was in various ways millennial, looking to some mystic power ('the Revolution') which would move through the alien and hostile forces of Stalinism to bring us towards socialism. The War-Revolution scenario of the early 1950s was the first and most extreme case of this neo-millennialism. In this scenario, the profane appearance of things would be world war and the expansion of Stalinism; the essence, world revolution! Stalinism was a product of Russia's isolation; the expansion of Stalinism broke that isolation; the strengthening and expansion of Stalinism was therefore in truth its "decline and fall".

The millennial search for other forces to carry through the Revolution, and the 'recognition' of revolutions carried through by such forces — such as been the focus of the political life of most post-Trotsky Trotskyism. For the rational politics of Trotsky — based on conscious action by the working class — they have substituted the idea of a 'world revolution' stalking across the world,

autonomous from the working class and indeed sometimes, in the victorious forces of Stalinism, murderously counterposed to it.

Post-1951 Trotskyism has thus opened itself to a vast variety of alien elements. 'Trotskyist' groups operate with basic ideas of the Bolsheviks and Trotsky alloyed with bits of 'new revolutionary' ideas ranging from Stalinism through petty bourgeois nationalisms to Islamic fundamentalism. The movement is in political chaos.

Nowhere is that chaos more graphically shown than in the fact that those who have maintained the idea that the state-monopoly systems are some form of workers' state — following Trotsky's views on the USSR up to 1940 — in fact describe something different. Within the sheath of the verbal "workers' state" formula, they describe a new form of society where the bureaucracy is the creator of the nationalised economy, not an alien force imposed on and in agonising contradiction to a nationalised economy shaped by the working class.

Must we then, on the 50th anniversary of the Fourth International, conclude that the history of Trotskyism has been "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing"? No. That is not our conclusion.

The living continuity of revolutionary Marxist socialism flows through the First, Second, Third and Fourth Internationals. That the movement for the Fourth International led by Trotsky failed, and then lost its way politically, was the result of the successive defeats suffered by the forces of unfalsified communism as the hands of capitalist reaction and of the new state-monopoly ruling elites, beginning with the USSR's.

The roots of that movement are alive. No other consistent revolutionary working-class politics exist apart from the politics personified by Trotsky up to 1940. The working class in the state-monopoly societies and in the market capitalist societies needs those politics. Because the class struggle can never be stilled, the working class will find a way to those politics. Living Marxists will cleanse the Trotskyist movement of the encrustations and irrationalities accumulated over the decades of defeat and disorientation. There exists no more deadly measure against which to judge what has passed for Trotskyism these last decades than the writings of Leon Trotsky himself.

Faced in 1914 with the collapse of the powerful Second International on the outbreak of World War, Lenin and his comrades set about digging down to the roots of the corruption, examining what had passed for Marxism over the previous 20 years and more in the light of that collapse. They found their way back to the Marxist roots. A similar task needs to be accomplished today by those who want to continue the fight for Trotskyist politics and yet are forced to recognise that much that passes for Trotskyism is incoherent and irrational. That is one reason why we publish *Workers' Liberty*.



Margaret Thatcher

## The frame-up of socialism

**M**argaret Thatcher says she wants to 'wipe out socialism' from British politics. Bryan Gould and *Marxism Today* follow in her footsteps.

They denounce traditional socialism as bureaucratic, drab and old-fashioned; what they offer in its place is only a prettified version of the market economy. The bureaucrats of Eastern Europe chime in. The old talk of socialism and capitalism as opposed and irreconcilable systems is outdated. Now there is only 'modern economics', in various forms, and a common drive for efficiency and enterprise, in which Poland's new prime minister declares he wants to be Margaret Thatcher's pupil.

In France, in Spain, in Australia, in New Zealand, Socialist and Labour governments denationalise, deregulate, and cut; the old collectivist ideals, they say, don't fit these cost-conscious times.

Socialism, they all agree, means lack of individual liberty, massive bureaucracy, and grey uniformity. What we want is freedom and choice, they say. The Tories counterpose their 'ideals' of liberty, individuality, and choice to a restrictive and dictatorial socialism; and much of what is

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supposed to be the Left chimes in with feeble dissent.

It's a frame-up! The socialism Thatcher uses as a bogeyman is no socialism at all, but either the state tyranny of the Soviet Union and its allies, or the state-capitalist nationalisations of post-war social democracy.

Given a choice between Britain, even Thatcher's Britain, and the Eastern Bloc societies, with no political liberties, no trade union rights, and shortages of basic foodstuffs, it is not surprising that workers reject what is called 'socialism'. But that's not the choice.

The socialism of Marx, of Lenin and Trotsky, and of *Workers' Liberty*, is different. It is about workers taking control in society, and building a new world based on people's needs. It is about ending the wage-slavery of the workers to the capitalist owners of the means of production. Private property in the means of production will be taken from the capitalist class as a means to an end — the democratic running of society, the use of resources on the basis of need rather than profit. Society should be run on the basis of human rationality rather than the chaos of the market.

Such a society would for the first time in history provide real freedom and choice for all: "the free development of each as the condition for the free development of all", as Marx put it.

Contrast this to the Tories' freedom and choice. Thatcher's freedom is the freedom of the market. The freedom of landlords to charge ridiculously high rents without constraint. The freedom of employers to attack workers' conditions and pay. The freedom of the rich to undermine public education and public health by opting out into the private sector.

The Tories sell their policies in education and housing under the label of 'choice'. Their new housing law, they say, enables people to 'choose' their landlord, rather than remain council tenants. Parents can 'choose' whether to vote that their children's school should 'opt out' of local authority control.

All this is cynical doublespeak for doing away with the welfare state. For those without money, without jobs, there is no choice, no freedom — except maybe the choice between low-paid work and the dole, the choice between eating and paying the rent.

The post-Stalinists of *Marxism Today* eulogise the 'High Street revolution', the new possibilities for individual development in the 'post-Fordist' epoch. For them, being able to have a choice of winter overcoat at 'Next' may be exciting. For the sweated labour that produces the garments, for the millions who cannot afford new clothes, their enthusiasm has a hollow ring.

In his earliest writings as a communist or socialist, Marx rejected 'barracks communism', and emphasised that socialism must go beyond bourgeois individualism rather than just negating it. He criticised

"crude communism... levelling on the basis of a preconceived minimum... abstract negation of the entire world of culture and civilisation, the reversion to the unnatural simplicity of the poor and wantless man who has not gone beyond private property, has not yet even achieved it".

As the first mass working-class socialist movements developed at the end of the 19th century, they scorned 'state socialism'. Engels wrote: "A certain spurious socialism has recently made its appearance... which without more ado declares all nationalisation, even the Bismarckian kind, to be socialistic. To be sure, if the nationalisation of the tobacco trade were socialistic, Napoleon and Metternich would rank among the founders of socialism... the Royal Maritime Company, the Royal Porcelain Manufacture, and even the regimental tailors in the army would be socialist institutions..."

**"State ownership and control is not necessarily socialist — if it were, then the judges, the gaolers and the hangmen would all be socialist functionaries"**

The Irish revolutionary James Connolly repeated the argument: "State ownership and control is not necessarily socialist — if it were, then the army and the navy, the police, the judges, the gaolers, the informers and the hangmen would all be socialist functionaries as they are all state officials — but the ownership of the state of all the land and material for labour, combined with the cooperative control by the workers of such land and materials, would be socialist... To the cry of the middle-class reformers, 'Make this or that the property of the government', we reply — 'yes, in proportion as the workers are ready to make the government their property'."

As capitalist state intervention in the economy increased hugely during World War 1, Lenin and the Bolsheviks warned that this state regulation was not socialist

but a mechanism for tyranny and exploitation. Lenin went back over the writings of Marx and Engels to reinstate struggle against state tyranny as a central part of working-class politics. The working class would need a state, he wrote — but not a bureaucratic machine raised above society, as the old ruling classes had had, but a 'semi-state' in which 'every cook would govern'.

If the government did not belong to the workers, then state property was not socialist. Trotsky emphasised this in his struggle against Stalinism. "State property becomes the property of 'the whole people' only to the degree that social privilege and differentiation disappear, and therewith the necessity of the state. In other words: state property is converted into socialist property in proportion as it ceases to be state property. And the contrary is true: the higher the Soviet state rises above the people, and the more fiercely it opposes itself as the guardian of property to the people as its squanderer, the more obviously does it testify against the socialist character of this state property".

The bludgeons of fascism and Stalinism drove these ideas — the ideas of workers' liberty — to the margins of politics. In their place was installed an impoverished, meagre, cut-down version of socialism, tailored so that the USSR (or a glossed-up picture of it) could be presented as socialist. As workers' illusions about the USSR have faded, we have had to re-learn authentic socialist politics, slowly and clumsily. In the meantime, drab ersatz '1945 socialism' serves as a scarecrow for Tories and renegades.

But the frame-up will not work. We have an alibi! Socialism was somewhere else! The Tories say that the spirit of socialism has resided with the Stalinist state-monopoly systems of the East and with the bureaucratic state enterprises of the West. No it hasn't! Socialism — the struggle of the working class against tyranny and exploitation — has been with the workers who rebelled in East Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956, France in 1968, Portugal in 1974-5, Poland in 1980-1... Since 1968, in particular, we have had chances to re-learn. The uncorrupted ideas of the great Marxists have been circulated, discussed, absorbed. The remaking of the working-class socialist tradition will not be easy, any more than its first creation was. But it is under way.

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## Revolt against Russian imperialism

**T**hroughout the USSR, nationalism has become explosive. From Armenia and Azerbaijan to the Baltic states of Latvia and Estonia, there have been demonstrations, protests, declarations, even riots. The local bureaucracies of the ruling party have been drawn into the nationalist upsurge.

Why is there so much nationalism in the Eastern Bloc? Because there is so much national oppression. The old Tsarist empire used to be called the 'prison house of nations'. Its core nationality, the Great Russians, ruled over and oppressed dozens of other nations.

The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 liberated the oppressed nationalities. Their right to secede was recognised — and some, like the Finns, used it. Those nationalities that remained within the USSR were offered a voluntary federation, with determined efforts to guarantee their rights to use their own languages and develop their own cultures.

As the workers' state was gradually undermined from within, and then overthrown by Stalin's bureaucratic counter-revolution, so too the national minorities fell under the yoke of oppression. The Russian nation dominated. Other nations had less access to power. Their languages and cultures were persecuted, often severely. Some small nationalities, like the Crimean Tatars, were deported en masse.

The Ukraine, a nation of 60 million people and a part of the USSR, is probably the largest oppressed nation on earth today.

The Russian bureaucracy came through World War 2 not only strengthened within the USSR, but with control over a vastly enlarged area in Eastern Europe. Apart from the Baltic states, most of the new territory was not formally incorporated into the USSR, but it nevertheless became part of its empire. The governments rested on Russian occupying troops and Moscow-picked bureaucracies. Sometimes, as in Czechoslovakia, they had some real popular base within the country; sometimes, as in Poland, they were crudely imposed from the Kremlin; but everywhere they were viceroy governments, under Stalin's overlordship. In East Germany in 1953, in Hungary in 1956, and in Czechoslovakia in 1968, the USSR used armed force to maintain its empire.

Nationalism looms so large in the East also because there is so little space for political opposition in the USSR and in East European societies. In the absence of any kind of democratic forum and of free political or trade union organisation, traditional nationalism becomes the vehicle for dissent.

Nationalism has been at the core of



Polish workers carry Lech Walesa in triumph, 1980

every major conflict in Eastern Europe since 1945. The Hungarian revolution of 1956, which was unambiguously working-class in its social character, focused around demands for national independence and withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, as well as for a parliament and free elections. In 1980-1, a drive for Poland's national rights was one of the major motor forces in Solidarnosc.

The current upsurge includes many other sorts of nationalism than the Hungarians' or the Poles' justified demands for self-determination for long-oppressed nations. Azerbaijanis have massacred Armenians. In Yugoslavia, Serbia demands full control over the Albanian-minority area of Kosovo.

One of the chief indictments in the charge-sheet against Stalinism is that, by its brutal suppression of national rights, it made nationalism more intense and bitter. Intense nationalism, even in an oppressed nation, easily spills over into chauvinism.

Socialists want a free federation of the peoples — not the break-up of multinational states like the USSR and Yugoslavia into myriad statelets, nor an explosion of recriminations between the nations of Eastern Europe over their dozens of disputed border areas and pockets of each others' populations within each others'

territories. But bureaucratically-enforced unity cannot foster internationalism, harmony and reconciliation: the present ferment exists because dictatorial Moscow centralism has done exactly the opposite, heating national grievances to fever-point. A phase of fragmentation and multiplication of small nation-states may prove to be a necessary transition; in any case it would be better than the status quo.

The programme to combat both Russian imperialism and small-nation chauvinism is the one the Bolsheviks had in 1917: *consistent democracy*. As Lenin put it: "We fight against the privileges and violence of the oppressing nation and do not in any way condone the strivings for privilege on the part of the oppressed nation".

The right to self-determination for every nation; regional autonomy for every area occupied by a distinct community within states of a mixed national composition; full rights for every language-group, and full individual rights for even the smallest and most scattered minorities; free federation of nations; workers' unity across all national divisions — those were the principles of the Bolsheviks, and those are the principles that workers need to fight for in the USSR and Eastern Europe today.