

# Sandinism and permanent revolution

In a series of articles beginning in 1981 the leadership of the Socialist Workers' Party (USA) has explicitly repudiated the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution.

This has been expressed through a historical debate on the analysis of the Russian revolution.

In *International Socialist Review* (the magazine supplement to the SWP's paper 'Militant') of November 1981, Doug Jenness presents a review of the different perspectives in the Russian revolution. He omits all mention of Trotsky's perspective, and argues only the accuracy of Lenin's view of the dynamics of the Russian Revolution against the Mensheviks.

In *ISR* April 1982 Ernest Mandel points out the existence of Trotsky's perspective — and argues that it was vindicated against the others in the 1917 Revolution. In short, he repeats the traditional arguments current in the Trotskyist movement for over 50 years.

Jenness's reply (*ISR* June 1982) is startling.

*Trotsky's pre-1917 strategy, insofar as it differed from the Bolsheviks, was wrong... It was a centrist amalgamation of the positions of the two principal trends.* It underestimated the role of the peasantry.

The real significance of this debate, so I shall argue, is in relation to the SWP's current orientation towards Cuba, Nicaragua, etc.

But first let us examine the terms of the debate on Russian history.



## Permanent revolution in Russia

All the Marxists in Tsarist Russia, from the earliest days of their movement, agreed that the principal immediate issues of struggle were those of the bourgeois-democratic revolution: breaking the feudal hold of the landlords over the peasants; replacing the arbitrary rule of the Tsar by a democratically elected assembly which would draft a constitution; self-determination for the oppressed nationalities of the Tsarist empire; legal equality for women; the eight-hour day and other reforms for the working class. There was no question of leaping over the struggle on these issues to some sort of peasant socialism.

In the early years of the 20th century, and most sharply from 1905, a division developed among the Russian Marxists on strategy for this bourgeois-democratic revolution.

The moderate Menshevik wing saw the question most schematically. Because the

coming revolution was bourgeois-democratic, it must be led by the bourgeoisie. The task of the socialists was to nudge and pressurise the bourgeoisie into fulfilling its role, at the same time remaining a party of opposition through the whole affair and defending the immediate interests of the working class.

The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, insisted on a more active role for the working class. The French bourgeois-democratic revolution of 1789-99, they pointed out, had owed its radical sweep not to the bourgeoisie but to the small craftsmen and other working people of Paris. The Russian working class should be directed not to pressurising the bourgeoisie but to an alliance with the peasantry.

The peasantry was bourgeois in its nature and aspirations — it wanted a piece of land as private property for each peasant family, not collective ownership of the means of production. But the peas-

ants' 'bourgeois democracy' was quite different from the 'bourgeois democracy' of the factory owners, the lawyers, and the professors.

The Marxists should fight for a provisional revolutionary government based on an alliance of the working class and peasantry. This provisional revolutionary government would sweep away medieval-type Tsarist institutions in the most radical democratic way possible — in contrast to the slow, moderate, limited, bureaucratic modernisation of Russian society preferred by the bourgeoisie.

The provisional revolutionary government could only go as far as bourgeois-democratic revolution — the backwardness of the peasantry made any more impossible. But the working class would immediately *begin* the struggle for the next stage — the socialist revolution.

Lenin called this provisional revolutionary government the 'democratic dictator-

ship of the proletariat and peasantry'. He stressed that the democratic revolution in Russia would give an impulse to the socialist revolution in Europe, and in turn would depend on the socialist revolution in Europe for the possibility of its radical victory.

Trotsky took the logic of the Bolsheviks' arguments further. The peasantry was, to be sure, the biggest mass force of the revolution. Yet as a dispersed, scattered class it could have no independent programme. It would either follow the bourgeoisie or follow the working class. Revolutionary victory presupposed that the working class had managed to gain the leadership of the bulk of the peasantry. But then the revolutionary government would not be an equal coalition, but the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the peasantry.

The working class in power could not restrict itself to a purely bourgeois-democratic programme. Against the sabotage of the capitalists it would have to proceed to socialist measures. Having liberated the whole of the peasantry from the landlords' domination, it would then carry the class struggle among the peasantry.

The 'two stages' would thus be intertwined. It was not a question of completing the democratic revolution and then proceeding as quickly as possible to the socialist revolution, but of *both* revolutions being realised by the working class in power.

After 1928 Trotsky generalised the theory as follows. Backward capitalist countries in the modern integrated capitalist world *combine* the beginnings of modern industry and an industrial working class with old, semi-feudal economic, social and political relations, especially on the land.

Democracy, land reform, national liberation, are the main issues of struggle in these countries. According to the theoretical norm of capitalist development, these are the issues of the bourgeois revolution against feudalism. But the weak bourgeoisies in the backward countries, closely tied to the landlords and to imperialism, will lead no consistent struggle on these issues.

The working class can lead the struggle for democracy, and on that basis form an alliance with the peasantry against the bourgeoisie. Indeed, it must do so, if there is to be any thorough democratic revolution. Otherwise:

*"the struggle for national liberation will produce only very partial results, results directed entirely against the working masses"* ('The Permanent Revolution').

*"At a certain stage in the mobilisation of the masses under the slogans of revolutionary democracy, soviets can and should arise... Sooner or later, the soviets should overthrow bourgeois democracy. Only they are capable of bringing the democratic revolution to a conclusion and likewise opening an era of socialist revolution"* ('The Transitional Programme').

The fight by the working class to take

power, with the support of the peasantry, can and must combine the democratic revolution and the socialist revolution. The concrete interrelation of democratic

## From bowdlerisation to disavowal

The theory of permanent revolution has long been considerably debased in the post-war Trotskyist movement. From a programme of action by the working class, it is transformed into a description of an objective process, whereby any revolution in a backward country is bound to 'grow over' into a socialist revolution. From a theory requiring a concrete analysis of each concrete situation, it is transformed into a mechanically-applied schema.

The theory was originally formulated in polemic against some socialists (the Mensheviks) who held rigidly to a schema whereby the democratic revolution in backward Russia must be made in the 'normal' way by a 'normal' democratic bourgeoisie. *"Always and everywhere"*, Trotsky points out (1919 Preface to 'Results and Prospects'),

*"the Mensheviks strove to find signs of the development of bourgeois democracy, and where they could not find them they invented them. They exaggerated the importance of every 'democratic' declaration and demonstration..."*

Permanent revolution has now been transformed by some Trotskyists into a schema equally rigid, which leads them to exaggerate and hang on every 'proletarian' declaration and demonstration by the Stalinist or other petty-bourgeois forces at the head of what they dub an objective process of permanent revolution.

Nonetheless the SWP's formal repudiation is significant. Permanent revolution, like many other basic Trotskyist concepts, has been stretched out of shape by many attempts of the USFI current to reconcile the basic concepts with the desire to be in tune with the so-called revolutionary process. Yet the formal adherence — which is not purely formal, inasmuch as the USFI comrades sincerely believe the stretching to be a serious attempt to update theory — imposes certain limits to capitulation. If the desire to be in tune with a revolutionary process led by anti-Trotskyists overwhelms the formal adherence — and that is what seems to have happened with the SWP — then a limit has been removed. And the pressures that removed that limit can push the SWP a long way further.

As a debate on the history of the Russian Revolution and Russian Marxism, this dispute is perhaps interesting but not crucial. Its importance flows from its relation to current struggles — from the fact that Jenness and Mandel are in fact arguing, in 'coded' terms, about strategy for those struggles.

First, however, the debate should be dealt with on its own terms.

What about Jenness's charge that Trotsky underestimated the peasantry?

demands and socialist struggle in each country will, Trotsky stresses, depend on the specific conditions of the country.

In some articles he did express doubt about the revolutionary potential of the peasantry *as a whole*, focusing instead on the landless poor peasants as the revolutionary factor. (See 'The Permanent Revolution' p.48). This could have led to sectarianism towards the peasant struggle. *In fact it did not*. The crucial step for the worker-peasant alliance of 1917 — the Bolsheviks' adoption of the agrarian programme of the party with most support among the peasants, the 'Social Revolutionaries' — received Trotsky's full support. On the fundamental issue of orientation to the peasantry rather than to the liberal bourgeoisie, Trotsky was with the Bolsheviks throughout. And it was not just a matter of opinions on paper. Trotsky it was who organised and led to victory the mainly peasant Red Army.

The other main point of Jenness's argument is that the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' perspective was not refuted, but confirmed, by the 1917 revolution. Jenness in fact overdoes his argument, asserting that the 'democratic dictatorship' was realised *twice* — once by the February Revolution and once by the October Revolution! Then the dictatorship of the proletariat — the real proletarian revolution — was not until autumn 1918.

As Trotsky put it in relation to a similar argument,

*"then it follows that two democratic revolutions were 'realised' in Russia. This is too much, all the more since the second is separated from the first by an armed uprising of the proletariat"* ('The Permanent Revolution' p.105).

Jenness's argument is buttressed by point-scoring over incidental matters in Mandel's article, and by a great show of quotations from Lenin.

To get into a scholastic dispute on quotations is useless, especially with quotations from Lenin, who was fond of expressing himself in paradoxical and 'overstated' ways. What needs to be said on the quotations was said by Trotsky in 'The Permanent Revolution' (chapter 5). The essential point is that as from April 1917 Lenin dumped the slogan of the 'democratic dictatorship' and instead steered towards a 'state of the Paris Commune type' — i.e. a workers' state.

## Lenin

He explained himself as follows in the April Theses.

*"A new and different task now faces us: to effect a split within the soviets between the proletarian elements [the anti-defencist, internationalist, 'Communist' elements, who stand for a transition to the commune] and the small-*

proprietor or petty-bourgeois elements [Chkheidze, Tsereteli, Steklov, the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the other revolutionary defencists, who are opposed to moving towards the commune and are in favour of 'supporting' the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois government].

The person who now speaks only of a 'revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' is behind the times, consequently, he has in effect gone over to the petty bourgeoisie against the proletarian class struggle; that person should be consigned to the archive of 'Bolshevik' pre-revolutionary antiques [it may be called the archive of 'old Bolsheviks']...

A Marxist must not abandon the ground of careful analysis of class relations. The bourgeoisie is in power. But is not the mass of the peasants also a bourgeoisie, only of a different social stratum, of a different kind, of a different character? Whence does it follow that this stratum cannot come to power, thus 'completing' the bourgeois-democratic revolution? Why should this be impossible?

This is how the old Bolsheviks often argue.

My reply is that it is quite possible. But, in assessing a given situation, a Marxist must proceed not from what is possible, but from what is real.

And the reality reveals the fact that freely elected soldiers' and peasants' deputies are freely joining the second, parallel government, and are freely supplementing, developing and completing it. And, just as freely, they are surrendering power to the bourgeoisie — a fact which does not in the least 'contravene' the theory of Marxism, for we have always known and repeatedly pointed out that the bourgeoisie maintains itself in power not only by force but also by virtue of the lack of class-consciousness and organisation, the routinism and downtrodden state of the masses.

In view of this present-day reality, it is simply ridiculous to turn one's back on the fact and talk about 'possibilities'.

Possibly the peasantry may seize all the land and all the power. Far from forgetting this possibility, far from confining myself to the present, I definitely and clearly formulate the agrarian programme, taking into account the new phenomenon, i.e. the deeper cleavage between the agricultural labourers and the poor peasants on the one hand, and the peasant proprietors on the other.

But there is also another possibility; it is possible that the peasants will take the advice of the petty-bourgeois party of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, which has yielded to the influence of the bourgeoisie, has adopted a defencist stand, and which advises waiting for the Constituent Assembly, although not even the date of its convocation has yet been fixed.

It is possible that the peasants will maintain and prolong their deal with the bourgeoisie, a deal which they have now concluded through the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies not only in form, but in fact.

Many things are possible. It would be

a great mistake to forget the agrarian movement and the agrarian programme. But it would be no less a mistake to forget the reality, which reveals the fact that an agreement, or — to use a more exact, less legal, but more class-economic term — class collaboration exists between the bourgeoisie and the peasantry.

When this fact ceases to be a fact, when the peasantry separates from the bourgeoisie, seizes the land and power despite the bourgeoisie, that will be a new stage in the bourgeois-democratic revolution; and that matter will be dealt with separately.

A Marxist who, in view of the possibility of such a future stage, were to forget his duties in the present, when the peasantry is in agreement with the bourgeoisie, would turn petty bourgeois. For he would in practice be preaching to the proletariat confidence in the petty bourgeoisie [this petty bourgeoisie, this peasantry, must separate from the bourgeoisie while the bourgeois-democratic revolution is still on]. Because of the 'possibility' of so pleasing and sweet a future, in which the peasantry would not be the tail of the bourgeoisie, in which the Socialist-Revolutionaries, the Chkheidzes, Tseretelis, and Steklovs would not be an appendage of the bourgeois government — because of the 'possibility' of so pleasing a future, he would be forgetting the unpleasant present, in which the peasantry still forms the tail of the bourgeoisie, and in which the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Social-Democrats have not yet given up their role as an appendage of the bourgeois government, as 'His Majesty' Lvov's Opposition.

This hypothetical person would resemble a sweetish Louis Blanc, or a sugary Kautskyite, but certainly not a revolutionary Marxist.

(Louis Blanc was a reformist socialist active in the 1848 revolution in France. Karl Kautsky was known in the socialist movement before 1914 as 'the Pope of Marxism', but used his theoretical skills to cover opportunism with 'orthodoxy'. He took an equivocal position in World War 1).

i.e. to wait around for the peasantry to be ready to accomplish the 'democratic dictatorship' in the form foreseen by the Bolsheviks was to evade real tasks for the sake of a formula. The Marxists must map out a line of struggle for the working class — against the bourgeoisie — and then 'patiently explain' it (to use Lenin's phrase) in the Soviets, aiming to win over the peasants and soldiers.

One quotation by Jenness from Trotsky needs nailing before we proceed to the substance of the events of 1917.

"Only towards the autumn of 1918..." Jenness quotes Trotsky as asserting, "can one speak of the inception of a real dictatorship of the proletariat". Before then — i.e. before the major nationalisations were carried through — the Russian revolutionary regime was, Jenness argues, a 'democratic dictatorship'.

The quotation is ripped out of context from a 1933 article, 'The Class Nature of the Soviet State'. Trotsky was polemicis-

ing against those argued that the Stalinist USSR was no longer a workers' state, even degenerated. Such people, he wrote, only recognise a workers' state in an ideal, 'normal' form. They "often reach the conclusion that a 'real' dictatorship [of the proletariat], that is, one that conforms to their ideal norms, existed only in the day of the Paris Commune, or during the first period of the October Revolution..."

Trotsky replies that even these 'ideal' examples are not ideal: for example, the dictatorship of the proletariat departed from the norm up to autumn 1918 because the major nationalisations had not been carried out. The term 'real dictatorship of the proletariat' is used ironically — indeed, the conclusion of this passage is:

"To these gentlemen the dictatorship of the proletariat is simply an imponderable concept, an ideal norm not to be realised upon our sinful planet".

So much for quotations. The rational core of Jenness's argument, however, seems to be the following. The Soviets, representing an alliance of workers and peasants (and soldiers — peasants in uniform), were nothing other than the 'democratic dictatorship'. Between February and October they were a sort of parallel government. In October the 'democratic dictatorship' took power. It was transformed into a workers' state only by the class struggle in the countryside and the nationalisations in 1918.

But the soviets were not the 'democratic dictatorship' (despite any number of quotations from Lenin in early 1917 — not later — saying that they were). The February Revolution was, as Trotsky put it,

"the maximum of democratic revolution that could be realised as an independent stage"

i.e. a miserable half- or quarter-revolution. The soviets then, under Menshevik and SR leadership, were no dictatorship but the means by which the power of the workers and peasants was channelled to prop up the bourgeoisie.

The Bolsheviks set themselves the task of organising the revolutionary workers' opposition to the bourgeois provisional government and rallying the peasants round it. When they succeeded in doing this, and thus in convincing the soviets that they must stop propping up the bourgeoisie and take power themselves, the soviets became a dictatorship — but the dictatorship of the proletariat (supported by the peasantry).

The October Revolution was made by the working class. The new soviet power was led by the Bolsheviks, a working-class party. It had been agitated for by the Bolsheviks on the basis of democratic demands, to be sure, but also on the basis of slogans of workers' control, nationalisation of the banks, and nationalisation of the big monopolies. For years the Bolsheviks had put forward as one of the main tasks of the 'democratic dictatorship' the convening of a Constituent Assembly; the new soviet power dissolved the Constituent

Assembly, on the grounds that the soviets represented a higher form of democracy than a bourgeois parliament.

What was this new Bolshevik soviet power if not the dictatorship of the proletariat? True, its first measures were primarily radical bourgeois-democratic (though workers' control was also decreed). It proceeded slowly to socialist measures. But that was exactly as Trotsky had foreseen.

Between October 1917 and autumn 1918 the soviets became more solidly Bolshevik-dominated; they also, to tell the truth, became somewhat hollowed-out. But the soviet power did not change its class character. There was a contradiction between October 1917 and autumn 1918 between the working-class character of state power and the still-capitalist economy. But that contradiction does not justify Jenness's argument. *In fact the contradiction was never suppressed.* Even after central economic planning in the USSR was initiated (April 1921) the Bolsheviks consciously boosted market-capitalist forces in the economy (the New Economic Policy). To this day the USSR's economy stands much closer to capitalism than to socialism; only now, after the Stalinist counter-revolution, the political character of state power is actually counter-revolutionary. The contradiction is inverted. It could have been transcended in a progressive way only by the international extension of the revolution. But, one of the main traits of Jenness's argument is his neglect of internationalism.

In the years immediately following the October Revolution, no-one concerned themselves much about who had best predicted the perspectives of the revolution. More important questions were at hand. And both Lenin and Trotsky hesitated to formulate perspectives for other countries by the method of mechanically copying the perspectives developed for Russia.

Permanent revolution became an issue of controversy quite artificially in 1923-4. Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev, installing themselves in power after the death of Lenin, directed a torrent of written-to-order polemic at Trotsky, stuffed with quotations from Lenin and asserting mainly (just like Jenness!) that Trotsky "underestimated the peasantry".

Trotsky defended himself. But he still hesitated to make sweeping generalisations. When the Opposition – now including Zinoviev and Kamenev – did battle with Stalin in 1926-7 over the perspectives for the Chinese revolution, Trotsky went along with the slogan of 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' for China.

Analysing the experience in 1928, however, he quickly concluded that the slogan was misleading. The Kuomintang and the Left Kuomintang had shown "the maximum of democratic revolution that could be realised as an independent stage" – repressing the working class. It was disastrous for Chinese

communists to be seeking futilely for a peasant-party ally with which to realise a 'better' democratic revolution – the 'democratic dictatorship' – rather than steering clearly towards the working-class overthrow of the bourgeois Kuomintang leadership.

Working out a concrete analysis of permanent revolution for China, Trotsky also concluded that the same general perspective was relevant (more or less, and with concrete interpretation in each case) to all backward capitalist countries. His opponents, the Stalin faction, also generalised.

Given that the Bolsheviks had known when to consider the 'democratic dictatorship' slogan superseded, and when to discard the idea of the democratic revolution as an independent stage separate from the workers' revolution, in practice the Bolsheviks' line and Trotsky's perspective had coincided in the Russian Revolution. But when Stalin and his allies, after the Revolution, set about emphasising all the differences between Bolshevism and 'Trotskyism', that was a different matter.

"My adversaries", wrote Trotsky

(*'The Permanent Revolution'*), "did not, of course, foresee that in creating an artificial axis of struggle they would imperceptibly be compelled to revolve around it themselves and to manufacture, by the method of inversion, a new world view for themselves".

In 1929 Trotsky wrote:

"The dispute has so broadened and deepened that it now embraces in essence all the most important questions of the world revolutionary movement".

After further experience, Trotsky summed up in 1938 (*'The Transitional Programme'*):

"When the Comintern of the epigones tried to revive the formula buried by history of the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry', it gave to the formula of the 'workers' and peasants' government' a completely different purely 'democratic', i.e. bourgeois content, counterposing it to the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Bolshevik-Leninists resolutely reject the slogan of the 'workers' and peasants' government' in the bourgeois-democratic version. They affirmed then and affirm now that when the party of the



Bolsheviks with an armoured train, 1917

*proletariat refuses to step beyond bourgeois-democratic limits, its alliance with the peasantry is simply turned into a support for capital*".

The 'democratic dictatorship' had been shown to be reactionary not by closer examination of the history of the Russian Revolution, still less by more minute study of the old texts, but by subsequent experience.

It was one thing for Lenin to develop the 'democratic dictatorship' strategy as a formula for an active role for the working class within the broad general 'objective' perspective formulated by Russian Marxism in its first polemics against the populists — 'the coming revolution will be bourgeois-democratic' — and to sharpen it in polemic against the Mensheviks. It was entirely in line with this whole path of political development that Lenin in 1917 abandoned the formula of 'democratic dictatorship' but maintained the spirit of seeking the maximum active role for the working class.

When Stalin and his allies sought to gobackwards, and counterpose the pre-1917 differences between Lenin and Trotsky to the common struggle of 1917, it was quite a different matter. They stressed what in Lenin's thought was vestigial — the separation of the stages, the bourgeois character of the revolutionary government. They ended up with a formula scarcely different from the Mensheviks. The main difference was that the Stalinists subordinated the Chinese workers to the Kuomintang on the grounds that it was allegedly a 'workers' and peasants' party', whereas the Mensheviks would have done likewise on the more accurate basis that the KMT represented the bourgeoisie.

An analogy may clarify. In 1891 Engels wrote:

*"If one thing is certain it is that our party and the working class can only come to power in the form of the democratic republic. This is even the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat..."* ('Critique of the Erfurt Programme').

Engels was not counterposing parliamentary democracy to soviets. Soviets had not yet been created. He was expressing as clearly as he could, on the basis of the experience available, the idea that the working class in power needs the broadest, most flexible democratic forms possible.

Yet for an author today to fasten on Engels' perspective for 1891, insisting at length on its correctness as against the state socialists and elitists of the 19th century, and ignoring the later disputes over soviet democracy and bourgeois parliamentarism, would only be parliamentary cretinism.

The purpose and importance of the SWP's new interpretation of the Russian Revolution is not to mull over history, but to give a new framework for interpreting present-day revolutions. It must be judged as such.

In Trotsky's view of 1938, the 'democratic dictatorship', counterposed to the dictatorship of the proletariat, would only

subordinate the working class to the bourgeoisie. Is that the conclusion implicit in Jenness's polemic for the SWP's politics of today? Yes and no.

The period since World War 2 includes experiences entirely similar to those on which Trotsky based his 1938 conclusions: Indonesia 1965 for example. But there have also been new variants.

Imperialism, reshaped and reorganised after the war, has proved able to dispense with direct colonial rule. It took huge and heroic struggles by the colonial peoples to force the big powers to release their colonial grip, but on the whole they have done so, while of course retaining economic domination of the poorer capitalist countries.

Stalinism since World War 2 has been not merely an ideology or a deformation, but a big material force. Although the ruling bureaucracies are not social classes they are more weighty on the world scene than many a capitalist class.

These shifts — together with the conti-



Castro

nuing industrialisation in the backward capitalist countries, and the development of sizeable urban middle classes in many of them — have created a wider scope for radical petty bourgeois nationalism. The Algerian revolution could serve as archetype: winning national independence, carrying out some serious land reforms, nationalising industry, but with all these results partial and on the basis of rigid state control over the working class.

In Yugoslavia, Vietnam, China, and (under somewhat different circumstances) Cuba, radical petty bourgeois nationalists (in all cases but Cuba, Stalinists) went further. Linking up with the USSR, they expropriated the capitalists and established deformed workers' states. The economic results have been more substantial than in those countries where the revolution remained within capitalist bounds. But the Stalinist state structures set up (in all cases, though with differing degrees of rigidity) have been no less anti-working-class than the Algerian-type regimes.

These results confirm the continuing vitality and relevance of permanent revolution as a programme for the working class to take the lead in fighting for the liberation of the nation — though they also underline the need for new concrete analyses, in each concrete situation, of the terms and conditions of struggle.

The current of the USFI represented by Mandel has long interpreted the Stalinist-led revolutions as examples of a schema whereby:

*"It matters little that their movement of revolt is at first clothed in this or that form, more or less clear and conscious politically... The colonial Revolution, once begun from the national-democratic level, has an irresistible tendency to develop into socialist revolution"*. (Pablo, 'The Coming War', 1952).

All that then remains in each particular case is to juggle facts and theory so as to fit the particular Stalinist leadership into the costume of a proletarian party.

The SWP always used to be more prudent. Their present reinterpretation in fact links up with a previous interpretation of the post-war social revolutions designed to avoid the USFI's excessive crediting of the leaderships of those revolutions as 'proletarian'.

At least, by using the term 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry'/'workers' and peasants' government' for the first stage of such revolutions, the present interpretation establishes an apparent continuity with that previous interpretation's use of 'workers' and peasants' government' for their initial phase. But the context is, as we shall see, quite different.

From July 1960, first in relation to Cuba but then applying the same analysis retrospectively in relation to China, Yugoslavia, etc., Joseph Hansen, a leader of the SWP who died in 1979, developed the notion that the 'workers' and peasants' government' in the sense discussed by the Fourth Congress of the Communist International (1922) was the key link in processes where petty-bourgeois leaderships had overthrown capitalist states in those countries and created deformed workers' states.

*"By recognising the new Cuban government (after the removal of Urrutia and Pazos) as a 'Workers' And Farmers' Government' we indicate its radical petty bourgeois background and composition and its origin in a popular mass movement, its tendency to respond to popular pressures for action against the bourgeoisie and their agents, and its capacity, for whatever immediate reasons and with whatever hesitancy, to undertake measures against bourgeois political power and against bourgeois property relations"* ('The Character of the New Cuban Government').

Hansen also described the Ben Bella government in Algeria in 1962-5 as a workers' and peasants' government, and cited its fate as:

*"proof that the establishment of a workers' and peasants' government does not automatically guarantee the subsequent establishment of a workers' state"* ('The Social Transformations in E.



Europe, China and Cuba', August 1969).

Hansen based himself on a passage in the Transitional Programme:

*"One cannot categorically deny in advance the theoretical possibility that, under the influence of completely exceptional circumstances... the petty-bourgeois parties including the Stalinists may go further than they themselves wish along the road to a break with the bourgeoisie. In any case one thing is not to be doubted; even if this highly improbable variant somewhere and at some time becomes a reality and the 'workers' and farmers' government' in the above-mentioned sense is established, it would represent merely a short episode on the road to the actual dictatorship of the proletariat".*

The 'workers' and peasants' government' formula had been used before, for the Chinese revolution, by some Marxists (e.g. Ernest Mandel). But Hansen systematised the theory.

It was, surely, a case of scissors-and-paste theorising. The Fourth Congress of the CI advanced the idea of the workers' and peasants' government as the highest form of the united front. The Communists would fight to force the parties based on the workers and peasants to break with the bourgeoisie, and under the control of their mass base to take serious measures against capitalist power. Such agitation would in any case be useful educationally. And in the event of the opportunist parties going so far as to create such a government, its first clashes with the bourgeoisie would spark off huge mass struggles which could only end victoriously in the full rule of the working class.

In the cases Hansen was describing, it is rather a matter of clashes between a petty bourgeois apparatus, based on a victorious armed struggle, and the bourgeoisie. It is not inconceivable that such clashes should provide an opening for working-class revolutionary action: in the actual cases they did not. The Fourth Congress reference to a workers' and peasants' government is to a condition of flux in state power where the alternatives are the workers mobilising and going over the head of the petty-bourgeois leaders in the government, to create a workers' state, or capitalist counter-revolution.

Hansen's reference is to a state of flux where these two alternatives may exist, but so may (and crucially did) two others: consolidation of a state-capitalist regime, with the old bourgeoisie to a serious extent elbowed out, or, where the old state has been smashed by the armed struggle, creation of a deformed workers' state. Hansen implicitly equates the 'deformed workers' state' outcome with the outcome of direct workers' power, and the 'state capitalist' outcome with straight bourgeois counter-revolution. The former equation illustrates a tendency in Hansen's thinking (as in the USFI's generally) to blur over the qualitative nature of the deformations of the deformed workers' state.

Moreover: since the bureaucratic deformations in China, Yugoslavia, etc. certainly did not suddenly spring into

being at the time of the consolidation of the new state power, surely we should be speaking of 'deformed workers' and peasants' governments'?... This conclusion adequately indicates the scholastic nature of the theory.

Nonetheless, Hansen's theory:

a) preserved a clear characterisation of the political leaderships of these revolutions;

b) characterised the transitional phase as one where state power is in flux;

c) pointed to the need for independent working-class initiative in that phase.

Or at least, potentially it did that. The actual record of Hansen and the SWP in the 1960s in relation to the Castroites was far from adequately independent.

The new theory being presented by the SWP, under similar labels, has a very different character. Now the 'workers' and peasants' government' — the transitional phase — is the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry'. But the 'workers' and peasants' government' ('democratic dictatorship' version) is quite different from the 'workers' and peasants' government' (Fourth Congress version).

In the 'workers' and peasants' government' (Fourth Congress version) the reference 'and peasants' did not mean peasant domination; the 'workers' and peasants' government' was a formula with the same essential drive as 'workers' government', only agitationaly adapted to the task of rallying the peasants behind the workers in countries with a large peasant population. The 'democratic dictatorship' was however distinguished from the dictatorship of the proletariat precisely by the expected *peasant predominance* which would limit it to (radical) bourgeois democracy.

The 'workers' and peasants' government' (Fourth Congress version) differed from the dictatorship of the proletariat in that it referred to a government which had *only begun* the decisive confrontation with bourgeois state power. Its programme was precisely to carry out that confrontation. The 'workers' and peasants' government' (democratic dictatorship style) was the government created *after the victory* of an uprising against the old state power. It differed from the dictatorship of the proletariat in its bourgeois limitations.

Thus, if the 'workers' and peasants' government' (Fourth Congress version) is a somewhat scholastic and inappropriate label for the transitional phases in Cuba or China, etc., the 'workers' and peasants' government' ('democratic dictatorship' version) is a wildly misleading label.

The 'democratic dictatorship' was to be the means whereby the widest democracy (within supposedly inescapable bourgeois limits) would be realised by means of the workers and peasants directly undertaking the overthrow of the old order themselves, not leaving it to the bourgeois or well-off petty bourgeois. The Chinese, Yugoslav, Vietnamese, Cuban revolutions certainly carried out radical bourgeois-democratic measures in land reform, national liberation, and emanci-

pation of women. But they also included suppression of independent trade unions and one-party states.

In China, among the first measures of the 1949 revolution were a ban on strikes and compulsory arbitration of labour disputes. The leadership was a bureaucratic apparatus elevated above the workers and peasants.

On the other hand, these revolutions have realised tremendous social transformations going beyond bourgeois limits. The SWP's new labelling turns everything upside down.

On a strictly ideological level, the SWP's new theory of revolution represents a rapprochement with Havana and the Sandinistas. All these currents now preach revolution by stages, though the Castroites used not to. Quite possibly immediate 'diplomatic' motives of appearing more acceptable to these currents have weight with the SWP.

But let us look at how the SWP's interpretation of the Russian Revolution, taken as a framework for today's revolutions, 'encodes' the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. The democratic revolution was the overthrow of Somoza. The workers' and peasants' government/democratic dictatorship is the present regime, in which the petty bourgeois Sandinista leadership, having smashed the old state apparatus in the civil war, precariously balances with the still-strong bourgeoisie. The socialist revolution will be realised if, under Havana influence, Nicaragua takes the Cuban road.

The 'coding' is not perfect. The independent workers' party and peasant parties which should form the democratic dictatorship are lacking. But clearly the Sandinista movement in this period is deemed to be what the soviets were in 1917. That we are in the democratic dictatorship stage implies that bourgeois measures are all that could or should be demanded now.

The SWP's passive waiting upon the Sandinistas to do wonders in their own good time is hardly Lenin's method. Nor was the SWP's declaration (after the event) that the Sandinistas' coalition with the anti-Somoza bourgeoisie had been '*obviously the correct, intelligent and revolutionary policy*' and that exclusion of the bourgeois ministers from the first Government of National Reconstruction would have been '*sectarian*' ('The Militant', 24.8.79, 'Intercontinental Press' 22.10.79). But such loss of the spirit of Lenin is inevitably when trying to parrot the letter anachronistically — and even more so when the letter of the theory is applied always to the task of after-the-fact rationalisation of what others have done.

Go along with the petty-bourgeois revolutionary nationalists in their strategy of 'national democratic revolution' as the 'first stage'; don't demand too much of them too fast; and hope that with Moscow or Havana Stalinist influence and example they will move to the expropriation of capitalism — that is the gist of the SWP's new theory. It is an adaptation to Stalinism and thus generally also indirectly to the bourgeoisie.