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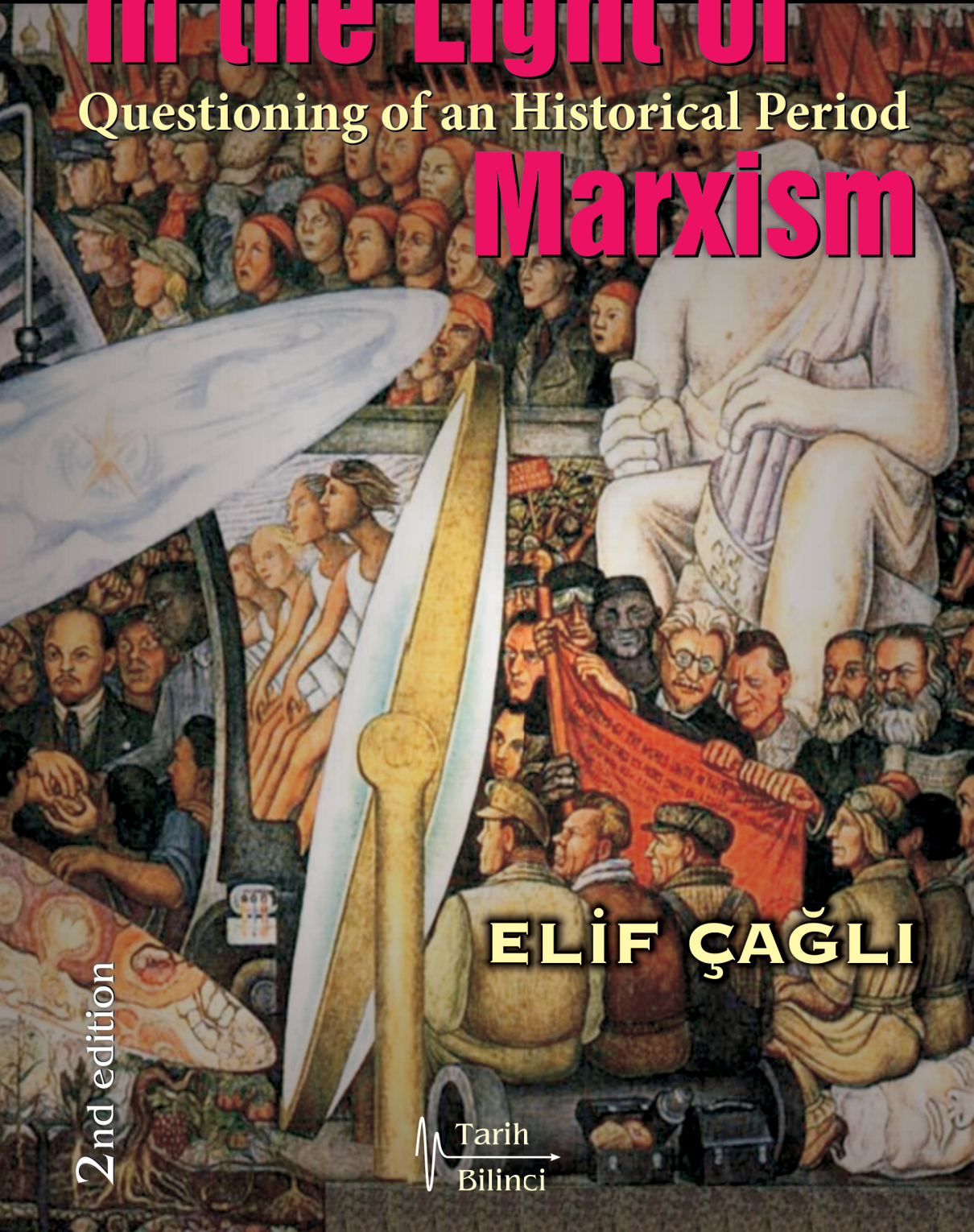
Questioning of an Historical Period

Marxism

2nd edition

ELİF ÇAĞLI

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Bilinci



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Tarih Bilinci Publisher, 5
Theory and History series: 4

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May 1991

1st edition: October 2001

2nd edition: June 2005

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Publisher's Introduction

This book was written about ten years ago and presented to the discussion platform of revolutionary Marxists. The theoretical positions expressed by the author in this book had taken shape in the course of a discussion process during the year 1990. That discussion was about questions like what kind of socio-economic formation the countries that had been for long characterised as “real socialism” or “existing socialism” have, what sort of historical role they played and what kind of a future was awaiting them.

Looking back one may think that these questions belong to the past and have lost their significance. It might even be a nuisance for many left-wingers from the old generation, who were “real” socialists of the past and “liberals” of today, to remember the past. But this is not the case at all for those who stand for Marxism. Marxists know that a sound consciousness of history and a consistent socialist outlook can only be attained through a correct knowledge of the past. This is especially getting more and more important in relation to the young generations who want to get correct knowledge of the history of socialism and the experiences of “socialism”.

The old generations of socialist struggle had gross fallacies and thence a big suffering as they underestimated the importance of getting correct knowledge of the past and were deprived of a Marxist consciousness of history. Yet it is unnecessary for the new generations to do the same mistakes after all these experiences.

In this context we would like to express our opinion that we find it extremely important *In the Light of Marxism* which contains fresh theoretic analyses on the subject to reach especially to the new generations that turn their faces towards Marxism.

As the author pointed out, to attempt to explain the real reasons of the collapse in the USSR and the likes with the “betrayal” of some leaders (i.e. of individuals) or with the “degeneration” of recent few years, or to blame the working class for this, as the Stalinist left did at that time, was useless and a way of evading the facts which is peculiar to petty-bourgeois. Those who want to understand the real reasons of the collapse had to inquire the real nature of these monstrous regimes that are called “real socialism”, the circumstances that gave birth to them and their historical evolution. One could not understand neither the events nor the reason why the working class did not show any reaction against the collapse, without questioning to what extent the practices experienced in these regimes in the name of socialism are in accordance with the historical interests of the working class and scientific socialism.

The point is therefore to question the Stalinism which characterises these regimes.

Without doing this one could have hardly understood what socialism really was and was not. When you read again what was written in the traditional (Stalinist) left papers during the course of collapse you will see that the prominent figures of the traditional left, who were desperately seeking a way of avoiding this questioning, continued to blur the idea of socialism and falsify the historical facts.

The author's ideological explanations and theoretic analyses in this book represent in a sense an answer of revolutionary Marxism to this Stalinist falsification. And in our opinion the real value of this book written in the middle of the heated debates of that period lies in this.

Once the book is read it will be seen that the ideological approach and the theoretic explanations of the author are not only entirely different from the notion of "national socialism" which prevails amongst the Turkish socialist movement but also stand in opposition to it. And this stance represents a critical revolutionary line on the basis of Marxism.

But this is not the only thing that makes the book important. The original theoretical analyses of the author in relation to the nature of the regime in the USSR are also remarkable, where she examines in depth the circumstances that gave birth to the Stalinism, the forms that the property relations assumed under despotic bureaucracy, the rising to the level of a ruling class of the Soviet bureaucracy, the class division that came into being on the basis of state property. Taking as basis Marx's materialist theses of history on Asiatic mode of production and Oriental despotism the theoretical conclusions that the author reached on the formation of despotic bureaucratic state in the Soviet Union and the peculiar position of the bureaucracy are quite different from hitherto Marxist works on the subject.

At the beginning of 1991 the USSR is still on its feet and Gorbachov is at the helm. But the author has already established with certainty what direction the developments would take. On this basis she describes the nature of that historical period that was being passed through in her introduction as follows: "As in every historical turning point pregnant with colossal turbulence and transformations, we are witnessing, and will be witnessing more, the eruption, with severe crises, of contradictions accumulated and deepened through long years and their world-wide effects. While a historical period is closing, a new one is going to open up which will be the stage for a richer, more learned, more conscious, though more painful, action of human beings." And she adds that in this new period Marxism will still be throwing light to the historical struggle of humankind for a classless, free-of-exploitation, free social life.

In the wake of the collapse of the Stalinist bureaucratic regimes which had been presenting themselves for years as "real socialism" to the peoples of the world the bourgeoisie sought to present this collapse as the collapse of "Marxism and communism" in its world-wide ideological campaign. Of course the bourgeoisie was trying to exploit the deceit of the Soviet bureaucracy that depicts their totalitarian regimes (Stalinism) as identical to Marxism for its own ends.

According to the author, due to the chaos of ideas and the conditions of the historical period that was being passed through there was a number of theoretical and political problems piled up before the revolutionary Marxists. She was saying: "To elaborate the historical experiences in their all aspects, to convey the whole theoretical and political lessons drawn to the consciousness of the working class and young generations that turn their faces towards socialism, that must be the foremost task of the revolutionary Marxists." She stressed that, without a radical questioning of the past, without eradicating the precipitates of Stalinist ideas that cover Marxism like a dead crust for years, it would be impossible to bring to the light the scientific nature and historical rightfulness of Marxism. Then the starting point was obvious.

The author starts with the most fundamental positions of Marxism on the subject. In the first chapters a reconstruction of the theory of "transition from capitalism to communism" is endeavoured on the basis of Marx's fundamental analysis. In this context the most fundamental concepts of Marxist theory as the world revolution –which has been distorted and forgotten–, state in general, the dictatorship of the proletariat (workers' "state") in particular and transition period are re-presented. After that, the conditions of existence of Stalinism, which was risen above the liquidation of the October Revolution and created a different notion of "socialism", and a tradition based on that, by the 1930's, are investigated. And that no identity can be established between the so-called theory of "socialism in one country" and scientific socialism and that on the contrary it was developed as a counter-theory against it is explained alongside with the elaboration of the phases of Soviet history. It is also revealed with both theoretical and empirical data that the system in the USSR cannot be characterised as "a transition society under working class power".

The author deals in detail with Marx's "transition theory" and criticises misconceptions and deliberate falsifications on the subject. Especially that how the state, classes and relationships of commodity will disappear in the period of socialism, together with their material foundations, which is defined by Marx as "the lower phase of communism", is dealt with and explained in the light of Marx's analyses.

Another point that the author emphasises is the following: the way to overcome the problems in the world socialist movement created by Stalinism, which has put its stamp on a sixty-years period in terms of both theory and practice, and to confront the anti-communist ideological crusade of the world bourgeoisie lies in bringing about the international political unity of revolutionary Marxists. Thus it is of vital importance to draw correct theoretical-political conclusions from what has happened. It acquired an extreme importance to reach a synthesis by deepening the discussions on the controversial subjects among revolutionary Marxists today. If we consider the historical process and experiences, one should admit that not a single thesis or particular theory on the "class nature of the USSR and the likes" put forward in the past can be excluded from criticism. The theoretical discussions among the revolutionary Marxists should serve not to set up separate sects but to draw lessons from what has happened, to grasp the tasks of the day, to obtain a sound Marxist perspective of future and to raise the revolutionary internationalist tradition of the proletariat back to the level of a organised political force.

In this context, the author raises a series of theoretical and historical questions back into the agenda for discussion. These are basically the concepts related to the essence of socialism, which are falsified basically by the Stalinism, emptied of their contents by the practices in the bureaucratic dictatorships, and even turned into their opposites. Moreover these concepts have not been grasped and interpreted in a sufficiently proper way by some revolutionary Marxists either.

Once the book is read it will be seen that the theoretical analyses of the author on the real nature of the USSR and its historical place do not only expose the anti-Marxist aspects of the Stalinist understanding but they also represent a criticism of those Trotskyists who have frozen Trotsky's analyses and turned his thesis of "degenerated workers' state" nearly into a dogma. Also exposed in the book is the inconsistency of those Trotskyists who seek to explain the system in the USSR with a theory like "state capitalism" which lacks a scientific ground.

The method of the author in treating the problems, the inquiring and critical attitude in her theoretical approach appear as a critical and revolutionary attitude, essentially remaining loyal to Marx's scientific method at the same time.

The author takes it seriously to develop a dialogue with revolutionary Marxist circles that pursue a discussion on the basis of historical experiences, question, and seek to draw lessons. In this context she deals with the most fundamental problems relating to the essence of the scientific socialism, raises them back to the agenda and inquires the following:

Is there any room for a "socialism in one country" or a "national socialism" in Marx's scientific theory of socialism? Is there a separate socio-economic formation called "socialism" in itself independent from communism in Marx's theory? Can the socialist organisation of society (which is classless society) be compatible with the simultaneous presence of a "nation-state"? Can there really be a workers' democracy if the workers do not rule, even if there is a state operating "in the name of" the working class, organised in a bureaucratic manner with its professional army and police, judicial and administrative machinery? Or, in such a "workers" state, in whose hands would be the real power, in the hands of workers, or of some others? Is it possible to say that state property and social property are the same; or can one speak of a social property if the state still exists? Again, is it still possible to talk of the existence of a workers' state in a society in which the control and running of the state and the economy is not directly in the hands of the workers but of a professional ruling elite (the ruling bureaucracy) behaving "in the name of" the working class and this, with time, is turned into a standing system, even if the capitalism is abolished, the means of production, land and foreign trade is nationalised, and it proclaimed itself as "socialist". Can we say "despite everything the nationalised property still remains a gain of the working class" in such a society? Should "the transition period from capitalism to communism", which is defined by Marx as "a period of revolutionary transformations", understood as a process to be lived and completed on a national level, or on a universal level? And does the workers' state corresponding to this transition period have a chance to survive if it is surrounded by capitalism and

isolated for a long period of time? And were the national states established under the name of “Socialist” or “People’s Republic” really workers’ states? If not, then in whose hands was the state in these regimes, or what class was ruling?

These theoretical questions relating to the essence of the scientific socialism were indeed being discussed during the end of 80’s and the beginning of 90’s, although not among the Stalinists but among the revolutionary Marxists.

And here in this book you will find the answers to these theoretical problems given by the author on the basis of Marxism.

Tarih Bilinci

Author's Foreword

In 1991 when I wrote this work my main aim was on the one hand to investigate a socio-economic fact which put its stamp on history for a period of over seventy years and on the other hand to express an irreconcilable attitude against the Stalinist tradition which falsified entirely the Marxist theory. Also I needed to make clear the points of distinction of my conclusions from the other views which I disagree.

I suppose I could manage not to pay attention to any dogmatic and unscientific concerns apart from the concern of grasping the reality in the light of Marxism in my effort to express my views. I believe it is the correct attitude to defend the historically rightful and revolutionary position of a great revolutionist like Trotsky against all the accusations of the Stalinists and centrists. But I am also convinced that the course that is taken by those who head towards wrong destinations hiding behind the name of Trotsky is not a way out.

It is of great importance to make it clear the differences of the conclusions that I arrived at on the historical experience from various views which have been put forward over the years. However such aspects which were taken into consideration during the collective discussions that served to clarify my views were not echoed in the first writing of the book. The main reason for this was that I considered it better to draw the reader's attention to an understanding on the basis of the fundamental ideas of Marxism, which had been forgotten and distorted, rather than to the conclusions of various writers.

After a decade following the first edition of this book I deemed it necessary to expand some chapters when I went through my work. But at the same time I found it more useful to present some chapters of the book to the reader untouched as the book was written in the heat of important events and Gorbachov's SU was still in existence. I must remind the reader that the expressions used in these chapters reflect the observations and predictions made in those days. Therefore I left those time expressions like "today".

On the other hand, I added two new chapters (8 and 9) for this edition devoted to the critique of the theory of "state capitalism" and some other views that have been developed by other writers in order to give a general idea on our differences with these views. However the examination of these views have been deliberately kept to the limits which I consider suitable for the scope of the book. Leaving a further detailed inquiry for the future I just concentrated on immediate aspects for the time being.

In 1991 when I wrote the book I had to refer to some secondary sources as I was not able to obtain the original sources at that time. Now for this edition I changed these secondary

references to the originals as far as I could reach them. And also I retranslated some of the quotes the available Turkish translations of which I consider incorrect or inadequate. But I stated the Turkish references in brackets for the readers.

As I stated in the Introduction I do not regard it a correct attitude at all to claim to have developed a fully-fledged theory or to create a new sect only on the basis of some differences on the definition of the nature of the Soviet Union. And finally I must state that I believe every serious criticism that can contribute to the struggle of seeking the truth and building the future will help me see my errors and enrich us.

July 2001

Elif Çağlı

Introduction

History is nothing but the acts of human beings to reach their objectives. Karl Marx

The power of workers' soviets, which was born as a result of a victorious proletarian revolution, found itself isolated under the circumstances in which the German revolution was defeated and the world revolution retreated. As a result of this isolation the workers' power failed to survive and were liquidated by the bureaucracy. Establishing its own power in place of the workers' power the Soviet bureaucracy put its stamp on a period of over 60 years. During this period not the ideas of scientific communism but of the official ideology of Soviet bureaucracy, i.e. Stalinism, and its doctrine of "national socialism" dominated over the world socialist movement. This also determined the fate of the revolutions that took place after the 1917 October Revolution and the states established after the Second World War within the sphere of influence of the Soviet state.

And since the second half of the 1980's we have been witnessing the successive collapses of these despotic-bureaucratic regimes that are the representatives of this understanding of "national socialism". The period of cold war, which has been a result of the Second World War, is coming to an end. Stormy events follow each other, in which the old balances were ruined and the pursuit of "restructuring" is in full swing under the heavy influence and direction of the capitalist system.

As in every historical turning point pregnant with colossal turbulence and transformations, we are witnessing, and will be witnessing more, the eruption, with severe crises, of contradictions accumulated and deepened through long years and their world-wide effects. While a historical period is closing a new one is going to open up which will be the stage for a richer, more learned, more conscious, though more painful, action of human beings.

Marxism is still the only scientific and revolutionary world view capable of analysing the historical adventure of mankind in this planet and of explaining the historical conditions of mankind's real liberation. And there is no doubt that the exploiting ruling class of modern society, i.e. the bourgeoisie, is also pretty well aware of this fact.

They know that as long as the unbearable consequences of capitalism exist and alienation increases together with the division of labour the contradictions emanating from this objective basis will still cause a lot of social convulsions. Thus the rightfulness of Marxism, which demonstrates the inevitability of the abolition of capitalism on a world

scale for the emancipation of mankind, will surface again and again.

This is the real reason of the hysterical campaigns of the bourgeoisie, of the noise it has been raising for years. And the fact that bureaucratic dictatorships have entered into a process of collapse offered new opportunities for this anti-communist campaign of international bourgeoisie. Seizing this opportunity the bourgeoisie is trying to convince whole the people that “all predictions of Marxism have proved to be wrong, that it is just a dream to reach a classless society and capitalist market is the most excellent and eternal system that mankind discovered.”

The international bourgeoisie has tried to justify the political disguise of its exploitative system (i.e. bourgeois democracy) by comparing it with the totalitarian nature of bureaucratic regimes that had claimed to be socialist, and succeeded in influencing the working class with this ideological propaganda. Socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat have usually been identified with the regimes in the Soviet Union and the likes in the eyes of a European worker and this has led to a distancing of the workers from the idea of socialism and revolution. When we think of the tremendous destruction the Stalinist practises created on Marxism and the blackening of the socialist ideal then we can say that even the bourgeoisie could not have managed more than that.

The period we are living in now is a period of retreat on a world scale on the front of the fight for socialism, and of decline in the level of political class consciousness among the working class. In other words this means that the ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie over the masses is consolidated. On the other hand it is quite clear that capitalism could not solve any of its fundamental problems. Contrary to what the bourgeois ideologues and politicians try to picture the world capitalism is entering into a period of continuing instability, increasing potential of wars and actual regional wars, instead of a period of stability and peace.

This has piled a number of theoretical-political problems to be solved in front of the internationalists who defend scientific socialism. Above all the problem of reviving the deleted historical memory of the working class and helping it reach a consciousness of history. For this, the struggle against bourgeois ideology need to be stepped up. To examine the historical experiences from all respects, to convey the theoretical and political lessons drawn from this to the consciousness of the working class and the young generations that turn towards socialism should be the foremost task of the revolutionary Marxists.

It is of vital importance to raise high the flag of revolutionary Marxism in such a conjuncture in which the international bourgeoisie try to darken and eliminate the aspiration of the proletariat for emancipation from capitalist exploitation amid hysterical cries saying “Marxism is dead.” To do justice to this task today requires above all the smashing down of the delusions created by the Stalinist understanding of socialism and exposing the real meaning of the experience of “real socialist” countries which represented the embodiment of this understanding. Unless this is done it will be impossible to blow the dark clouds over the struggle of the proletariat for socialism in general. Therefore

the meaning of all that happened should be questioned under the light of revolutionary perspectives of Marxism in order to re-rail the struggle of the proletariat for socialism.

Of course it is clear that this questioning is not a brand new one. As early as in 1924 the Bolshevik-Leninists had already started this against the national narrow-mindedness and anti-Marxist line of Stalinism. However the period we are passing through now does not make the reappraisal of the practices since the October Revolution less important. On the contrary.

It acquired an extreme importance to reach a synthesis by deepening the discussions on the controversial subjects among revolutionary Marxists today. If we consider the historical process and experiences, one should admit that not a single thesis or particular theory on the class nature of the USSR put forward in the past can be excluded from criticism. Yet these particular theories have been for a long time the “trademarks” of some circles within the revolutionary Marxist current and it is still the case now. Moreover we can say that these theories served as though to separate and distance the revolutionary Marxist milieus from each other.

In our opinion, a split on the basis of debates on the “nature of the Soviet state” and particular theories produced thereafter is an irresponsible attitude. Today the internationalist revolutionaries should unite their forces essentially on the basis of the defence of the fundamental premises of Marxism.

In this work we deal with some theoretical problems that the revolutionary Marxists have been discussing –without reaching a clarity or an agreement– for a long time among themselves. In this context we deal with issues like the question of state in general; transition period and the dictatorship of the proletariat; the theory of “degenerated workers’ state” and the theoretical analyses of Trotsky on this subject; the class nature of the Soviet State; the process of bureaucratic counter revolution and the evolution of bureaucracy in the Soviet Union; Mandel’s views on workers’ state and the nature of bureaucracy; glasnost, perestroika and where the Soviet Union is going. Of course we do not claim that we have brought finished answers to the questions at hand. Our point is to deepen the process of questioning and get a sound revolutionary Marxist perspective for the future.

Without doing this, without carrying out a comprehensive discussion and reaching clear conclusions on the basis of these questions it will be impossible to attain the political unity of genuine internationalists and start a new period in the struggle of the world proletariat for socialism.

Chapter 1

The Historical Mission of the Proletariat

For humankind to emancipate from the exploitation and oppression created by class society, be his own master, save nature from the destructive effects of capitalism and put it in harmony with his long term interests; in short, reach his freedom can only be possible through world socialist revolution. To open this road to universal freedom, that is the historical mission of the modern proletariat. For the proletariat is the only real class that is capable of putting an end to the international capitalism dragging mankind towards a destruction.

The proletariat seizes the public power and by means of this transforms the socialised means of production, slipping from the hands of the bourgeoisie, into public property. By this act, the proletariat frees the means of production from the character of capital they have thus far borne, and gives their socialised character complete freedom to work itself out. Socialised production upon a predetermined plan becomes henceforth possible. The development of production makes the existence of different classes of society thenceforth an anachronism. In proportion as anarchy in social production vanishes, the political authority of the state dies out. Man, at last the master of his own form of social organisation, becomes at the same time the lord over nature, his own master – free.

To accomplish this act of emancipation is the historical mission of the modern proletariat. To thoroughly comprehend the historical conditions and thus the very nature of this act, to important to the now oppressed proletarian class a full knowledge of the conditions and of the meaning of the momentous act it is called upon to accomplish, this is the task of the theoretical expression of the proletarian movement, scientific socialism.¹

Capitalism has created the objective conditions of organisation of socialism on a world scale from the day it constituted a world system. The fact that capitalist system of exploitation still exists on a world scale despite the ripeness of the objective conditions for socialism manifests its results most strikingly in the profound degeneration and decay marring the whole social life, in the destruction of human race and nature.

Capitalism is an international system, which has created a system of market and production relations on a world scale. That is why to put an end to the domination of capitalism can only be accomplished on an international scale and the proletarian revolution must be a world revolution. The emancipation of the working class is neither a local nor a national question. To achieve this goal, joint action of the world proletariat is needed

1 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p.151

particularly on the basis of practical and theoretical collaboration of the proletariat of the most developed countries embracing whole countries that contain modern society. Since the proletarian revolution is a world revolution its revolutionary power must also assume the same scope. Hence the goal of the working class cannot be establishing “isolated”, separate workers’ powers. Such a situation is never in accordance with the historical interests of the working class.

A workers’ power confined to national boundaries and a backward economic base cannot survive should this isolation persist. A proletariat that comes to the power in a country should direct all its efforts towards spreading the socialist revolution to other countries. And because the power of the working class is embodied in the power of soviets, the establishment of an international workers’ power will find its expression in a “World Republic of Soviets”. This situation represents the end of the capitalist rule on a world scale.

The progress of proletarian revolution towards this goal cannot take place in such a way that individual countries break off the imperialist chain one by one, with intervening long historical periods. Marx and Engels anticipated the process of world revolution as a series of proletarian revolutions which closely follow each other and are closely connected with each other. And historical experience confirmed the anticipation of the founders of Marxism, by demonstrating the impossibility of an enduring victory unless such a progression takes place.

In order proletarian world revolution to proceed and worker’s power to survive, successively won victories of proletarian revolution, essentially in the advanced countries, are needed. Although it is possible to build the dictatorship of the proletariat in a single country, its basic task must be to prepare for a new and lasting leap forward of the international revolutionary forces of proletariat. The founders of Marxism did not deny that political introduction of the socialist revolution, i.e. the conquest of the political power by the proletariat, is quite possible in a single country. But they never anticipated that this revolution could remain in isolation for a long time.

The historical task of the workers’ power is to put an end to the economic privileges of the bourgeoisie which has lost its political power, abolish capitalism by carrying out the social transformations, abolish the exploitation of human beings by human beings, reach the classless society. Although it is the duty of the proletariat that has come to the power in a country to start these transformations, it would be a reactionary utopia to limit the revolutionary targets to a national scale (such as socialism in one country) for the liquidation of capitalism is a task that can be accomplished only on an international scale. The historical interest of proletarian power and the guarantee for its victory lies in advancing the world revolution, i.e. in the permanence of revolution. The tendency to stop, freeze and confine an already started social revolution to national boundaries is a characteristic feature of the petty-bourgeois revolutionism.

While the democratic petty bourgeois wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible, and with the achievement, at most, of the above demands,

it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent, until all more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance, until the proletariat has conquered state power, and the association of proletarians, not only in one country but in all the dominant countries of the world, has advanced so far that competition among the proletarians of these countries has ceased and that at least the decisive productive forces are concentrated in the hands of the proletarians. For us the issue cannot be the alteration of private property but only its annihilation, not the smoothing over of class antagonisms but the abolition of classes, not the improvement of existing society but the foundation of a new one.²

The revolutionary Marxist leaders of the proletariat remain loyal to this appeal of Marx and Engels to communists. Their conviction to the idea of the permanency of revolution was expressed in the first article of the statute of the Third International accepted in the 1920 Congress:

The new International Working Men's Association is founded to organise joint action by the proletarians of different countries, who are pursuing a single aim: the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of dictatorship and of an international Soviet republic which will completely abolish classes and establish socialism, the first stage of communist society.³

Trotsky was the first to raise the flag of struggle against Stalinism which step by step moved the Comintern away from proletarian internationalism and erected the conception of national socialism in front of the world revolution as an obstacle. And he persistently continued his revolutionary struggle until the end of his life. The truth of the matter is that today's generations of internationalist revolutionary struggle can clarify their understanding of permanent proletarian revolution thanks to Trotsky:

The socialist revolution begins on national foundations—but it cannot be completed within these foundations. The maintenance of the proletarian revolution within a national framework can only be a provisional state of affairs, even though, as the experience of the Soviet Union shows, one of long duration. In an isolated proletarian dictatorship, the internal and external contradictions grow inevitably along with the success achieved. If it remains isolated, the proletarian state must finally fall victim to these contradictions. The way out for it lies only in the victory of the proletariat of the advanced countries. Viewed from this standpoint, a national revolution is not a self-contained whole; it is only a link in the international chain. The international revolution constitutes a permanent process, despite temporary declines and ebbs.⁴

The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds on the international arena, and is completed on the world arena. Thus, the socialist revolution becomes a permanent revolution in a newer and broader sense of the word; it attains completion only in the final victory of the new society on our entire planet.⁵

2 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, pp.178-9

3 "Statutes of the Communist International", *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, Pluto, London, 1983, pp. 124-5

4 Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, Pathfinder Press, p.133

5 Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, p.279

As every class that comes to power proletariat has to put forward its own interests as the general interests of society as well. But under workers' power this fact will assume a qualitatively different character from two respects. First, while the interests of the bourgeoisie mean the continuation of the capitalist system of exploitation, which threatens the future of mankind, the interests of the working class mean the liquidation of capitalism and transition to classless society. And second, when the bourgeoisie imposes its self-interests on society as "common interests" by means of bourgeois state, there is literally a forceful imposition. Thus the bourgeois society is a deceiving pseudo partnership from the point of view of exploited majority. Even under the form of bourgeois democracy the bourgeois dictatorship is the means of oppressing the working class and the toilers. Yet under the dictatorship of the proletariat unlike the bourgeois society there will be no antagonisms between the self-interest of the working class and the interests of the other toiling sections of society. From an historical point of view a workers' power has to represent these layers as well.

Pointing out in this context that all revolutions during the course of history up to the proletarian revolution are "minority revolutions" Engels says the following:

All revolutions up to the present day have resulted in the displacement of one class role by another; but all ruling classes up to now have been only small minority in relation to the ruled mass of the people. One ruling minority was thus overthrown; another minority seized the helm of state in its stead and refashioned the state institutions to suit its own interests. This was on every occasion the minority group qualified and called to rule by the given degree of economic development; and just for that reason, and only for that reason, it happened that the ruled majority either participated in the revolution for the benefit of the former or else calmly acquiesced in it. But if we disregard the concrete content in each case, the common form of all these revolutions was that they were minority revolutions. Even when the majority took part, it did so – whether wittingly or not – only in the service of a minority; but because of this, or even simply because of the passive, unresisting attitude of the majority acquired the appearance of being the representative of the whole people.⁶

And also pointing out the qualitative change with the emergence of the great potential of transforming society on stage of history, which can be realised under the leadership of the working class, he goes on to say:

The time of surprise attacks, of revolutions carried through by small conscious minorities at the head of unconscious masses, is past. Where it is a question of a complete transformation of the social organisation, the masses themselves must also be in it, must themselves already have grasped what is at stake, what they are going in for, body and soul. The history of the last fifty years has taught us that. But in order that the masses may understand what is to be done, long, persistent work is required, and it is just this work that we are now pursuing, and with a success which drives the enemy to despair.⁷

Therefore both in advanced capitalist countries, in which the majority of population is

6 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p.190

7 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, pp.199-200

proletarianised, and in the underdeveloped or moderately developed capitalist countries, in which the proletariat together with urban and rural poor constitutes the majority of the population the political target of the revolutionary proletariat is to establish a real workers' democracy. It is a proven fact that in imperialist epoch, except a proletarian power, it is impossible for this or that "democratic power" in these countries to solve democratic tasks.

Therefore, the progress of social revolution in all capitalist countries today can only be possible, should the oppressed majority of population be united under the hegemony of proletariat which is effectively organised to build a worker's power. Any conceptions of staged power, that the so-called need for a separate stage of "democratic revolutionary" power (the "democratic" dictatorship of proletariat and peasantry or petty-bourgeoisie in general) as a beginning in order to fulfil the democratic tasks of the revolution, cannot be the revolutionary strategy of the working class. Such strategies of staged revolution, theoretically blur the proletariat's aim of power, and practically have no chance to advance the revolution. Petty bourgeois revolutionary governments or the "revolutionary" coalitions that are not established under the hegemony of the proletariat ends up, in the final analysis, with class collaboration with the bourgeoisie. As proved by historical experiences, in the imperialist epoch, it is the proletarian revolution that can accomplish both democratic transformations and socialist transformations which would abolish capitalism. The revolutionary proletariat's target is to build its own democracy, i.e. the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Chapter 2

The Question of State in Marxism

The Historical Course of State

On the subject of the evolution of human society and the formation of state there had been a commonly shared prevailing understanding of history in contemporary Western thought (from Hobbes to Hegel) before Marx and Engels developed the historical materialism as a scientific theory. According to this understanding of history, which is a reflection of philosophical idealism, pre-state society (natural society) was overwhelmed by passions and instincts and it was an irrational society in which everyone is in war with one another. On the other hand state represented the transformation of this reign of uncontrolled power into a controlled freedom, a transcending of passions and instincts. Thus state had to be regarded as the highest and final stage of the common and collective life of humankind who was assumed to be a rational being.

In the history of Western political thought, all idealist thinkers, from those who described the state in a realistic way as it is (Machiavelli) to those theoreticians of “natural law” (Hobbes, Rousseau, Kant) who suggested ideal state models in order to achieve the ends, agreed on the idea that the only sphere in which humankind can live a rational life was the state. This understanding of the role of state in the life of human societies and its place in history, of course, flowed from the philosophical idealism that regards the pre-state society as a “negative” stage and the state as a “positive” stage reached as a result of the evolution of human mind.

This way of thinking culminated in the German philosopher Hegel. In his *Philosophy of Right* state is presented not only as a necessity (a consciously conceived necessity) or an ideal model, but as the consciousness of real historical movement. In other words it represents the embodiment of universal mind (rationalisation of state). The Hegelian state embraces the whole sphere of material-economic relations of individual (civil society), and therefore dissolves the civil society into the state (political society). Thus the Hegelian state, in a sense, coincides with the society and turns into a being which is society itself. That means that the state is conceived not as a special organisation (instrument) as a means of political rule, but as the final aim of the social-historical evolution, and consequently it claims to be absolute and eternal. Of course, this idea was in accordance with the philosophical reflection of the bourgeois social development of 18th century. In this context, Hegel’s philosophy of right is essentially a defence of bourgeois society and bourgeois state.

This idealist conception of history culminated in Hegel has been reversed with the development of the theory of historical materialism by Marx. Marx's effort to work out the theory of historical materialism begins with his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843). Continuing with *1844 Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology* (1845-6) this effort culminates with his colossal preparatory work (*Grundrisse*) to criticise the political economy of bourgeois society.

The scientific explanation of state-society relationship in Marxism

Marx set out to criticise the idealist connection established by Hegel between civil society (sphere of material-economic relations) and state (sphere of political relations). To him this idea of Hegel was entirely false and displayed the reality upside down. On the contrary it was the civil society itself that conditioned and determined the state, and not the other way round.

Civil society embraces the whole material intercourse of individuals within a definite stage of the development of productive forces. It embraces the whole commercial and industrial life of a given stage and, insofar, transcends the State and the nation, though, on the other hand again, it must assert itself in its foreign relations as nationality, and inwardly must organise itself as State.⁸

Marx said that the historical pre-condition and the elementary basis of civil society was simple family or combined family which is called clan and that the civil society is "the real bedrock, real stage of history". And the political formation called state came into being as the direct product of social division of labour, classes and class struggles developing in the heart of civil society. Being secondary and dependent with respect to civil society, state, in the final analysis, is not a determining but a determined phenomenon. As a consequence, state is an organisation that is not the final stage of the process of social evolution or "an absolute and eternal being", but a transient and doomed one which has come into being as a result of certain historical conditions and will disappear.

This historical materialist conception developed by Marx and Engels was in fact entirely an anti-thesis of the tradition of philosophy of natural law which had culminated in Hegel. Marx and Engels put forward their materialist conception of history for the first time in a systematic way in their *German Ideology* against the idealist philosophy and the conception of history prevailing in bourgeois political thought. In this work the historical conditions of the birth of social division of labour, property forms, classes and forms of class rule (state-law-ideology) are explained in the framework of materialist conception of history. At that time they could essentially examine the Western line of historical evolution and the formation of economic-social forms on this line of evolution. Their knowledge on property forms and modes of production, at this early stage, was limited to the data on Western line of development. "The schema of societal evolution" presented in *German Ideology* thus bears a certain limitation.

In *German Ideology* the formation of class society and state is explained on the basis of the development of division of labour, private property and exchange in the heart of

8 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p.76

primitive communal society, and thus of the dissolution and disintegration of primitive commune, and of the replacement of commune by a new social formation organised along class lines. This abstraction of Marx and Engels is crucial to understand the historical conditions of the emergence of class society and state in the West. According to this explanation, the presence of private property on land is regarded as the precondition for the social division of labour, exchange and the development of the relations of exploitation, and on this basis the dissolution of equalitarian primitive communal society, the transition to class society and state. Of course this idea in *German Ideology* was correct from the point of view of explaining the Western line of historical evolution and thus the formation of the Western class societies. However it was inadequate as far as the development line of Eastern civilisation is concerned. Because the emergence of state and the establishment of the exploitative class rule in the East had happened under such historical conditions that there was no private property on land, where division of labour and exchange relations are not developed, and where primitive agrarian communes still exist. The state in the East was not based on private property and individual exploitation, but on collective exploitation of Asiatic agrarian communes. This fact implied the existence of an entirely different line of historical evolution from that of Western civilisation. Moreover the transition to civilisation, that is class society and state, in the East had happened nearly 2500 years before in Ancient Sumer and Egypt) than the West. Therefore the Western line of evolution might have been a peculiar route, which have emerged into history on a later stage, rather than a universal-historical model for the development of human society.

Marx has filled this gap subsequent years (1853-59) by working out a wider and detailed study of history so as to include the development line of Eastern civilisation. This detailed study of history by Marx (*Grundrisse*) to examine the origins of capitalism and criticise the political economy of bourgeois society provided a great contribution to the development of the theory historical materialism. With this work Marx provided –in the framework of the materialist conception of history– a more accurate and perfect explanation of the historical evolution of the Eastern and Western society since the early ages. He explained the conclusion of his efforts in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

My inquiry led me to the conclusion that neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life, the totality of which Hegel, following the example of English and French thinkers of the eighteenth century, embraces within the term “civil society”; that the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy. ... In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs marking progress in the economic development of society.⁹

⁹ Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1981, p. 21

From barbarity to civilisation: from classless society to class society and state

Marx and Engels describe the phases that humankind passed through from savagery up until to civilisation as the pre-history of humankind. They explain that the basic social unit that existed throughout the whole of this period is “primitive communist” community which does not know class antagonisms and state. This community which had natural origins at first, based on the unity of blood, language, custom etc., is a not yet a settled community (tribe). And the first form of property we have in these primitive classless societies is the tribal property (collective communal property).

[The first form of ownership is tribal (Stammeigentum) ownership.] It corresponds to the undeveloped stage of production, at which a people lives by hunting and fishing, by the rearing of beasts or, in the highest stage, agriculture.¹⁰

In this historical stage of social evolution the division of labour could not develop further much and it represents merely a further extension of natural division of labour that existed within family. In this stage a hidden slavery within family slowly develops by the increase of population and needs, and the spread of wars between tribes. By the unification of relative clans, marriages between clans etc. this primitive communal community develops into tribe and a union of tribes. However this organisation does not go beyond the framework of relationships between relatives (chain of descent) and does not spoil the “primitive communist” structure. Neither in clan level nor in tribe level there is no room neither for private property nor antagonistic classes, and state. The owner of the land that has been temporarily settled on is the community itself (collective ownership). The members of the community, individuals (or families), are not entitled to private ownership on land. Individuals can merely be entitled to possess the land. And the prerequisite for the individuals to possess the land is to be a member of the community. The individual can only possess the land through the community. Apart from the existence of the collective property on land, in some communes, even the production itself is carried out collectively. And in some others, families produce independently in a piece of land allotted to them by the community, and the products that remain after the necessary funds are collected (religious rituals, building temples, war preparations, auxiliary reserves etc.) are shared among the individuals of the patriarchal family. But in any case the production is for sustaining the existence of the members of commune and thus that of commune.

The oldest, simplest and purest forms of these primitive communes are “archaic Asiatic” communes seen in ancient Eastern societies. Stating that the very origin of all pre-capitalist socio-economic formations is this primitive Asiatic commune, Marx established the following on the historical evolution of these communes:

When they finally do settle down, the extent to which this original community is modified will depend on various external, climatic, geographic, physical etc. conditions as well as on their particular natural predisposition – their clan

10 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p.21

character.¹¹

Accordingly, in the subsequent stages of social evolution, especially during the process of transition from barbarity to civilisation, this primitive communal community appears in a state that it has moved very far from its original state and undergone structural changes.

Marx distinguishes three different forms of both property and communal organisation in the primitive communal societies that have reached to settled agriculture depending on the relationships of the individuals of commune to the land and to one another. First is the Asiatic form wherein the ownership of land is entirely collective. Secondly, the Ancient form which appears in the ancient ages of the West. It involves both collective ownership and individual private ownership of land. Thirdly, the Germanic form in which individual ownership on land is predominant. But in all these three forms, in order an individual to be able to claim anything about land (either possession or private ownership) he must be a member of the community as a prerequisite.

All these three primitive communal forms represent equalitarian societies which leave no room for class distinctions and exploitation yet. In all of them the purpose of production is to sustain the existence of community. Here, to produce value is not an end in itself. Within community there is no exchange and commercial activity that flows from division of labour. Although a differentiation of wealth begins among the members of community, this does not lead to exploitation yet. Because every individual member of community, or of the family unit, has the objective conditions of his labour and does not make someone else's labour the objective condition of his own production. However in the subsequent periods of history –in the course of transition to civilisation– these communal societies underwent different processes of evolution and led to different types of class societies and states.

One of the most important discoveries introduced by Marx's investigations into the science of history was the following: instead of just one form of transition from barbarism to civilisation, or from classless society to class society and state, there are two forms. The first one represents the line of evolution of Eastern civilisation and the second one that of Western. This at the same time shows that there are two different ways of the formation of state instead of just one.

The urban communes of ancient age (Greek and Roman) and German rural communes at the beginning of the middle ages were on the Western line of development and therefore represented Western type of transition. The evolution of both of these communal societies led to the victory of private property and therefore out of both these societies flowed class societies (slave and feudal) and states based on private property. On the other hand, the Asiatic agrarian communes that were on the Eastern evolution line remained thousands of years without change and formed the material foundation of the class societies of Eastern despotic type. The transition to class society in the east, contrary to the west, did not happen on the basis of private property but on the basis of collective state property.

11 Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin, 1973, p. 472

Marx and Engels were the first to discover that this historical difference between the evolution lines of the west and the east flowed from the difference in the property forms, the production relations and the mode of communal organisation.

The essential factor that determines the evolution line of the west has been the private ownership on land, the development of the division of labour and exchange, and the spreading of individual exploitation (the use of slave labour). As an example of this development Marx points to the ancient urban communes (ancient Greece and Rome) which are on the Western line of development and which represent the classic form of transition to Western type of class society. We have the purest and most exact form of ancient communal community and ancient mode of production, which is prior to slave society and represents the transition to slave society, and ancient mode production in the Roman history. Here the primitive urban community (city) was not formed by a natural process but as a result of the unification of the agrarian-warrior communities (many tribes) as a city, either by agreement or conquest. Being more alive and organised in a more democratic way in comparison with the Asiatic communes the Ancient city commune was a volunteered company of the free individuals having private property. Contrary to the East, there was no “sacred” being, a higher unity (a supreme authority), above this city community, appropriating the surplus. With the deduction of common expenditures (for religious ceremonies, building temples, defence, war preparations, etc.) necessitated by the common interests of the city, all the remaining surplus were being accumulated in the hands of free producers (who had the private ownership of land). This accumulation of surplus led to a rapid development of division of labour and exchange of products within the commune. The development of exchange stimulated the production for market leading to making use of slave labour on a wide scale by the landowners. Creating, on the one hand, a differentiation in terms of riches and accumulation of wealth among the members of society (free citizens) this process, on the other hand, led to an increase in the number of slaves, who had become the basic element of the production, making them the most crowded class of society. This amounted to the dissolution of old equalitarian communal traditions and a division of society into classes in the form of “rich and poor” and “masters and slaves”.

Having become economically stronger and dominant on the basis of new production relations the big landowners and slave owners started to reorganise society according to their rules. Although they were wealthy and powerful from an economic point of view, they constituted a minority. In order to be able to preserve their economic superiority they needed another organisation apart from their economic organisation. An organisation that would defend the common interests of the big landowners and slave owners and assure the permanence of their economic superiority. Thus special political organisation of the ruling class which is called state came out.

Consequently, in the case of Western development of civilisation this special political organisation called state has come onto the stage of history as an inevitable result of division of society into classes on the basis of relations of exploitation based on private property. In this context the state in ancient Greece and Rome was based on big landowners and slave owners, and was a political organ organised by these classes

themselves. The Roman empire was based on slavery and had to be organised in a centralised-bureaucratic manner. Because the source of the wealth of the Roman nobles was expansionism, conquest of land and the massive *latifundia* agriculture carried out on these lands on the basis of extensive slave labour. And a political rule that is to assure this economic superiority necessitated a centrally organised big military-bureaucratic apparatus.

Another example for the development of class society and state on the basis of private property in the West can be found in the development of the feudal relations at the beginning of the middle ages with the dissolution of German commune. These relations were formed because of the disintegration of the German rural communities as a result of migrations and wars, and, with time, their subordination to a new class of nobles (German military chieftains) losing their land and individual independence. The ownership of land in this system is in the monopoly of the nobles (seigneurs) organised in the form of a hierarchy of estates. And this type of land ownership represents the collectivity of the feudal lords in front of peasants. As to the peasants, they have fallen into a position of dependent producers and serfs who were under a lot of obligations in front of these feudal lords.

The feudal land system of the middle ages had created isolated local communities. The feudal economy was a natural economy with limitations so that it could only meet the needs of the direct producers and that of (in the form of surplus product or surplus labour) the feudal lords who established a rule over these local communities. Owing to its essential rural character feudal society developed rural (feudal) statelets in isolation to one another. Obviously, this feudal state failed to be a highly centralised imperial state as the Roman state and it remained at such a limited level of organisation that could assure the functioning of this local economic-social unit (exploitation of the serf) in the interests of the feudal lords.

Thus in the case of the Western type of development of civilisation we see first the emergence of the private property and exchange (commodity relations) and then, on the basis of these, the division of society into classes, and finally the coming onto the stage of history of the state as the instrument of political rule. Yet in the case of Eastern type of development of civilisation the formation of the ruling class and state developed on a completely different basis. Those states in the ancient ages of the East (for instance, Sumer, ancient Egypt, India, China, Persia, etc.) arose not on the basis of individual private property and relations of individual exploitation (exploitation of slaves) as in the West, but of collective communal property and the relations of collective exploitation. The ruling class of the Eastern society emerges as a result of the fact that those functions, which had been just public functions at the beginning, were turned into standing posts and that those servants turned their authority of function into authority of exploitation.

Oriental despotism: from servants of society to lords of society

Marx finds the economic foundation of Oriental despotism (as a type of state) in the Asiatic mode of production. To Marx this mode of production emerges when there is

an increase in production thanks to more developed production methods leading to an accumulation of a regular surplus within the primitive rural communities. There is a certain level of division of labour in these communities. Agriculture and handicrafts have been divided, but at the same time they form a unity. This mutually complementary and supporting nature of agriculture and handicrafts within the same community makes them self-sustaining. Here the economic unit is not the family or the individual in the community but the community itself as a collective entity. Marx points out that these communities “contain all the conditions of reproduction and surplus production within themselves” and states that Asiatic mode of production is based on these structures.

The unity of these little Asiatic agrarian communities vegetating side by side in their isolation is represented either by an assembly formed of family chiefs or by a grand chief (despot), and respectively the social authority acquires either democratic or despotic forms.

For Marx, “... in most of the *Asiatic* land-forms, the *comprehensive unity* standing above all these little communities appears as the higher *proprietor* or as the *sole proprietor*; the real communities hence only as *hereditary* possessors.”¹² Thus a higher organisation that represents the unity of these little agrarian communities already emerged spontaneously before state emerged with its full components. This higher unity that appears as the real proprietor (an assembly of chiefs or a despot) first allots the possession of land to the lesser agrarian communities; and these small communities respectively allots this possession to their members (family units). Here the emergence of the higher unity as the real proprietor is also accepted by the lesser communities. Consequently, the transfer of some part of the surplus product produced by the lesser communities to the higher unity which represents the unity, who are the real direct producers, becomes the custom.

In the Lower Mesopotamia, Sumer country, there were no laws, no armed force of repression and no bureaucracy during the first appearance of the state. The state was a “higher unity” that symbolised the cooperation of the lesser communities (local communes). That is, at the beginning, this higher unity was not a state in the proper sense of the word. But it was at the same time the embryo of the Oriental despotic state that was to come.

The lines of Marx that explain the formation of classes and state on the basis of this Asiatic mode of production can be found in both *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. The characteristic feature that distinguishes the Oriental development is the formation of classes out of what was a functional division of labour at the beginning on the basis of organisation of big scale public works. Marx points out the fact that how the public offices that flowed from this division of labour subsequently transformed and led to an authority to exploit. This transformation is embodied in organisation in the form of state of a despotic power. In the ancient ages the central public offices necessitated by the big scale irrigation agriculture brought about the formation of an early state and first class societies (first civilisations) in the Middle East (Sumer, Egypt) and in the far East (India, China). And in his *Anti-Duhring* Engels also deals with how this authority of public office could turn

12 Marx, *Grundrisse*, pp. 472-3

into an authority to exploit and those in service of society become the lords of society. Thus in the heart of the formation of state in the Asiatic case lies the fact that those who had taken upon social functions then acquired an autonomy from society, united and formed a ruling class.¹³

As Marx said the higher unity (the ruling group), which arose on the basis of Asiatic agrarian communes and having a despot at the helm, while carrying out a social function, transforms with time the appropriation of surplus product on the basis of this functional authority into no-return liabilities and creates a particular form of exploitation. In order the ruling group to be able to continue this position of ruling it had to make the no-return liabilities standing ones and for this purpose organise a political, military, judicial and ideological structure (state). Thus the basic factor here to make the Asiatic mode of production standing is the formation of a despotic central state power above the primitive self-sustaining agrarian communes. Pointing out to the formation of despotic state Engels explains:

The form of this political authority depends in its turn on the form of the communities at the time in question. Where, as among the Aryan peoples of Asia and Russians, it develops at a time when the fields are still cultivated by the community on behalf of the whole collective, or when at any rate the fields are only temporarily allocated to individual families, i.e. when there is as yet no private property in land, the political authority appears as despotism.¹⁴

Hence the Asiatic mode of production cannot be conceived separately from a state power in the form of Oriental despotism. Having emerged out of the conditions of production of primitive agrarian communes the Asiatic mode of production can only acquire a standing character under the existence of a central authority that is absolute and having almost a godlike power. In the absence of such an authority the primitive agrarian communes could not prevent a dissolution and disintegration through the emergence of private ownership and development of division of labour, i.e. through its inner dynamics. The obstacle that prevented this natural process and doomed the agrarian communes to their primitive positions for thousands of years is the system of exploitation that is based on the unpaid surplus product extracted from these communes by the Oriental despotism.

It is on the very basis of this mechanism of exploitation established by the central authority (Asiatic mode of production) that there is no remaining surplus product or surplus labour that could be accumulated and exchanged. Thus while the agrarian communes, having no accumulation of surplus product, lives on without any change in their situation of a self-sustaining natural economy, we have cities just beside them rising through the air as if different planets and inhabiting the central authority (despotic state) and its

13 A second way of emergence of Asiatic mode of production and Oriental despotism since the ancient ages of the East appears as a result of the subjugation of the settled agrarian communities to foreign invaders. The state of these conquerors became the real proprietor of the whole land. The Mesopotamian states of the late period such as the Assyrian state can be given as examples for this variety.

14 Engels, *The Frankish Period*, in Marx and Engels, "Pre-Capitalist Socio-Economic Formations", Progress, 1979, p.363

functionaries (ruling bureaucracy). In these cities where the surplus product extracted from the agrarian communes is accumulated we have a more developed division of labour and more alive foreign trade to satisfy the needs of the state class. The surplus product that is accumulated in the hands of state is introduced to foreign trade in these cities through merchants who are state officials. Here the trade is not an expression of a commodity production that occurs within small village communities with the purpose of selling in the market. Having been appropriated by the state the surplus product is then used for getting some rare items (arms, jewels, luxurious materials, etc.), which means that it is used for the satisfaction of the needs of the despot and his ruling elite.

When we examine carefully the basic features of the state organisation of Oriental despotic type we see how important it is, not just for learning ancient history but also for grasping some characteristics of the modern bureaucratic dictatorships that constitutes the axis of our survey. Therefore we consider it useful to underline some important points.

Under Oriental despotism the only and real proprietor is the state. State functionaries who fulfil public functions enjoy the right to use the state property in so far as their posts exist. But this right does not make him a private property owner. He cannot transmit the status he gained and the revenues that come from this status through inheritance. In short, these rights are limited to his period of office.

In order to continue the central authority the power must be kept undivided, monolithic. That is why in all despotic Oriental states an utmost care is paid to form the ruling class corporation (civil, military and religious bureaucracy) out of picked-up (uprooted) cadres. The ties that connect the picked-up state functionaries to their social class are completely cut. History is full of examples that show what kind of control mechanism was established and how the candidates for office were finely elected, employed by the despotic powers to protect their monolithic structures.

In despotic Oriental states the never-ending dynastic conflicts and the decentralising tendencies such as landlordism coming out of the heart of the system always flow from the inner structure of the state class. The dynastic conflicts that occurred within the great Asiatic empires (such as China, Iran and Ottoman) are perfect examples for this. These conflicts, as Marx said, are the ones that happen within the despotic state structure, developing independently from the rural communities that constitute the foundation of the system. Because the real producers, that is the communities (village communities), are in a completely dependent position and because of the stagnation of their inner structures they are simply outside the political conflicts. The conflicts taking place within the political sphere (state) is as far as the sky for them.

As a final point we must add that the Oriental despotism and the Asiatic mode of production which are based on collective state property proved to have constituted the most resistant and enduring structures against change. In Oriental civilisations developing on this basis the existing production relations and property forms could continue to exist for thousands of years without undergoing a change. No formation with the Asiatic mode of production ever has been able to evolve towards another mode

of production by its own inner dynamics. The fundamental factor that made this mode of production evolve has been the external dynamics, especially the dissolving effect of capitalism. These systems suffered a painful process of dissolution when they came into touch with capitalist production relations. For instance, the despotic empires of China and Ottoman in the 19th century have been dissolved when they came into contact with the Western imperialists.

* * *

The different pre-capitalist production relations and property forms that constitute the basis of Oriental line of civilisation and Western line of civilisation have led to different social and political organisations and these differences existed until 20th century. However, despite all differences, history of both lines of civilisations have been essentially a history of class societies.

And finally modern history is the history of wage labour and capital on a universal scale. And modern state is the instrument of the exploitation of wage labour by capital. With the becoming of capitalism, which developed in Europe, a world system the different histories of these societies coming out of different historical roots have become united into a common history. Capitalist mode of production while turning the majority of the population into proletarians both in the west and in the east and forcing the overwhelming majority of mankind to live under conditions of wage slavery paves the way for a social revolution that at the same time will eradicate these conditions.

The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production –antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism but of an antagonism that emanates from the individuals’ social conditions of existence– but the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation.¹⁵

The proletariat, being the only class capable of carrying out this revolution, putting an end to the division of society into classes, will put the means of production under the ownership of its semi-state, when it seizes the political power. But doing this it abolishes whole class structures, differences and antagonisms including itself as well. Thus the death knell of the state rings, which had once came onto the stage of history on the basis of division of society into classes.

As soon as there is no longer any social class to be held in subjection; as soon as class rule and the individual struggle for existence based upon our present anarchy in production, with the collisions and excesses arising from these, are removed, nothing more remains to be repressed, and a special repressive force, a state, is no longer necessary. The first act by virtue of which the state really constitutes itself the representative of the whole of society –the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society– this is, at the same time, its last independent act as a state. State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after

15 Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p.21-22

another, superfluous, and then withers away of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The state is not “abolished”. *It withers away*.¹⁶

Beneath the division of society into classes lied the inevitable struggle for individual existence due to the insufficiency of production. Hence the abolishment of social classes can only be possible on the basis of creating an abundance that would put an end to this struggle. Even in 1878 Engels was pointing out that modern capitalism had prepared the conditions that mankind could create such an abundance:

The expansive force of the means of production bursts the bonds that the capitalist mode of production had imposed upon them. Their deliverance from these bonds is the one precondition for an unbroken, constantly accelerated development of the productive forces, and therewith for a practically unlimited increase of production itself. Nor is this all. The socialised appropriation of the means of production does away, not only with the present artificial restrictions upon production, but also with the positive waste and devastation of productive forces and products that are at the present time the inevitable concomitants of production, and that reach their height in the crises. Further, it sets free for the community at large a mass of means of production and of products, by doing away with the senseless extravagance of the ruling classes of today and their political representatives. The possibility of securing for every member of society, by means of socialised production, an existence not only fully sufficient materially, and becoming day by day more full, but an existence guaranteeing to all the free development and exercise of their physical and mental faculties – this possibility is now for the first time here, but it is *here*.¹⁷

The level of development that the modern productive forces have reached under capitalism since the above lines were written reveals the fundamental question. Unless the international proletariat puts an end to the world capitalist system mankind will continue to be suffocated in an ever deepening and spreading decay. Under the domination of capitalism the aggravating contradiction between technology, nature and humanity leads not to a further development of productive forces that will satisfy the needs of mankind on a greater level but on the contrary to destruction of them. The only condition that could save mankind from this situation and eradicate the whole social evils is the power of proletariat on a world scale. If this happens, the waste and destruction that is caused by the capitalist mode of production can be put an end to; all class privileges and state thereof would disappear and an abundance in which the productive forces can be used for the benefit of an harmonious development of mankind with nature can be created together.

Hence if there is an understandable objective basis for the emergence of the exploitation and oppression of human beings over human beings and thereof state, similarly there is an understandable and possible objective basis for a social level of development that makes this exploitation, oppression and state unnecessary. A society in which producers organise the production on the basis of a free and equalitarian unity, i.e. a classless society,

16 Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1975, pp.332-3

17 Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, p.335

will be based on such a level of abundance of productive forces that will remove the basis of struggle for individual existence. And the advancement that will make mankind move towards this level is the social revolution of proletariat on an international level. Engels expressed this as follows:

The state, then, has not existed from all eternity. There have been societies that did without it, that had no idea of the state and state power. At a certain stage of economic development, which necessarily involved the split of society into classes, the state became a necessity because of this split. We are now rapidly approaching a stage in the development of production at which the existence of these classes has not only ceased to be a necessity but becomes a positive hindrance to production. They will fall just as inevitably as they arose at an earlier stage. Along with them the state will inevitably fall. Society, which will reorganise production on the basis of a free and equal association of the producers, will put the whole state machinery where it will then belong: into the museum of antiquities, by the side of the spinning-wheel and the bronze axe.¹⁸

Workers' State: A State Withering Away From the Very Beginning

In order to understand the question of state from the standpoint of the aims of proletarian revolution, we must first of all keep the following general framework in mind: revolutionary Marxism explains the final aim of the proletariat as reaching a classless, stateless society of free producers. To reach this aim proletariat needs a state during the transition period from capitalism to communism, but a new type of state that starts withering away from the very beginning. These features do not define one of the possible forms of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but defines its essence, its primary conditions of existence. We must now deal with the fundamental aspects of the general framework drawn by the founders of Marxism and Lenin.

In today's world where bureaucratic dictatorships who presented themselves as "real socialism" has been falling one by one, the need to defend the revolutionary positions of Marxism against ideological attacks of the bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie has been increased hundred times compared with the past. A more dangerous thing than the attacks that the bourgeois ideology is delivered at Marxism is the refined, sly ideological campaigns using a Marxist cover of "criticism of bureaucratism". Typical for this is the denial of the need for a revolutionary authority under guise of denying bureaucratic authority. Under today's circumstances in which the need for revolutionary authority, which constitutes a necessary element of workers' revolution, is sought to be blurred, it would be timely to remind the words of Engels on this matter:

... Hence it is absurd to speak of the principle of authority as being absolutely evil, and of the principle of autonomy as being absolutely good. Authority and autonomy are relative things whose spheres vary with the various phases of the development of society. If the autonomists confined themselves to saying that the social organisation of the future would restrict authority solely to the limits within

18 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p.330.

which the conditions of production render it inevitable, we could understand each other; but they are blind to all facts that make the thing necessary and they passionately fight the world.

Why do the anti-authoritarians not confine themselves to crying out against political authority, the state? All Socialists are agreed that the political state, and with it political authority, will disappear as a result of the coming social revolution, that is, that public functions will lose their political character and will be transformed into the simple administrative functions of watching over the true interests of society. But the anti-authoritarians demand that the political state be abolished at one stroke, even before the social conditions that gave birth to it have been destroyed. They demand that the first act of the social revolution shall be the abolition of authority. Have these gentlemen ever seen a revolution? A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon – authoritarian means, if such there be at all; and if the victorious party does not want to have fought in vain, it must maintain this rule by means of the terror which its arms inspire in the reactionaries. Would the Paris Commune have lasted a single day if it had not made use of this authority of the armed people against the bourgeois? Should we not, on the contrary, reproach it for not having used it freely enough?¹⁹

Engels writes about the nonsense of “free people’s state”, which is an extension of petty bourgeois socialism, to criticise the draft Gotha Programme of German social democrats (in 1875) in his letter to Bebel. That the communists, in their programme, talk about the goals like “free people’s state” instead of talking about the withering away of state gives rise to a rightful reaction of anarchists and confuses the aims by putting together the incompatible concepts like freedom and state. Engels says:

...The whole talk about the state should be dropped, especially since the Commune, which was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word. The “people’s state” has been thrown in our faces by the Anarchists to the point of disgust, although already Marx’s book against Proudhon and later the *Communist Manifesto* directly declare that with the introduction of the socialist order of society the state will dissolve of itself and disappear. As, therefore, the state is only a transitional institution which is used in the struggle, in the revolution, to hold down one’s adversaries by force, it is pure nonsense to talk of a free people’s state: so long as the still *uses* the state, it does not use it in the interests of freedom but in order to hold down its adversaries, and as soon as it becomes possible to speak of freedom the state as such ceases to exist. We would therefore propose to replace *state* everywhere by *Gemeinwesen*, a good old German word which can very well convey the meaning of the French word “*commune*”.²⁰

As can be understood from these explanations it is not proper to use concepts like “socialist state” or “socialist democracy” to describe the workers’ state (if we are to examine the meanings of the words meticulously). For in fact the expressions “state and democracy” and “socialism” mean two different historical periods. Yet these terms have sometimes been used for the purpose of describing the position of the ruling proletariat

19 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, pp.378-9.

20 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, pp.34-35.

aiming to reach socialism. But if we are to use the exact proper words the correct term for the period of the proletarian dictatorship should be “workers’ commune (soviet)” or “workers’ democracy”.

It would be useful to examine some points of the related analyses of Marx and Engels together with the analyses of Lenin. He draws important conclusions from the standpoint of the relation between the proletarian revolution and state, pointing to two documents²¹ in which the draft Gotha Programme is criticised. He describes the main differences that distinguish the revolutionary Marxists from anarchists and opportunists on the basis of the first letter:

From the anarchists we are distinguished (a) by the use of the state *now*, and (b) during the *revolution* of the proletariat (“the dictatorship of the proletariat”), points of the utmost importance for practice, immediately. (It is these that Bucharin *has forgotten!*)

From the opportunists by more profound, “more eternal” truths about (aa) the “temporary” character of the state, about (bb) the *harm* of “talk” about it now, about (cc) the not entirely state character of the dictatorship of the proletariat, (dd) about the contradiction between state and freedom, (ee) about the more correct idea (concept, programme term) “Gemeinwesen” instead of state, (ff) about the “smashing” (zerbrechen) of the bureaucratic-military machine.²²

Lenin notices a difference when he compares Engels’ letter and Marx’s marginal notes in relation to the Gotha programme. While Engels proposes the word *commune* instead of state, which means he avoids using the word state, Marx can talk of “the future state of communist society”. Lenin says that when this explanation, which seems to be a contradiction at first sight, is examined it would be understood that there in fact is no contradiction between Marx and Engels and Marx has used the word state in a conditional manner just to grasp some hints of what is to come in the future. In his attempt Marx remarked two points:

- a) that the state could be nothing but the revolutionary power of the proletariat over the transition period,
- b) and the form which the state would take in the future communist society. Here the word “state” is not used to mean that state would remain but in a tentative manner to refer to what its future would be.

Lenin considered the development of state and democracy from the standpoint of mainly three historical periods (capitalist society / transition period / communist society). To him, when transition period ends and communist society begins its life, a period of freedom will be opened, in which state, and thus democracy, would have been withered away. In this context Lenin notes the mistake of using the concepts of “freedom” and

21 The two documents are the letter from Engels to Bebel dated March 28, 1875 and the letter from Marx to Bracke dated May 5, 1875, which also includes the critical marginal notes to the draft Gotha Programme.

22 Lenin, *Marxism on the State*, Progress Publishers, p.26

“democracy” interchangeably:

Usually the concepts “freedom” and “democracy” are considered identical and one is often used instead of the other. Very often, vulgar Marxists (headed by Kautsky, Plekhanov and Co.) reason precisely in that way. In fact democracy precludes freedom. The dialectic (course) of development is as follows: from absolutism to bourgeois democracy; from bourgeois democracy to proletarian democracy; from proletarian democracy to none at all.²³

Here Lenin uses the expression “none at all” to mean the historical period in which state is withered away and a stateless society, i.e. the real freedom, will be enjoyed. The most important point that should be kept in mind alongside with these explanations, is the enormous damage created by official Marxism (Stalinism) on the question of state. By revising Marxism, and creating an official ideology which forms a basis for the petty-bourgeois conception of socialism, Stalinism mixed up the different historical periods beginning with the proletarian revolution. It identified the period of socialism, which is the lower phase of communism meaning the classless-stateless society, with the period of proletarian dictatorship, and turned the question into a complete puzzle. Because of this, socialism began to be understood as a period in which classes and state would still remain to exist, and this understanding has rooted deeply into the Turkish socialist movement in such a way that is very hard to eliminate. Those who accept the “theoretical” arguments of Stalinism as identical to Marxism, have approached Lenin, not in a way to understand him, but on the contrary to make compatible his ideas with the Stalinist distortions. For this reason, it is impossible to understand Lenin’s analyses unless breaking with the official ideology of Stalinism absolutely.

In Lenin, distinction between the transition period from capitalism to communism (the period of revolutionary transformations) and the period of classless society is clearly drawn. According to this, the transition period is a period with classes and “with state”, based on the dictatorship the proletariat. But the state organised by the proletariat is a “semi-state” compared to the past, a state that starts withering away from the very beginning. As to the communist society, it is a classless and stateless society in terms of both its lower phase and higher phase. And now let us deal with certain conclusions Lenin drew from *the Critique of Gotha Programme* to see these distinctions in a more detailed manner and clarify certain issues.

Lenin makes the following three-part distinction to distinguish the transition period and the lower and higher phases of communist society:

- I- prolonged birth-pangs
- II- the first phase of communist society
- III- a higher phase of communist society²⁴

And he goes on to explain the distinction between the lower and higher phase of

23 Lenin, *Marxism on the State*, p.25

24 Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 25, pp.471-2 (Lenin, *Marxism on the State*, p.31)

communist society with his own words on basis of the lines from the Critique of Gotha Programme:

The *lower* (“first”) – the distribution of articles of consumption “proportionately” to the amount of labour supplied by each to society. Inequality of distribution is still strong. “The narrow bourgeois horizon of right” has *not yet* been crossed *in its entirety*. This *NB!!*. With (semi-bourgeois) rights the (semi-bourgeois) state obviously does not fully disappear either. This is *Nota Bene!!*

The “*higher*” – “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs”. When is this possible? When (1) the antithesis between intellectual and manual labour disappears; (2) labour becomes a *prime necessity of life* (NB: the habit of working becomes a norm, without coercion!!); (3) the productive forces develop highly, and so on. It is obvious that the *complete* withering away of the state is possible only at this highest degree. This is NB.²⁵

Previously Lenin, with a view to make clear the qualitative difference from the bourgeois state, had described the workers’ state as a *semi-state*, which starts withering away from the very beginning. This definition refers to the period of proletarian dictatorship. In the last quote above, however, he makes some points to distinguish the features of the lower and higher phases of communist society. He resorts to the terms “semi-bourgeois rights” and “semi-bourgeois state” to emphasize that the narrow bourgeois horizon of right is not yet crossed in the lower phase. Meanwhile we must remember here that these descriptions must not be confused with the period of proletarian dictatorship.

Here Lenin, just like Marx, seeks for some hints about the future of the state. He tries to find how can giving an “equal share according to equal quantity of labour” to the individuals who are unequal in real life in the first phase of communism be expressed in terms of rights. He states, as Marx points out, that this situation means “the narrow bourgeois horizons of right” is not crossed yet. In order to be able to speak of real equality and to surpass the narrow horizon of bourgeois right, he stresses the necessity of giving unequal shares to the individuals who are unequal in real life, that is of attaining a level of abundance characterised by “from each according to his ability to each according to his needs.” Thus what he tries to express by the terms “semi-bourgeois right”, “semi-bourgeois state” is about the relative “unequality” of the lower phase which does not yet represent such an abundance. In other words, Lenin describes this situation by emphasising the fact that the relics of bourgeois right are not completely extinguished yet. Hence this cannot be interpreted at all as meaning that state will still be present in the lower phase of communism, i.e. socialism, and that it can only start to wither away afterwards.

But the fact that Lenin added the term “semi-bourgeois state” besides the term “semi-bourgeois right” did not serve to clarify the matter, on the contrary created confusion. For Marx had nothing in his mind but that the bourgeois principle of “exchange of equivalents” still holds when he used the concept of right. And we must also remember that Marx’s motive in emphasising this is the need to criticise the petty-bourgeois

25 Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 25, p.472 (Lenin, *Marxism on the State*, p.32)

socialists of the time, for instance the Lassallean understanding of “equality”. Because the petty-bourgeois goal of final equality is formed under the domination of bourgeois ideology and does not go beyond the limits of capitalism. What Marx did was to state the difference of the scientific communist understanding of equality from that of petty-bourgeois which ignores the real inequalities. It would be an entirely mistaken approach to attempt to reduce this rather philosophical explanation of Marx to a formal system of law or state. Because Marx and Engels explained very clearly how to treat the problem of “state” in the first phase of communism.

Over the period of proletarian dictatorship (the transition period) the proletariat must advance towards the aim of removing all classes including itself. If the proletariat successfully fulfils this historical mission, then a new phase will be reached, in which classes and class struggle cease to exist. In this phase the proletarian dictatorship (state) will lose its essential (political) character, become useless and wither away. As Marx and Engels said:

When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character....

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.²⁶

This moment represents the end of transition from state to statelessness and the beginning of a new period (communism). And this is the historical phase what Marx called “the lower phase of communism” and what Engels and Lenin called socialism. A society in which there are no classes, commodity production is removed, state has completely withered away, associations of free producers decide and implement directly in all spheres of production and social life. This is how Marx described the lower phase of communism (socialism) in his *Critique of Gotha Programme*. Socialism is therefore the beginning of a qualitatively different historical period from the period of proletarian dictatorship.

As for the qualitative change the democracy undergoes with the qualitative change undergone by the state in transition period Lenin says the following:

Democracy for the vast majority of the people, and suppression by force, i.e., exclusion from democracy, of the exploiters and oppressors of the people – this is the modification of democracy undergoes during the *transition* from capitalism to Communism.²⁷

From a historical point of view the period of proletarian dictatorship is bound to abolish the classes. And of course this must be considered not on a national scale but on an international scale. A relative success attained by the proletarian revolution within national boundaries and establishment of a proletarian power do not yet mean that the

26 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p.127

27 Lenin, *State and Revolution*, International Publishers, New York, 1990, p.73.

resistance of capitalists is decisively crushed. Because their resistance is not limited to national boundaries. As the capitalist system is an international system the capitalist class is an international class as well as proletariat.

So, unless the capitalist rule is overthrown throughout the world, the victory of proletariat who conquered the power on a national scale can not be considered as a final victory yet. Under these conditions the question of maintaining the proletarian power goes beyond the national boundaries and depends on the advance of the world revolution. That is why the transition period can only be completed on the world arena, and the corresponding need for a proletarian dictatorship remains unless capitalism is overthrown on a world scale. Therefore the proletarianisation of the whole society and abolition of all classes including the proletariat itself is a question of a whole historical period (transition period) on a world scale.

In the period of proletarian dictatorship it would not be correct to speak of “freedom” as long as there are elements that must be suppressed and the resistance of whom must be crushed, though democracy will be a reality for the vast majority of the society. When the proletarian dictatorship completes its historical mission and a classless society begins to be lived throughout the world, then the state will have been completely withered away as there will be no social classes the resistance of which must be crushed. It is only then to speak of freedom will be possible. Or if we are to express this in relation to democracy, there will be a free society in which a real, complete democracy without any exceptions is enjoyed and therefore democracy, having exhausted its historical function as a way of administration, is withered away.

Distorting the fact that what Marx meant by transition period (period of proletarian dictatorship) was the birth process of classless society, Stalinism has theorised this birth process as the lower phase of classless society, i.e. socialism. From the standpoint of social systems, the birth of a new system is a long and painful process. And when we consider the case of transition from class society to classless society, it is obvious that it involves an enormous historical change compared to the previous epochs. While such is the situation, Stalinism reduced this colossal historical question, in a light minded way, into a kind of simple act which is to be completed by the establishment of proletarian power in a single country and which means that socialism begins its life immediately after the political revolution.

While the birth even hasn't taken place yet from the standpoint of socialism, the judgement of experiences from the standpoint of practising socialism is a bitter fruit of the distortion created by Stalinism. This distortion is on the level of a social nightmare with its long term results that put their stamp on a long historical conjuncture and are destructive, whose effects to be felt for a long time. The Stalinist bureaucratic rule has found its ideological ground in the Lassallean petit-bourgeois concept of socialism which was criticised mercilessly by Marx and Engels at the time. Because the period that has begun with the overthrow of the bourgeoisie within national boundaries and with the nationalisation of the means of production was presented as the period of socialism, the transition period described by the founders of Marxism and Lenin as a “long and painful

birth process on a universal scale” has been reduced to the level of “transition in a single country.” Yet, this is the very heart of the matter. Having exposed the impossibility of socialism in a single country, revolutionary Marxism thus explained that the transition period from capitalism to communism cannot be conceived in a national narrowness. In other words, to imagine that the transition period can be completed on a national scale by establishing proletarian dictatorships in individual countries which are isolated from each other, is the same thing as arguing the possibility of building socialism in a single country.

The founders of revolutionary Marxism emphasised at every opportunity how difficult, prolonged and deep-rooted would be the fight of mankind to create a classless society without exploitation. Distinguishing itself from the petty-bourgeois utopian mentality which, in a light-minded way, takes colossal historical problems easy, Marxism placed its predictions for future on firm scientific foundations. Marxism felt it necessary to explain that even after the overthrow of world capitalist system mankind could not immediately enjoy the longed-for classless society in its developed form.

For this –and only this– reason Marx tried to express his predictions about the future communist society in terms of lower and higher phases. He distinguished the lower phase, which still has the traces of a long birth pangs and could only be a communist society as it comes out of capitalist society, and the higher phase which thanks to a lower phase would now develop on its own foundations.

But the communist society is essentially such a socio-economic formation that has the capability and potentials of proceeding from its lower phase to higher phase through evolutionary means. When explaining the fundamental features of communist society Marx took both its lower and higher phases as a whole and characterised this historical period (communism) as classless, stateless and involving no commodity relationships. And when describing the difference between the lower phase of communism (socialism) and higher phase he did this taking not them as two qualitatively distinct moments but as two different levels of ripeness of the same quality.

The Experience of Paris Commune

The struggle of the world proletariat for power proceeds on the basis of experiences that show what to do and what not to do, making it possible to draw lessons. The experience of Paris Commune, despite all its limited character, provided essential hints to the founders of Marxism on what kind of instrument to be put in place of the old state apparatus demolished by the proletariat.

Marx in his *Civil War in France* explains the true secret of the experience of Paris Commune:

Its true secret was this. It was essentially a working-class government, the produce of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form

at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour.²⁸

And in his introduction to the 1891 edition of this work Engels remarks a very important feature that a commune type power must bear, not only in relation to the past but also to the future. When the working class comes to power it should not be content only with the smashing of old state machine, but it should also take the necessary measures that would not allow new lords to emerge.

From the very outset the Commune was compelled to recognise that the working class, once come to power, could not go on managing with the old state machine; that in order not to lose again its only just conquered supremacy, this working class must, on the one hand, do away with all the old repressive machinery previously used against itself, and, on the other, safeguard itself against its own deputies and officials, by declaring them all, without exception, subject to recall at any moment.

...

Against this transformation of the state and the organs of the state from servants of society into masters of society –an inevitable transformation in all previous states– the Commune made use of two infallible means. In the first place, it filled all posts –administrative, judicial and educational– by election on the basis of universal suffrage of all concerned, subject to the right of recall at any time by the same electors. And, in the second place, all officials, high or low, were paid only the wages received by other workers. ... In this way an effective barrier to place-hunting and careerism was set up, even apart from the binding mandates to delegates to representative bodies which were added besides.²⁹

What was the Paris Commune which from a historical point of view constituted the first experience of workers' state? What was its superior side making it different from the bourgeois democratic parliamentarism? Let us read from Marx:

The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms. The majority of its members were naturally working men, or acknowledged representatives of the working class. The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time.³⁰

In the light of Marx's explanations based on the experience of Paris Commune we can establish the necessary measures that must be taken by a workers' power in order to smash the old bureaucratic-military state machine and build a new type of state without bureaucracy and a standing army as follows:

- abolition of standing army and replacement by armed people
- immediate stopping of the political character of the police and making it a responsible recallable body of commune
- every kind of public office must be paid equally as the workers' wages

28 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, Progress Publishers, 1977, s.223

29 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, s.187-8

30 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, s.220

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- abolition of high state posts together with their rights of use and grants
 - putting an end to the public office being a private privilege of those protected by the central government
 - passing not only the municipal administration, but also the whole enterprises to the hands of commune
 - putting an end to the privileged position of clergy which is the spiritual instrument of oppression of the bourgeois state. Complete separation of religion from state, and leaving it to live on its own community revenues.
 - All the institutions of education to be free and for all, releasing them from all kind of religious and state intervention. Releasing science from chains put by the state power.
 - Smashing of old judicial machine. Making high judicial posts and judges, as well as others, elected, responsible and recallable.
 - Replacement of old central government by *a self-government of producers* even in the smallest areas of settlement.
 - Giving a political form even to the smallest rural areas of settlement, and the replacement of standing army with a people's militia with a very short terms of service in rural areas.
 - the rural communes of every province should administer their common affairs through an assembly of deputies in the administrative centre of the province.
 - Provincial assemblies to send MPs to the national council of deputies in the centre.
 - All delegates to be recallable, remain loyal to the commands of the electorate, wages not exceeding average workers' wages.
 - The important responsibilities that will still have to be left to the central government after the transfer of many responsibilities to the communes should be carried out by communal officials who are strictly responsible.
 - Commune type organisation can never be conceived as a federation of small states. On the contrary, it must set as its goal a political centralisation on the basis of a broadest unity of nations.
 - Commune is not a municipal regime, although it involves a municipal freedom. That is, the nature of commune type power is not a localism or autonomism as against political centralism. It aims to establish a central political unity based on the self organisation of producers involving the broadest initiatives in the workplaces and living-places.

- Universal suffrage must certainly be used in a way that makes it essentially different from bourgeois parliamentarism. This political mechanism will serve for the proletariat and other labourers organised in the form of communes to freely determine the deputies they like, unlike in the case of bourgeois parliamentarism where this or that party is elected for power. That is, whoever is elected the power will remain in the communes. The hundred times more democratic character of workers' democracy from bourgeois democracy (the broadest democratic rights and freedoms, the right to freely organise, work and join the elections for every party on condition that they obey the constitution of workers' state, etc.) will serve to strengthen the power of communes. As Marx said:

... Instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to misrepresent the people in Parliament, universal suffrage was to serve the people, constituted in Communes, as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for the workmen and managers in his business.³¹

And this emphasis of Marx on “universal suffrage” when he said “... on the other hand, nothing could be more foreign to the spirit of the Commune than to supersede universal suffrage by hierarchic investiture,”³² pointed out to the inseparable condition of the workers' state. That is, instead of the mechanism of “bureaucratic appointment” which is set by the Stalinist mentality, the labouring people, all producers, men and women, organised in communes should have the right of universal suffrage.

What is the way of doing away with parliamentarism? Remembering the lessons Marx had drawn from the Paris Commune Lenin said the Commune “is based on not overthrowing representative institutions and principle of election but on transforming these representative institutions which are mills of talk as such into «dynamic institutions»” and went on to say:

The venal and rotten parliamentarism of bourgeois society is replaced in the Commune by institutions in which freedom of opinion and discussion does not degenerate into deception, for the parliamentarians must themselves work, must themselves execute their own laws, must themselves verify their results in actual life, must themselves be directly responsible to their electorate. Representative institutions remain, but parliamentarism as a special system, as a division of labour between the legislative and the executive functions, as a privileged position for the deputies, *no longer exists*. Without representative institutions we cannot imagine democracy, not even proletarian democracy; but we can and *must* think of democracy without parliamentarism, if criticism of bourgeois society is not mere empty words for us, if the desire to overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie is serious and sincere desire, and not a mere “election cry” for catching workingmen's votes

...³³

Lenin was once again emphasising that the commune type state was doomed to wither away on the basis of the experience of Paris Commune:

31 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, s.221

32 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p.221

33 Lenin, *State and Revolution*, s.41-42

... The Commune *ceased* to be a state in so far as it had to repress, not the majority of the population but a minority (the exploiters); it had broken the bourgeois state machine; in the place of a *special* repressive force, the whole population itself came onto the scene. All this is a departure from the state in its proper sense. And had the Commune asserted itself as a lasting power, remnants of the state would of themselves have “withered away” within it; it would not have been necessary to “abolish” its institutions; they would have ceased to function in proportion as less and less was left for them to do.³⁴

The experience of Commune shows that the democratic centralism and the widest local self-government do not exclude each other, that the political centralism of the commune is rested on and made possible by the widest local autonomy. As Lenin remarked: “... centralism does not, with Engels, in the least exclude such wide local self-government which combines a voluntary defence of the unity of the state by the «communes» and districts with the complete abolition of all bureaucracy and all «commanding» from above.”³⁵

And he goes on to quote from Engels: “...Complete self-government for the provinces, districts and local areas through officials elected by universal suffrage. The abolition of all local and provincial authorities appointed by the state.”³⁶ On the other hand, the words of Lenin strikingly shows his radical position against bureaucratism, when he says that there cannot be talk of the victory of revolution unless the toiling masses set out to build the state administration from below to top on the basis of their self-organisations and actual initiatives:

We need *not only* representation along democratic lines, but the building of the entire state administration from the bottom up by the masses themselves, their effective participation in all of life’s steps, their active role in the administration. *Replacement* of the old organs of oppression, the police, the bureaucracy, the standing army, by a universal arming of the people, by a really universal militia, is the only way to guarantee the country a maximum of security against the restoration of the monarchy and to *enable* it to go forward firmly, systematically and resolutely towards socialism, not by “introducing” it from above, but by raising the vast mass of proletarians and semi-proletarians to the art of state administration, to the use of the *whole* state power. ... Comrade workers ... Learn the methods of democracy by actual practice, right now, on your own, from the bottom up –rouse the masses to effective, immediate, universal participation in government– this and this alone will assure the full triumph of the revolution and its unswerving, purposeful and systematic advance.³⁷

It might be considered that the Paris Commune is an early pre-experiment in the process of historical development. For this reason, what the first soviet power established by the October Revolution experienced afterwards essentially make it possible to draw extremely important lessons. The workers’ soviet power came to an end owing to the fact

34 Lenin, *State and Revolution*, p.56

35 Lenin, *State and Revolution*, p.61

36 Lenin, *State and Revolution*, p.61

37 Lenin, “A Proletarian Militia,” *CW*, Vol. 24, pp.181-2

that the bureaucratic deformation and degeneration turned into a bureaucratic counter revolution as a result of the isolation of the revolution in a backward country like Russia. While the formal existence of soviets continued the real power passed to the hands of bureaucratic state institutions which became standing institutions. This situation in the USSR led to a confused consciousness and perspective among the world proletariat as to the nature of a workers' state (that is, a workers' democracy).

Substituting its own rule for the workers' power the Stalinist bureaucracy theorised the distortions, which were the result of unfavourable circumstances, as the ideal situation. Thus the Soviet bureaucracy created a new understanding of proletarian dictatorship, which would constitute the underpinning of its rule, trampling the Marxist principles on workers' democracy. By identifying the bureaucratic dictatorships with workers' state the socialist circles of today that are unable to break with the Stalinist tradition serve to undermine the aspirations of the world proletariat for a power of their own.

On the other hand, we observe such efforts to discover the nature of workers' democracy, lacking a historical perspective, as if there is a need to discover America once again. The most typical example of this is the position of those who seem to defend the idea that the fundamental principles as "the democratic rights, free elections, universal suffrage etc." are now to be introduced to the theory, as if they have not already been introduced by the leaders of revolutionary Marxism as *indispensable* conditions for a workers' democracy. Yet what must be done is to proceed in the light of the experiences of Paris Commune and October revolution and the historical heritage of revolutionary leaders who themselves lived through these experiences –of course without ignoring that there might always appear new points to be completed.

The Worker's State Defined by Marxism is a State Without Bureaucracy

The bourgeois state which is based on the domination of exploitative minority over exploited majority makes, for this very reason, the existence of an expensive and complicated apparatus in organising the affairs of state mandatory. Bourgeois state involves a privileged horde of bureaucrats, specialised in conducting the public office, whose expertise show a permanence and who feed from the special bourgeois grants. Conducting the affairs of state is up to the standing bureaucratic institutions (state apparatuses) which is organised hierarchically from top to down in a pyramidal manner, defending the interests of bourgeois order. In short the state in capitalist society is composed of bureaucratic apparatuses.

Yet in the worker's state organisation and conduction of public office must be radically different. The worker's state, which is the means of domination by majority of toilers over exploitative minority, for this very feature, is a kind of new state historically different than bourgeois state. The most distinctive indicator of this historical difference is the fact that worker's state is a state without bureaucracy, i.e. self-organisation of working class as direct democracy. This quality is the main characteristic, *sine qua non* of the

worker's state. The measures enumerated by Marx upon examining the Paris Commune are not only for overthrowing the old bureaucratic-military state apparatus, but also for replacing the overthrown with a mechanism capable of which "prevents returning to the old filthy business."

Marx considers such measures of Paris Commune type as necessary to prevent a bureaucratic-hierarchic division among the proletariat itself, who has accomplished the revolution, and not to lose its own power surrendering to the "new lords" emanating from its own ranks. A workers' state must be a state without bureaucracy and standing army, "a state which starts withering away from the very beginning", that is a commune type "state", in order to be and keep being a workers' state.

Will the division of ruling class and ruled class continue over the period of proletarian dictatorship which will radically transform the class society –inherited from the capitalism– towards classless society? Of course no. Because with the proletarian revolution and smashing of the bourgeois state the bourgeoisie stops being the ruling class and the working class rises to that position. The transition period is a period of sharp class struggles that will liquidate capitalism on a world scale. Therefore the absolute need for a workers' state demonstrates that this division is not removed but undergoes a qualitative change with the proletariat in power.

On the other hand the working class can maintain its ruling position only if it manages to establish a power in accordance with the essence of the measures taken in the Paris Commune. There are conditions, making this possible in practice, which are not dependent on people's will, but are deeply connected with the fact that proletarian revolution is a world revolution. For instance, it is a necessary condition that the revolution not be isolated in backward countries and advance by inflicting heavy blows on the world capitalist system. Otherwise, it is impossible for the proletariat to rise to the level of a dominant force capable of confronting the world bourgeoisie only by nationalising the means of production on a backward economic and cultural base.

Is the argument that the need for a bureaucracy would still continue to exist even in the worker's state correct?

Insofar as the division between mental and physical labour continues to exist in social life, it finds its expression within ruling class too. But this neither prevents the owners of property from being a dominant class in societies based on private property, nor changes its position in social structure of being the ruling class. Marx and Engels say the following on this subject:

The division of labour, which we already saw above as one of the chief forces of history up till now, manifests itself also in the ruling class as the division of mental and material labour, so that inside this class one part appears as the thinkers of the class ..., while the others' attitude to these ideas and illusions is more passive and receptive... Within this class this cleavage can even develop into a certain opposition and hostility between the two parts, which, however, in the case of a practical collision, in which the class itself is endangered, automatically comes to

nothing, in which there also vanishes the semblance that the ruling ideas were not the ideas of the ruling class and had a power distinct from the power of this class.³⁸

On the basis of the division of *mental and material labour* in the ruling class in capitalist society there is a ruling top layer specialised in running the state. One can distinguish between the bourgeois layer composed of bourgeois ideologues, politicians, writers, top level civil and military officials, specialists, managers etc. who are busy maintaining the existence of the bourgeois state through this or that policy and the other bourgeois layer which is basically involved in the capitalist economy. In short, the state affairs in modern bourgeois society are run on the basis of an expensive and complex bureaucratic organisation specialised in this sphere, and not directly by the whole of the bourgeois class.

Some Marxists argue that the need for a bureaucracy in conducting the affairs of state continues to exist as the worker's state belongs to modern age, and consequently they put forward the idea of indispensability of bureaucracy.

This argument contradicts the Marxist understanding of workers' state. What lies behind this false understanding is the false interpretation of the phenomenon of bureaucracy. Making use of elected public servants and the need for specialists are confused with bureaucracy, which is *a particular way of organisation*. The notion of functionary, specialist etc. who works in organising the public office is not the same thing with the notion of *bureaucracy* which implies the organisation of conduction of public office based on an hierarchical authority from top to down in a pyramidal manner. With expressions as "abolishing the bureaucracy", "a state without bureaucracy" Marxism does not mean that the need for functionaries and specialists would cease, but it does mean that the organisation of public services in a bureaucratic manner (that is bureaucracy) would cease.

Hence it is true that the need for functionaries, specialists etc. would continue as long as the division between mental and physical labour exists, but to conclude from this that bureaucracy (organisation in a bureaucratic manner) would exist until abolishing of the division between mental and physical labour, means arguing that the working class will never be able to dominate and to rule, and put the functionaries, specialists under its own rule, and manage to organise itself in a non-bureaucratic manner.

Although a situation that has its roots in the continuing existence of the division between mental and physical labour, and that embodies in the working class in the form of division between mental work and material work, still continues to exist objectively in the period of proletarian dictatorship, the important point here is to be able to create a state of which working class would not lose the domination despite this fact. The key question here is already the question of state. Because, in class societies based on private property, the division of labour among the ruling class, although, might cause some conflicts between the two sections, the ruling section is, in the final analysis, the one that holds the monopoly of the means of production and that maintains the economical

38 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, pp.47-48

domination. Thus, in capitalist society, the fact that bourgeois state is based on a specialised bureaucracy, a bureaucratic apparatus, in conducting the affairs of state, does not alter the bourgeoisie's position of being the ruling class.

Yet, in the period of proletarian dictatorship which is based on state property, the state must be a semi-state, without bureaucracy not involve any bureaucracy. If this necessary condition cannot be materialised and a state with bureaucracy develops, then in this case property will be in the hands of the state, and the state in the hands of bureaucracy. Thus, because the bureaucracy, holding the right to use the state property in its hands, would take over the management of production, it would be dominant in economic sense as well. In that case the working class will lose its domination, and the bureaucracy will rise to the position of being a dominant class, a ruling class.

As a consequence, to argue that the need for a bureaucracy even in the period proletarian dictatorship would still stand would be to understand nothing from the necessity that a workers' state must be a different type of state from the bourgeois state. Also the argument that as far as the role of state in modern social life is concerned we must necessarily accept the need for a bureaucracy ends up in the same point with the idea that the perspective of revolutionary Marxism on the question of workers' state is a mere "sweet dream". Such an understanding, in the final analysis, ends up with the idea of impossibility of a workers' state predicted by Marxism and that all revolutions sooner or later will end up in bureaucratic dictatorships.

The proletarian dictatorship, i.e. the transition period, means basically to unite the two categories of ruling and producing class. The achievement of this will amount to a big historical step forward to create the conditions for abolishing the division between mental and physical labour. Because the social division of labour that emerged on the basis of this division in history was the reason for the division of producing class and ruling class. On the other hand, the question of doing away with this division and the putting an end to the division between mental and physical labour are not identical questions, although there is a connection in terms of general historical line of march. Their resolutions belong to different historical eras.

To put in a nutshell, the question of putting an end to the division of producing and ruling class belongs to the period of proletarian dictatorship that is to the period of transition from capitalism to communism. Whereas the complete removal of the *functional division* between mental and physical labour is a problem of an historical period in which the free producers can completely liberate themselves from the enslaving dependence to the division of labour, i.e. communist society.

Workers' state is based on a radical change of the organisation of state in bourgeois society and the principle of transferring the public offices to the local soviets and turning them into the cheapest and the most ordinary practices as far as possible. Yet some inevitable functions that needs expertise will continue to exist. But the idea of workers' power is based on conducting such functions by using functionaries who are very closely responsible against the worker voters, recallable at any time and replaceable, without

creating any privileges and any “masters” over working class. If one happens to remind that there would not be sufficient economic and cultural level to put these measures into effect, as in the case of the isolation of proletarian revolution in a backward country, then it amounts to state that the conditions for a worker’s state to survive are not existent yet.

There is no doubt that a certain level of knowledge and specialisation is necessary to conduct some affairs in modern age. Although the principle is to distribute all those state affairs that are possible to be simplified in a way that every ordinary worker can deal with, it is not possible to think that every office can immediately be dealt with every ordinary worker. To attain this will take long years depending on the raising of the economic and cultural level, shortening of working hours etc. Considering from this angle we must remember that the isolation of proletarian revolution in backward countries will objectively create a dangerous situation for the existence of workers’ state. But here we do not reason in a speculative way with a view to find a way to keep alive the workers’ state even under the objective conditions that draws a workers’ state to destruction. By defining what should be the case we want to get a general perspective that will serve as a measurement device that will show what lessons should be drawn from the practical experiences. What we are discussing is that proletariat coming to power in the process of progressing world revolution has to, and is able to, replace the bourgeois state with a state without bureaucracy.

The nub of the question from the standpoint of workers’ state is not whether the need for specialisation has been put an end to, but how to employ the specialists and in whose hands the rule and control in organising public affairs would be. That certain knowledge for certain offices leads to bureaucratic specialisation and privileged positions is a quite suitable consequence with the structure of the bourgeois society. On the contrary, workers’ state is based on such an organisation that enables this knowledge to serve to the dominant proletariat without creating bureaucratic specialisation and privileges. The target Lenin pointed to during process of February 1917 revolution is actually a general target that must be reached by the proletarian revolution:

To destroy officialdom immediately, everywhere and completely – this can not be thought of. That is utopia. But to *break up* at once the old bureaucratic machine and to start immediately to construction a new one which will enable us gradually to reduce all officialdom to naught –this is *no* Utopia, it is the experience of the Commune, it is the direct and urgent task of the revolutionary proletariat.

We organise large-scale production, starting from what capitalism has already created; we workers *ourselves*, relying on our own experience as workers, establishing a strict, an iron discipline, supported by the state power of the armed workers, shall reduce the role of the state officials to that of simply carrying out our instructions as responsible, moderately paid “managers” (of course, with technical knowledge of all sorts, types and degrees). This is *our* proletarian task, with this we can and must *begin* when carrying through a proletarian revolution. Such a beginning, on the basis of large-scale production, of itself leads to the gradual “withering away” of all bureaucracy, to the gradual creation of an order, an order without quotation marks, an order which has nothing to do with wage slavery, an order in which the more and more simplified functions of control and accounting

will be performed by each in turn, will then become a habit and will finally die out as the *special* functions of a special stratum of the population.³⁹

In short, workers' state cannot organise itself in a bureaucratic manner as the bourgeois state; otherwise it cannot be a workers' state. On the other hand the employment of specialists and officials by the ruling proletariat "just like a capitalist employer" does not lead to creation of a privileged bureaucracy or a ruling elite insofar as it is possible to control them. Distinctive characteristic of democratic centralism in workers' state is that it is opposed to bureaucratic organisation. As Lenin said:

The bourgeoisie adopted from the feudal + absolute monarchy the "bureaucratic-military" state machine and developed it. The opportunists (especially 1914-1917) grew into it (imperialism, as epoch in the advanced countries, in general tremendously strengthened that machine). The task of the proletarian revolution: to "smash", break that machine and replace it with most complete self-government below, in the localities, and with the *direct* power of the armed proletariat, its dictatorship, at the top.

How are the communes to be united, linked together? In no way, say the anarchists
 (a). By the bureaucracy and the military caste, says (and does) the bourgeoisie
 (b). By an alliance, an organisation of the armed workers ("Soviet of Workers' Deputies"!), says Marxism (c).⁴⁰

Hence to conclude that workers' state cannot manage without bureaucracy with the view that centralism is necessary in modern state contradicts with the fundamental perspective of Marxism in relation to workers' state. But different variations of thought which are based on Stalinist ideology distort Marxism in order to whitewash the bureaucratic dictatorships. Put tacitly, what they mean is: "of course there will and have to be bureaucracy." And their so-called criticisms of bureaucracy again start from the assumption of necessity of bureaucracy and go on to make up light-minded idealist categories as "good bureaucracy" and "bad bureaucracy" leading eventually to the legitimisation of bureaucracy in general.

On the other hand there are others who seem to accept the necessity of overthrowing the bureaucratic dictatorships by the struggle of working class, but in the end of the day advocate the idea that "despite everything there will still be a bureaucracy" accepting the Soviet Union or others under Stalinism as a valid case. But does not this way of thinking amount to condemn oneself to a vicious circle?

It would be beneficial at this point to remember some important quotes from Lenin's polemic against some "Marxists" who defend the necessity of bureaucracy in a workers' state. He was criticising Kautsky who defended that the proletariat could not abandon a bureaucratic organisation after the revolution.⁴¹

39 Lenin, *State and Revolution*, pp.42 and 43

40 Lenin, "A Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Programme of 1891," *Marxism on the State*, pp.18-19

41 In this and some subsequent passages Lenin uses the term "socialist society" in a careless way. What is meant in fact is the proletarian dictatorship.

In a socialist society, this “something in the nature of a parliament,” consisting of workers’ deputies, will of course determine the conditions of work, and superintend the management of the “apparatus” – *but* this apparatus will *not* be “bureaucratic.” The workers, having conquered political power, will break up the old bureaucratic apparatus, they will shatter it to its very foundations, until not one stone is left upon another; and they will replace it with a new one consisting of these same workers and employees, *against* whose transformation into bureaucrats measures will at once be undertaken, as pointed out in detail by Marx and Engels: 1) not only electiveness, but also instant recall; 2) payment no higher than that of ordinary workers; 3) immediate transition to a state of things when *all* fulfil the functions of control and superintendence, so that *all* become “bureaucrats” for a time, and *no one*, therefore, can become a “bureaucrat.”⁴²

Lenin says that Kautsky does not understand the fundamental difference between the bourgeois parliamentarism and proletarian democracy. Arguing that to demand the abolishment of bureaucracy would be a naïve idea Kautsky asks: “which ministry will be abolished with its officials?” Lenin replies as follows:

... revolution consists in the proletariat destroying the “administrative apparatus” and the whole state machinery, and replacing it by a new one consisting of the armed workers. Kautsky reveals a “superstitious reverence” for “ministries”; but why can they not be replaced, say, by commissions of specialists working under sovereign all-powerful Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies?⁴³

On the other hand Lenin points to the difference in the positions of public officials in bureaucratic mechanism of bourgeois state and in a workers’ state without bureaucracy:

From what Kautsky says, one might think that if elective officials remain under Socialism, bureaucrats and bureaucracy will also remain! This is entirely incorrect. Marx took the example of the Commune to show that under Socialism the functionaries cease to be “bureaucrats,” to be “officials” –they change *in the degree* as election is supplemented by the right of instant recall; when, *besides this*, their pay is brought down to the level of the pay of the average worker; when, *besides this*, parliamentary institutions are replaced by “working bodies, executive and legislative at the same time.”⁴⁴

* * *

Marx said Paris Commune was “the finally discovered political form that will enable the emancipation of the wage labour.” Commune type state is the distinctive essence of the workers’ state. Although there are different forms of councils with different labels depending on the national variations a workers’ state is a commune democracy or, to put it in the last form discovered by the 1917 October Revolution, a soviet democracy. It can be distinguished with the absence of oppression and imposition and presence of a real

42 Lenin, *State and Revolution*, pp.91-92

43 Lenin, *State and Revolution*, p.96

44 Lenin, *State and Revolution*, p.97

democracy for the non-propertied masses.

The difference between the bourgeois dictatorship and proletarian dictatorship mainly appears in the following essential point: the bourgeois state, that is the dictatorship of bourgeoisie, is democratic only for an exploitative minority in terms of its economic essence, and a dictatorial state, even under its most democratic form, from the standpoint of exploited majority. On the contrary the proletarian state, that is the proletarian dictatorship, is dictatorial for the exploiting minority and must be democratic for the labouring majority, even in the case that it has to resort to open repression against the bourgeois forces due to the hard conditions of class struggle (civil war, etc.).

Therefore to invent a category of workers' state in which a workers' democracy "*is not supposed to be applied for excusable reasons*" would be an unforgivable concession from goal of workers' state. Such a mentality that argues that proletarian dictatorship can still live despite in a form that its democratic content is emptied due to civil war, serious foreign threat etc. ends up with substituting the phenomenon of bureaucratic dictatorship for the aim of proletarian dictatorship.

A direct democracy –with a working system of representation– of the proletariat organised in the form of soviets is an indispensable condition for the workers' state. Workers' democracy is not one of the forms of workers' state but its essence. At this very point, it would be incorrect to draw conclusions by making analogies with the bourgeois state. In the case of bourgeois dictatorship, which is based on an exploiting minority, the bourgeois democracy is just one of the forms of the dictatorship over the exploited masses; and the bourgeoisie, if need be, can rule via a naked dictatorship which is completely different from the parliamentary democracy. But in the case of proletarian power we have a period of real democracy in terms of its essence (without depending on any form) opened up from the point of view of the working class and non-propertied; now there is no exploiting, oppressive dictatorial force over them. It is the proletarian revolution that creates this qualitative change in the relationship of democracy and dictatorship. If certain historical circumstances have created in practice monstrous distortions with respect to what must be, then this cannot be taken as a problem related to the form of proletarian dictatorship but to the essence of it. Such a situation is obviously not the indication of the fact that, due to certain unfavourable conditions, the proletarian dictatorship can live even without workers' democracy in a certain historical period, but on the contrary, of the fact that it cannot live unless those conditions that lead to these distortions are done away with.

Proletarian dictatorship represents a dialectical unity of a contraction in the scope of state from the standpoint of the toilers who constitute the overwhelming majority of society (a transitional state from statehood to statelessness, a semi-state) and an enormous expansion in the scope of democracy (almost a complete democracy). When you take out the democracy side of this unity –although this may seem possible in the realm of ideas– what is left cannot be described as a handicapped, disabled proletarian dictatorship. In that case we have a social phenomenon of bureaucratic dictatorship nature, which is in fact not proletarian dictatorship.

On the Concept of the Proletarian Dictatorship

We must also bring a clarification to the concept of proletarian dictatorship itself as there is a lot of debate on it. The concepts of democracy and dictatorship are not supra-class categories, which came onto the stage of history together with the state phenomenon and assumed different meanings according to political structuring of different class societies. On this basis we want to draw attention to the following aspect of the matter: For the first time in the history of class society the possibility of establishing the rule of the exploited majority over the exploiting minority arises thanks to the working class revolution. Thus the working class revolution, differing from the other revolutions in history, is the reflection of an unprecedented historical and qualitative change in the political conditions of human society. Such a change will inevitably lead to a colossal change regarding the hitherto familiar meanings of the concepts.

Thus the concepts of *democracy* and *dictatorship* will be representing a brand-new social order which is different from what these concepts suggest hitherto. For instance, in capitalist societies the concept of democracy expresses in the final analysis the set of political and social rights that can be enjoyed by the ruling class (or a bloc of ruling classes), whereas the concept of dictatorship expresses the domination of a privileged minority over the oppressed majority. Thus there seems to be an antagonistic contradiction in the meanings of these two concepts. In fact this contradiction constitutes the dialectical unity of the power structuring called “state”. And therefore, we can qualify in the final analysis the character of a state which is based on an exploiting class rule, but having a “democratic” form, as a democracy for the rich and dictatorship for the poor. And that is the very point where the hidden secret lies, which has always been distorted and concealed by the bourgeois ideologues, writers etc., who serve to create confusion. There emerged quite a few controversial issues that need to be discussed due to the fact that the form of bourgeois state which enables a somewhat broader realm of political democracy (parliamentarism) is presented by the bourgeois ideology as the antagonism of “dictatorship” and the universal form of democracy and enforced to the labouring masses as such.

One of the most important of these is the attempt of the bourgeoisie, which was once upon a time defending to set up the dictatorship of its own over the old ruling class while it was waging a struggle against feudal absolutism, to accuse the struggle of working class of striving to set up a class dictatorship. Another case is also the attempt of bourgeoisie, who once upon a time dragged the labouring masses after itself through the pledge of “universal democracy” to win their support in the its struggle against absolutism, to present its rule as a supra-class “universal democracy”, which is nothing but a dictatorship over the labouring masses. As Marx said, prevailing ideas in a society are the ideas of ruling class in general and as a result of this what is meant by the concepts “democracy” and “dictatorship” is reflected in the mind of the working class as they come out of the prism of bourgeois ideology. That is why an organised ideological struggle to smash this prism is inevitable in order or put an end to the prevalence of bourgeois ideology. The present reality is that the working class and masses in general accept the meaning of the

words “democracy” and “dictatorship” as what the bourgeoisie wants.

One of the fundamental issues that the founders of Marxism seriously dealt with and tried to explain from the standpoint of the working class was the historical distinction between the meaning of the concepts “democracy” and “dictatorship” under the bourgeois rule and under the working class rule. But unfortunately with the influence of bourgeois ideology within the working class movement the correct principles of Marxism have been distorted over the intervening years and one of the most effected from this was the dialectical understanding of the relationship between democracy and dictatorship. In addition to that there was another big confusion for a long period of time, which is the presentation of the Stalinist bureaucratic rule as a “proletarian dictatorship” by itself, which in fact had overthrown the workers’ power, i.e. the workers’ democracy, established by the October revolution. As a result of such factors “proletarian dictatorship” which in fact at the same time amounts to democracy for the exploited majority for it is for the first time in history the dictatorship of their own is introduced into the discussion agenda as if it is nothing but a dictatorship in the negative sense of the word.

Thus the problem was not coming out of what the concept really means. On the contrary the roots of the problem lied on the one hand in the ideological assault of the bourgeoisie against the historical meaning of this concept and on the other hand in the distortion created by the phenomenon of bureaucratic dictatorship in the imagination of the masses. Hence the target of the ideological struggle that was to be waged by Marxism in this context was obvious. But, as in every other issue, the so-called Marxists placed the concept “proletarian dictatorship” into the target and started to fire at it, instead of going down to the roots of the matter. At the end of the day, for this or that reason, the ideological clarity paved by the founders of Marxism has been damaged. And an attitude of timidity developed in the sense that when one talks about “proletarian dictatorship” it would be received by the labouring masses as a very bad thing.

Yes there is this reality independent from our will. But what must be the attitude in front of this? Should we sacrifice the concept to subside the above-mentioned concern or to correct the distortion by going down to the roots of the concern? Obviously the latter is the correct way. Because, according to genuine Marxism, proletarian dictatorship means workers’ democracy. Hence it might be a preference to use the concept of workers’ democracy not because there is an error contained in the concept of proletarian dictatorship or with a view to abandon it, but just to highlight the fact that what is meant by this concept is a workers’ democracy. Therefore it would be beneficial to remember that Marx and Engels explained this relationship with clarity from the very beginning.

Although not expressed directly via the term “proletarian dictatorship”, analyses meaning the necessity of a proletarian dictatorship were always there in the works of Marx and Engels. It was in the *Communist Manifesto* they stressed this point: “The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all other proletarian parties: Formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.”⁴⁵ Also, as another example, they used the expression “the

45 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p.120

seizure of state power by the proletariat” in the context of “the permanent revolution of the working class” on the basis of the process of German bourgeois revolution.⁴⁶ This perspective pointed to the task of the working class to seize the power, not just in one country, but in all capitalist countries in general.

Marx used the term “proletarian dictatorship” for the first time in his articles compiled under the title *Class Struggles in France* in 1850. In the first article he stated that all revolutions of French bourgeoisie since 1789 changed only the political form, without changing the order based on the slavery of workers. Then in *18 Brumaire* he said: “All revolutions perfected this machine instead of smashing it. The parties that contended in turn for domination regarded the possession of this huge state edifice as the principal spoils of the victor.”⁴⁷ But finally in June 1848 a blow had been inflicted on the order by the insurrection of the proletariat. Therefore, despite the concept of revolution meant changing the form of the state, that is political revolution, until the June insurrection, afterwards it began to mean the overthrow of the bourgeois society, which means a social revolution. As Marx said: “The Paris proletariat was forced into the June insurrection by the bourgeoisie. ... In place of the demands, exuberant in form but still limited and even bourgeois in content, whose concession the proletariat wanted to wring from the February Republic, there appeared the bold slogan of revolutionary struggle: Overthrow of the bourgeoisie! Dictatorship of the Working class!”⁴⁸

Again another important conclusion Marx drew from this process is the necessity of proletarian dictatorship as a necessary transit point in the context of the permanency of the working class revolution, as he stated in the third article. Pointing out that the workers at that time were gathering around “revolutionary socialism”, “communism” (which was called Blanquism by the bourgeoisie) Marx said the following:

This socialism is the declaration of the permanence of the revolution, the class dictatorship of the proletariat as the necessary transit point to the abolition of class distinctions generally, to the abolition of all the relations of production on which they rest, to the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, to the revolutionizing of all the ideas that result from these social relations.⁴⁹

As he wrote in his letter to Weydemeyer in 1852 he did not assert himself as discovering the existence of classes and the necessity of class struggles. What was new done by him, according to his own words, was the following:

What I did that was new was to prove: 1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular historical phases in the development of production, 2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat, 3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society.⁵⁰

46 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p.179

47 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, s.477

48 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p.226

49 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p.282

50 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p.528

The origin of the word dictatorship lies in the constitutional institution called “dictatura” which was supposed to protect the ancient Republic of Rome against foreign enemies and domestic sedition. Until the power of the working class which had come onto the stage of history at the middle of the 19th century scared the bourgeoisie, the concept of dictatorship had not been attributed in general a pejorative connotation such as “despotism” or “absolutism”. Of course, in the context of conflicting different class interests, Girondins had accused the Jacobins’ “Dictatorship of Paris Commune” in the process of French Revolution for the Jacobins were resting on the massive movement of labouring masses coming from below. And that there was an evil connotation of the word “dictatorship” meaning the rule of one person gathering the whole authority in his hands, is entirely a different matter of discussion.

So there was not any sound justification for the accusations of bourgeoisie against the working class to be found in the history of this concept, and neither it was discovered by Marx. He had found it readymade in the political environment he was in. But the important point is that the reason why Marx used this term was the fact that the concept of proletarian dictatorship had a political sense embracing the notions of people’s power and democratic assemblies. He did not use the term to mean the dictatorship of a conspiratorial dictatorship of a minority in a Blanquist manner as some argued.⁵¹

On the other hand, the fact that Marx did not consider it necessary to use the term “proletarian dictatorship” in the subsequent years and in *Civil War in France*, in which the experience of Paris Commune is elaborated, showed that he was mainly interested in the essence of the proletarian rule rather than words. Because what he did as to draw conclusions from the experience of Commune was to underline workers’ state, workers’ republic, workers’ democracy. However, both Marx and Engels did not hesitate to characterise Commune as a “proletarian dictatorship” in the debates in the First International against the Proudhonist tendency or other similar tendencies which sought to attribute a pejorative meaning to the term “dictatorship”. After all, as Marx stated in his *Critique of Gotha Programme*, the state corresponding to the transition period from capitalism to communism can be nothing but “the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat”, with his widely known words.

Engels kept making remarks on the subject for various reasons after the death of Marx. In his introduction to *Civil War in France* written to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Paris Commune he gave concrete example of Commune to defend the idea of proletarian dictatorship: “Of late, the Social-Democratic philistine has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at

51 Hal Draper, who has made a research on the proletarian dictatorship, points to this problem: “Incidentally, the attribution of the term “proletarian dictatorship” to Blanqui is a myth replicated tirelessly through a host of books by those eager Marxologists who try to prove that Marx is a conspiratorial Blanquist; yet, in reality all the authorities on the life and work of Blanqui stated (sometimes in disillusionment) that the term had not been invented at the time of Blanqui. Moreover, an understanding of political power used by democratic masses is fundamentally alien to the idea of Educative Blanquist Dictatorship.” (Hal Draper, *The Debate on Proletarian Dictatorship*)

the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.”⁵² It is obvious that for Marx and Engels the demand of a “proletarian dictatorship” meant seizure of political power by the working class, its raising to the position of ruling class, that is to establish a workers’ democracy.

But those who are willing to misunderstand Marx and Engels talked of different forms of proletarian power one being “democratic” and the other being “dictatorial”. Or the need for a proletarian dictatorship, within the framework of this misconception, or distortion, was merely related to the task of suppressing open counter-revolutionary plots. According to this scheme dictatorial period would come to an end and afterwards a period of democracy would commence. Just as bourgeois wished, this kind of understanding conveyed a suggestion of an indefinitely postponed period of “democracy” to the idea of workers’ power. Due to such misunderstandings and misinterpretations a clear understanding of proletarian dictatorship defended by the founders of Marxism was blurred. And with time confused ideas on the subject have been deepened and become permanent.

Of course it was not a question of misunderstanding on the part of Stalinist bureaucracy and its supporters but it just “suited well” to their interests. For instance Stalinism depicted the proletarian dictatorship as something like antagonistic to democracy and serving only to the need of repression. In fact the nature of petty-bourgeois political culture implanted by Stalinism was already suitable for this. On the other hand the reformist current, especially its Eurocommunist version, ruled out the dictatorship side of the dialectics of proletarian power interpreting this side entirely in a negative sense and decimated its democracy side by reducing it to bourgeois parliamentarianism. As a matter of fact it would be ridiculous to expect a correct attitude from those tendencies which are non-Marxist or even hostile to Marxism, no matter what guise they have, “left” or “right”, on a vital subject like “seizure of political power by the working class”. One had to be real Marxist to grasp the dialectics of “dictatorship-democracy” under workers’ power.

Of course the attacks on the term proletarian dictatorship did not only appear with the *Eurocommunism* of late. The roots of this go back to the past. For instance, Bernstein, in his notorious book, *Evolutionary Socialism*, advocates the idea that this term is bad and must be abandoned. On the other hand W. Liebknecht, although not starting from same point as Berstein, approached the term as if there was not an idea like proletarian dictatorship in Marxism and it was just a fabrication of bourgeoisie.

Even in the period when he was not opposed openly to the term proletarian dictatorship Kautsky made remarks reducing the workers’ democracy nearly to level of bourgeois parliamentarianism. But during subsequent years when he betrayed Marxism he also concretised his assault on Marxism in the subject of the dictatorship of the proletariat. He argued that the term had been accidentally used by Marx in passing, and especially the socialists of backward countries cling to the term as they were opposed to democracy. And he endeavoured to correct the well-known position of Marx on the problem of *transition*

in the following way: “Between the democratic state with pure bourgeois government and the democratic state with pure proletarian government a transition period takes place from first to second. And a political transition period corresponds to this period where the government, as a general rule, will be in the form of a coalition government.”⁵³ Due to this deliberate distortions of Kautsky Lenin said the following about him: “... Kautsky beat the world record in the liberal distortion of Marx. The renegade Bernstein has proved to be a mere pupy compared with the renegade Kautsky.”⁵⁴

Although the Second International had distorted the position of Marx and Engels on proletarian dictatorship the situation in Russia during the beginnings of 1900’s was different. The term and the demand of the *dictatorship of the proletariat* was conveyed into the RSDLP programme in 1902 by Plekhanov and in the beginning both Bolshevik and Menshevik wings accepted it, although the attitudes were to differ later on depending on the political developments. But even then a clear understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat was lacking due to the assaults and attempts of distortion it suffered since the death of Marx. It was only in the course of developments from the 1917 February revolution to the October revolution when the question came onto the scene Lenin was to write *State and Revolution* taking this burning question on board with a new approach and try to bring into light the forgotten correct positions of Marx and Engels. He was clearly to defend the aim of the dictatorship of the proletariat when he saw the danger of watering down the perspective of working class revolution and power to reduce it to something which is acceptable to the bourgeoisie as in the case of Kautsky.

Those who recognise only the class struggle are not yet Marxists; they may be found to be still within the boundaries of bourgeois thinking and bourgeois politics. To confine Marxism to the doctrine of the class struggle means curtailing Marxism, distorting it, reducing it to something which is acceptable to the bourgeoisie. Only he is a Marxist who *extends* the recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the *dictatorship of the proletariat*.⁵⁵

The main theme that runs through the whole *State and Revolution* was that the dictatorship of the proletariat can be nothing but workers’ democracy; Lenin was clear on that. Also he expressed in his theses he presented in the first congress of the Communist International the conclusion that followed from the fact that the dictatorship of the proletariat had to mean the rule of the exploited majority:

It follows that proletarian dictatorship must inevitably entail not only a change in democratic forms and institutions, generally speaking, but precisely such a change as provides an unparalleled extension of the actual enjoyment of democracy by those oppressed by capitalism—the toiling classes.⁵⁶

53 Kautsky, *The Labour Revolution*, London 1925, pp.53-54

54 Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and Renegade Kautsky*, Foreign Language Press, Peking 1975, p.18

55 Lenin, *State and Revolution*, p.30

56 Lenin, “Theses on Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat at the First Congress of the Communist International,” *Against Revisionism*, Progress Publishers, Moscow 1966, p.475

But even then it is possible to find some careless lines written in the heat of events followed, which can overshadow his approach. However what we are discussing here is the essence of the matter. There is no doubt that the revolutionary leaders like Lenin and Trotsky grasped the essence of Marxism. Our approach cannot be to chase and take out some careless and ambiguous expressions and put forward them as examples. Here it would be beneficial to remember an important warning about the interpretation of democracy and dictatorship under a genuine workers' power as antagonistic. Rosa Luxemburg's remark in the course of October Revolution is relevant, where she points out that the dictatorship of the working class must be the work of the class itself and expresses her concern about some careless statements made by Lenin and Trotsky which might turn out to be contradictory to this. Apart from details her lines represent a consistent example of correct Marxist approach on the matter.

Yes, dictatorship! But this dictatorship consists in the manner of applying democracy, not in its elimination, but in energetic, resolute attacks upon the well-entrenched rights and economic relationships of bourgeois society, without which a socialist transformation cannot be accomplished. But this dictatorship must be the work of the class and not of a little leading minority in the name of the class.⁵⁷

With the overthrow of the workers' power established by the October Revolution and the advent of the Stalinist dictatorship the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat exiled again to the realm of theoretical debates. But the most bitter thing was that the bureaucratic dictatorship managed to present itself as the dictatorship of the proletariat for long years to the working class of the world and thus led to a bad image of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the thinking of workers. In addition to this distortion another political development took place, which created confusion on the matter. Various left liberal and reformist currents who try to justify themselves under the guise of criticising the Stalinist totalitarian dictatorships sought the evil in the analyses of revolutionary Marxism. And they condemned "the dictatorship of the proletariat" as the main perpetrator. This was one the main themes of *Eurocommunism* which came to the fore in 60s.

If there had been a strong response in the subsequent years on the front of revolutionary Marxism which could counter these attacks, there is no doubt that we would have been in a more favourable situation from the point of view of dealing with the problems of working class power. But unfortunately this is not the case and the traces of distortions are still too strong.

As far as the defence of the dictatorship of the proletariat is concerned we would also like to remember Engels' warning on the *state* in order to develop a correct attitude:

In reality, however, the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy; and at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy, whose worst sides the victorious proletariat, just like the Commune, cannot avoid having to lop off at once as much as possible until such time as a generation reared in new, free social conditions is able to throw the entire lumber

57 R. Luxemburg, "Russian Revolution", in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, Pathfinder, 1999, p.538

of the state on the scrap heap.⁵⁸

As a matter of fact the point made by Engels is very important. Because state, no matter whether it is a workers' state, is nothing but a necessary –unfortunately– means (but still an unpleasant means with respect to the final goal!) to achieve the desired goal. For this reason it is necessary to oppose firmly to those approaches that would amount to replacing means with ends or degrading the scientific communism as if it is a sort of world view which worships state and dictatorship even under the dictatorship of the proletariat. One cannot defend revolutionary Marxism by worshipping some fundamental concepts but by grasping the essence of those concepts.

58 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, s.189

Chapter 3

Transition Period: A Period of Revolutionary Transformations

Marx deals with the problem of transition from capitalism to communism in the *Critique Of The Gotha Programme* with the following well-known lines:

Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*.⁵⁹

What can be the fundamental economic aspects of this transition period which will be launched by the conquest of political power by the proletariat and in which the process of the birth of classless society will begin? There are no lengthy explanations specifically focused on this subject in the classical works of Marxism. The Marxist theory has limited itself with throwing light on the future prospects and the fundamental points of start for the struggle for communism. This attitude is in conformity with the materialist understanding of history and the scientific method of Marxism and reveals its difference from the utopian and petty-bourgeois socialist currents that design future with idealist schemes and models. This point can easily be understood from the lines of Marx and Engels emphasising this aspect of the problem:

Communism is for us not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.⁶⁰

The outlines drawn by Marxist theory on the structure of the capitalist society in which the proletarian revolution will take place, and on the classless society which is the final aim of this revolution, constitute a general framework for the nature of the movement from the former to the latter (the transition period). Thus, it is possible, by making deductions from this general framework, to grasp what kind of properties this historical period, which has the character of transition from capitalism to communism on a world scale, will bear compared to the past and the future.

59 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p.26.

60 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p.38.

The Theoretical Conception of Transition Period as Defined by Marx

It is essential to have a correct position on two central points in order to make a general assessment of the economic transformations of the transition period. First is the laws of movement of the economic system the proletariat will liquidate by its struggle on a world scale, that is the world capitalist system. Secondly, a general perspective of the classless society that the proletariat will reach through a social revolution. The classical works of Marxism provide the basis for a correct position on these two central points. Despite the experience after the October Revolution, this holds true even today.

The framework drawn by Marxism concerning the law of motion of the capitalist economic system is a very wide subject to be thoroughly dealt with here. Therefore, we have to limit ourselves by focusing only on the points necessitated by this study. As for the future perspective of the proletariat, it seems necessary to start with the fundamental ideas of the founders of Marxism in this respect.

As is well known, under capitalism all labour products, including the labour power itself, become commodities and are exchanged via sale and purchase. To be able to speak of commodity production, first there must be labour products produced for exchange in the market; and the consumer and producer qualities must not be united in the same person.

Political economy begins with commodities; begins from the moment when products are exchanged for one another – whether by individuals or by primitive communities. The product that appears in exchange is a commodity. It is, however, a commodity solely because a relation between two persons or communities attaches to the thing, the product, the relation between producer and consumer who are here no longer united in the same person.⁶¹

Marx's theory of value explains the operation of the law of value which regulates the distribution of total labour-time in a society. Under capitalism this distribution is realised not via a kind of plan but the market mechanism. There are no direct links between individual producers: they exist in a social division of labour where the links are constructed only by commodity exchange. Law of value is peculiar to capitalism only; and the capitalism reflects a mechanism in which the law of value dominates. As Marx explains, the capitalist has two aims:

Use-values are only produced by capitalists, because, and in so far as, they are the material substratum, the depositories of exchange-value. Our capitalist has two objects in view: in the first place, he wants to produce a use-value that has a value in exchange, that is to say, an article destined to be sold, a commodity; and secondly, he desires to produce a commodity whose value shall be greater than the sum of the values of the commodities used in its production, that is, of the means of production and the labour-power, that he purchased with his good money in the open market. His aim is to produce not only a use-value, but a commodity also; not only use-value, but value; not only value, but at the same time surplus-value.⁶²

61 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p.514

62 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1977, p.181

Under capitalism, commodities –as exchange values with different magnitudes– meet according to the quantity of general abstract labour (socially necessary labour) they include, which constitutes the essence of the exchange value. The transaction of exchange in the market is regulated through a price mechanism in which prices are supposed to become equal to the exchange values only in the long run.

However, the capitalist law of value ceases to exist in the communist society from its very first phase. This means that labour products will no longer appear as bearing two different values (use value and exchange value). The production process, which, under capitalism, is a process of producing use values, which assume an exchange value, and surplus-value, undergoes a qualitative change in the classless society. It becomes a process, where the necessary products to meet the need of the society, that is the use values directly supplied to the service of the society, are produced.

This means the commodity economy is over. Under socialism, where there are no classes, and which is based on the co-operation of all individuals who can work, therefore where all workers become free producers, the separation between producer and consumer no longer exists. Producers do not exchange their products in the classless society which is based on the common possession of the means of production. Marx starts evaluating the classless society in *Critique of The Gotha Programme* with the following lines:

Within the co-operative society based on common ownership of the means of production, the producers do not exchange their products; just as little does the labour employed on the products appear here as the value of these products, as a material quality possessed by them, since now, in contrast to capitalist society, individual labour no longer exists in an indirect fashion but directly as a component part of total labour.⁶³

Yet under capitalism, an individual's labour could only indirectly be part of the total labour, that is after being transformed into exchange value. What Marx explains here is that, even in the first phase of communist society, the products of social labour will start to function as use values (products) not exchange values (commodities). In socialism, labour products are never transformed into capital through exchange and therefore do not have an exchange value. To tell in a nutshell, socialism is a historical period in which law of value and commodity production absolutely cease to exist.

Expressing at every opportunity that the “value” is not an eternal economic category but only an expression of the nature of the period of capitalist production, Marx always made fun of the assumptions that the law of value would also be valid in the period of socialism. Likewise, Engels criticised Duhring who had wanted to apply the law of value to socialism.

The end of the capitalist commodity economy means that the conditions of existence of capital no longer exist. Since, in order to speak of capital, it is necessary to have a market where those privately owning the means of production and those having nothing but their labour power meet each other. However, there will neither be a class having

63 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p.17.

private property nor labourers selling their labour-power in order to make a living in the classless society built upon the common ownership of the means of production.

In socialism, the first phase of classless society, each producer will get his/her share directly from the society's consumer goods stock according to the proportion of his/her working hours to the total working hours of the society. As Marx stated, by this way the producer as an individual will get just the equivalent of his/her contribution (after making necessary deductions) to the society. What are these necessary deductions? Marx explains them as follows:

First, cover for replacement of the means of production used up.

Secondly, additional portion for expansion of production.

Thirdly, reserve or insurance funds to provide against accidents, dislocations caused by natural calamities, etc.

...

There remains the other part of the total product, intended to serve as means of consumption.

Before this is divided among the individuals, there has to be deducted again, from it:

First, the general costs of administration not belonging to production.

This part will, from the outset, be very considerably restricted in comparison with present-day society, and it diminishes in proportion as the new society develops.

Secondly, that which is intended for the common satisfaction of needs, such as schools, health services, etc.

From the outset, this part grows considerably in comparison with present-day society, and it grows in proportion as the new society develops.

Thirdly, funds for those unable to work, etc., in short, for what is included under so-called official poor relief today.⁶⁴

Of course, we are not here considering the communist society (that is its higher phase) which develops on its own foundations. This is a communist society just as it emerges from the capitalist society. Let's read from Marx:

What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has *developed* on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it *emerges* from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges. Accordingly, the individual producer receives back from society –after the deductions have been made– exactly what he gives to it. What he has given to it is his individual quantum of labour. For example, the social working day consists of the sum of the individual hours of work; the individual labour time of the individual producer is the part of the social working day contributed by him, his

64 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, pp.16-17

share in it. He receives a certificate from society that he has furnished such-and-such an amount of labour (after deducting his labour for the common funds); and with this certificate, he draws from the social stock of means of consumption as much as the same amount of labour cost. The same amount of labour which he has given to society in one form, he receives back in another.⁶⁵

The price mechanism, that accompanies the distribution of commodities, and the money as a medium of exchange and bearer of exchange value in capitalism will have no function in socialism. Thus the planning which will dominate the economic mechanism in the period of socialism will be based on the social working hours, not on the price-money mechanism.

Another important point that must be kept in mind with Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme* is the concept of "equal rights". As is well known, it is not yet possible in the first phase of communism for each to give to society according to his ability and receive according to his needs. In the period of socialism, a principle in the form of giving equal share from the consumption stock of society for equal periods of work will be in force. It flows from the prediction that an abundance which could be expressed as "from each according to his ability and to each according to his needs" will not yet be achievable in the first phase of communism.

For the same reason, the first phase of communism will be a period in which *the functional division of mental-manual labour between the producers* does not yet completely disappear, but starts to wither away. This division will completely be overcome only in the higher phase when labour ceases to be a must and becomes a habit and a pleasure and there is an abundance and a cultural development makes it possible for every individual to do every work he/she wants. However, to remind an important point, we should say that, beginning from the first phase of communism, class division within society will be over; this means *the division of mental-manual labour as a social classification* or the division of *ruler-ruled* will no longer exist.

Thus, what is meant by the division of mental-physical labour is not yet removed in socialism, is *only the functional differences* between the direct producers based on their work. Even this can only be overcome by the advances and leaps in the productive forces and technology.

It is certainly possible that the existing level of productive forces in the world at present can bear the potentials of a far greater abundance than Marx's time. However we cannot ignore at the same time the increasing needs of the ever growing human population and the enormous destruction capitalism has caused in labour power and nature. Marx has long ago made it clear that capitalism can develop material production only by weakening two sources of all wealth: human labour power and nature.

Let us turn to Marx's explanation. It states that in the lower phase of communism the bourgeois equal right is not yet surpassed. This means that two individuals who are not equal in fact (one is superior to another physically or mentally, one has more children

65 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, pp.17-18

etc.) can get equal shares from the consumption stock of the society for equal hours of work in socialism. This is what is meant by the bourgeois conception of equality and that its short-sightedness has not yet been surpassed. The lower phase in which labour is not yet life's "prime want", but a "compulsory means of life" (since, leaving aside those who are unable to work, "if you don't work, you don't eat" principle is valid) is an enormous progress compared to the past. However it also represents a level of social development in which some limitations continue compared to the higher phase which will develop on its own foundations. This limitedness is not because people are not yet able to demand a higher law, namely the genuine equality, but because law can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development.

In the higher phase of communism genuine equality is reached by giving unequal shares from the consumption stock of society to the individuals who are unequal in reality. In this phase individuals get their share not according to their hours of work, but according to their needs. Thus the narrow horizon of the principle of bourgeois equality, which is only a relic of bourgeois law, will be surpassed and the free producers will be able to start to live the real equality and freedom without the need of coercion thanks to the economic abundance they have created and cultural change conditioned by it.

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly – only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!⁶⁶

And Engels described in his *Anti-Dühring* the transformation human life will undergo on a world scale with the seizing of the means of production by society and doing away with the commodity production:

With the seizing of the means of production by society production of commodities is done away with, and, simultaneously, the mastery of the product over the producer. Anarchy in social production is replaced by systematic, definite organisation. The struggle for individual existence disappears. ... The extraneous objective forces that have hitherto governed history pass under the control of man himself. Only from that time will man himself, with full consciousness, make his own history – only from that time will the social causes set in movement by him have, in the main and in a constantly growing measure, the results intended by him. It is the humanity's leap from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom.⁶⁷

Evidently all explanations of Marx and Engels on "freedom" are based upon an abundance of productive forces. They objected the concept of abstract freedom in the bourgeois society and futile discussions on this subject. However, some authors incapable of understanding the essence of Marxism, accused this approach of the founders of Marxism,

66 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p.19

67 Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, pp.335-6

which is based on “the level of productive forces”, of “economic determinism” etc. It would be just the place here to cite the following lines of Marx refuting quite succinctly the petty bourgeois mentality which is incapable of understanding that freedom is not an intellectual action but an economic level that human race can reach in its social evolution:

... it is only possible to achieve real liberation in the real world and by employing real means, ... slavery cannot be abolished without the steam-engine and the mule and spinning-jenny, serfdom cannot be abolished without improved agriculture, and ... in general, people cannot be liberated as long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quality and quantity.⁶⁸

Transition Period is not a Stagnant Period

Having drawn conclusions from Paris Commune, which would illuminate the vision of the communist movement, Marx had remarked the profound historical dimension of the transition period. Establishment of the Commune administration in Paris in 1871 was only a beginning just like the proletariat’s conquest of power in industrial centres of Russia after the October Revolution in 1917. That is why Marx pointed out that there would be a hard, long and hilly historic road stretching out before the proletarian power:

The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They have no ready-made utopias to introduce *par décret du peuple*. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realise, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant.⁶⁹

Thus, Marx explained that the main characteristic of the transition period was the accomplishment of social transformations by the ruling proletariat in order to “set free the elements of the new society”. These social transformations will make it possible to liquidate capitalism and develop the productive forces to a level beyond that under capitalism thanks to the centralisation of the means of production in the hands of the proletariat.

The transition period neither has its own peculiar production relations nor it can be called capitalist or socialist. It represents a movement from the past to the future. It can be at a point very near to the past (capitalism) or to the future (socialism) depending on the situation of the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale and its real position against the capitalist system. For this reason, the main characteristic of the transition period with respect to the transformation of the production relations can reveal itself only with the progress of the world revolution in the advanced capitalist countries. What we mean by the main characteristic is the advance of the proletariat, having become the ruling class by a political revolution, to the position of being the master of the conditions of production. Marx points out to the element that illuminates the base of whole social

68 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, pp.26-27

69 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p.224

structure:

It is always the direct relation of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers, which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden foundation of the entire social construction, and with it of the political form of the relations between sovereignty and dependence, in short, of the corresponding form of the state.⁷⁰

Marx states that the proletariat would take the material conditions of production under its control in the case that it becomes the ruling class and centralises the means of production in its own hands. This is a very important feature of the transition period. It means that when the proletariat becomes the real master of the conditions of production by its own state, the plans about what to produce, how and how much will be made by the ruling proletariat. What characterises this period is not only the destruction of the old order, expropriation of capitalists and liquidation of capitalist production relations. Also and essentially within this period the proletariat, organised as a “state”, will organise a planned economy and prepare the material and cultural developments in order to do away with the social division of labour and contradictions resulting from it. That is to say, this will be a historic period in which economic, social, cultural foundations of classless society are built. This is in fact a period of struggle between the defeated but not yet completely destroyed capitalism and emerging communism. The class antagonisms taken over from the old society will gradually disappear in the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat but old class differences in the form of habits, culture etc. will continue to exist for a long time (until the first phase of communism).

We cannot speak of pure forms or categories peculiar to the transition period, since it does not bear the character of an independent socio-economic formation and is a dynamic period in which revolutionary transformations take place. The economic life of the transition period should be understood as a dynamic process of construction from the past to the future, in which the capitalist production relations are liquidated and therefore cannot yet be defined by the features of classless society.

Although the transition period will find its full meaning on the basis of revolutionary leaps on a world scale by the proletariat, let us make an abstraction in order to grasp its features with future dimensions. Let us assume that nationalisation has been done by a workers power and private ownership of the means of production has been put an end to. In such a situation, and within the limitations posed by these conditions, the laws of capitalist economy would cease to operate. For example generalised commodity economy would be over, the production process would cease to be a process where exchange value and surplus-value are produced. The law of value would no longer hold sway. And connected with this, the price mechanism as the expression of exchange value and the function of money as the universal equivalent would cease to be valid. But under the given conditions, by extending the transition period to its logical conclusions, these assumptions would only remain as abstractions aimed at understanding the new situation that may appear when the capitalist workings are completely put an end to.

⁷⁰ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, p.919.

On the other hand, even though the speed and the scope of the change in the transition period depends on the given conditions, it would be useful to try to understand more closely the possible results of some practices to be immediately carried through at least in big industry (such as nationalisation or prohibition of employing waged labour by private entrepreneurs. Because transformations of this kind were carried out in Russia after the October Revolution in 1917. Therefore, we can continue examining the subject in broad lines taking as a starting point the meaning of the transformation experienced under the soviet workers power.

Under the workers' state if the use of wage labour on the basis of private property in large industry is put an end to, then labour power ceases to be a commodity in that sector. Such a situation is a sign of the liquidation of the capitalist production relations within given limits. Because the essential character of capitalist mechanism reveals itself in that labour power itself is a commodity. That labour becomes wage labour.

However if capitalist relations still exist in agriculture and small-scale production in general, this means the categories of money and commodity have not been abolished. However, under these circumstances we have tried to describe, we cannot talk of a generalised commodity production characteristic of capitalism. Is this a contradiction? Or is this a process, just like before capitalism, in which the categories of money and commodity exist although we cannot talk of a generalised commodity production? But of course not in the sense of a process of birth of capital but that of a death! Let us turn to Marx for further explanation. Pointing out to the difference between the period during which only money and commodity circulation existed and the period of generalised commodity economy which amounts to the primary condition of existence for the capitalism, Marx says:

The historical conditions of its existence are by no means given with the mere circulation of money and commodities. It can spring into life, only when the owner of the means of production and subsistence meets in the market with the free labourer selling his labour-power. And this one historical condition comprises a world's history. Capital, therefore, announces from its first appearance a new epoch in the process of social production.⁷¹

Thus, the transition period between capitalism, in which general commodity production prevails, and socialism, in which commodity production ends, is a historic process in which the former is liquidated and the latter is prepared. So the transition period is not a separate socio-economic formation completely independent from these two; it cannot be comprehended without reference to the past and the present.

Likewise, if we try to understand the transformations to be carried out on the basis of the liquidation of capitalism, it is possible to say the following: In the transition period, the production process gradually becomes, depending of course on the existing level of productive forces and provided that the workers' state nationalises and efficiently uses the means of production, a process in which the social needs of the producers are met. So, in this situation, the capitalist market economy comes to an end and a new period of

71 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, p.167

central planning begins in the economy.

Thus, the principle of “profit” that motivates production under capitalism leaves its place to the planning to meet the needs of labouring masses in much more optimum scales. Within the nationalised big scale industry transformation of the surplus value produced by the proletariat into capital ceases. The meaning of this can be expressed as follows: the ruling proletariat expropriates the surplus value created by itself in the name of its own state and appropriate these social funds for necessary investments. As to small scale production, it is united in cooperatives and is put under control of the workers state by means of economic measures (taxes etc.).

Consequently “price” now does not involve a capitalist profit in the sector under the control of workers’ state since the capitalist accumulation and surplus value production is over; it can only carry on its function of measuring in the planning. This, on the other hand, is very relative and only valid within the borders of workers state. Since if we consider the existence of the workers’ state surrounded by the world capitalist market, the pressure of the latter and world prices inevitably affects this or that way the economy under the workers’ state, and in the final analysis it will be a decomposing, destructive element.

In the transition period under the workers state labour power ceases to be a commodity in the given conditions described above. Under the workers state, even though the worker gets for his work in the form of money as if like his old wage, when we compare his position in the production process with that under capitalism, we see that he will have been far from being a wage labourer. Since after the liquidation of the capitalist mechanism, the workers will not have sold their labour power to the capitalist; they will have appropriated it for themselves. One cannot be his own waged slave. Or one cannot be the boss and the worker at the same time. This means that the waged slavery of capitalism is over.

According to an evaluation system of labour under the workers’ state, a plan which is based on a principle of equal pay for equal work in similar type of labour can be valid. If the ruling proletariat is to decide the arrangement of the working hours and conditions, it will at the same time be the one who decides how much should be the burden and for what. A regime of labour regulated by workers themselves as their own bosses will not lead to the type of problems as in the case they are forced by an alien power (a ruling bureaucracy, for instance), although this regime does not yet offer the well-being of the classless society of the future. Under the dictatorship of the proletariat the social surplus labour is transferred to the social development funds with a plan of advancing the general level of development of society.

The economic functioning of the transition period can be realised through a centralised plan that reflects the demands, proposals and participation from below of the proletariat organised in soviets. One can talk of a democratic functioning, which is the necessary condition for a workers’ state, only if the central planning is based on the initiatives of the local soviets and factory committees and the results are evaluated on this basis.

Otherwise it will merely be a bureaucratic central planning which is in full contradiction to the workers' democracy, the necessary condition for the transition period.

In the era of world economy the real calculation of economic productivity (the distribution of the forces of production among different production fields, choice of technology etc.) must depend on a world-wide planning. The dictatorship of the proletariat to be established in a relatively backward country has no chance to reach the economic productivity of the world capitalism, unless it is spread to the countries dominating the world capitalist system. In this case the price system, which is a measure in central planning and intersectoral input-output calculations, will be useless even for comparison with the prices in the capitalist market dominating the world economy. Yet the economic productivity has to be measured on a world scale in order to be able to talk about a successful planning in the real sense of the word.

On the other hand, under a dictatorship of the proletariat limited by such conditions, commercial relations with the capitalist world will inevitably be continued. Although under workers' state foreign trade is nationalised, this does not mean everything. Given that people live in a single world after all, being aware of each other despite all measures, their demands as consumers will take shape according to world standards. Now that the goods that can meet these needs can only be supplied from the world market, then the workers' state will either import what it can not produce, or a black market under the workers' state will do it. In either case, the economy under the workers' state will be under the pressure of the capitalist world market. And this will drag the economic planning into a crisis upon the effect of objective economic pressures. Thus the idea that the dictatorship of the proletariat surrounded by the world capitalism will not be affected by this objectivity and stand firm on its feet is alien to Marxism.

In conclusion, the speed and scope of the arrangements and transformations concerning the transition period depends, in the final analysis, not solely on the voluntary decisions of political organisations, but on the level of economic development of the sector under control of the workers' state. For example, it is not possible to avoid from the enormous problems of the lack of industrialisation if the dictatorship of the proletariat is isolated in backward countries. To bring about in a democratic fashion the "primitive accumulation" required for an industrial leap forward purely with its own resources and human power, without benefiting from the capabilities of world economy under the capitalist embargo is not a question of will. Even though it seems possible in some respect to employ the human power ruthlessly for this purpose in a big country, it runs counter to the spirit of the workers' state or workers' democracy. But on the other hand a workers' state cannot survive without economic development. Therefore to make a living for a workers' state born anew facing such impasses is closely linked with the advance of world revolution.

Transition Period is Linked With World Revolution

Since capitalism is a world system, the social revolution to overthrow it should have worldwide dimensions rather than national. Therefore the transition from capitalism to communism can acquire its full meaning only when the political revolution is victorious

on a world scale; that is when the political rule of the world bourgeoisie is brought to an end.

The new social conditions in the transition period under the dictatorship of the proletariat do not in fact come into being out of nothing. As Marx stated, the socialisation of productive forces already accomplished due to capitalist development is now set free from the restricting capitalist relations of production and is given the freedom for a full development. It is in this sense that “the socialist building”, although it will be the conscious product of the working class who also changes itself by a social revolution, is in the final analysis not a question of will, but depends on whether the material conditions for change exists or not.

It is this very point that Marx explains by his famous phrase: “A social formation never disappears before all the productive forces inherent therein develop; new and higher relations of production never come and place themselves before their material conditions of existence flourish in the heart of the old society.” And he continues:

Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation.⁷²

Of course the question whether the material conditions for socialism have ripened or not can be answered on a world scale and not on a national scale. Because the capitalist mode of production represents not an organisation of production restrained to a local or regional level, but the creation of a world system. This approach is as correct as the fact that the reality of individual countries can not be substituted for the reality of a whole world. And it is obvious how the kind of thinking “now that the world revolution does not proceed along with revolutions in the advanced capitalist countries, we should find a way to build socialism within the borders of a single country” is unscientific and far from the Marxist conception.

The overthrow of bourgeois power and building the proletarian power historically signify the beginning of a movement of transition from capitalism to communism, of course with the reservation that it is conditioned with the limitedness of national bounds yet. However, even a partial victory of this historic movement depends on the permanence of revolution on a world scale.

Even if the *nationalisation* process, that is the appropriation of the means of production by the workers’ state (the first task of a victorious proletarian revolution), starts on a national scale, the *socialisation* of the ownership of the means of production can only be achieved on an international scale. In other words, the state ownership over the transition period is not yet a social ownership (that is the ownership of whole society) in the real sense of the word. Here the state ownership means, like in all other class societies, not the common ownership of whole society, but still of the ruling class (the proletariat). Therefore the state ownership cannot be identified with the social ownership despite it is

⁷² Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p.21

in the hands of the proletariat. The proletariat's state ownership is an important step on the way to social ownership, but only a step.

The real socialisation of the ownership of the means of production is a matter of classless society. The real social nature of the means of production can fully appear only when the transition period concludes its historic task on a world scale. In other words, a social organisation wherein the means of production serve all the people throughout the world can be possible if and only if the world capitalist system is absolutely put an end to and the national borders disappear.

Realisation of "individual ownership on the basis of common ownership of the means of production" *that is the assumption of social ownership by each individual in society* will mean the solution of the contradiction between individual and society. When the conditions that lead to the self alienation of individual to his own labour are thus liquidated, the phenomenon of *alienation* will disappear and free individual will profoundly be interested in the consequences of his labour; and labour will become a pleasure.

Although the proletarian state ownership that puts an end to the capitalist ownership constitutes a point of support for a socialist planning of production, everything depends in the final analysis on whether there is an economic productivity exceeding the level reached by world capitalist system. That is the problem. It is impossible for a proletarian revolution beginning in the backward countries to reach such a productivity without the company of advanced countries. For this reason, even if the legal changes in the sphere of property after the revolution in such countries (for example nationalisation in industry and collectivisation in agriculture) may bring about a certain economic development with respect to the past, this will be a "development" falling behind the level of world capitalism, identifying itself with catching up with it. But this is not what Marxism understands from the economic development which will be reached by abolishing private ownership of the means of production. It is a kind of development which exceeds the level reached by capitalism. For this reason, to accept the state ownership as an adequate point of support and say "socialism is being built", is to confuse the legal with the real.

Marx said "law can never be superior to material base", meaning that legal changes without a material basis would prove inadequate to break through. Thus, it will not be more than legal wishful thinking to take the state ownership of the means of production alone as the sign of the presence of a process of building socialist production relations. Above all, the concept of socialist production relations imply the period of socialism and presuppose an according level of material-economic base. Socialist production relations means the relations between the free producers in the production process, in the first phase of the classless society.

If the preparations for socialist production relations are meant, then the matter should have been approached from the standpoint of the characteristics of a real transition process. But those who start from the standpoint of "socialism in one country" declared that the state ownership signifies the establishment of socialist production relations

theorising the distortions emerged under the bureaucratic dictatorships. However, this did not solve the problem and they tried to evade it by defining the fundamental contradiction of those countries as the contradiction between the “already established” socialist production relations and the backwardness of the productive forces. For example Bettelheim, who defended such views for years, and those who aped him and alike likened the bureaucratic dictatorship to a “tent” which is supposed to mean the establishment of socialist production relations. To them this tent was to be filled with the production forces suitable for socialism in time! What they had in common was that they theorised the state ownership in the Soviet Union and alike as socialism without questioning the production relations. They were asserting that law can be superior to material base by identifying state ownership with the socialist production relations and making a complete mess of Marxism by this kind of “contributions”.

The concept of production relations belongs to the sphere of economic-material base, and it is not a “legal” concept in relation to property forms. Production relations depend on the level of productive forces. While production relations can fall behind the level of productive forces, in the final analysis they can never be ahead of it, which means the production relations are fundamentally conditioned with the level of productive forces. For example just like the need for a qualitative development (industrial revolution) in order to surpass feudal production relations and reach capitalist production relations, the formation of socialist relations of production requires a leap in the productive forces that exceeds the level of capitalism on a world scale. To claim otherwise means to turn upside down the dialectical materialistic understanding of the evolution of society.

The period of dictatorship of the proletariat, as a historic period, is not one that can be lived and concluded within the borders of one country. It is a historic period that will include the growth of revolution into world revolution on the basis of spreading into at least a few advanced capitalist countries. In the case that the proletarian revolution has not yet achieved a leap forward that can shake the reign of the world capitalist system to its foundations, and that it can hit not the core but the peripheries of capitalism, then the workers’ power (if established) will be subjected to the crushing pressure of these objective conditions. In that case, the rule of the proletariat (organised as a state) over the production process will be shadowed by the reign of the world capitalist system. Engels pointed out the difficulties awaiting the proletarian power in case that the world proletarian revolution breaks out not in one of the vital centres of capitalism but in the periphery where political contradictions are intensified:

If a war ... brings us to power prematurely, the technicians will be our chief enemies; they will deceive and betray us wherever they can and we shall have to use terror against them but shall get cheated all the same.⁷³

The danger Engels had mentioned, was realised when the proletarian revolution was confined to a backward country like Russia. Despite the historic leap forward by the 1917 October Revolution, the Russian proletariat could not overcome its enormous inadequacies in economy and culture, since the European revolution did not come to

73 Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, London, 1942, p.493

help. The proletariat, therefore, could not fully become the ruling power of the production process. For example, it could not take the technicians under its control; on the contrary, unfortunately, got subordinated to the hegemony of the returning bureaucracy.

The reality in the Soviet Union has been for years theorised as “real socialism”. The so-called Marxists have written a lot of books on this subject. They have presented the economic structure in the Soviet Union as an example of transition from capitalism to communism. They have done this without investigating whether the state is a workers’ state or not and without verifying the precondition of workers’ democracy, the principle Marx had stated as the fundamental condition for the transition period. In fact, the workers state born out of 1917 October Revolution had later been destroyed by a bureaucratic counter-revolution and the “Soviet” state had been transformed into a despotic-bureaucratic state. The destruction of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is the fundamental condition of the progress from capitalism to communism, thus resulted in termination of the dynamic of transition period in the Soviet Union. A new socio-economic process has begun based on the despotic-statist mode of production with the absolute power of Stalinism.

Chapter 4

The Fate of the Isolated Revolution

The Birth of Worker's Soviets' State with the October Revolution of 1917

The dictatorship of the proletariat is based on direct domination of the proletariat organised in soviets, councils. But, to maintain this domination and fulfil its requirements is not a spontaneous process. Thus, the proletariat's need for a guiding political force, i.e. a vanguard force organised as party being an organic part of the class, remains during the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat. But the soviet power cannot be reduced to the power of the party. To regard the soviet power as one party dictatorship means that one has not understood the historical function and necessity of soviets.

Both before and after the October Revolution, Lenin tried to educate the Bolsheviks on the historical role of the Soviets in the proletarian revolution. As is known, the problems that originate from an inadequate understanding on the part of the Bolsheviks of the importance of soviet type organisation caused a lot of controversies during 1905 revolution. After some time, Lenin, who grasped that the soviets were the embryo of a revolutionary power, criticised the sceptical attitude of Bolsheviks against these organs of self-management which were born as a product of the revolutionary awakening of the labouring masses. Lenin's rightfulness was to be understood in 12 years.

With the October Revolution of 1917, the exploiting rulers of Russia were overthrown. Taken place in a backward country as Russia, the proletarian revolution, despite all its shortcomings, heralded the birth of a revolutionary workers' power which rested upon the mass of workers and poor peasants organised in soviets.

The Russia of 1917, which was still predominated by the peasantry, was fraught with contradictions within which past and future clash in historical, economic and cultural respects. While reactionary and conservative elements largely predominated, there were pangs of an enormous cultural change and awakening of the working masses that gathered in modern factories. A strong desire to learn, which sprang from the heart of the oppressed masses that had long been left uneducated, marked the early period of the revolutionary power. John Reed, who witnessed those days, remarks that lorries of books and printed material went out from Smolny Institute in the first six months, saturating the land:

And it was not fables, falsified history, diluted religion, and the cheap fiction that

corrupts – but social and economic theories, philosophy, the works of Tolstoy, Gogol and Gorky....

(...) Lectures, debates, speeches – in theatres, circuses, school-houses, clubs, Soviet meeting-rooms, Union headquarters, barracks.... Meetings in the trenches at the front, in village squares, factories.... What a marvellous sight to see Putilovsky Zavod (the Putilov factory) pour out its forty thousand to listen to Social Democrats, Socialist Revolutionaries, Anarchists, anybody, whatever they had to say, as long as they would talk! For months in Petrograd, and all over Russia, every street-corner was a public tribune. In railway trains, street-cars, always the spurting up of impromptu debate, everywhere....⁷⁴

The first constitutional declaration of the Soviet history, *Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People*, which was drafted by Lenin in January 1918, proclaimed that Russia was a republic of soviets of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies, and that all power, centrally and locally, was vested in these soviets. On the other hand, the Constituent Assembly elections was held in November as they had been scheduled before. But, as power was in the hands of the Soviets, the Constituent Assembly seemed to have been born dead from the outset and was resolved to be dissolved. Thus the Assembly that was held on 5 (18) January 1918 lasted only one day. In those days, the bourgeois camp and reaction was in such a paralysed situation that the resolution to dissolve the Constituent Assembly was implemented without difficulty. But as soon as the reaction gathered strength, they were to gather around the slogan of Constituent Assembly. Thus, throughout the civil war waged against the Soviet power whose legitimacy originated from the participation and support of the toiling masses, the capitalists and land owners would hide their ambitions for a bloody reactionary dictatorship behind the guise of seemingly legitimate "Constituent Assembly".

After the revolution, nationalisations in the industry and organisation of large farms in agriculture were introduced in order to organise the economic life. *Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People* constituted the basis for the nationalisations carried out after the October Revolution. Because the *Declaration* proclaimed the principle of transferring all factories, mines and transportation to state ownership. The implementation of this principle would of course depend on concrete decisions to be taken in the subsequent process. What must be borne in mind as a rule was that, in order to avoid an economic collapse, nationalisations would have to be conducted according to a plan and with a pace that would not go out of control of the workers' state. In the early period, many enterprises were nationalised by the workers themselves on the basis of decisions of the local and regional soviets. It was also witnessed that whole industries were nationalised according to central decision. For instance, the trade fleet which was at first organised under a single central management and then nationalised in January 1918; the nationalisation of sugar industry in May 1918; of the petroleum industry in June 1918; and so on.

In order to make progress on the road to organise large scale collective production in the countryside, "kolkhozy" (collective farms, i.e. agricultural communes based on the

74 John Reed, *Ten Days That Shook the World*, Penguin Books, 1982, pp.39-40

principle of joint work and life) and “sovkhozy” (soviet farms in which workers were employed under Soviet government’s control) were established.

In the political report of the Central Committee to the Seventh Extraordinary Congress of the RCP(B) held on 6-8 March 1918, Lenin made clear the irreplaceable role of soviets in the success of the revolution:

Had not the popular creative spirit of the Russian revolution, which had gone through the great experience of the year 1905, given rise to Soviets as early as February 1917, they could not under any circumstances have assumed power in October, because success depended entirely upon the existence of available organisational forms of a movement embracing millions. The Soviets were the available form, and that is why in the political sphere the future held out to us those brilliant successes, the continuous triumphal march, that we had; for the new form of political power was already available, and all we had to do was to pass a few decrees, and transform the power of the Soviets from the embryonic state in which it existed in the first months of the revolution into the legally recognised form which had become established in the Russian state –i.e., into the Russian Soviet Republic. The Republic was born at one stroke; it was born so easily because in February 1917 the masses had created the Soviets.⁷⁵

On the success of the Russian proletariat, which accomplished the necessary historic action in the first stage of the socialist revolution, smashed the old state mechanism, set out to replace it with a new state apparatus without bureaucracy, Lenin said the following in 1918:

But in Russia the bureaucratic machine has been completely smashed, razed to the ground; the old judges have all been sent packing, the bourgeois parliament has been dispersed -- and *far more accessible* representation has been given to the workers and peasants; *their* Soviets have replaced the bureaucrats, *their* or Soviets have been placed in control of the bureaucrats, and *their* Soviets have been authorized to elect the judges.⁷⁶

In his article, *Economics and Politics in the Era of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* (30 October 1919), the first steps taken by the October Revolution were enumerated as:

We accomplished instantly, at one revolutionary blow, all that can, in general, be accomplished instantly; on the first day of the dictatorship of the proletariat, for instance, on October 26 (November 8), 1917, the private ownership of land was abolished without compensation for the big landowners – the big landowners were expropriated. Within the space of a few months practically all the big capitalists, owners of factories, joint-stock companies, banks, railways, and so forth, were also expropriated without compensation. The state organisation of large-scale production in industry and the transition from “workers’ control” to “workers’ management” of factories and railways – this has, by and large, already been accomplished; but in relation to agriculture it has only just begun (“state farms”, i.e., large farms organised by the workers’ state on state owned land). Similarly, we have only just begun the organisation of various forms of co-operative societies

75 Lenin, *The Revolutionary Phrase*, Progress, 1972, p.76

76 Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, p.28

of small farmers as a transition from petty commodity agriculture to communist agriculture. The same must be said of the state-organised distribution of products in place of private trade, i.e., the state procurement and delivery of grain to the cities and of industrial products to the countryside.⁷⁷

Although Lenin speaks of a transition from *workers' control* to *workers' management*, it was dependent in the last analysis upon the development of productive forces, i.e., great industrial investments and the improvement of the level of the working class. That is why, those measures emphasised by Lenin could not, in fact, be fully implemented. In other words, the real development lagged behind the desired targets and proclaimed decrees. A chequered process took place on this matter. For example, although in the aftermath of the revolution factory committees were given the authority to control the factories, in practice, these committees started to undertake the management with an outlook limited purely to their own workplaces and this fact in turn deprived the Soviet power of the ability to handle the economy as a whole. In order to prevent industrial mess and disorder, the Supreme Economic Council was formed and the trade-unions were given more authority to achieve a more integral workers' control. Factory committees were tied to the unions, and the management of the economy was handed over to the Supreme Council of National Economy.

In order to avoid a misconception of reducing the October socialist revolution, which undertook great historic tasks viewed from the problems it had to solve, to the level of a simple act able to solve the historic tasks by the decrees of the first days, we must remind an important point here. The proletarian dictatorship established by the October Revolution set out to fulfil that big prime task marked by the founders of Marxism many years ago, that is, transferring large-scale means of production to the ownership of the workers' state. But in a backward country like Russia, the question could not be solved by just making certain juridical changes in relation to the property. In order to eliminate poverty, put an end to economic and cultural backwardness, a rapid leap of industrialisation forward had to be performed on the basis of large-scale means of production under state ownership. This was an enormous historic task which could not be resolved by just releasing the revolutionary energy, demanding the company of the productive forces of advanced countries, i.e. the making progress of world revolution. Thus, although Lenin put too great a load on the political will in order to strengthen the revolutionary political power in the first days of the revolution, later on he underlined the impossibility of escaping from objective difficulties.

On the other hand, carried out under the leadership of the proletariat in a predominantly peasant country like Russia, the October Revolution was of bourgeois nature from the point of view of the content of the tasks it had to solve for the rural population. This was expressed by Lenin:

Our victory was made easier by the fact that in October 1917 we marched with the peasants, with all the peasants. In that sense, our revolution at that time was a bourgeois revolution. The first step taken by our proletarian government was to embody in a law promulgated on October 26 (old style), 1917, on the next day

77 Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 30, p.109

after the revolution, the old demands of all the peasants which peasant Soviets and village assemblies had put forward under Kerensky. That is where our strength lay; that is why we were able to win the overwhelming majority so easily. As far as the countryside was concerned, our revolution continued to be a bourgeois revolution, and only later, after a lapse of six months, were we compelled within the framework of the state organisation to start the class struggle in the countryside, to establish Committees of Poor Peasants, of semi-proletarians, in every village, and to carry on a methodical fight against the rural bourgeoisie. This was inevitable in Russia owing to the backwardness of the country. In Western Europe things will proceed differently....⁷⁸

A new epoch of incredible difficulties was just beginning. As Lenin said at the Third Congress of Soviets in January 1918, construction of a new society would involve a lot of difficulties, sacrifices and errors, which was unprecedented hitherto and could not be learned from books. It was the biggest and most difficult transition ever seen in history.

One of the biggest problems encountered in the period following the seizure of power by the soviets was the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which was signed due to the difficult position of the Soviet Russia under the pressure of imperialist powers. As Russia was under difficult conditions and has no army to fight, and so on, the peace negotiations started on 9 (22) December with the representatives of German and Austria-Hungarian Empire were held in unequal conditions. This problem caused different factions within the Bolshevik party, which formed around different positions on the course to be taken to solve the problem. For instance, while Bukharin, being the representative of the opposition called *Left Communists*, defended the tactic of launching an immediate revolutionary war, Trotsky, with the idea of playing for time, was advocating the “neither peace, nor war” tactic. Whereas Lenin was thinking that the concrete circumstances were pressing for the tactic of “immediate peace” independently of their intentions. And he was trying to convince others in the direction of signing the peace treaty without losing time. Meanwhile, although Zinoviev and Stalin supported the immediate peace, the fact that they did it in a manner to mean “peace at all costs, even if it weakens the movement in the West”, i.e. in a way that ignored internationalism, enraged Lenin. Because he was defending the tactic of peace precisely in the interests of international revolution. As shown by the minutes of the Central Committee meeting on 11 (24) January 1918, he did not agree with Zinoviev’s view that concluding a peace would weaken the workers movement. He expressed his response as follows:

If we believe that the German movement can develop immediately, in the event of an interruption of the peace negotiations, then we must sacrifice ourselves, for the German revolution will have a force much greater than ours.⁷⁹

Though left alone at the beginning and received harsh criticisms, Lenin managed to gain majority in the Central Committee only when the German military went on the offensive on 18 January and the German troops marched towards Ukraine without any resistance. But precious time was lost and Germans started to press for a peace with harsher terms

78 Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 28, p.473

79 Lenin, *The Revolutionary Phrase*, Progress, 1972, p.20

as they were now in a more advantageous position. The crisis in the party flared up again. Criticising the tendency spearheaded by Bukharin, Lenin declared that the slogans in the direction of helping the German revolution by sacrificing the Soviet power in Russia had unfortunately turned into empty talk, into revolutionary rhetoric, as they did not take the objective circumstances into account, although they originated from revolutionary intentions. On 23 February the Central Committee started to discuss the terms of peace imposed by Germans. According to this, Russia was to lose all the Baltic territory and part of Belorussia, demobilise her army immediately, withdraw from Finland and Ukraine, surrender Marz, Ardagan and Batum to Turkey. Trotsky declared that they could not fight a revolutionary war when the party was split and although he was not totally convinced by Lenin's arguments he was now in favour of a compromise due to the circumstances.⁸⁰ At the end of the day Lenin's resolution was approved and the treaty was signed on 3 March. The Russian delegation explained the concrete circumstances with a statement before signing the treaty:

Under the circumstances Russia has no freedom of choice ... The German proletariat is as yet not strong enough to stop the attack [of German imperialism]. We have no doubt that the triumph of imperialism and militarism over the international proletarian revolution will prove to be temporary and ephemeral. Meanwhile the Soviet government ... unable to resist the armed offensive of German imperialism, is forced to accept the peace terms so as to save revolutionary Russia.⁸¹

The question of Brest-Litovsk caused harsh debates also within the soviets and the treaty could be approved only at the Fourth Congress of Soviets held on 15 March 1918. This caused a delay in the preparations for the constitution and only on 1 April 1918 a decision could be made to form a commission to prepare the constitution. The draft was prepared within three months and issued on 3 July 1918 to be submitted to the party central committee and the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets.⁸² It was underlined that the soviet structure sketched in the constitution was based upon the already formed *de facto* soviet-type organisations. The local soviets, which, in the countryside embrace

80 On 3 October 1918 at the extraordinary joint meeting of the higher organs of the Soviet government Trotsky was to make the following assessment "I deem it my duty to say, in this authoritative assembly, that at the hour when many of us, including myself, were doubtful as to whether it was admissible for us to sign the Brest-Litovsk peace, only Comrade Lenin maintained stubbornly, with amazing foresight and against our opposition, that we had to go through with it to tide us over until the revolution of the world proletariat. And now, we must admit that we were wrong." (Trotsky, *My Life*, Penguin, 1984, p.410)

81 Quoted in T. Cliff, *Lenin: The Revolution Besieged*, Bookmarks, 1987, p.50

82 The draft constitution submitted to the Fifth All-Russia Congress of Soviets was unanimously approved on 10 July 1918 and went into force on 19 July 1918 upon its publication in *Izvestia*. According to this, the new republic was called Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic (RSFSR). But later, with the constitution of 1923 the structure of the republic was rearranged. First, the "Transcaucasian Socialist Federated Republic" was formed by the unification of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. In December 1922 the congresses of RSFSR, Ukraine, Belorussia and Transcaucasia were separately convened and resolved to unite in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The first Congress of Soviets of the USSR was convened with the deputies of these four republics. A new draft constitution was prepared in July 1923 and approved in January 1924 by the second Congress of Soviets of the USSR.

the village communities and in the cities all the workers in the factories, were regarded as the source of soviet power. These smallest soviets were intended to be a model for direct democracy.

The larger soviets, on the other hand, comprised of delegates elected by citizens or workers to represent them. During the early period of the Soviet power, they were called the *soviets of deputies* in order to discern them from the local soviets. According to the constitution “the highest authority” was All-Russia Congress of Soviets. Every 25,000 electors in the cities and 125,000 electors in countryside had one representative in the congress.⁸³ The Congress elected All-Russian Central Executive Committee made of 200 persons to act in its name in periods between the convocation of the congress. And the Executive Committee elected the Council of People’s Commissars which was entrusted with the general management of the affairs of the RSFSR, issuing decrees, resolutions, orders. According to the constitution, only those “who have acquired the means of livelihood through labour that is productive and useful to society”, soldiers and disabled had the right to vote. Persons who employ hired labour, rentiers, private merchants, monks and clergy, bureaucrats, and agents of the former police were deprived of the right to vote. Thus, one of the principles of the Paris Commune, i.e. *universal suffrage*, was introduced so as to embrace the toiling masses organised in communes (or soviets) as described by Marx.

The first Soviet Constitution was remarkable to show the correct understanding of the Bolsheviks then. For instance, the constitution stated both of the principles that the workers’ state was a temporary phenomenon and that socialism, as the lower phase of communism which was the goal to be achieved in the future, was a classless and stateless social order. Acknowledging the RSFSC as only the *first* member of the World Socialist Federated Republics, this constitution had in fact been the result of a general understanding true to the spirit of the workers’ democracy. But unfortunately, the circumstances developed in such a direction that is not favourable to encourage this democracy, but on the contrary to hamper it. For instance, due to the unusual conditions of the civil war period the government was bestowed with over-authority above the soviets. It was justified with the special article for emergencies in the constitution; the local soviets lost their power, and so on.

A foreign military intervention launched by Japans when they occupied Vladivostok revived the hopes of internal enemies of the new regime and helped them recover. On the other hand, the second partner of the coalition government, the Left Social-Revolutionaries, were preparing to leave the government in response to the increasingly harsher practices of the Bolsheviks due to the more difficult conditions both in economic and political spheres. Although Lenin hoped that, with the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, “a civil war had now come to an end”, and sought for a breathing space for the Soviet regime, a violent civil war broke out which in its consequences was to drift the workers’ power

83 Lenin explained this disproportion in this way: “Yes, we have violated equality between the workers and peasants... The vote of one worker is equal to several peasant votes. Is that unfair? No, in the period when it is necessary to overthrow capital it is quite fair.” (“First All-Russia Congress On Adult Education”, *CW*, Vol. 29, pp.359 and 369)

to a miserable situation. The Left SRs left the government on 19 March 1918 in protest of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The unrest, afterwards, was spread and assassinations followed one another. The German ambassador Mirbach's assassination by two Left-Social-Revolutionaries on 6 June 1918 marked a turning point in the escalation of the tension. The Bolshevik Volodarsky and Uritsky were assassinated in Petrograd; Lenin was attacked in Moscow and severely injured. This led to the increase of the importance of Cheka in political life.⁸⁴

While Lenin was talking about the successes of the newborn proletarian government in the first days of the October Revolution, he started to point to shortcomings and mistakes (for instance, that they have made too much nationalisation to manage). He persistently said that they could not efficiently utilise the sources and that it would take long years to overcome the economic and cultural backwardness. On the other hand, we know that Lenin, who had spoken immediately after the October Revolution of the destruction of the old bureaucratic mechanism, shortly afterwards drew attention to the danger of bureaucratisation of the workers' soviets state. As a matter of fact, being a result of objective conditions the power of workers' soviets was born with such weaknesses that cannot easily be surmounted. Therefore, in order to draw lessons from the experience of the October Revolution, we need such analyses that direct attention to the factors putrefying from within the Soviet workers' state rather than eulogies.

1918-1921: The Life and Death Struggle of the Soviet Worker's Power

War communism

The revolutionary proletariat experienced a harsh period of war following the October Revolution to defend its power against both the attacks of imperialism from outside and of the bourgeoisie and landlords from within. During the civil war between 1918 and 1921 the poor masses of workers and peasants organised in soviets actively took part in the sharp political struggle by joining in the ranks of the Red Army, the armed force of the revolution. On 14 March 1918, Trotsky was appointed as the Commissar of War and became the Head of the Supreme Council of War.⁸⁵ At first, the Red Guards were consisted of volunteers. By April 1918, 100,000 volunteers joined the ranks of the Red Army. But it became necessary to increase the numbers due to the intensification of the civil war. Hence, conscription was re-introduced and the total number rose to five million during the general mobilisation in 1919. However, due to the harsh punishments introduced against the mass desertion of peasant soldiers, the compulsory disciplinary measures, and the employment of former Tsarist officers as specialists, and so on, the aimed transformations in the context of "democratising the army" unfortunately could

84 *Cheka* is the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission set up after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. Renamed as GPU (State Political Administration) with the RSFSR Constitution and as OGPU (United State Political Administration) with the Constitution of 1923.

85 It is said that during the civil war the armoured train used by Trotsky as the headquarter to visit the fronts, travelled a distance five times the length of the equator.

not be realised as it had been desired.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, as the military historians pointed out, the detachments mostly consisted of communist workers, fought to death to defend the revolution and exhibited exemplary courage. The historical sources relate that around 200,000 communists died during the civil war.

During the civil war, the Soviet state resorted to economic measures called *war communism*. Due to hunger, famine, chaos, and sabotages in production and distribution, the central task was to maintain the supplies for the Red Army and industrial cities. Therefore, during this period the economy was arranged so as to supply the necessities through confiscation of products by the state, and not to increase the productive forces in a planned way. In Trotsky's words, military communism was, in essence, the systematic regimentation of consumption in a besieged fortress.⁸⁷ During this period, the wages were paid in kind; foods were rationed and armed workers' detachments tried to maintain the food supplies of cities by confiscating agricultural product.

Due to the pressure of circumstances, the extent of nationalisation in the industry went too far than considered. According to the decree issued in November 1920, those factories that use machinery and employ more than five workers and all those manufactures that employ more than ten workers even if they are based totally on manual labour were to be nationalised. Thus, a lot of nationalisations were carried out, which were not done on the basis of economic calculations of efficiency or plan, but due to the exigencies of war communism. But, as they could not be controlled, there appeared dramatic falls in production.

The introduction of the practices of war communism in the countryside led to a harsh opposition on the part of the Left Social-Revolutionaries organised among peasants. For instance, in the Fifth All-Russia Congress of Soviets held in July 1918, while the question of agriculture was being discussed, Spiridonova, the leader of Left Social-Revolutionaries, proclaimed that she was now an enemy of the Bolshevik Party. But due to the rapid spread of the civil war, to supply the grain needed by the cities and army turned, indeed, into a life and death question rather than a question of choice. For that reason, the products produced by the peasantry were confiscated by both the workers' detachments in the cities and the poor peasant committees organised by the Bolsheviks in the countryside. Yet the goal advocated by Lenin in the period of October Revolution was "to help the little peasantry, not to harm the middle peasantry and to hinder the rich peasantry". Thus the policy of war communism in the countryside was not a desired thing or a programmatic target on the part of Lenin, but a product of exigencies.

Meanwhile, in this period, foreign trade nearly stopped, the Soviet Russia was forced to autarky. And also these conditions led the Soviet financial system to a collapse. The

86 The transformations that a workers' democracy must carry out, unfortunately could not be accomplished due to the helplessness of the "isolated revolution" and the flames of the civil war. There were objective reasons for this, understandable from a historical point of view. However, after the USSR became transformed into a bureaucratic dictatorship, the official parades of troops in goose steps before the generals lined up in the stands in their gaudy uniforms with collections of medals were as if an irony of history!

87 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, Pathfinder, 1989, p.21

costs of civil war created an enormous problem of resources and, out of helplessness, banknote printing was increased in a planless way. In the end, the purchasing power of rouble fell steeply. And the prices came to make no sense as they did not increase in the official market to match the increase in the free market due to the depreciation of rouble. And practices such as the temporary abandonment of money during war communism period and the introduction of payment in kind were not the result of a conscious and must planning, but, on the contrary, of helplessness. Unfortunately, some Bolsheviks construed it as a *must practise*.

According to the party programme the need for money would cease only in the future. But a section of Soviet officials, construed the collapse of rouble due to the civil war as the sign of transition to an economy without money. For instance, Bukharin was prominent among those who regarded the practices of “war communism” as a necessary step on the road towards communism. For him the payment of wages in kind instead of money was the abolishment of wage-labour.

Yet war communism was a struggle for the survival of the Soviet power imposed by the circumstances in which hunger spread and there was no other option. These difficult circumstances could sometimes hurl many Bolsheviks including Lenin into entirely different positions than the correct considerations they had defended before. For instance, the suggestions put forward by Lenin and Trotsky with a view to raising labour-productivity and work-discipline during the harsh years of civil war in an endeavour to solve the hunger problem were of this nature.

In fact, in order to raise production, certain measures had been proposed, discussed and decided as early as in April 1918, i.e. before the civil war broke out, such as the enlistment of bourgeois experts with higher salaries, the attempt to introduce certain aspects of Taylorism,⁸⁸ which had been previously condemned, the resumption of piecework payment. Although such regulations were considered to put into practice in a more gradual manner in an agreement with the trade unions, the outbreak of civil war ruined the plans. As a result, these measures could not be implemented in a balanced way as considered and the tempo was speeded up. As the conditions deteriorated, new proposals were raised concerning the working conditions. The issues of *one-man management, the militarisation of labour* considered in 1920 are typical examples. It was Lenin and Trotsky themselves who raised these questions into the agenda to be debated. For instance, Lenin noted the following points against the criticism of the opposition on the basis of such problems:

Secondly, a condition for economic revival is the raising of the working people’s discipline, their skill, the effectiveness, the intensity of labour and its better organisation.

The more class-conscious vanguard of the Russian proletariat has already set itself the task of raising labour discipline. For example, both the Central Committee of the Metalworkers’ Union and the Central Council of Trade Unions have begun to

88 Taylorism derives from the American industrial specialist F. W. Taylor who pioneered the stopwatch system to make workers work more intensively.

draft the necessary measures and decrees. This work must be supported and pushed ahead with all speed. We must raise the question of piece-work and apply and test it in practice; we must raise the question of applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system; we must make wages correspond to the total amount of goods turned out, or to the amount of work done by the railways, the water transport system, etc., etc.⁸⁹

But, no matter who made the proposal, this sort of practices would inevitably increase the discontent among the workers and cause opposition on the part of trade unions. On this basis, different tendencies, opposing views and groups formed within the Bolshevik Party, the soviets and the trade unions. For us, to be able to appraise such a period there are certain points to be taken into account: the practical measures proposed by the leaders like Lenin and Trotsky even at the cost of contradicting their own goals cannot be judged out of the context of concrete circumstances. On the other hand, if the past events proved something wrong, it would not be a revolutionary attitude to ignore them. Moreover, the exemplary features of revolutionary leaders are not that they never make mistakes, but that they admit when they recognise the mistakes and stick to the principle of not fooling the masses. When a perverse practice against the goal of socialism emerges, it must be frankly expressed as it was in Lenin's example:

To conceal from the people the fact that the enlistment of bourgeois experts by means of extremely high salaries is a retreat from the principles of the Paris Commune would be sinking to the level of bourgeois politicians and deceiving the people.⁹⁰

In April 1919, the government declared state of emergency as a result of the intensification of the civil war. The trade unions sent nearly fifty percent of its members to the front. The collapse in the industry brought the issue of compulsory work into the agenda again. In early 1920, Kolchak and Denikin were defeated and the military detachments consisted of workers were considered to dispatch to the ruined industrial enterprises. Namely, the workers' detachments that had been mobilised for the Red Army were now considered to compose the *labour armies*. In his speech at the Third All-Russia Congress of Economic Councils in January 1920, Trotsky emphasised the importance of work discipline. A decree was issued which transformed the Third Army Corps operating in Urals into a revolutionary labour army and Trotsky announced that the first "labour army" was founded "on the initiative of the Red Army". And this was one of the questions discussed at the 9th Congress in March 1920. For Trotsky, the organisation of disciplined, enthusiastic, devoted labour armies, i.e. the factor that enabled the victory in the civil war, was necessary for the solution of industrial problems. Trotsky said:

Militarization is unthinkable without the militarization of the trade unions as such, without the establishment of a regime in which every worker feels himself a soldier of labour, who cannot dispose of himself freely; if the order is given to transfer him, he must carry it out; if he does not carry it out, he will be a deserter who is punished. Who looks after this? The trade union. It creates the new regime. This is

89 Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 27, p.258

90 Lenin, *ibid.*, p.249

the militarization of the working class.⁹¹

The congress endorsed the related proposal. In reality, it was a terrible bill of the economic collapse. However, having defeated the armies of Wrangel by late 1920's and thus put an end to the civil war, the workers started to change their minds. The practices that had been justifiable to some extent by the civil war were now regarded in a different manner. Therefore, the "militarisation of labour" provoked a reaction in the trade unions. And for us, Trotsky's position in relation to the trade unions was not correct. Nevertheless, we must not skip an important point: although it was Trotsky who was under the spotlights during the debates of this proposal, which was raised with a view to reviving the collapsed industrial production, Lenin, though cautiously, supported the same proposal as well. He said:

And in order to utilise our apparatus with the greatest possible dispatch, we must create a labour army.... In launching this slogan we declare that we must strain all the live forces of the workers and the peasants to the utmost and demand that they give us every help in this matter. And then, by creating a labour army, by harnessing all the forces of the workers and peasants, we shall accomplish our main task.⁹²

In short, if there was a mistake committed under the pressure of economic collapse, Trotsky and Lenin had both shared this mistake, though in different degrees. As the debates grew, the issue was brought to the Central Committee. Lenin made a distinction between "centralism and military forms of labour which will turn into a contemptible patronage over the trade-unions" and "healthy forms of militarisation of labour" and stood for the latter formulation. The debates around these problems continued until the complete abandonment of the policy of war communism at the party congress in March 1921 and occupied a significant space in the party literature.

If we are to make a general appraisal of the period, one must note that "war communism" was considered at that time to be a possible starting point for a planned economy on the road towards transition to socialism. But, by the end of the civil war the handling of the issue started to change when it began more apparent that any further continuation of this kind of policies would be wrong. For instance, Lenin drew a balance sheet of the past explaining the need to transition to NEP in April 1921: "It was the war and the ruin that forced us into War Communism. It was not, and could not be, a policy that corresponded to the economic tasks of the proletariat. It was a makeshift."⁹³ Indeed, the distribution of products by the state instead of commercial methods was encountered with the resistance of peasants and a steep fall in agricultural production resulted in, causing hunger in the cities. Meanwhile, the enormous cost of the civil war for the workers' state was a threatening factor.

Trotsky reminds the well-known lines of Marx that "a development of the productive forces is the absolutely necessary practical premise of communism and without it want

91 Quoted in E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, v.2, Penguin, 1966, pp.214-215

92 Lenin, "Third All-Russia Congress of Economic Councils", *CW*, Vol. 30, p.312

93 Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 32, p.343

is generalised, and with want the struggle for necessities begins again, and that means that all the old crap must revive”, adding that Marx did not feel the need to develop this thought because he never foresaw a proletarian revolution in a backward country. But this thought of Marx offers an indispensable key to the concrete problems and malaise of the Soviet regime.

On the historic basis of destitution, aggravated by the destructions of the imperialist and civil wars, the “struggle for individual existence” not only did not disappear the day after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, and not only did not abate in the succeeding years, but, on the contrary, assumed at times an unheard-of ferocity. Need we recall that certain regions of the country have twice gone to the point of cannibalism?⁹⁴

The bureaucratisation

During the civil war, more than half of the trade union members joined in the Red Army, and the number of industrial workers fell from around 3.5 million in 1913 to one million. The urban population decreased a lot due also to the migration to the countryside as a result of hunger, apart from losses in the civil war. While the urban population experienced a total decrease of around 35 percent, the decrease in the population of cities like Moscow and Petrograd, the bastions of the proletarian revolution and the centre of Bolshevik organisation, was much more than that. The population of Petrograd, for instance, fell from 2.5 million in 1917 to 500,000 by the end of civil war.

The experienced industrial proletariat, which had spearheaded the proletarian socialist revolution, was weakened due to the losses in the civil war and the migration to the countryside on account of the hunger in cities. And most of the remaining workers in the cities were being atomised due to the fact they tended to get a living from black market, trade, and so on. In consequence, the factories were filled with newcomers workers, who were inexperienced semi-worker/semi-peasant elements. The new workers constituted a favourable ground for the rise of bureaucratic leaders as they had not been tempered in the heat of the period of revolutionary struggle between 1903 and 1917 in big industrial centres, with their empty stomachs and lack of revolutionary consciousness, and also with their traditional obedience to bureaucratic authority resulting from the patriarchal heritage of Russian despotism.

On the other hand, the enormous fall in agricultural and industrial production and the famine fomented the struggle for individual survival. Thus, in order to prevent a chaos, an over-centralisation in economy and politics and most importantly the urgent measures to increase production were inevitable. As a result, the local soviets, the veins of soviet power, began to lose their functions. On the other hand, the self-seekers wearing *red shirts* crowded the higher ranks of the party and soviets in expectation of utilising the advantages of a government party as it became evident that the Bolsheviks would win the civil war. In consequence, the composition of membership of the Bolshevik Party underwent a radical transformation. One must take this unfavourable situation into account in order to make a proper evaluation of the real outcome of the civil war, which

94 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.56

was waged to defend the revolutionary power emerged out of the October Revolution.

The soviet government seems to have survived the civil war. The Soviet fortress, which remained isolated as the anticipated European revolution did not come about, was successfully protected against the imperialist siege and the attacks of the internal bourgeoisie and landlords. But, what was the cost of this triumph? To what extent could the possible measures to sustain the isolated Soviet fortress, which remained alone in the middle of the whole world amid the devastation caused by the civil war, be compatible with the spirit of the needed revolutionary social transformations?

An atomised proletariat at the end of the civil war, the poor peasants who started to pursue their petty interests of property concerning their small lands as soon as the invading armies were driven out, and a Bolshevik Party that faces a chaos caused by hunger... Such was the reality and the party turned out to be a helpless vanguard force deprived of its social basis to advance the revolution. Under such circumstances, the vanguard [force] striving to preserve the revolution –regardless of the leaders’ will and intentions– found itself to be the guardian of the revolutionary class. Under the circumstances where the revolutionary proletarian masses were perished due to the war and famine, the revolutionary leaders like Lenin and Trotsky and the Bolshevik revolutionaries, who acted with the responsibility of maintaining the October Revolution at least until the aid of world revolution, appear, in a sense, to have substituted themselves for the vanguard section of the proletariat. Though it is not possible, given the circumstances, to blame them for the necessary measures they would take, this experience does not provide a proper historical model for the progress of the socialist revolution.

Lenin, Trotsky, and the other Bolshevik warriors strove to save the masses from unendurable hunger and misery under those utterly unfavourable conditions. Nevertheless, their strivings were historically full of contradictions because of the objective conditions they were unable to change by their will. Thus, while the Bolshevik revolutionaries led by Lenin took measures to increase production (one-man management in the industry, diminishing role of the factory committees, recall of the bourgeois experts and the technical staff with high salaries, applying techniques like Taylorism), on the other hand, they were worriedly observing the growing evil of bureaucratisation.

Hence, the victory of the Russian proletariat in the civil war turned out to be a Pyrrhic victory since the rise of new masters, i.e. the Soviet bureaucracy, could not be prevented. That is why one must be utterly scrupulous in evaluating the historical experience. It would be a petit-bourgeois nihilist approach to put all the blame on the revolutionary leaders for the insurmountable difficulties under given historical circumstances, instead of trying to understand the objective reasons of their mistakes. Such is the attitude of anarchists in relation to the Soviet experience.

The anarchists contend that the methods applied out of exigencies and some unavoidable mistakes of Bolsheviks in practice are due to the inherent bureaucratism of Leninism. The anarchist thinking does not find any difference between Leninism and Stalinism and takes the latter as the natural continuation of the former. Thus, the anarchist writers

appraise the period between 1917-1921 as years of bureaucratic counter-revolution led by Lenin himself. But that is utter deceit. As a devoted Marxist, Lenin's commitment to proletarian democracy and his hostility toward bureaucratism is testified by his struggle in deed in those hard years when the revolution was under siege.

The workers' state born out of the October Revolution of 1917 was under serious threat, confirming the revolutionary leaders who had pointed to the dangers in case the European revolution would not come to aid. The bureaucratisation, which Lenin drew attention to in his writings and speeches, was spreading throughout the whole organism given the circumstances of economic and cultural backwardness. Leaving aside the talk of "success" to retain the political power in the early period of the revolution when there was a struggle against the extra-ordinary hardships of those days, one can easily see that Lenin himself expressed the weakness of the Soviet state just a few years after the revolution. Lenin's warnings against bureaucratism signify that favourable conditions existed for the rise of a bureaucratic rule.

The evil of bureaucratisation did not appear as soon as Stalin took the reins in the party and state organisation after Lenin's death. On the contrary, the bureaucratisation, which prepared the ground for the rise of Stalin-type leaders, had begun to emerge as a result of the isolation of the Russian Revolution in one country. In March 1919, Lenin professed a truth to the masses in his speech in the Petrograd Soviet.

We threw out the old bureaucrats, but they have come back ... they wear a red ribbon in their buttonholes and creep into warm corners. What to do about this? We must fight this scum again and again and if the scum has crawled back we must again and again clean it up ...⁹⁵

At the 8th Party Congress held in the same year, Lenin addressed to the party:

The tsarist bureaucrats began to join the Soviet institutions and practise their bureaucratic methods, they began to assume the colouring of Communists and, to succeed better in their careers, to procure membership cards of the Russian Communist Party....What makes itself felt here most is the lack of cultured forces.⁹⁶

The level of cultural development emphasised by Lenin was such a fundamental problem that the proletarian revolution could not get round in its struggle for the construction of a new type "non-bureaucratic state". Therefore, in case of isolation of the revolution in backward countries, the new could yield to and be diverted by the old, despite all the efforts of the revolutionary forces. Then, what could or should the party do? First of all, it would be correct to think that the party could not be the only factor of the evolution. We may stop here for a moment to look at Lenin's last speech to the party at the 11th Party Congress in 1922. In response to Ustryalov, a liberal professor, who said that the Soviets had to be supported since they have become bourgeois, Lenin stated that he preferred the daring speeches of an enemy to the "communist fibbing":

We must say frankly that the things Ustryalov speaks about are possible. History

95 Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 29, pp.32-33

96 Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 29, p.183

knows all sorts of metamorphoses. Relying on firmness of convictions, loyalty, and other splendid moral qualities is anything but a serious attitude in politics. A few people may be endowed with splendid moral qualities, but historical issues are decided by vast masses, which, if the few do not suit them, may at times treat them none too politely.

... sometimes one nation conquers another, the nation that conquers is the conqueror and the nation that is vanquished is the conquered nation. This is simple and intelligible to all. But what happens to the culture of these nations? Here things are not so simple. If the conquering nation is more cultured than the vanquished nation, the former imposes its culture upon the latter; but if the opposite is the case, the vanquished nation imposes its culture upon the conqueror. Has not something like this happened in the capital of the R.S.F.S.R.? Have the 4,700 Communists (nearly a whole army division, and all of them the very best) come under the influence of an alien culture?⁹⁷

The “supremacy” principle, which is applicable to the wars between nations in different cultural levels as well as to the struggle between the old and new forces, prevailed after the October Revolution too. This was what Lenin described with “the 4,700 Communists having come under the influence of an alien culture”. It was thought that the nomination of the Bolshevik commissars to the head of former bourgeois experts and Tsarist bureaucrats, who were called back due to the economic difficulties, would suffice to hinder the possible danger of bureaucratisation. Nevertheless the outcome was quite the contrary. Instead of adapting the bourgeois experts and the Tsarist bureaucrats to the ideals of the new regime, the latter adapted the commissars to themselves. As it can be understood from the literature of the time, the communists as the winner of the October Revolution faced the enormous resistance of the horde of officials of the old state. And while the Bolsheviks considered that they have broken the resistance of the officials and the experts, etc., in reality the old had sneaked into the new and predominated it. It was Lenin who said that the Soviet Government had hundreds of bureau officials and none of them had faith to the Soviet Government. (The numbers indicate that there were 5,880,000 state officials as against around 2,000,000 industrial workers in 1920).

Hence, despite its success in the October Revolution, the Soviet working class needed actual support of the proletariat of advanced countries in order to deal with the objective hardships the solution of which would take long years. On the other hand, the Soviet workers had to protect themselves against their bureaucratised state. As Lenin stated in December 1920:

Our Party Programme ... shows that ours is a workers' state *with a bureaucratic twist to it*.... We now have a state under which it is the business of the massively organised proletariat to protect itself, while we, for our part, must use these workers' organisations to protect the workers from their state, and to get them to protect our state.⁹⁸

What could be the truth that these words indicate? If the Soviet state had corresponded to

97 Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 33, pp.287 and 288.

98 Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 32, pp.24-25

the organisation of the proletariat as a ruling class, would it have been needed to use “the workers’ organisations to protect the workers from their state”? Undoubtedly no. Lenin was pointing to a reality with his emphasis on the “bureaucratic twist” and drawing attention to the fact that the Soviet state was losing its character as a workers’ state. It was this reality that propelled Lenin to think that the workers had to protect themselves against the Soviet state through the trade unions.

1921-1924: The Bureaucratic Degeneration of the State and the Party

Kronstadt mutiny

The civil war ended leaving enormous problems behind. The unrest within the Bolshevik Party on the basis of this situation resulted in the emergence of the largest opposition group ever since the revolution, i.e. the “Workers Opposition” group. The leaders of the group were Shliapnikov, a former metal worker, and Kollontai, the People’s Commissar of Labour in the first Soviet government. The opposition lacked a comprehensive programme; their views generally revealed a reaction against the growing centralism in the economic and the political life.

The famine in the cities and the terrible conditions of the peasantry compelled the government to introduce new measures to increase agricultural production. War communism was being brought to an end and a new economic policy (NEP) was being shaped that allowed the peasantry to sell part of its product in the market causing a revival of private trade. Lenin and the Bolshevik Party were preparing for the 10th Congress under such circumstances. But just before the congress a uprising broke out backed by the international capital and the counter-revolutionary forces. The uprising had a big impact since it broke out during a counter-revolutionary campaign which provoked the discontented masses and was conducted under the slogan of “Soviets without the Bolsheviks”. Trotsky assessed the incident as follows: “The fact that the Kronstadt mutiny has come at the moment when we are about to sign the peace treaty with Poland and the trade agreement with Britain is, of course, not accidental”.⁹⁹

The soldiers in Kronstadt, a naval base in the middle of the sea covered with ice and snow, revolted against the government in March 1921. The negotiations and the calls to end the mutiny turned out to be futile. And unfortunately, the mutiny could only be suppressed by clashes on 17 March while the discussions of the 10th Congress were going on. Trotsky said that the counter-revolutionary forces of capital, without explicitly opposing the soviets, was slyly using the slogan of “soviets without parties”, and he also emphasised an important fact: “A section of the sailors swallowed this bait. We waited as long as we could for the bemused sailor comrades to see with their own eyes where the mutiny was taking them.”¹⁰⁰

99 Trotsky, “On the Events at Kronstadt”, *The Military Writings of Leon Trotsky*, v.4: 1921-23, The Kronstadt Mutiny, [Marxist Internet Archive (MIA) at www.marxists.org]

100 Trotsky, “Speech at the parade in honour of the heroes of Kronstadt”, *ibid.*

The mutiny was a product of those unfavourable years. The rebellious sailors tried to secure legitimacy before the working masses with seemingly correct demands like “elections to the soviets through free elections”. However, the mutiny was essentially based on the manipulation of the unrest among the peasants by the anarchist leaders against the Bolsheviks. Of course the rebellious soldiers and supporting toilers, like in all similar cases in history, revolted due to reasons that seem utterly rightful to themselves, without knowing where it would lead to and by whom it was provoked and managed. Lenin also discerned this aspect of the incidence from the intentions of the counter-revolutionaries who manipulated the mutiny in their own interests:

Weariness and exhaustion produce a certain mood, and sometimes lead to desperation. As usual, this tends to breed anarchism among the revolutionary elements. ... The petty-bourgeois element is in the grip of a crisis because it has had it hard over the past few years ... That is why there is confusion and vacillation in its midst, and this is being taken into account by the capitalist enemy, who says: “All it needs is a little push, and it will start snowballing.”¹⁰¹

As a result, a delicate event had happened, favourable to exploit and extremely distressing for the Bolsheviks which caused them to be seriously accused by some in their appraisal of history. The attitude of anarchists in their appraisal of the Kronstadt mutiny explicitly displays their political make-up. Emphasising in a one-sided manner the spontaneous action of the masses and apparently rejecting all kinds of authority in principle and exalting the anti-authoritarianism and spontaneity, the anarchists conceal their roles in the mutiny as it suits them.¹⁰²

The anarchists appraise the mutiny without mentioning in the slightest way the changed class composition of the Kronstadt sailors in the course of the civil war. Yet, as the advanced worker elements of the 1917 sailors that supported the proletarian revolution had perished in the civil war, the majority of the 1921 Kronstadt sailors consisted of rather backward soldiers with peasant origins. Therefore, the mutiny did not break out as an action that raised the socialist demands of the industrial proletariat. On the contrary, it revealed the reaction of the peasants to the socialist goals of the Bolsheviks. The sailors of 1921 proceeded from the peasantry demands like “drive out the Bolsheviks from the soviets; create a free market in agriculture.”

Due to this reality, none of the opposition groups within the Bolshevik party objected to the suppression of the mutiny. In order to depict the suppression of the Kronstadt mutiny as an utterly unjustifiable act, certain writers alleged that some dissenting Bolsheviks also took part in the mutiny or that there were parallels between the demands of the mutineers and the platform of the Workers’ Opposition. But, there are no documents to prove it, nor any parallelism between the demands of the mutineers and of the Workers’

101 Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 32, p. 282

102 As a matter of fact, the anarchists themselves were among those who played a role in planning and inciting the mutiny. And they called on the masses to follow them instead of the Bolsheviks. Emphasising the spontaneous action of the masses in opposition to the leadership of the Bolsheviks, the anarchists in fact aimed at seizing the political leadership of the masses. In inciting the masses against the Bolshevik leaders, they were trying to get their leadership accepted.

Opposition.

The problem of trade unions

The Workers' Opposition group of the time was the mouthpiece of a tendency based on the viewpoint that the trade unions should have had superior rights over the industry and production. The debates on the problem of trade unions during the winters of 1920 and 1921 were on the agenda of the 10th Party Congress held in March 1921 with the publication of the book titled *Workers' Opposition* written by Kollontai. Trotsky then argued that the trade unions had to be subjected to the state. Lenin, on the other hand, differed from both Trotsky and the Workers' Opposition and tried to influence the congress, arguing for the independence of the trade unions from the state.

The Bolshevik Party published a double-issue of internal discussion bulletin for the discussion of different views. Nevertheless, Lenin was worried since the problem came along just after a crisis like Kronstadt mutiny, and though he criticised the viewpoint of Trotsky, he waged his essential struggle against the Kollontai group. For Lenin, it was quite natural to discuss different views within the party. But, it could not be approved on the other hand that the members of a communist party raise their criticisms in the line of such a political current like syndicalism that is alien to communism. The Workers' Opposition, nevertheless, stated that their views could not be accused of syndicalism. In their theses, the Opposition stated, "The workers' unions must be drawn from the present position of passive assistance to the economic institutions into active participation in the management of the entire economic structure"¹⁰³ and asked "Is this syndicalism? Is not this, on the contrary, the same as what is stated in our Party programme?"¹⁰⁴

Lenin put a full-stop to the discussion by winning the majority of the congress and made speeches underlining the necessity of the party unity under given difficult circumstances. The main theme was:

Comrades, we have passed through an exceptional year, we have allowed ourselves the luxury of discussions and disputes within the Party. This was an amazing luxury for a Party shouldering unprecedented responsibilities and surrounded by mighty and powerful enemies uniting the whole capitalist world.

I do not know how you will assess that fact now. Was it fully compatible with our resources, both material and spiritual?¹⁰⁵

The Congress made two decisions upon Lenin's theses on the indispensability of the party unity. The first one was on the syndicalist and the anarchist deviation in the party; and the other, on the incompatibility of spreading the views of the Workers' Opposition with party membership. Having been re-elected for the Central Committee, the members of the Workers' Opposition group resigned. But the congress did not accept the resignations and called on them to remain in the party and obey the party discipline. Although, in fact,

103 A. Kollontai, "The Trade-unions: Their Role & Problems", *Workers' Opposition*, [Marxist Internet Archive (MIA)]

104 A. Kollontai, *ibid.*

105 Lenin, "Tenth Congress of the RCP(B)", *CW*, Vol. 32, s.168

it was quite normal in political struggle for those who have different views to defend their differences or resign, the given hardships, unfortunately, compelled Lenin to bend the stick in a different direction. But, considering that the goal of Workers' Opposition was to keep alive the workers' democracy, the attitude towards them was hardly acceptable. However, the members of the opposition were not banished or murdered, but called upon to remain in the party, entirely unlike the practices in the period of Stalinist reign!

The Congress appended a paragraph to the concerning resolution, which was preferred to be kept secret as it would be temporary and in use only under extraordinary circumstances. According to this paragraph, those who do not obey the party unity including the members of the Central Committee would be demanded to be expelled from the party. However, it was yet the period of Lenin. Therefore, the demand was not left to the will of one person as in the Stalin era, but tied to a rule. The concerned paragraph included the following condition:

A necessary condition for the application of such an extreme measure to members of the Central Committee, alternate members of the Central Committee and members of the Control Commission is the convocation of a Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee, to which all alternate members of the Central Committee and all members of the Control Commission shall be invited. If such a general assembly of the most responsible leaders of the Party deems it necessary by a two-thirds majority to reduce a member of the Central Committee to the status of alternate member, or to expel him from the Party, this measure shall be put into effect immediately.¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, when we remember the fact that such resolutions to secure the party unity were so much abused after Lenin's death, the resolution should still mean a negative step for the party life. In fact, the enormous post-civil war ruin had also influenced inner party life and drove the leadership of the party, including Lenin, into great deal of contradictions. For instance, it was Lenin who emphasised that over-centralisation in economy and politics was in fact the result of "war communism" necessitated by the civil war and that after the war it was necessary to improve the workers' democracy. On the other hand, Lenin could bring the above mentioned measures into the agenda of the party since the difficulties were not overcome yet. Yet, the Workers' Opposition group demanded a revival of the democratic spirit within the party. In its campaign the Workers' Opposition had three basic principles:

- (1) Return to the principle of election all along the line with the elimination of all bureaucracy, by making all responsible officials answerable to the masses.
- (2) Introduce wide publicity within the Party ...
- (3) Make the Party more of a workers' Party. Limit the number of those who fill offices, both in the Party and the Soviet institutions at the same time.¹⁰⁷

The error of the Workers' Opposition group which offered correct and progressive

106 Lenin, *ibid.*, p.244

107 A. Kollontai, "On Bureaucracy & Self-activity of The Masses", *Workers' Opposition*, [Marxist Internet Archive (MIA)]

measures to reinforce the workers' democracy, was perhaps they hoped that the problems could be overcome on the basis of strict commitment to the idea of the necessity of the self-organisation of the class. Unfortunately, the reality was not favourable to put this good intention into use; the proletariat had been declassed and bereft of strength to reinforce workers' democracy.

The year 1921 is a new turning point with full of negative results for the workers' state. Bearing this fact in mind, the desire to solve problems, say, on the basis of the revolutionary proletariat organised in the trade unions or in the soviets appears to be a wishful thinking. Actually, the revolutionary leaders also desired that. Indeed, in his last writings, Lenin sought for the assistance from the control of the working masses and considered for a Central Committee consisted of hundreds of common workers against the enormous deformation in the workers' state and the party. However, a number of social unrests that broke out under the circumstances, unfortunately, compelled the party and its leaders, Lenin and Trotsky, to take harsh measures with the hope of saving the workers' state from devastation. That the opposition parties banned, the right of opposition within the Bolshevik Party was suspended within the Bolshevik Party, and so on, were incidents of some negative results of the turning point of 1921. Though the measures enabled the Soviet government to survive for that period, they were far from being measures reinforcing the revolution. On the contrary, they were manifestation of isolation and weakness. Therefore, these measures would not abolish the objective conditions that create the bureaucratic deformation but lead to a colossal growth of the bureaucratic deformation in the long run. The year 1921 was a turning point characterised by that the bureaucratic deformation could not be prevented but grew into bureaucratic degeneration despite the intentions and wills of the revolutionary leaders.

In 1921, Lenin enumerated the fundamental factors threatening the revolution as follows: "We are carrying on propaganda against barbarism and against ulcers like bribery ... In my opinion, three chief enemies now confront one, irrespective of one's departmental functions; these tasks confront the political educationalist, if he is a Communist – and most of the political educationalists are. The three chief enemies that confront him are the following: the first is communist conceit; the second – illiteracy, and the third – bribery."¹⁰⁸ Ideally, the main lever in the struggle with bureaucratic deformation of the workers' state could have been the active intervention of the proletariat organised in the soviets, the factory committees and the trade unions. That was also the chief factor that would enable the revolutionary leaders like Lenin and Trotsky to maintain their influence. In other words, the Bolshevik Party was not an abstract entity immune to the existing social conditions, malaise and bureaucratic deformation, but a concrete social entity, which, in the last analysis, could make its way insofar as there exists a vigilant revolutionary proletariat. Yet, even the following sentence of Lenin alone indicates the gravity of the situation:

The capitalists will gain from our policy and will create an industrial proletariat, which in our country, owing to the war and to the desperate poverty and ruin, has

108 Lenin, "The New Economic Policy and the Tasks of the Political Education Departments", *CW*, Vol. 33, p.77

become declassed, i. e., dislodged from its class groove, and has ceased to exist as a proletariat.¹⁰⁹

NEP

The year 1921 was an important turning point also from the standpoint of economic policy. On the 10th Congress of the Party an economic package of new measures was approved. Proposed by Lenin, the package included some concessions to the peasants. Thus the policy of “war communism” of the civil war period was put an end to and a new era was ushered in to overcome the economic hardships. This *New Economic Policy*, which was called *NEP*, was for preventing the danger of famine and economic devastation and improving the economic relations in the countryside. Lenin stated that unless revolution broke out in other countries, the social revolution in Russia could only be saved by an agreement with the peasantry and that it was impossible and dangerous to attempt to a hasty transformation of the small-scale production and peasantry. Indeed, this issue had already been raised by the founders of Marxism as a programmatic warning. In his *The Peasant Question in France and Germany* Engels wrote about the programmatic views of the communists against the small peasants:

... it is just as evident that when we are in possession of state power we shall not even think of forcibly expropriating the small peasants (regardless of whether with or without compensation), as we shall have to do in the case of the big landowner. Our task relative to the small peasant consist, in the first place, in effecting a transition of his private enterprise and private possession to co-operative ones, not forcibly but by dint of example and the proffer of social assistance for this purpose. And then of course we shall have ample means of showing to the small peasant prospective advantages that must be obvious to him even today.

We of course are decidedly on the side of the small peasant; we shall do everything at all permissible to make his lot more bearable, to facilitate his transition to the co-operative should he decide to do so, and even to make it possible for him to remain on his small holding for a protracted length of time to think the matter over, should he still be unable to bring himself to this decision.¹¹⁰

Before the Stalinist bureaucratic rule was founded and a falsified version of “Marxism” shaped the views and practices of the world communist movement, the communists had been advocating that socialism could not be founded through commands from the top, through the oppression of the toiling masses and they had been discerning themselves from all kinds of petit-bourgeois socialist movements. Yet, the oppression of and coercion on the small peasants on the basis of “rapid collectivisation” during Stalin’s era created an insurmountable abyss in view of the principled approach of Marxism. The following remarks of Lenin are as if to show the historical reason for the reaction of the toiling masses against the bureaucratic dictatorships that had oppressed them for many years:

Creative activity at the grass roots is the basic factor of the new public life.
... Socialism cannot be decreed from above. Its spirit rejects the mechanical bureaucratic approach; living, creative socialism is the product of the masses

109 Lenin, *ibid.*, p.65

110 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 3, pp.470, 471.

themselves.¹¹¹

With the beginning of the NEP period the peasantry were indeed bestowed some rights. For instance, after giving certain amount of their produce to the state, they were allowed to sell the rest on the market. Despite the fact that the low level of production in 1921, which was due to natural disasters, led to the continuation of the danger of famine and of hardships, the harvests of 1922 and 1923 turned out to be good, bringing along a relief. But it was at the cost of the growth of social differences in the countryside. Because the kulak (rich peasantry) grew rich with the lifting of restrictions on production for market. With the introduction of new legal regulations in 1922, “the right to rent land and hire workers” that had been banned on principle following the October Revolution was now legal to a certain extent.

NEP was a reinstatement of the capitalist relations in the countryside under the control of the workers’ state. In order to describe the control and regulation of capitalist relations by the workers’ state, Lenin used the term “state capitalism”. He said:

Not directly relying on enthusiasm, but aided by the enthusiasm engendered by the great revolution, and on the basis of personal interest, personal incentive and business principles, we must first set to work in this small-peasant country to build solid gangways to socialism by way of state capitalism.¹¹²

On the basis of lessons drawn from the practices of “war communism”, Lenin had to bring to the agenda the necessity of a long transition period and development of capitalism in the countryside under the control of the workers’ state. That is, he was describing NEP as not a proper step forward that must be taken on the road to socialism, but an inescapable necessity due to the isolation of the proletarian revolution in a backward country. In retrospect, Lenin was to state in his last writings that their one-sided emphasis on the necessity of NEP had been wrong. He was to draw the attention of the party to the fact that the drawbacks of this policy could be balanced by launching a campaign of co-operativising in the countryside and a cultural revolution. In Trotsky’s words, Lenin explained the necessity of restoring the market by the existence in the country of millions of isolated peasant enterprises, unaccustomed to define their economic relations with the outside world except through trade.

On the other hand, it was also very important to put an end to the commercial isolation of the Soviet Union. And the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement was signed on 16 March 1921 in London as a result of negotiations with the British government and the representatives of some companies. The most important point the Bolsheviks accepted was that the Comintern would stop the anti-British propaganda in the colonies. One of the most concrete results of this was that the Congress of Eastern Peoples has never met again. This policy change which coincides with the NEP also had its impact on the relations of the Soviet Union with the Eastern countries. For instance, in the same year with the Anglo-Soviet agreement the Soviet Union signed another agreement with Turkey, in

111 Lenin, “Meeting of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee -November 4 (17) 1917, *CW*, Vol. 26, s.288

112 Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 33, s.58

which both counties proclaimed their solidarity in “the war against imperialism”.¹¹³ Likewise, similar relations were carried on with the Germans.

With the introduction of NEP, the industrial nationalisations stopped. Most of the large-scale enterprises were already at the hands of the state. However, in order to make these enterprises work, the individual entrepreneurs or the former owners of these enterprises were now allowed to rent them. Meanwhile, the enterprises of less than twenty workers were not in general considered for nationalisation. The individual entrepreneurs in the industry as well as in the agriculture were allowed to sell the products on the market, provided they pay the tax. All these innovations enabled an increase in production and a certain recovery, but on the other hand prepared the ground for major dangers. As Lenin pointed out at the 10th Congress of the Bolshevik Party, though these measures were necessary, the “freedom of trade” meant nothing but the encouragement of capitalism. Indeed, in his report to the 11th Party Congress in 1922, Lenin described the NEP as a “regression” and emphasised that discipline was hundred times necessary in such a period.

In 1922, the Goods Exchange was founded in Moscow to establish control over trade. The new urban rich, the merchants (the NEPmen), were increasing their level of trade activities. The co-operatives, introduced as a rectifying addendum to the NEP policy, were not sufficient at all; therefore it was the NEPmen who controlled the retail trade not the consumer co-operatives. Meanwhile, one of the most important problems was the *price crisis*. As the market fluctuations of the NEP period replaced the price control of the war communism period, the unbalance between agriculture and industry gave rise to steep price hikes. Furthermore, the rights granted to individual entrepreneurs led the working class to face similar problems as in capitalism such as low wages, threat of unemployment and so on. Another thing that increased the discontent among the workers was the introduction of a measure that had been considered earlier on but could not have been put into practice due to war communism. Former factory managers and bourgeois experts were re-employed in higher wages.

In conclusion, despite a certain relief in the countryside thanks to NEP, the affairs in the industry were not sorted out. Economic unbalances manifested themselves in the instability of rouble and serious crises in financial system. And these problems persisted. Despite symptoms of a temporary recovery in the economy in 1924, the situation was still delicate. “Although the total industrial output of the year that ended by 1 January 1924 was 2.5 times the output of 1920 according to Gosplan figures, it could hardly reach 40 percent of the pre-war level, and 28.7 percent in metal industry.”¹¹⁴ Therefore, now some dissenting voices were arising against NEP practices that were formerly considered to

113 Stating that this agreement caused long standing troubles, E. H. Carr explains the reasons as follows: “Three months before the signing of the agreement, the leader of the illegal Turkish Communist Party was killed by Kemal’s men and the other Turkish communists were either killed or arrested, and it was known that the suppression of communism was one of the objectives of the Kemalist regime.” (E.H.Carr, *Russian Revolution from Lenin to Stalin*, our translation from the Turkish edition)

114 E.H.Carr, *The Russian Revolution from Lenin to Stalin*, our translation from the Turkish edition.

have alleviated the problems.

Lenin's last period

The fact that the party and state merged, and the role of the soviets gradually withered away under conditions where the political regime is based on one-party, i.e. the Bolshevik Party, revealed the seriousness of the danger threatening the workers' state. Lenin proposed a rearrangement of mutual rights and duties of the party and the state in his speech (his last speech to the party) at the 11th Party Congress in March 1922. He was concerned about the general course of events: "The machine refused to obey the hand that guided it. It was like a car that was going not in the direction the driver desired, but in the direction someone else desired; ... and often it goes in an altogether different direction."¹¹⁵ In the last speech of his life at the 4th Congress of Comintern in November 1922, he said: "We took over the old machinery of state, and that was our misfortune."¹¹⁶

In his last writings and in his famous testament, Lenin pointed to the discomfiting consequences of the Stalinist bureaucratic apparatus. He was as if crying out with the anxiety of a revolutionist who wants to fulfil his last duty of saving the party and state from this apparatus. In May 1922, Lenin had a stroke that prevented him from working for weeks. He could start working in autumn and made several speeches. When he started working after the stroke, he was terrified due to the power and authority that Stalin's bureau and staff acquired. In December, Lenin had another stroke and in the following three months he dictated some notes and articles on party problems. On 24 December 1923, Lenin dictated his famous testament to which he appended a note on 4 January. As Lenin stated in this appendix, Stalin was "too rude". He must be removed from the position of General Secretary and replaced with "another man who is more patient, more loyal, more polite and more attentive to comrades, less capricious, etc." Moreover, Lenin declared that he ended his "comradely relations" with Stalin in a letter dated 5 March after Stalin insulted Krupskaya. After a third stroke on 9 March 1923, Lenin was unable to speak and though he lived for ten months, he could never work again.

Advocating that the united state apparatus of Soviet Republics (USSR) be founded according to the principle of complete equality, Lenin grew angry at the rude and aggressive conduct of the Stalin faction that resorted to Russian chauvinism against the Georgian communists. Lenin, for this reason, severely condemns Stalin, Dzerzhinsky and Ordzhonikidze in person. Lenin, in his article titled *The Question of Nationalities or 'Autonomisation'*, which was dictated in December 1922, launched an open struggle against the Stalin faction. The Stalinist faction tries to conceal their great nation chauvinism and bureaucratic aggressiveness under the pretext of "a united apparatus was needed". Lenin's response to this attitude, as in his testament, demonstrates the rightfulness of Lenin's desire to get rid of Stalin from the head of the party.

It is said that a united apparatus was needed. Where did that assurance come from? Did it not come from that same Russian apparatus which, as I pointed out in one of the preceding sections of my diary, we took over from tsarism and slightly anointed

115 Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 33, p.279

116 Lenin, *ibid.*, p.428

with Soviet oil?...

It is quite natural that in such circumstances the “freedom to secede from the union: by which we justify ourselves will be a mere scrap of paper, unable to defend the non-Russians from the onslaught of that really Russian man, the Great-Russian chauvinist, in substance a rascal and a tyrant, such as the typical Russian bureaucrat is. There is no doubt that the infinitesimal percentage of Soviet and sovietised workers will drown in that tide of chauvinistic Great-Russian riffraff like a fly in milk.”¹¹⁷

In this article, Lenin stresses on the need to take measures to provide the non-Russians with a real safeguard against the truly Russian bully. He explains that people of other nationalities who have become Russified “over-do this Russian frame of mind” and shows that the rude and aggressive conduct toward the communists of the oppressed nations stem from Stalin-type bureaucrats. And without explicitly giving his name he warns the party about Stalin:

The Georgian who is neglectful of this aspect of the question, or who carelessly flings about accusations of “nationalist-socialism” (whereas he himself is a real and true “nationalist-socialist”, and even a vulgar Great-Russian bully), violates, in substance, the interests of proletarian class solidarity, for nothing holds up the development and strengthening of proletarian class solidarity so much as national injustice; “offended” nationals are not sensitive to anything so much as to the feeling of equality and the violation of this equality, if only through negligence or jest- to the violation of that equality by their proletarian comrades.¹¹⁸

Finally, the following lines are extremely educative as they represent the most striking warnings against bureaucratic degeneration and a questioning of the process in the face of such an evil without even excluding himself:

We don’t know how to conduct a public trial for rotten bureaucracy: for this all of us, and particularly the People’s Commissariat for Justice, should be hung on stinking ropes. And I have not yet lost all hope that one day we shall be hung for this, *and deservedly so*.¹¹⁹

To what degree could the subjective factor be effective against these unfavourable objective conditions? In order to avoid from an abstract discussion, we must avoid from identifying the subjective element with the party and from considering the party as an abstract entity. If we leave aside the fact that even the best revolutionary leaders might commit a number of mistakes under extremely difficult conditions when faced colossal problems, the question that must be asked is this: Is there a potent, conscious, organised revolutionary proletarian bulk so that can assure even the existence of a revolutionary leadership within the party? If not, it would but be a wishful thinking to say, “this or that must have been done”. Even the survival of a revolutionary leadership, which could at least partly accomplish the tasks, would be a problem.

117 Lenin, “The Question of Nationalities or ‘Autonomisation’”, *CW*, Vol. 36, [Marxist Internet Archive (MIA)]

118 Lenin, *ibid*.

119 Lenin, *CW*, Vol. 36, p.557 [quoted in T. Cliff, *Lenin: Revolution Besieged*, pp.159-60]

What does it mean that the industrial proletariat which had come together with a revolutionary enthusiasm behind the barricades in 1917, came to be declassified a few years later? This situation indisputably signifies that the sovietic workers' state born out of the October Revolution has been deprived of its social base. It was very unfortunate from the standpoint of the vanguard that, at that moment, the revolutionary leaders tried to save the revolution by substituting themselves for the self-organisation of the class and maintain the soviet rule through one-party dictatorship.

Nevertheless, a mentality that sees this state of affairs as if a desired goal, which in fact was but a terrible impasse from the point of view of history, has unfortunately survived. For instance, at the 12th Party Congress held in Lenin's absence, Zinoviev's statements that nearly praised the dictatorship of the Central Committee against some Bolsheviks, who tried to explain that the party dictatorship was actually an unfavourable situation, are striking:

We need a single strong, powerful Central Committee which is leader of everything ... The Central Committee is the Central Committee because it is the same Central Committee for the soviets, and for the trade unions, and for the co-operatives, and for the provincial executive committees and for the whole working class. In this consists the role of leadership, in this is expressed the dictatorship of the party.¹²⁰

One wonders if Zinoviev and co-thinking Bolsheviks remembered these kinds of statements when they were murdered with the order of the omnipotent Stalinist Central Committee! And what can be said about those who sanctify one-party dictatorship in the name of socialism and insist on following the course of Stalin even years have passed after these painful episodes of history?!

As a matter of fact, there was a definite conflict within the Bolshevik Party between retrogressive subjective elements and those who want to make the revolution progress. The retrogressive subjective factors can be enumerated as the transformation of the composition of the party due to the loss of the Bolshevik vanguard workers in the civil war, the replacement of the former experienced workers with a new generation of workers coming out of young peasants, the emergence of bureaucratic tendencies within the party in expectation of enjoying the blessings of power, the crowding of the petit bourgeois elements into the party who want to enjoy the advantages of power and the emergence of Stalin-type leaders against this background of backwardness. The progressive subjective factors, on the other hand, were consisted merely of revolutionary leaders like Lenin and Trotsky, who were committed to the interests of the world revolution within a backward country, and the experienced Bolshevik warriors who were striving to keep the revolution alive, though with a diminishing number. In short, the former was overriding.

It is possible to observe the bureaucratic degeneration in the Bolshevik Party from the numbers showing the changing composition of the party. While the members of the Bolshevik Party, who actively participated in the struggle in the revolutionary process of 1917, formed one-tenth of the party in 1919, this ratio was one-fortieth in 1922. The

120 quoted in T. Cliff, *ibid.*, pp.174-75

position of the proletariat in the production process deteriorated in favour of the rising new bureaucrats, managers, and directors. For instance, while 65% of the administrative personnel were consisted of workers and 35% of non-workers in 1922, these percentages reversed in 1923: 26% as against 64%.

What is important here is the fact that the evil of bureaucratisation is unavoidable unless the proletarian revolution make progress on an international level, rather than whether the party does this or that to protect the revolution on a national level. It would be an inexcusable concession from the point of view of the goal of world revolution to ignore this point and pay whole attention to the preservation of a revolution in one country.

To put it with a concrete example, we must remember the measures resorted to by the revolutionary leaders in order to increase the production when they faced the economic collapse during the civil war, which, in the last analysis, aggravated the bureaucratisation. The leaders of a revolution which is isolated in a backward country like Russia were compelled to call back the bourgeois experts. Then, did these revolutionary leaders forget that the proletarian revolution in a backward country could advance only with the revolutionary thrust of the proletariat in advanced countries? Of course they did not. However, in the absence of an international thrust, which would enable the organisation of international revolutionary detachments of the world proletariat and mobilise the communists of various countries to solve the practical problems of the Russian Revolution (such as the organisation of production, education of the proletariat and their preparation for management), the leaders of the October Revolution, surely feeling the deep distress of falling into contradiction with their own principles, were compelled to call back the bourgeois experts with higher wages. Under the circumstances where the world revolution could not be advanced, Rosa Luxemburg's reproach for the German proletariat is not unfair, who expressed her revolutionary anger at those who put all the blame upon the weakness of the Russian proletariat and the revolutionary leaders. In this context, while she boldly emphasised the "the fatal inertia of the German masses", on the other hand, she expressed the need for a critical assessment due to the traps of all kinds that beset the revolutionary leaders.

There is no doubt that the wise heads at the helm of the Russian Revolution, that Lenin and Trotsky on their thorny path beset by traps of all kinds, have taken many a decisive step only with the greatest inner hesitation and with most violent inner opposition. And surely nothing can be farther from their thoughts than to believe that all the things they have done or left undone under the conditions of bitter compulsion and necessity in the mids of the roaring whirlpool of events, should be regarded by the International as a shining example of socialist policy toward which only uncritical admiration and zealous imitation are in order.

It would be no less wrong to fear that a critical examination of the road so far taken by the Russian Revolution would serve to weaken the respect for and the attractive power of the example of the Russian Revolution, which alone can overcome the fatal inertia of the German masses.¹²¹

121 *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, Pathfinder, 1999, p.504

The conclusion to be drawn is as follows: When the objective conditions have matured on a world scale, the only guarantee to keep alive and protect the proletarian revolution, in the last analysis, is the revolutionary internationalist consciousness and the level of revolutionary preparedness of the world proletariat. However, this is dependent on an organised struggle that has to be waged well before the revolution has broken out and not after that. And the fulfilment of this task is possible only if there is a revolutionary internationalist leadership that aims at the world revolution and educates the proletarian masses in this perspective.

However, such a leadership did not exist when the October Revolution broke out. The Second International was like a “rotten corpse” and busy strangling the revolution in Europe hand in hand with the imperialist bourgeoisie. Yet, the construction of a new and revolutionary international started only two years after the October Revolution and one year after the strangling of the German Revolution, which means that it was too late. The Second International was, as Rosa described, like a “rotten corpse”. Until the foundation of the Third International, the international proletarian movement had been deprived of a revolutionary international leadership sticking to the goal of world revolution. All these factors explain the passivity of the European proletariat during the process started by the October Revolution.

That the Bolshevik Party, led by Lenin, turned out to find itself in a position of the guardian of the proletariat and strove to save the Soviet power during the process between 1921 and 1924 was only one side of the coin. On the other side is the reality that the one-party now in power has been deprived of its social base to fight the evil of bureaucratic degeneration. Therefore, the entire political struggle and the fight for power would be conducted within that one-party. That reality which came into being due to the objective exigencies in Lenin’s era, was to be turned into an opportunity in the hands of Stalin-type leaders to ensure the domination of the rising bureaucracy. The bureaucratic degeneration of the Bolshevik Party between 1921-1924 would point to the becoming of the Soviet state vulnerable to a bureaucratic counter-revolution, increasingly ceasing to be a workers’ state.

Under these circumstances, the gains of the October Revolution were under severe threat though they were still not lost completely. The degeneration of the Bolshevik Party signified the elimination of the last factor that remained as the only guarantee to wage a fight in the historical interests of the proletariat under given conditions. When the soviets ceased in reality to play their indispensable role in power, the struggle between the bureaucratic oligarchy rising in the party and state and the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat has turned out to be the decisive factor. In a revolutionary bastion like Russia, isolated on the basis of economic and cultural backwardness, the gradual transformation of the power of workers’ soviets into one-party power, though it emerged due to the compulsion of preserving the revolutionary power, turns the question of who is to lead the party into a life and death question. Indeed, as we approach 1924, despite all the endeavours of leaders like Lenin and others, it was to be observed that the reins would be seized by the rising bureaucracy in the party organisation and thus the Soviet institutions transformed into an apparatus of domination of the bureaucracy.

The passing of the party leadership into the hands of the triumvirate of Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev due to the illness of Lenin served to create the historical opportunity for the bureaucracy and Stalin in the Bolshevik Party. Considering these facts, though the analyses of some opposition groups (like Workers' Opposition or the Democratic Centralists) had lapses and shortcomings, it turns out that there is point in their cries that the workers' state had ceased to exist.

The economic crisis deepened by the summer and the autumn of 1923. Actually, the prices of industrial products had increased against the prices of agricultural products since September 1922. Accordingly, Trotsky carried that central problem to the 12th Party Congress in September 1923 and pointed out to this price unbalance called *scissors crisis* which was caused by the increasing gap between the prices of agricultural products and industrial products. The situation was truly serious and Trotsky, in his critical letter to the Central Committee in 8 October, stated that this crisis could not be overcome by trying to command the prices as in the period of war communism. According to him, there was urgent need for measures such as a reorganisation of large-scale state enterprises and a plan. A week after Trotsky's letter the declaration of *the Platform of the 46* was published, signed by both those who support Trotsky and various opposing elements. In the declaration the economic crisis was drawn attention to, and the mismanagement of the economy and the repressive regime in the party were criticised.

Though the opposition demanded for the gathering of a broader party conference to discuss these important problems, the party leadership only allowed them to express their views in the columns of *Pravda*. Actually, even that little concession was a last instance and the opposition would never again be granted such a right. On 25 October the Central Committee condemned both Trotsky's letter of 8 October and the Platform of the 46. The triumvirate of Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev now openly girded on their swords to attack Trotsky.

In 15 December, Stalin ushered in a new era publishing an article in *Pravda* against Trotsky. Throughout that era in which Stalin collaborated with Zinoviev and Kamenev to get rid of Trotsky by means of various lies and intrigues, the insults against Trotsky were conducted under the accusation of "Trotskyism" invented in fact by Zinoviev and Kamenev. And, when Lenin was on his deathbed in January 1924, Stalin condemned the opposition in the Party Congress and blamed Trotsky personally for opposition against the party leadership. Was not this result an evident demonstration of how Lenin was right in his concerns about Stalin in his testament and to what degree the triumvirate took the testament seriously?

1924-1928: The Process of Bureaucratic Counter-Revolution

That the isolation of the Soviet Union was certain with the defeat of the German Revolution and the ebb of the revolutionary tide in Europe led to a sharpening of the conflict between the groups in the Bolshevik Party, particularly after Lenin's death. The conflict was now between the rising bureaucracy and the Bolshevik-Leninists (The Left Opposition), which kept defending the historical interests of the proletariat. This period

of conflicts between 1924-1928 would be a process of bureaucratic counter-revolution in which the bureaucracy set out to liquidate the workers' power that have lost its function as a result of the bureaucratic degeneration.

The peculiarity of this process lies in the following: A bureaucracy that consisted not only of the relics of the bureaucrats of the old order, but more importantly of the new masters rising in the soviets and the party, is now marching forward to establish its own absolute domination. This was not an external but an internal counter-revolutionary process, rather different from a potential bourgeois counter-revolution. That is, the proletariat, in this process, was removed from political power by the bureaucracy that reinforced its positions in the Bolshevik Party and the soviets instead of overt attacks of its former class enemy, i.e. the bourgeoisie. Though in appearance the party organisations and the soviets kept their formal existence, in reality they were ceasing to be the sign of life of the workers' power. The bureaucracy dominated the soviets and the Bolshevik Party and thus the workers' state was being liquidated. Of course, when such a process reaches its conclusion, then it would be impossible to speak of the indispensable prerequisite of a workers' state, i.e. the sovietic state structure (non-bureaucratic state, the state as a workers' democracy), even if the bureaucracy preserved the formal existence of the soviets. In short, the workers' state will have definitely ceased to exist with the establishment of the absolute power of the rising bureaucracy in the party and the state.

Hence, the power struggle of the Stalinist faction within the Bolshevik Party, now blatant after Lenin's death, is the struggle of domination of the rising bureaucracy as a new class over the proletariat. Under conditions where the other parties were eliminated, where the Bolshevik Party and the state became merged, where the class [the proletariat] was declassed, the power struggle of the bureaucracy took the form of internal party intrigues and liquidations conducted against the Bolshevik-Leninists who advocated the historical interests of the proletariat. This is the expression of the peculiarity of the process of bureaucratic counter-revolution.

By Lenin's death, a lack of authority appeared, an authority which would unite the revolutionary elements in the party. The struggle of the Left Opposition in the Bolshevik Party turned out ineffective, because the internal party democracy did not function at all and the reins were completely concentrated in the hands of the secretary general Stalin. The old Bolshevik leaders like Zinoviev and Kamenev, who were to oppose Stalin later on, in a sense prepared their own ends since it was acceptable for them to collaborate with Stalin in their struggle for supremacy, apart from the fact that they were also unable to establish a political unity. Such factors were incomparably important due to the exceptional conditions wherein the political struggle for power occurred in one party, rather than between more than one parties.

The Left Opposition

Due to the economic hardships of the period, the focal point for the internal groupings was different views about achieving industrialisation. Three main groups emerged in the party on the question of the relationship between agriculture and industry. The Left

Opposition that included Trotsky too, defended a planned and rapid industrialisation. Meanwhile Trotsky continued the struggle launched by Lenin against bureaucratism and called on the party to beware of the intrigues of the Stalinist faction. Trotsky criticised bureaucratism on 8 December 1923 in his “Letter to Party Meetings” which was part of his pamphlet *The New Course*:

*Bureaucratism of the apparatus is precisely one of the principal sources of factionalism. It ruthlessly represses criticism and drives discontent back into the depths of the organisation. It tends to put the label of factionalism upon any criticism, any warning. Mechanical centralism is necessarily complemented by factionalism, which is at once a malicious caricature of democracy and a potential political danger.*¹²²

The Left Opposition, with the suggestion of rapid industrialisation, demanded the encouragement of the heavy industry, over-pricing of machines, and thus transferring sources to the industry and compelling the *kulaks* to mechanisation by means of economic factors. In fact, the fundamental problem of Russia was then to get industrialised, which would enable improvement in economy. Nevertheless, it required sources. As the Soviet power was almost completely deprived of sources like foreign capital, loans and credits, the prominent Soviet economists like Preobrazhensky were compelled to turn their eyes towards internal sources.

In July 1924, Preobrazhensky submitted his work *The Fundamental Law of Socialist Accumulation* to the Communist Academy. Preobrazhensky demanded the material sources obtained from outside the nationalised industrial system be accumulated in the hands of the state. He offered to term it *primitive or pre-socialist accumulation* for he considered that this accumulation would inevitably play a colossal role in a backward, agricultural country and become central in the industrialisation period. However, as the party leadership found it incompatible with the official line of that period, it accused Preobrazhensky’s work of “Trotskyism”. In fact Preobrazhensky had proceeded from the analyses of Marx on capitalist primitive accumulation. Just as this accumulation had required the separation of producers from the means of production, he thought the “socialist accumulation” must be inspired from it. That is, for him there was a question of “socialist accumulation” in Russia and it was impossible to solve this problem unless the small-scale production was exploited and the sources were transferred from agriculture to industry.

The right wing which was shaped around Bukharin’s views, however, opposed to this proposal on the ground that it would break the alliance of workers and peasants and demanded agriculture be subsidised. Bukharin ridiculed the idea of a planned industrialisation and argued for a “tortoise tempo” industrialisation and making concessions to the bourgeois elements in the countryside. The attitude of the right wing towards the peasantry was expressed in the slogan “get rich”.

The third group in the party that included Stalin, the centre group, seemed to stand in the middle of both views. Its main concern was to develop tactics and intrigues by utilising

122 Trotsky, *The New Course 1923*, New Park, 1972, p.72

the right wing to crush the Left Opposition. For this reason, the Stalinist centre supported and implemented Bukharinists' theses, and accused Trotsky and the Left Opposition of adventurism.

Meanwhile, in May 1924 before the 13th Party Congress, Zinoviev raised the issue of Lenin's testament in a meeting participated only by the leading party members. According to him Lenin's suggestion to remove Stalin was not fair. He was supported also by Kamenev. In the course of discussions, where Trotsky, as it turns out, chose to remain silent, Krupskaya insisted on reading out of Lenin's testament to the congress. However, the resolution was to secretly inform only certain delegates about the testament. So the triumvirate concealed the testament as it did not suit its aims, despite Lenin had dictated it to warn the party.

The question of *testament*, and the year 1925 as a whole, would turn out to be a dangerous turning point for Trotsky's political life. At that time an American communist, M. Eastman, known as pro-Trotsky, cited from Lenin's testament in his book, published in New York, about the last period of Lenin's life. The Stalinist faction exploited this incident as a pretext to weaken Trotsky politically. In January 1925 Trotsky had to make a statement that "the testament did not exist". But this statement could not prevent his removal from the post of head of the Revolutionary Military Committee and of the People's Commissar of War at the Central Committee meeting in January 1925. Now the wheel of bureaucracy was being directed by Stalin and the new victims were going to be Zinoviev and Kamenev.

The triumvirate was to fall apart at the 14th Congress held in the end of 1925 and now Stalin was trying to get rid of Zinoviev and Kamenev. In response to this, Zinoviev and Kamenev changed their views and joined the ranks of those who were in favour of a rapid industrialisation. Hence, in the summer of 1926, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev and their followers formed the United Opposition. Also some members of Democratic Centralists, a small but radical group led by Sapronov, joined the United Opposition. The opposition participated in the Central Committee meeting held in July and at that meeting Zinoviev was expelled from the Politburo and Kamenev from the government.

A new crisis broke out in early 1927. One of the underlying factors was the deterioration of the foreign relations of the Soviet Union. Germany was in favour of maintaining its commercial relations with the Soviet Union for its own interests. However, Britain, then the biggest commercial partner of the Soviet Union, cut off its relations with the Soviet Union.¹²³ Moreover, the Soviet leadership lapsed into anxiety in anticipation of a war with Poland, under Pilsudski, which was allegedly to intervene in the Baltic region. As a result of this tense process, the intra-party strife became highly aggravated.

123 "In May 1927 the Soviet leadership received a new and heavier blow. Britain's Tory government was very angry about the Chinese events and the Soviet policy, which was aimed at undermining the international position of Britain. Also motivated by considerations of domestic politics such as the rivalry with the Labour Party, the Tories broke off relations with the Soviet Union and cancelled the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement which served as the legal basis of commercial affairs between the two countries." (Michal Reiman, *The Birth of Stalinism*, our translation from the Turkish edition)

Nevertheless, the Soviet diplomacy at the same time kept up its attempts to break its isolation on the international arena. In May 1927, a Soviet delegation went to Geneva to attend the World Economic Conference. Though the delegates in general criticised the capitalists and defended the monopoly of the foreign trade, they made an appeal for “peaceful co-existence of the two economic systems”.

Repressions against the opposition were stepped up during the process; pretexts were being sought and campaigns conducted to expel Trotsky and Zinoviev from the party. Trotsky held a plea in Central Control Commission. When Aron Soltz, a member of Presidium, spoke of the history of French Revolution and the guillotine, Trotsky responded to this threat with his famous words about the “Thermidorian degeneration” of the Stalinist leadership. M. Reiman, who refers to this event on the basis of documents, states that Trotsky wrote in his letter to Ordzhonikidze, the chairman of the Central Control Commission, that the war danger did not rule out the necessity of criticism and that a change of leadership could really be a prerequisite for the victory.¹²⁴ The pressure applied on the opposition for it to give up its positions did not prove effective. In the end, an advisory resolution was arrived at, which suggests expelling of Trotsky and Zinoviev from Central Committee, in their absence at the joint plenum of Central Committee and the Central Control Commission on 29 June 1927. The role of the OGPU in political life steadily increased as the hotbed of political plots against the opposition since the Stalinist leadership was unable to silence the opposition merely through bureaucratic intra-party manoeuvres.

The United Opposition submitted its platform (Declaration of the 83), a programmatic document, to the party leadership in early September 1927. The platform demanded a structural improvement in the Soviet economy; an immediate recovery of the social conditions of the industrial workers and the poor in the countryside; reinforcement of the vital nucleus in the party, soviets, public institutions; an end to national oppression, etc. The Politburo banned the Platform on 8 September 1927. After that, Stalin’s consecutive attacks against the opposition followed.

The year 1927 was also fraught with tensions due to the defeat of the Chinese Revolution and Trotsky’s criticism of the policy of the Stalinist leadership on China. Criticising Stalin’s policies at the Comintern Executive Committee meeting, Trotsky was expelled from the Executive Committee of the Comintern on 27 September. A month later at the Central Committee meeting of the party, Trotsky and Zinoviev were expelled from the Central Committee too. As a result of criminal investigation campaigns launched on grounds that the opposition leaders were spreading their views among people at the Celebrations of the 10th Anniversary of the October Revolution in Moscow and Leningrad, now it was high time for expulsions from the party itself: Trotsky and Zinoviev were expelled from the party; Kamenev and some other oppositionists were liquidated from the Central Committee.

Thus the preparations of the Stalinist leadership for the coming 15th Party Congress in December were focused on the tactics to assure its own power instead of solving the

124 Michal Reiman, *ibid.*

problems of Soviet economy. The campaign against the opposition climaxed at the time of the congress and massive expulsions and exiles followed. Kamenev and Zinoviev were exiled to Kaluga, several hundred miles away from Moscow; and Trotsky, the real danger as he was considered by Stalin, was sent into exile in 1928 to Alma-Ata, one of the farthest frontier cities of central Asia. In March 1928, with an order entitled *On the Policy of Punishment and Prison Regime*, it was decided that the hitherto limited concentration camps be extended and that the OGPU be granted broader powers to apply the harshest repressive measures against the oppositionists and recidivists.

Though the Left Opposition was losing its strength due to naked repressions of the Stalinist leadership, it was still a reality. Yet, Stalin desired to get rid of such an opposition. Stalin, in a secret letter to party organisations, made clear that all kinds of “liberalism” toward the opposition was inexcusable and that “the Trotskyists” had completed their evolution “by transforming themselves into an anti-Soviet underground organisation”.¹²⁵

On the other hand, however, this episode of history saw the return of many former leaders to the party lapsing into illusions. But they would later come to understand these were mere illusions when they were faced with death penalties ordered by Stalin. For instance, Kamenev, Zinoviev and some other oppositionists in this manner returned to the party in June 1928. Moreover, Preobrazhensky and Radek, known as Trotsky’s collaborators, declared to have disagreed with Trotsky’s views and drew closer to Stalin. In the course of all these regrettable events, Trotsky, in Alma-Ata, wrote a critique of the draft Comintern Programme prepared for the 1928 Congress, and sent it to the delegates of the congress. The critique dealt an extensive and heavy blow to the doctrine of “socialism in one country” which was made the ideological underpinning of the bureaucratic state.¹²⁶

In December 1928, Stalin made a proposal at the Politburo to exile Trotsky from the USSR. His goal was to entirely crash the left opposition by depriving it of its leader. In January 1929, Stalin made the Politburo pass this resolution despite the objections of Rykov, Bukharin, and Tomsky. Trotsky was sent into exile to Turkey in a ship from Odessa to Istanbul. Thus Stalin achieved his goal to establish his despotic-bureaucratic dictatorship in the Bolshevik Party, and the Bolshevik-Leninists, the followers of Lenin, were purged out of the party. Now the Bolshevik Party essentially had nothing in common with the former party.

If the rise of Stalin-type nationalist, Great Russian chauvinist bureaucrats could not be prevented despite the struggle of the internationalist revolutionary elements and the existence of the respected leaders like Lenin and Trotsky, then there must be a lesson to be drawn: the economic-cultural backwardness of society, the weakening of the industrial proletariat in the course of civil war and, most importantly, the isolation of the revolution in one country, not only did enable the rise of a bureaucratic rule but also led to an enormous change in the structure and situation of the party that had been the vanguard of the revolution. That the party, which included once the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat, transformed itself into the apparatus of the rule of the bureaucracy explains

125 Michal Reiman, *ibid.*, our translation.

126 see Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin*.

what devastating effects could the objective situation have on the development of the subjective factor.

In the process of bureaucratic counter-revolution between 1924-1928, the bureaucracy reorganised the Bolshevik Party as its own ruling device. In Lenin's era, campaigns used to be conducted to fight bureaucratic degeneration against those careerists who flocked to the party to enjoy the fruits of power. Nevertheless, Stalin, on the contrary, opened the doors of the party to such elements after Lenin's death. Busying himself with liquidating the old Bolsheviks who were Lenin's comrades, Stalin found the necessary backing for this in the unconscious, backward layers of the proletariat, the former Menshevik elements, the peasants, and the rising bureaucracy.

Cliff's extract from Boris Pilnyak's story concerning the bureaucrat type that represent "the revival of the old crap" perfectly depicts the situation at that time: "near the telephone in his room stood an armchair, and when he talked to his subordinates, he sprawled in the armchair, legs spread wide; when he talked to his equals he sat like an ordinary human being; when he talked to those in authority he jumped to attention and jingled his spurs: these were three distinct voices."¹²⁷ There is an abyss between this backward type, shrewd and egotist in guarding his own interests, who should never be allowed to an administrative position in a healthy workers' democracy and those heroic vanguards who did not hesitate to die for the revolution of the proletariat. In this context, one should always remember the example of Lenin, that is his simplicity, as a true communist character.

Between 1924 and 1928 the number of party members rose from 472,000 to 1,304,000 and the old Bolshevik members were liquidated from the party during the process. That the composition of the party has now definitely changed to favour new masters (the Soviet bureaucracy) is an expression of the fact that the Bolshevik Party has turned into an organ (a temple) symbolising the privileges of the bureaucracy.

Under conditions that the political and economic existence of the bourgeoisie had been eradicated in industrial cities and also that the rule of the proletariat had come to an end, the Soviet bureaucracy that established its rule within party and state ranks became a *rising new class*, growing beyond a bureaucratic caste. Possessing the right to collectively dispose the nationalised means of production and managing the state monopoly over foreign trade, the Soviet bureaucracy, on this material basis, elevated itself to the position of a dominant class. Having completely seized the party, under conditions where the struggle for political power took on a character of conflictive process within the party, the Stalinist Soviet bureaucracy thus accomplished the counter-revolution against the proletariat. This outcome signified that the bureaucracy attained a crucial position to spread its counter-revolutionary acts also on an international level. Because the Soviet bureaucracy, leaning on the one-party dictatorship and the Soviet state that is now organised so that to defend the interests of the bureaucracy, would be able to establish its hegemony over the world communist movement proclaiming itself as the "centre of revolution".

¹²⁷ quoted in T. Cliff, *ibid.*, p.190

The Stalinist bureaucracy set out to assure its domestic victory on a world level. It had to do that to preserve and reinforce its domination. Having established its domination by liquidating the Workers' Soviets' State, the Soviet bureaucracy could only maintain its existence by protecting itself from the "danger" of the progress of the world revolution. Because any new sovietic positions to be gained by international proletariat could be nothing but a sword of Damocles hung over the head of the ruling bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. Therefore, just as the only chance of survival for the proletarian revolution is its growth into a world revolution, the bureaucratic counter-revolution, accordingly, had to prevent the world revolution in order to establish its international underpinnings and thus ensure the domination of the bureaucracy.

The reaction of the Soviet bureaucracy against the world revolution materialised in the construction of its own state on the basis of defending the interests of a nation state, just as the bourgeois state. While the historical interests of the proletariat are expressed in *the permanence of the revolution*, the interests of the bureaucracy were expressed in *the international stability and the security of the nation-state*. The Soviet bureaucracy, hence, formed its own official state ideology on the basis of establishing the status quo and trying to preserve it on a world scale.

The theoretical insufficiency of Stalinism is indisputable. It is true that, in seeking to present itself as socialist, it could not develop an independent theory and laid claim to the existing brands of petit-bourgeois socialism. However, all these do not mean that the ruling bureaucracy lacked an ideology. As we remember, the bureaucracy organised as a state shall create a new ideology once it becomes an independent force in the face of society. The myth of "socialism in one country" is an "ideology" that the Soviet bureaucracy clung to in order to substitute the historical interests of the world proletariat for its own selfish national interests.

This ideology was the excuse for the Soviet bureaucracy to distance itself from the idea of the world revolution and escape from its responsibility. Stalin appeared to be committed to the goal of world revolution until Lenin's death. However, as he seized the reins in the Bolshevik Party capitalising on the void of authority formed in the aftermath of Lenin's death, and explicitly proved himself to be a "Great Russian chauvinist" despot and the leader of the rising bureaucracy, the idea of "socialism in one country" started to take shape as the official ideology of the state. It is a clear indication of the rise of the bureaucratic counter-revolution that Stalin accused the Left Opposition, which was defending the goal of world revolution, and especially Trotsky, as one of its leaders, of adventurism and set to purge the Bolshevik Party of this "dangerous" idea of world revolution. This also displays the international dimension of the Stalinist counter-revolution for the world proletariat. By its nature, the bureaucratic counter-revolution was organised and conducted as a counter-revolutionary attack within the international communist movement too. While the liquidation of the Bolshevik-Leninists and Trotsky from the party by Stalin in 1927 symbolizes the victory of the bureaucratic counter-revolution in the Soviet Union, the ratification of the conception of "socialism in one country" by the Comintern in 1928 is the reflection of this victory in the world communist movement.

Hence, the year 1928 is a historical turning point wherein the Soviet bureaucracy won the bureaucratic counter-revolution, and the Soviet state turned into the state of the bureaucracy. And the subsequent process would be a process in which the already established bureaucratic dictatorship would set about legal arrangements corresponding to the actual situation in order to consolidate itself. The dominant bureaucracy's state, in this process, would set to complete the liquidation, taking the remnants of the October Revolution from the proletariat. The process from 1928 to the Constitution of 1936 and the declaration that "socialism has been achieved in the Soviet Union" is marked by institutionalisation and stabilisation of the totalitarian regime.

1928-1936: Reinforcement of the Bureaucratic Dictatorship

The Stalinist centre continued advocating the views of the right wing on the question of industrialisation until the turn of 1928. The thesis Stalin defended until 1928 was this: "Not to hurry with industrialisation, not to quarrel with the muzhik, not to count on world revolution, and above all to protect the power of the party bureaucracy from criticism."¹²⁸

However, having done away with the pressure of the Left Opposition in the party, Stalin is now making plans to get rid of his partner in power, i.e. setting out to liquidate the Bukharinist right wing. The "case of Bukharin" is a typical example revealing the make-up of Stalin who builds his political tactics upon Asiatic style intrigues. After using Bukharin, Tomsy, etc., to crush the Left Opposition and Trotsky, Stalin was to forget his words about them in 1925 once he no longer needed them: "What is Bukharin supposed to do?... Do you want to sacrifice him? We are not going to sacrifice him, this must be well understood.... What is the meaning of this platform you have formed? Where would the whole thing lead to? This goes in the end up to the point of managing the party without Rykov, Kalinin, Tomsy, Molotov and Bukharin... but comrades the party cannot be managed without the comrades I have named."¹²⁹ It is as if an irony of history that upon noticing this attempt of Stalin, Bukharin offered Kamenev an alliance against Stalin and described him as "a Genghis Khan waiting to cut our throat as soon as we fall into conflict with each other."¹³⁰ This confession of Bukharin, one of the architects of the ideological pillar of the Stalinist rule, i.e. "socialism in one country", was not to change the subsequent course of events.

First, at a Central Committee meeting in November 1929, Bukharin, Tomsy and Rykov were made to sign a document stating that they abandoned their views and this document was published in *Pravda*. Then Bukharin was removed from the Politburo. And Tomsy and Rykov were condemned. On 21 December 1929, Stalin was celebrating his fiftieth birthday under circumstances where he had transformed the party into his device of rule and silenced all his opponents. Right at this point, E.

128 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.32

129 Stalin, *On the History of Differences (1925)*, our translation from a quotation in Tarik Demirkan, *Bitirilmemiş Devrim*, p.67

130 E. H. Carr, *ibid.*, our translation

H. Carr's assessment is quite correct:

In his fiftieth birthday Stalin's passion was at its peak. There had been sufficient incidence to vindicate Lenin's worries about the possibility that he could use his power in a rude and arbitrary way. He had revealed extra-ordinary cruelty in realising his targets by force, and had crushed all opposition. But a little more time had to pass before the nature of his dictatorship appear fully. The imposition of a rigid and monolithic orthodoxy on art, literature, history and science and silencing of any critical thought by force, along with the horror of the collectivisation process, concentration camps, the trials that were turned into great shows, and indiscriminate murder, with or without trial, of not only those who had opposed him, but also those who had helped him rise to power, left a stain that could not be cleared by the war success or other achievements.¹³¹

The last period of 1929 was filled with various meetings, discussions and drafts of commissions gathered about how the collectivisation would be conducted. A Conference of Marxist Agriculturists had been held in Moscow before the politburo negotiated the report of the commission. Stalin, utilising this opportunity to address the crowd for the first time since months, said: "the liquidation of the kulaks as a class is the sharpest orientation of our whole policy."¹³² Afterwards, the decision of Politburo on 5 January 1930 was in this direction and a large scale collectivisation was launched. All those peasants who resisted were considered either a kulak or in collaboration with the kulaks, and were harshly punished. Trotsky's fear that a collectivisation carried out by force would put the social revolution into danger, breaking the alliance between workers and peasants, was becoming the reality.

The Stalinist leadership developed a new plan to suppress the peasants on a mass scale. "Tens of thousands of kulaks were driven out of their houses and lands, exiled to far regions, their cattle, tools and machinery were transferred to kolkhozy. Only a small minority of peasants from all categories voluntarily entered into the kolkhozy. Most resentful for the peasants was that their livestock was demanded. Most of them preferred to kill their cattle instead of handing them over. Throughout the whole campaign the line between persuasion and use of force became very thin."¹³³ The interference of the OGPU in grain collection campaigns was increased and preparations were made for military troops to situate in the villages. Peasants were forced to join kolkhozy along with a repressive propaganda campaign. As a result of these acts the discontent in the countryside grew. As a reaction to state pressure, the peasants stopped sowing their land, killed their herds and even revolted in certain regions. "A new order followed few days later... The guilty would immediately be sentenced to death without any interrogation; there would be no right to appeal and the sentences would be executed within the period set by the law. In a way this was a prototype of the well-known decree about the "terrorists" issued on 1 December

131 E. H. Carr, *ibid.*, our translation

132 quoted in E. H. Carr, *ibid.*, our translation

133 E. H. Carr, *ibid.*, our translation

1934 by Stalin after the assassination of Kirov.”¹³⁴

Although there was an intervening period of softening the collectivisation and repressions in order to make peasants sow their land, in the end the resistance of peasants was broken and the collectivisation was stepped up; and finally, by mid 1931 two thirds of the enterprises in main grain production regions were united in the kolkhozy. The rest were also made join into kolkhozy in the following few years. It is estimated that the hunger peasants suffered during this period was the worst thing since the civil war and that a few million died of hunger. Resources report that by 1931 capitalist sector in the economy was completely ruined and on the other hand, as a result of this fast operation, agriculture was dragged into a complete chaos.

In this process, Stalin’s chief concern was the reinforcement of the dictatorship of the bureaucracy and took into account that a kulak danger that would develop in the countryside would threaten his dictatorship. The chief motive that drove Stalin to take this course is rather political, and not rational economic calculations. Main target of collectivisation is to stop the influence of the law of value and thus to gain the political control absolutely. That is, Stalin’s concern was not to save a non-existent workers’ state against a bourgeois counter-revolution. As the representative of the ruling bureaucracy that had wrested power from the hands of the working class, he focused his efforts on protecting his own bureaucratic rule against a possible bourgeois counter-revolution. For this reason Stalin took the course of a forced collectivisation by a sharp turn in 1929 and thus managed to prevent the kulak danger that would threaten his own power. After crushing the proletariat on the basis of obtaining the support of petty-bourgeois masses in the countryside, the Stalinist bureaucracy also crushed the peasant, thus reinforcing its own bureaucratic dictatorship.

Therefore, it would be unfounded to try to identify, on the basis of the need to get industrialised, Trotsky’s industrialisation plan with Stalin’s practices at the turn of 1929. Trotsky himself assesses Stalin’s collectivisation operation as a great adventure and destruction in terms of its consequences:

Opportunism, as has often happened in history, turned into its opposite, adventurism. Whereas from 1923 to 1928 the Politburo had been ready to accept Bukharin’s philosophy of a “tortoise tempo”, it now lightly jumped from a 20 to a 30 per cent yearly growth, trying to convert every partial and temporary achievement into a norm, and losing sight of the conditioning interrelation of the different branches of industry.¹³⁵

Stating that the real basis for collectivisation depends on the industry supplying machinery in great quantities to agriculture, Trotsky asserts that Stalin, who turned his back to the industrialisation proposals of the Left Opposition since 1923, set about a collectivisation in 1929 in a rush, without any preparation, and by force. And what were the results? In Trotsky’s words:

134 M. Reiman, *ibid.*, our translation

135 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.35

The destruction of people –by hunger, cold, epidemics and measures of repression– is unfortunately less accurately tabulated than the slaughter of stock, but it also mounts up to millions. The blame for these sacrifices lies not upon collectivization, but upon the blind, violent, gambling methods with which it was carried through.¹³⁶

These lines of Trotsky reveal the incompatibility between Stalin’s methods and the industrialisation plan of the Left Opposition. Unfortunately, Trotsky made some false evaluations emphasising, in order to prove political incapacity of Stalin, that he has come to the same point defended by the Left Opposition for years.¹³⁷ Although Trotsky rectified his position on this point, many Trotskyist circles, instead of questioning these points, have continued to establish nearly an identity between the two plans. And we must state that the main source of these misperceptions is some renegade Left Oppositionists whom Stalin managed to pull to his side. Various writers make this point on the basis of historical documents. For example M. Reiman says: “Apart from Zinovievists, some oppositionists including the most important Trotskyist wing leaders like Antonov-Ovseenko and Pyatakov used the ‘left turn’ of Stalin to justify their break with the opposition.”¹³⁸ Despite their surrender, those Left Oppositionists could not generally escape from Stalin’s death machine. But having swallowed his bait they could provide support to Stalin and evaluate the Stalinist collectivisation as the implementation of the plans of the Left Opposition. Yet, the lies of official Soviet view that presents collectivisation in the countryside as “the strengthening of the foundations of the socialist state”, “the establishment of socialist property relations in the countryside”, are exposed by Trotsky in 1936:

According to the official theory, collective farm property is a special form of socialist property. ... In reality the collective farms stand halfway between individual and state economy, and the petty bourgeois tendencies within them are admirably helped along by the swiftly growing private allotments or personal economies conducted by their members.

... In any case, the collectives have succeeded so far in transforming only the juridical forms of economic relations in the country – in particular the methods of distributing income but they have left almost without change the old hut and vegetable garden, the barnyard chores, the whole rhythm of heavy muzhik labor.¹³⁹

Let us underline a point about the need for collectivisation in the countryside of the Soviet Union: a balanced collectivisation in harmony with the industrialisation plan without upsetting the alliance between workers and peasants was necessary to enable

136 Trotsky, *ibid.*, p.40

137 For instance in September 1929 Trotsky made the following comment the incorrectness of which is evident when looking back from now: “At a time when the Left Opposition was crushed by coercion, Stalin found himself exercising, partially and in all areas, the programme of the Left Opposition, as if it was his own programme, in order to direct the barrel at right and turn an intra-party manoeuvre toward left after a sharp but long zigzag. And this shows that, despite everything, the proletariat still retains a power in its hands to impose its pressure and that the state apparatus still keeps depending on it. The Russian Opposition must keep basing its policy upon this essential fact and this policy is not a policy of revolution but of reform.” (our translation)

138 M. Reiman, *ibid.*, our translation.

139 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, pp.242-243

modernisation in the countryside and a transfer of sources from agriculture to industry. But the fact that the collectivisation was carried out under bureaucratic domination and therefore in such a way to destroy the alliance between workers and peasants, caused such grave problems that extend even to the present day. If the industrialisation drive was carried out under conditions where the workers' state existed, encouraging economic measures were taken in the countryside to draw poor and middle peasants, leaving out rich peasants, near the proletariat, and a freedom of making criticisms and proposals was assured in order to rectify mistakes which are unavoidable while starting a new drive, then no room would be left to those massacres that blackened the Soviet Union. Yet the hasty collectivisation started by the Stalinist bureaucracy in order to strengthen its own domination would end in nothing but the hostility of petty peasants towards socialism, and this was indeed the case. This process sowed the seeds of nationalist anger of the future in the vast lands of Russia.

Those who insist on not breaking with Stalinism try to find various excuses for the acts of the Stalinist bureaucracy without taking the trouble to find out the true nature of these acts. For example, they try to explain the destructive results of the Stalinist collectivisation by the excuse of "exigencies of the revolution". In fact, what must be noticed here is the character of Stalinism which is entirely alien to Marxism. At the turn of 1929, the apparatus of power, already adapted to the rule of one man, was ready to apply the orders of Stalin, who is prepared to do everything to secure a place in history with great leaps like Peter the Great had done. Since masses were not prepared to do this, repression and violence were made institutionalised as indispensable elements of the bureaucratic regime. This fact showed how Marxism, which emphasises that socialism cannot be built by orders from above, was thrown aside by Stalin.

Another point to be dealt with in relation to the industrialisation drive is the question of central plan. The goal of the first five years' plan adopted in 1929 was described as "securing maximum development in the production of the means of production as the basis of the industrialisation of the country". Pyatakov, who left the ranks of the Left Opposition at the time, was assigned as the head of the Central Bank. The principle of "balanced budget" was put into effect by financial measures like increasing direct and indirect taxes, issuing bonds, etc. But financial measures could not have the regulating function under a command economy, where the means of production are predominantly owned by the state especially after the collectivisation, similar to that in a free market economy. That is why Carr evaluates the reality of those days as follows: "The state bank was constantly pumping new credits to the economy. Step by step money was transformed into a simple means of exchange and a unit of accountancy, the future communist society where money would completely disappear was already being tasted."¹⁴⁰ Thus, although it was not officially declared that NEP was over, this command economy based on state ownership had a mechanism that took shape with the liquidation of capitalism under the rule of the bureaucracy and that was based on bureaucratic central planning. The bureaucratically "planned" economy of the USSR that did not leave the fate of the economy into the hands of the laws of the market in a period when the capitalist countries

140 E. H. Carr, *ibid.*, our translation

were in the grip of the Great Depression of 1929 would therefore gain a prestige and blur the conception of socialism of many people for a few generations.

The situation of the working class

The Stalinist dictatorship reinforced its ruling-dominating position in the face of the working class by strengthening the economic foundations of the despotic-bureaucratic state on the one hand, and liquidating the gains of the working class resulting from the October Revolution on the other. The Stalinist bureaucracy had taken a decision in 1928 with the aim of ending the Troika system officially.¹⁴¹ And in September 1929 it was decided that factory committees would no longer interfere in the administration. In Lenin's time the curtailment of some democratic rights due to the economic destruction caused by the civil war was described as an unfavourable situation due to the helplessness. Yet, under the rule of the bureaucracy all these kinds of curtailments were strictly made into law and presented as merits of the regime. For example, in a textbook on the Soviet economic laws issued in 1935 we read: "One-man management [is] the most important principle of the organisation of the socialist economy."¹⁴²

Legal regulations against the working class were also carried out in labour laws. While according to the labour law enforced in 1922 workers were free to change their workplaces and a change in the workplace of a worker was bound to his/her approval even when this workplace moves to another location, this situation was abolished under the bureaucratic dictatorship. From 27 December 1932 on, a new measure (system of domestic passport) was in effect throughout whole Russia: without the permission of the party a worker was not allowed to leave his/her workplace and go to another workplace or city. Besides, a system of "working cards" was also brought into use to cover at first only the industrial and transportation workers, and later on all of the workers. Workers had to show this card while applying for a new job on which every information about them was recorded by the managers.

With a law enacted on 15 October 1932, workers were threatened with discharge from their jobs and houses in case they cause any hitch in their work without a reasonable apology. With another law enacted in December 1938 it was made possible to punish those who come late to work or prolong their noon break a little with punishments even go down to discharge. Add to these forced labour, which was applied as a political punishment rather than a punishment in relation to labour relations, and labour camps, in which nearly 10 million prisoners were put during Stalin's purges in 1930's, and you will get the course of the formation of a totalitarian regime.

That the women workers lost many of their rights is another indication of the scale of the offensive waged by the bureaucracy against the gains of the October Revolution. By the Labour Law of 1922, it was forbidden to employ women and children in hard

141 The Troika System: a system in which the production process is controlled by the party cell in the plant, the workers' committee of the plant, and the technical director under the supervision of other two.

142 T. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, p.13

works, under unhealthy conditions, in mines, etc. Women workers took their lot from the offensive of the bureaucratic dictatorship against the gains of workers. For example “scientific” surveys arguing that working in coal mines has no adverse effects on women prepared the way for their employment in heaviest works and this became widespread.

The independence of trade unions was abolished; the right to collective bargaining was put an end to; strikes were banned; striking workers were sentenced to death. While the trade unions had been once defended as workers’ organisations by means of which “workers protect themselves from their state” due to bureaucratic deformation, it was now clear that the bureaucratic state could not tolerate this kind of “protection”. Indeed, the trade unions were transformed from organisations regulating and protecting workers’ rights into fake institutions. For example, the Trade Unions Congress did not convene between 1932 and 1949 and during this period the law that determines the working day as 7 hours was repealed. New regulations worsening the working conditions, like unpaid overtime, were enforced. The words of the head of Central Council of Trade Unions explicitly express the fact that wages are being determined by the state under the command economy of the bureaucracy.

When the Plan becomes the decisive element of economic development, questions of wages cannot be decided independently of it. Thus the collective agreement as a form of regulating wages has outlived its usefulness.¹⁴³

The practice of benefiting from capitalist production techniques introduced in Lenin’s time due to the disaster of hunger was sanctified by Stalinism. These kinds of measures were now defended as methods in full accordance with socialism, rather than unfavourable measures taken due to exigencies. Stalinism abandoned the demand of equal pay for similar jobs, branding it as a petty-bourgeois conception of equality. Splitting and competitive tendencies were promoted within the working class in the name of “socialist competition”. The working class was deliberately split and workers were made enemies of each other. This was officially called *Stakhanovism*. While labour productivity rose by more than threefold between 1928-1936, real wages fell more than half. The rule which restricted the income of party members was abolished; an abyss appeared between the income of the bureaucracy and the wages of workers.

Was a new working class created by these legal regulations, which works efficiently and with discipline and sees the new working conditions as important gains? Quite the contrary! In this bureaucratic system where the state is the only decision making authority and the local administrator is practically the one who decides in the final analysis, these legal regulations prepared the basis for the dismissal of opposing workers and for tying their fate, together with their families’, to the “mercy” of bureaucrats. The future was already determined from the onset for those who dared to oppose the bureaucratic regime and organise. Or if you flatter the managers, you could have the chance for a little privilege (like small scale black marketing) within the existing system! And thus,

¹⁴³ Quoted in T. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, p.17. The footnote put by Cliff on this point is quite striking: “It is interesting to note that books published for foreign consumption, such as Lozovsky’s *Handbook on the Soviet Trade Unions*, Moscow, 1937, pp.56-57 continue to describe collective agreements as if they still existed.”

as a result of severe repression and threat on the one side, connivance and bribery on the other, workers have gradually lost their hope for a better future; they let themselves sunk into the swamp of alcoholism in order to numb themselves. Such was the destiny of workers in the “living socialism” of Stalinism!

What do all these developments point at? They show that the Soviet working class is no longer the dominant class. It is clear that job security, a historical conquest of the working class gained with the October Revolution, has been hollowed by the bureaucratic dictatorship. It is not possible to speak of the soviet proletariat preserving its historical gains when the political power has been wrested from the working class, its ruling position in the production process has been put an end to, working regime has turned into a bureaucratic command system of the state instead of resting upon the free will of the worker.

On the other hand, another agent would of course fill proletariat’s place as a ruling class. This another agent is *the new masters, the bureaucracy*, that emerged within the soviets and took the possession of the state. Under these conditions, the Soviet bureaucracy is a fully developed dominant class. One of the expressions of the reinforcement of the bureaucratic dictatorship is that the Red Army has been turned into a standing army like those bourgeois professional armies and that an officers’ hierarchy has been restored. Trotsky expresses this transformation in his words:

A still more deadly blow to the principles of the October revolution was struck by the decree restoring the officers’ corps in all its bourgeois magnificence.

(...) In September 1935, civilized humanity, friends and enemies alike, learned with surprise that the Red Army would now be crowned with an officers’ hierarchy, beginning with lieutenant and ending with marshal.¹⁴⁴

Yet the programmatic goal of replacing the old standing army with a people’s militia had been tried to put into effect by decrees following the October Revolution. However, the objective reality that constitutes the biggest obstacle among the problems the revolution had to face, namely that the revolution has not come about in advanced countries but isolated within the conditions of a backward country, resulted in the fact that most of the issues in these revolutionary decrees could not be applied as wished. In conditions of civil war, even revolutionary leaders like Lenin and Trotsky opted for reconstruction of a standing army. But the difference between the conduct of revolutionary leaders who unwillingly have to take a measure due to exigencies and that of the bureaucracy, which does the same to maintain its class rule, is not a simple one. There exists a damnable counter-revolution between the two. We should not forget that Bolsheviks used to deliver sharp replies that defended the system of people’s militia to those who try to render the return to standing army a lasting measure. For instance, when a general who was called back on necessity said that the army should be based on the old barracks system, Trotsky answered as follows: “the Communist Party did not come to power in order to replace the tricolour barracks by red ones.”¹⁴⁵

144 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, pp.221 and 222

145 quoted in T. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, p.98

The Constitution of 1936 and liquidation of Bolshevik cadres

The 17th Congress of the CPSU held in 1934 was announced as “congress of victors”. Official declarations emphasised that socialism was established in the Soviet Union and that socialism in one country triumphed. Stalin said that old classes was abolished in the Soviet Union, old class contradictions ceased to exist, new classes peculiar to socialism appeared and there were no antagonisms between them. Therefore, he said, state was no more a proletarian dictatorship, but “the state of the whole people”. All these sophistries were just new arguments used by the bureaucracy in order to hide the fact that the proletarian dictatorship was liquidated by the Stalinist bureaucracy. Stalin had said that socialist society was one without classes and state. But once the bureaucracy has established its rule, it needed to sanctify its state. Thus the rhetoric was changed, and it was proclaimed that consolidation of the state was the necessary condition of “socialism in one country”.

Yet the world bourgeoisie did not look at these sophistries but real processes going on in the Soviet Union. The French official paper, *Le Temps* wrote on 25 September 1935: “This external transformation is one of the signs of a deep change which is now taking place through the whole Soviet Union. The regime, now definitely consolidated, is gradually becoming stabilised. Revolutionary habits and customs are giving place within the Soviet family and Soviet society to the feelings and customs which continue to prevail within the so-called capitalist countries. The Soviets are becoming bourgeoisified.” Trotsky commented on this: “There is hardly a word to add to that judgement”¹⁴⁶

In the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, established by the 1923 Constitution, the sovereignty was vested in the Soviets at the top of which stood the Congress of Soviets. However, as the bureaucracy rose, this right began to be hollowed and left on the paper only. In the period between 1931 and 1935 when new legal regulations were made under the rule of the bureaucracy, the Congress of Soviets was never called for a meeting. And by new regulations of the 1936 Constitution the function of the Congress of Soviets called “Supreme Soviet” was reduced to almost nothing.

The fairy tale of the “victory of socialism in one country” adopted in the 17th Congress also constitutes the spirit of the 1936 Constitution. By this constitution, the right of the Soviet proletariat to elect and be elected to form the organs of power based upon workplaces – a right already abolished in practice – was legally abolished. Universal suffrage introduced by the 1936 Constitution was reduced to a tokenism like that in bourgeois parliamentarism, even turned into a *compulsory approval*. As Trotsky points out:

In the political sphere, the distinction of the new constitution from the old is its return from the Soviet system of election according to class and industrial groups, to the system of bourgeois democracy based upon the so-called “universal, equal and direct” vote of an atomized population. This is a matter, to put it briefly, of juridically liquidating the dictatorship of the proletariat.¹⁴⁷

146 Trotsky, *ibid.*, p.225

147 Trotsky, *ibid.*, pp.260-261

In accordance with the principle of the “general right to vote for the toilers organised in communes”, the Soviet System born out of the October Revolution deprived only those elements outside the communes of this right. Besides, it introduced an election system entirely different from bourgeois parliamentarism by establishing an imbalance in favour of workers. This revolutionary Soviet system was liquidated by the 1936 Constitution. That the bureaucracy continued to define its rule with the term “The Soviet Union” means that it wanted to exploit the historical tradition. As Victor Serge points out:

... with the equalisation of votes the bureaucracy will, from now on, ensure establishing its rule over the workers with the rural majority when needed. The Supreme Soviet, the new legislative and executive organ, which is elected for four years, is not a parliament as it is a token consultative body of the union of electorate, and also is not a Soviet congress now.... One wonders why the word *Soviets* is used in naming the state? Maybe just to abuse the historical tradition.¹⁴⁸

We have to underline an important fact in order not to fall into legal short-sightedness in the form of attributing the end of the soviet power of workers only to the 1936 Constitution. Constitutions are not generally a starting point in the socio-political change but normative regulations following actual changes. It is true that the Stalinist bureaucracy formed a legal cover for its dictatorship with the 1936 Constitution following the conclusion of the bureaucratic counter-revolution as if to prove the rule. While some articles of the 1918 Soviet Constitution are maintained in appearance, the deep actual change that took place during the intervening years found its expression in the statements of the Soviet bureaucracy like “whole people’s state” or that “socialism has already been achieved in the USSR”. What is important in relation to the turn of 1936 is not formal articles of constitution but this radical change in describing the spirit of the Soviet state at the end of the process of the establishment of the domination of the bureaucracy.

These new arguments used by the Soviet bureaucracy reveal this fact: just as the bourgeoisie sanctifies its dictatorship as a nation-state, trying to hide class distinctions and thus establishing its hegemony over the class conflict, the slogan of the Soviet bureaucracy, i.e. “whole people’s state”, was attributed a similar role. Just as the bourgeoisie needed a veil to hide its nakedness to continue its dictatorship in the long run, the Soviet bureaucracy could maintain its hegemony in the long run under the veil of “socialism”.

While the economic situation was obvious, the Stalinist official ideology took a striking step forward in hollowing the Marxist concepts. In the chapter titled “Social Structure” of the 1936 Constitution it is claimed that “the principle of socialism is realised in the Soviet Union” which is expressed in the slogan “from each according to his abilities, to each according to his work”. This is a big lie. This lie is made up by arbitrarily cutting into two and distorting the phrase “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” put forward by Marx in order to characterise the higher level of communism. The phrase “from each according to his ability” signifies a period of abundance and high cultural development in which work ceases to be obligatory, becoming a pleasure

148 V. Serge, *Destiny of a Revolution*, our translation from the Turkish edition

of individuals without a pressure from society. For this reason, once such a social condition is reached, there will be no measure like “to each according to his work” in the division of social product, everybody will take as much as they need from the society. In conclusion, both sides of Marx’s expression are deeply connected to each other; they cannot be separated at all. And above all, to describe a situation where work is obligatory under the rule of the bureaucratic dictatorship as “from each according to his ability” is but ridiculing Marxism!

The period following the 17th Congress was one of bloody liquidations, exiles and massacres preparing the transition to the absolute dictatorship of the bureaucratic oligarchy personified in Stalin. The political regime in the Soviet Union assumed a totalitarian character under the will of one chief (Stalin). As a result of the Moscow trials of 1936-1938, the opponents of Stalin, the followers of Bolshevik-Leninist tradition, were physically destroyed on fake charges. Trotsky pointed out some striking facts about that period:

During these years hundreds of Oppositionists, both Russian and foreign, have been shot, or have died of hunger strikes, or have resorted to suicide. Within the last twelve years, the authorities have scores of times announced to the world the final rooting out of the opposition. But during the “purgations” in the last month of 1935 and the first half of 1936, hundreds of thousands of members of the party were again expelled, among them several tens of thousands of “Trotskyists.” The most active were immediately arrested and thrown into prisons and concentration camps. As to the rest, Stalin, through *Pravda*, openly advised the local organs not to give them work. In a country where the sole employer is the state, this means death by slow starvation. The old principle: who does not work shall not eat, has been replaced with a new one: who does not obey shall not eat. Exactly how many Bolsheviks have been expelled, arrested, exiled, exterminated, since 1923, when the era of Bonapartism opened, we shall find out when we go through the archives of Stalin’s political police.¹⁴⁹

The real truth of these fake trials was exposed in the chapter titled *Conspiracy Trials* of the famous report Khrushchev read out in a secret session of the 20. Congress of the CPSU (although it was to be buried later on!). The conclusion drawn by Khrushchev on the basis of the investigations of a committee formed to submit information to the 20. Congress on this issue was this:

Many party activists who were branded in 1937-38 as “enemies” were actually never enemies, spies, wreckers, etc., but were always honest communists ... and often, no longer able to bear barbaric tortures, they charged themselves with all kinds of grave and unlikely crimes.¹⁵⁰

And he continued:

Of the 139 members and candidates of the party’s Central Committee who were elected at the Seventeenth Congress, 98 persons, i.e., 70 per cent, were arrested and

149 Trotsky, *ibid.*, pp.282-283

150 N. Khrushchev, *Speech to 20th Congress of CPSU*, [Marxist Internet Archive (MIA) at www.marxists.org]

shot (most of them in 1937-1938)!!

(...) The same fate met not only the Central Committee members but also the majority of the delegates to the Seventeenth Congress. Of 1,966 delegates, 1,108 persons were arrested, i.e. more than half. This very fact shows how absurd, wild and contrary to common sense were the charges of counter-revolutionary crimes.¹⁵¹

Those who develop a superficial approach toward the process of establishment of the bureaucratic domination in the Soviet Union claim that there was not adequate opposition in the Bolshevik Party during Stalin's acts liquidating the workers' state step by step. Thus although they do not approve the result, they come to mean that "Stalin in a sense deserved victory"(!) This is a great falsification. The history of Soviet Union is stained with the blood of many Bolshevik-Leninists who resisted the Stalinist dictatorship and raised an opposition within the party. Then, what should we say about the mentality defending that Stalin's victory was "in the direction of the road to communism albeit some mistakes"? How should one characterise the bearers of such an idea? Perhaps we do not need to search for a characterisation. What follows should suffice to explain their position: In the Soviet Union more than 1,5 million party members, nearly half of all, were imprisoned between 1936-1939 by the Stalinist dictatorship and from 1936 on more than 10 million Soviet citizens died in prisons or labour camps.

Raskolnikov, one of the leaders of the Kronstadt sailors in the 1917 October Revolution and a member of Petrograd Revolutionary Military Committee, describes this bloody period of counter-revolution of the Soviet history in an *Open Letter to Stalin* he wrote in 1939:

Stalin! ... you have opened a new stage which will enter into the history of our revolution as 'the epoch of terror'. Nobody in the Soviet Union feels safe. Nobody, when he goes to bed, knows if he will escape arrest during the night. (...) And where are the heroes of the October Revolution? (...) You arrested them, Stalin. You corrupted and befouled the souls of your collaborators. You compelled your followers to wade, in anguish and disgust, through pools of blood shed by their comrades and friends of yesterday. In the lying history of the Party written under your direction you robbed the dead, those whom you had murdered and defamed, and took for yourself all their achievements and services. (...) On the eve of war you disrupt the Red Army, the love and pride of our country, the bulwark of its might. (...) You have killed the most talented commanders, those who were educated through experience in the world war and the civil war, headed by the brilliant Marshal Tukhachevsky. (...) Your crazy bacchanal cannot last for long. The list of your crimes is endless! Endless is the roll-call of your victims! It is impossible to enumerate them. Sooner or later, the Soviet people will put you in the dock as a traitor to socialism and the revolution, the chief wrecker, the real enemy of the people, the organiser of famine and of judicial forgeries.¹⁵²

Although these facts could be concealed for a certain episode of history and a different image of Stalin was established by official history with labels such as "Great Leader",

151 N. Khrushchev, *ibid*.

152 Raskolnikov, "Open Letter to Stalin", *Tales of Sub-Lieutenant Ilyin*, [Marxist Internet Archive (MIA) at www.marxists.org]

“Father of Peoples”, etc., as the saying goes, *history does not forgive!*

Trotsky explains the objective reason of how could it be that tens of thousands of revolutionaries, who opposed Stalinism even at the cost of death, were defeated by the bureaucracy:

To be sure, tens of thousands of revolutionary fighters gathered around the banner of the Bolshevik-Leninists. The advanced workers were indubitably sympathetic to the Opposition, but that sympathy remained passive. The masses lacked faith that the situation could be seriously changed by a new struggle. Meantime the bureaucracy asserted: “For the sake of an international revolution, the Opposition proposes to drag us into a revolutionary war. Enough of shake-ups! We have earned the right to rest. We will build the socialist society at home. Rely upon us, your leaders!” This gospel of repose firmly consolidated the apparatchiki and the military and state officials and indubitably found an echo among the weary workers, and still more the peasant masses.¹⁵³

And most important point was expressed by Trotsky who noted Lenin’s far-sightedness. He explains that the bureaucracy conquered the Bolshevik Party and thus defeated the programme of Lenin who had seen the chief danger in the conversion of the organs of the state *from servants of society to lords over society*: “The leaden rump of bureaucracy outweighed the head of the revolution. That is the secret of the Soviet’s Thermidor.”¹⁵⁴

Finally we must underline another fact: Just as the bureaucratic dictatorship is the counter-revolutionary negation of the workers’ state, Stalinism is the negation of Leninism. There exists a process of counter-revolution stained with the blood of many Bolshevik leaders and militants between the workers’ power that had come to life with the 1917 October Revolution and the Stalinist regime which overthrew this power and ruled supreme. Bukharin’s farewell letter (*To a Future Generation of Party Leaders*) which he made his wife memorise just before his arrest in 1938, is a bitter and late admission of Stalinism:

I am leaving life. The axe under which I am extending my head is not the axe of the proletariat. It must have a merciless moral, but consistent to the end. I feel my helplessness before a hellish machine, which, with its Medieval methods, has acquired gigantic power, fabricates organised slander, acts boldly and confidently.¹⁵⁵

The question we are examining here is not that a person named Stalin emerged as a despot in history. What needs to be investigated is not Stalin as a person, but Stalinism. As he is a historic personality that came into prominence by becoming the leader of the process of bureaucratic counter-revolution and establishment of the despotic-bureaucratic regime, it is inevitable that the new regime is called by his name. As is known, there were many different views voiced and many opposition groups and circles formed within the Bolshevik party. But it was Stalin that remained at the helm and ruled while all the old Bolsheviks were killed under the terror of the bureaucratic regime. Therefore, that the

153 Trotsky, *ibid.*, pp.91-92

154 Trotsky, *ibid.*, p.94

155 Bukharin, partly quoted in S.Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, New York 1973, p.370

despotic bureaucratic regime in Russia and later on in other countries is branded with his name is a historical “privilege” which Stalin has gained “deservedly”.

Although a totalitarian regime is characterised with a highly “personalised” rule of the dictator, this kind of political set-up can never justify overlooking the substance of the regime and the nature of class dictatorship. Indeed, the death of Stalin in 1953 and then the famous 20. Congress in 1956 where Khrushchev blamed Stalin, did not make any difference in the character of the Soviet regime and the despotic bureaucratic regime in the Soviet Union existed from its establishment until its collapse in 1990’s. The claim that there was a qualitative change in the nature of the regime in the Soviet Union after Stalin’s death does not fit reality. That the ruling Soviet bureaucracy turned Stalin into a scapegoat to absolve its sins without questioning Stalinism –like Khrushchev did in his report to the 20. Congress– or that there were changes in the leadership, attempts to make some reforms, etc., are not factors changing the nature of the bureaucratic regime.

On the other hand, those viewpoints that seek the origin of the bureaucratic dictatorship not in the process of bureaucratic counter-revolution that occurred under the rule of Stalin but in the period following his death, do not bear scientific merit. After all, these kinds of theses reflect merely different varieties of Stalinism, like Maoism, Enverism, etc., which are not based on a serious questioning pursued in the light of revolutionary Marxism.

Other Bureaucratic Regimes

The Stalinist bureaucracy that ruled the Soviet Union did harm to the struggle for socialism more than the world bourgeoisie could do by portraying those measures alien to the spirit of socialism as a “merit”, “ideal application”. We can enumerate some basic elements of the Stalinist conception of “socialism in one country” as follows:

- It preaches that it is possible to build a socialist society in one country, i.e. on a national scale.
- It argues that socialist society is a “national” one “with state”.
- It argues that socialism can be built not by the advance of world revolution but under conditions of “peaceful co-existence” with capitalism within the framework of national states.
- It declares that the “socialist state” must grow stronger and stronger, and the state must continue its existence even in communism.

The fact that “national socialism” seized power in the country of October Revolution, that it has thus created illusions and that it represented an actual power effecting the world balance of power, prepared the ground for it to gain strength within the world communist movement. This situation determined the fate of the revolutions that took place after the 1917 October Revolution and the states established within the USSR’s

sphere of influence after the World War II. The petty-bourgeois nationalist “socialist” mentality of Stalinism gave rise to the monstrosity of “national socialist states” cutting each other’s throat. We are witnessing what a nationalist and chauvinist content does such a current of “socialism” have in the nationalist conflicts in the USSR or Yugoslavia today, as well as we did in the conflicts of the USSR-China, China-Vietnam, Vietnam-Cambodia for years.

The period between the 1929 economic crisis that rocked Europe and the beginning of the World War II witnessed revolutionary upsurges and counter-revolutionary attacks and fascism coming to power in the European countries. Even in such a tumultuous conjuncture pregnant with revolutions, the policy of Stalinism was guided by “maintaining the status quo”. The chief concern of the Soviet bureaucracy was the safety of its own nation-state. Bureaucracy wanted to stay away from such developments that could upset the inner stability of the power apparatus and risk the future of the bureaucratic dictatorship. For this reason it viewed the workers’ actions in Europe from the point of its selfish national interests and not of world revolution. The official communist parties that followed blindly the Stalinist rule sought to intervene in the processes of revolution in their countries under the control of the Stalinist centre. In doing this they even collaborated with bourgeois governments and hindered the revolutionary struggle of the working class. The Comintern was rendered the executor of such an evil task and turned into a wreckage from the point of view of the interests of the world revolution.

By detaining the German Communist Party (KPD) from struggle in 1930’s while Hitler was rising, Stalinism was thus annihilating the potentials that could prevent the Nazi danger. Fearing that an uprising of left forces would damage the status quo by causing a civil war, Stalinism revealed the radical difference between itself and Leninism that had as its principle utilising economic-political-social instability to further the world revolution. Like in France in 1935 Stalinism reversed the revolutionary situation that was developing in favour of the working class by its “Popular Front” policy which was based on an alliance with the bourgeoisie. It was nothing but Stalinism that prepared the defeat of communist and revolutionary forces in the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War. In August 1939, at a stage when Nazism was preparing for an offensive on the Soviet Union, Stalin signed the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact and defined Germany as “a country trying to stop the war immediately and ensure peace” after the ceremony of signatures.

Stalin’s policy of “maintaining the status quo” totally collapsed in 1941 when armies of Hitler started the offensive against the Soviet Union. The Stalinist bureaucracy approached the fight of the Soviet people against Nazism as purely a “defence of fatherland”. They did not link this immense war to the revolutionary wave taking place in Europe due to the world war. After Hitler’s armies were defeated in 1943 at the Soviet land, the Soviet bureaucracy, coming into prominence as one of the victors of the war, was preparing for the bargaining table with its American and English bourgeois allies. But before these negotiations there was one “small” business Stalin had to take care of: to officially close the Comintern that was actually non-existing and thus please his bourgeois allies! Comintern was abolished in June 1943 at the order of Stalin.

The Teheran Conference was held in November 1943. The fact that imperialists accepted the Soviet bureaucracy as a third party and negotiate with Stalin in dividing the spheres of influence reflected this simple reality: that they had found an ally in the person of the Soviet bureaucracy against the revolutionary forces that were advocating the advance of world revolution! For example, Henry Wallace, the vice president of the USA, said a few months before the Teheran Conference: “If Russia once again indulges in the Trotskyist idea of provoking a world revolution, the third world war would be inevitable.”¹⁵⁶ The American and English governments, which had to give a share to the Soviet bureaucracy while dividing spheres of influence in the aftermath of the Second World War, had already obtained concessions. The imperialists hoped to prevent the danger of revolutionary upsurge that had already developed during the war and that would further develop after it by striking a deal with Stalin who would assign the mission of detaining the revolution to the communist parties. For this reason the rest of the agreement was reduced to a division of the European soil under Nazi occupation according to the balance of power at the end of the war.

In the end, according to the treaty signed by the USA, Britain and the Soviet government in the Teheran (28 November- 1 December 1943), Yalta (4-11 February 1945), and Potsdam (17 July-2 August 1945) Conferences, East European countries (East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Rumania, Albania, and Bulgaria) were left to the USSR as her spheres of influence. Therefore the states that were established in these lands with the intervention of the “Red Army” of Stalinism were by no means products of a revolution like the October Revolution. On the contrary, the Communist Party leaderships in these countries stopped the process of revolution, which bore a potential to grow into proletarian power, right at the point of establishing a power that achieved the “national liberation”. Thus, the process of establishment of the “People’s Democracies” in the East European countries took shape under the influence of the agreement between the world bourgeoisie and the Stalinist bureaucracy which reinforced its power on the basis of new world balances where the Soviet rule was also acknowledged in the aftermath of the world war.¹⁵⁷

But this general assessment does not mean that there are no differences among the processes of establishment of new powers in these countries. If we are to make a distinction according to the scope of resistance movements against German Nazism, one has to state that in some of them the decisive element with regards to “national

156 F.Claudin, *From Comintern to Cominform*, our translation from the Turkish edition

157 Deutscher notes that Stalin forced the resistance movements led by communists in Europe during the period of World War II to battle only for national liberation and not for socialism. He goes on to say: “A revolutionary situation emerged by the end of war. How this would be controlled and reduced to a minimum was the chief concern of Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill in Yalta and Teheran. The three leaders handled the problems of the alliance in the framework of traditional diplomacy and divided the spheres of influence.” (*Unfinished Revolution*, our translation from the Turkish edition) Emphasising that the countries called “People’s Democracies” were but the defence barricades of “Socialism in One Country”, Deutscher explains that in accordance with the agreements in Yalta and Teheran the bourgeois governments in Western Europe, which had received severe blows and degraded, were revived thanks to the fact that the communist parties, guided by Stalinism, strangled the radicalism of the working class.

liberation” is the intervention of the Red Army. But, the dominant factor in Yugoslavia, for instance, was an important and fighting partisan war led by Tito.

On the other hand, the fact that the bureaucratic leaderships of the Yugoslavian and Albanian CPs clashed later on with the Moscow bureaucracy does not entail a different approach to the process in these countries. Since these bureaucratic leaderships, like the Moscow bureaucracy, were also essentially against the goal of world revolution. They too had a conception of nationalist state socialism based on the defence of their own nation-state’s interests. Such was the perspective they had in relation to the anti-fascist national liberation struggle that took place in the conjuncture of World War II. With this perspective they intervened in the course of events. What determined the nature of power and state order in these countries was in fact the military bureaucratic structure that had formed during the long resistance war against Nazism and that grew into a standing army. And, contrary to the allegations, it was this military bureaucratic structure that constituted the basis of the future bureaucratic dictatorship and not the working class or peasantry.

For all these reasons East European states were phenomena that took shape from their birth as satellites or replicas of the Stalinist bureaucratic rule and that bore no similarity with the power of workers’ soviets the 1917 October Revolution gave birth to. In other words, unlike the workers’ state that was born in Russia in 1917, East European states came into life from the start as bureaucratic states. The economic regime in these bureaucratic states also reflected a structure of bureaucratic centralist command economy based on state ownership, liquidating capitalist economy and nationalising the big industry.

The situation is not essentially different in China under the leadership of Mao, who established his power by resisting in a way or another the hegemony of the Soviet bureaucracy (Moscow) after the World War II. The Chinese national liberation movement led by the bureaucratic leadership of Mao was essentially based on peasantry and the petty-bourgeoisie. People’s Republic of China has scored an advance in the field of industrialisation on the basis of state ownership, considerably reducing the historical gap in this respect in this enormous peasant country. Likewise, more recent national liberation movements in Cuba, Vietnam could break out of the sphere of influence of American imperialism and rise to power, thanks, in the final analysis, to the existence of the Soviet Union.

Although Maoism is nothing but a peasant version of Stalinism, petty bourgeois left have tried for years to knock out the “Soviet revisionism” by adopting Maoism! This trend was formed on the basis of a “revolutionism” which corresponds to the class position and mentality of the petty-bourgeoisie and it has hardly anything to do with the interests of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat. Yet such currents have had an influence for a certain period of time on the socialist ranks. And despite the objective basis of them has disappeared with the collapse of the bureaucratic regimes, their ideological effects are still alive.

It is of no use to emphasise the relatively revolutionary character of national liberation

movements when it comes to the character of the power and state from the point of view of the revolutionary targets of the proletariat. The question must be examined from a Marxist point of view and the fundamental shortcomings of such movements must explicitly be expressed. That the leaderships of these movements took a stance with national motives against the hegemonic attitude of the Soviet bureaucracy, did not mean that they achieved an essential departure from the Stalinist concept of “national state socialism”. Although they had some differences in political analysis, they all had in common the perspective of establishing a power limited by “organising the nation-state” and certainly not a genuine workers’ power that would proceed towards socialism. That is, a perspective of constructing their own independent national states prevailed in the political conception of the leaderships of these movements.

The Stalinist policy in the East, as well as in the West, was based on the desire to maintain the status quo, keep away from social conflicts that could harm the international status quo. Even if Maoists have tried to ascribe this policy to the “Khrushchevist revisionism”, in reality revisionism was Stalinism itself. Maoism did not touch upon Stalin or Stalinism since it was a replica of Stalinism itself. In this context, Deutscher’s remark has a point when he said: “even their conception of socialism bears the imprint of Stalinism; it is the idea of Socialism in One Country surrounded by a Great Wall of China.”¹⁵⁸

When you examine the history of political conflicts within the communist parties or other revolutionary organisations of these countries, the existence of a constant struggle will be seen between revolutionary Marxism and petty-bourgeois socialism, just like the one during the establishment of the Stalinist rule. And it is again true in general that the political leaderships brought to power by these revolutions were based neither on the proletariat organised in soviets nor on cadres who stood for revolutionary Marxism. They stepped forward as “national saviours” who were moulded with bureaucratic inclinations in the line of Stalinism and who reconciled leading a national revolution with a bureaucratic way of ruling. For this reason, these revolutions could not go beyond the limits of “national socialism” with respect to both their historical-social scope and the inclinations of the political representatives they brought to power.

When the national revolutionary leaderships educated in the spirit of Stalinist official Marxism came to power, they upheld the concept of “socialism in one country” of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Because, as a matter of fact, in this tendency of “socialist construction” they found the strategy of national development by which they could build their independent nation-states in the era of imperialism. Thus after the national liberation revolutions in these countries they embarked on nationalisation of the means of production in the hands of imperialist capital and big scale industry so far as it existed. Thus, they have all been “bureaucratic states” that came into existence as replicas of the Stalinist bureaucratic state with respect to their basic features, regardless of whether they were established as a result of the intervention of the Red Army or of national liberation revolutions. In that case, all the states established in the so-called “socialist countries” have nothing to do with a workers’ state except the historically short-lived Workers’

158 I. Deutscher, *Unfinished Revolution*, our translation from the Turkish edition

Soviet State that was product of the October Revolution.¹⁵⁹

159 Let us quote here from the translator's introduction to the collection of Trotsky's writings *On China* published in Turkish: "Essentially there is no fundamental difference between the case of engagement of the petty bourgeois revolutionary leaderships to this road more or less before the conquest of power in countries such as China, Yugoslavia and Vietnam etc. (in all these, the leadership of the movement was the official CPs) and the case of entering this road only months after seizing the state power in countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua etc. In both cases, the fundamentally decisive factor was that the national bourgeoisie stood away from the national liberation movement owing to its fear from the mobilisation of the masses, that the proletariat was unable to play a leading role because of its weakness and its lack of organisation, and that the «development model» offered by the USSR remained as the only option.

"Therefore the petty bourgeois intelligentsia which led the national liberation movements on the second half of the twentieth century has not played an independent role, confirming the predictions of Trotsky, and has marched along the way opened by the Soviet bureaucracy which has been an international power in the given international conjuncture. And when they managed to conquer power they transformed themselves into a ruling bureaucratic class."

Chapter 5

The “Transition Period” Ceases to Exist Under Bureaucratic Dictatorship

A socio-economic formation which takes shape under the command of a bureaucratic state -like the one in the Soviet Union- is a phenomenon that has nothing in common with the transition period from capitalism to communism and should be analysed entirely on the basis of its own peculiar nature. It is not possible to speak of the existence of the fundamental condition of the transition period from capitalism to communism in all those countries where the working class lost the power to the bureaucracy or where the state was established in a bureaucratic manner from the very outset. What is this fundamental condition? As Marx states in *The Critique of Gotha Programme*, “Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing *but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*.”¹⁶⁰

As the experiences have shown, the historical movement of the working class from capitalism towards communism can only be possible under its own direct domination. This political domination is embodied in the workers’ state, the essence of which is *the proletariat organised as ruling class*. The distinctive feature of transition period from capitalism to communism is that the proletariat, after establishing its domination by conquering the political power, lifts itself up to the position of being the master of the conditions of production, centralising the means of production in the hands of its own state. Marx noted the fundamental factor that illuminates the foundation of the entire social construction as follows:

It is always the direct relation of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers, which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden foundation of the entire social construction, and with it of the political form of the relations between sovereignty and dependence, in short, of the corresponding form of the state. The form of this relation between rulers and ruled naturally corresponds always with a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and of its productive social power.¹⁶¹

It is necessary to take measures of Paris Commune type and enforce them in order to avoid a bureaucratic division of rulers and ruled amongst the working class -after

160 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p.26

161 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, p.919

conquering political power- and not to lose by this way its power falling under the rule of new masters. Thus the Paris Commune type measures are necessary for not only destroying old bureaucratic-military state apparatus, but also for replacing it with a mechanism “that can prevent a return to old crap”. In short, the workers’ state cannot organise in a bureaucratic manner like the bourgeois state, otherwise it cannot be a workers’ state. Besides, the dictatorship of the proletariat is rested on the direct domination of the proletariat organised in soviets, not on the domination of the party which wins the leadership of the class. Thus *workers’ democracy is not one of the forms of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but its condition of existence, its essence.*

It is thus clear that one cannot speak of a “transition period” in those countries where the proletariat has not even really come to power and bureaucratic dictatorships have been established from the very outset. But, on the other hand, we have the example of the Russian proletariat who conquered the political power through 1917 October Revolution and started the historical transition from capitalism to communism. However as the Soviet state transformed into a bureaucratic one, the necessary condition of transition period (workers’ democracy) has disappeared and the historic movement from capitalism into communism stopped. It is not possible to speak of a workers’ state when there is no workers’ democracy and of the existence of a transition period when there is no workers’ state respectively. Thus, these societies cannot be defined as “societies in transition period” just as they cannot be defined as “socialist”.

The Ideology of the Bureaucratic State

The Soviet bureaucracy and the other bureaucratic sovereignties have existed and continued their existence on the basis of state ownership of the fundamental means of production. It has been a binding duty of bureaucracy to protect the economic foundations of the bureaucratic regime, that is state ownership, to save its own sovereignty. Having raised themselves up to the level of an independent power in the face of society, the bureaucratic dictatorships, in spite of certain differences between them, have formed an official ideology with a common content in the final analysis. This official ideology is materialised in the conception of “national and statist socialism”.

It is a general fact that in exploitative societies the state defines itself with an official ideology vis-a-vis society. Engels explains in his *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* the position of the state as the highest form of ideology as follows:

Hardly come into being, this organ makes itself independent vis-a-vis society; and, indeed, the more so, the more it becomes the organ of a particular class, the more it directly enforces the supremacy of that class....

But once the state has become an independent power vis-a-vis society, it produces forthwith a further ideology. It is indeed among professional politicians, theorists of public law, and jurists of private law, that the connection with economic facts gets lost for fair.¹⁶²

162 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p.371

However, in the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which represents the opening of a new historical period, since the state will undergo a qualitative transformation and organise as a semi-state, it will no longer represent an independent power vis-a-vis the toiling majority of society. On the contrary “state” here will or must itself be the organised power of the toiling majority. Of course, such a state cannot have an ideology different or independent from a worldview reflecting the historical interests of the majority.

It would be a great fallacy to hope that this rule, which applies to a real workers’ state, would also apply to a bureaucratic state that establishes its rule in the name of the working class. The fact that the workers’ state in the Soviet Union transformed into the state of the bureaucracy as a result of bureaucratic counter-revolution, resulted in a situation where state is an independent power vis-a-vis the majority, just like it is in exploitative societies in general. The state of the bureaucracy created an official ideology reflecting its own interests confirming the law Engels stated. This official ideology, which we call “Stalinism”, has been enthroned not only within the borders of the Soviet Union, but also, through the enforcement of the bureaucratic power in the Soviet Union, within the international communist movement. In brief, this official ideology in its heyday has put its imprint, to this or that extent, on all powers established in the name of “socialism”, spread and implant its bureaucratic system of domination to them.

The Stalinist bureaucracy presented the nationalisation of the means of production as “socialisation”, “socialist construction”, “real socialism”. However, as we stated in the previous parts, nationalisation can by no means be identified with socialisation; such an attempt could have a character of a leap forward towards socialisation only under a workers’ state.¹⁶³ A nationalisation under the political domination of the bureaucracy made the bureaucracy dominant in economic sense as well and lifted it to the position of the master of the production process. Thus, as Marx stated, the rule that reads “those who control the social surplus-product, control the whole society as well” operated and the bureaucracy emerged before the proletariat as a real dominant power in both political and economic sense. In order to continue its sovereignty, above all, over the proletariat, the bureaucracy needed an argument in order to establish, strengthen and maintain its ideological hegemony, apart from direct repression when necessary. This argument of the bureaucracy which has been a means of its ideological hegemony turned out to be the monstrosity of “socialism in one country”.

Just as the bourgeois dictatorship, in general, needed a guise of “democracy” in order to make itself presentable to the toiling masses, the bureaucratic dictatorship wore a guise of “socialism”. Of course, Stalinism was not to search for the sources of its official ideology in the perspectives of revolutionary Marxism. This would be a voluntary

163 We will remind here the words of Trotsky that bring clarity to the matter: “In order to become social, private property must as inevitably pass through the state stage as the caterpillar in order to become a butterfly must pass through the pupal stage. But the pupa is not a butterfly. Myriads of pupae perish without ever becoming butterflies. 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.” (Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.237)

suicide for it. Thus it clung to the *Lassallean* conception of petty-bourgeois socialism which was at the time bitterly criticised by Marx. All theoretical ammunition of Marxism on workers' state, transition period, socialism and communism have been pervaded by the Stalinist domination. And this theoretical arsenal have been kept under lock and key with every measure to prevent proletariat from seizing it. Thanks to the domination that has been provided by the nationalised means of production, the bureaucracy managed for a relatively long time to foist its sovereignty on the proletariat as "socialism".

According to the Stalinist ideology that identifies socialism with statism, if a national liberationist bourgeois or petty-bourgeois power in an economically backward country had taken the road of "statism" along with good relations with the Soviet Union, this was enough to call it "socialist". That the regimes in countries like Algeria, Yemen, Somalia, Angola, Mozambique, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Nicaragua are characterised as "socialist" shows how far the concept of socialism has been trampled over. In brief, the Stalinist sovereignty has given a present to the world, which is a distortion of "socialism" that has nothing in common with socialism. This distortion that the followers of Stalinism designated "real socialism" has enormously harmed the struggle for socialism.

The contributions (!) of the ideologues of the Stalinist bureaucracy and that famous "academy of sciences" are the evidences of the ideological struggle to kill Marxism. Their "scientific" occupation has been an "officialdom" that is responsible for defending Stalinism -which tramples over Marxism- against the criticism of revolutionary Marxism. The following quote from Kuusinen, head of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and one of the prominent ideologues of the Comintern and the Soviet bureaucracy, would suffice to show how Stalinist bureaucracy killed Marxism:

Under socialist regime national property is state property, as society, owning the means of production, is represented by state at this stage. The state manages whole social production as a single process in the name of society.... When it is said that, under socialist regime, people consciously direct the evolution of society, what one must understand from this is that people do this through party and state that play the role of managing and organising the socialist economy.¹⁶⁴

The Characteristics of the Bureaucratic Regime

As for the process experienced under bureaucratic domination in the USSR and countries alike, where capitalist private ownership on basic means of production is abolished and means of production are nationalised, we cannot talk about capitalism. Labour power is no longer a commodity that is sold to and purchased by private capitalists (or a capitalist state). As private property on the means of production is abolished, they cease to be capital and the process of capital accumulation is put an end to; instead a general accumulation of products begins. The general target of production is no longer the production of exchange values aimed at obtaining more profit in the market. The essential target of the bureaucratic command economy is to increase the production of

164 Quoted in M. Gündüz, *Bürokrasi ve Sosyalist Demokrasi [Bureaucracy and Socialist Democracy]*, February 1990, pp.117-118

goods on the basis of state ownership in order to guarantee the accumulation of surplus product necessary for reproduction.

In a bureaucratic command economy like the USSR, generalised commodity production has ended; the production process has ceased to be a process in which surplus value is produced. In this regime, distribution of productive resources is realised not according to the laws of market economy (which manifest themselves in the pursuit of capital to obtain the highest profit in the market) but to a central plan that reflects the preferences of the dominant bureaucracy. However as the gauge in planning is the price indicator and monetary evaluation, the input-output transactions between sectors go hand in hand with a financial planning that resembles only formally the exchange transactions in the market. This situation is completely different from the capitalist market economy where distribution of resources is done according to the competition rule in the market. In such a case, the dominant mechanism in the economy can be characterised as *neither private nor state capitalism*.

Thus, although the world market constitutes a pressure on the bureaucratic regime due to the existence of capitalist domination across the world, we cannot ignore the qualitative difference between the economies under a bureaucratic state and a capitalist state. The economy of a bureaucratic regime on the basis of state ownership is not like the “economic activities of state” in a capitalist society in which the economy is basically a market economy and individual private property on the means of production is essential. The “statist economy” under the bureaucratic state cannot be defined as a version of capitalism, i.e. “state capitalism”.¹⁶⁵ As Marx explains in *Capital*, capitalism can live only in a medium where there is capitalist competition, “many capitals” -even if they are merged and monopolised- and where they can find free wage labour. Yet, such a situation is out of question in the bureaucratic regimes.

In the bureaucratic dictatorships separated from each other by national borders and conflicts of interest, the pressure of the capitalist world market is reflected in the formation of an black market developing beside the nationalised foreign trade and the infiltration of capitalist relations into the inner workings of the bureaucratic regime. The channels of juicy revenues (smuggling, black market, etc.) created by world trade especially for those shrewd elements at key positions among the bureaucracy ended in a growing unofficial market economy in these countries.

We have already stated that labour power, which is a commodity under capitalism, would lose this character in a situation where the means of production are nationalised under the political sovereignty of the proletariat. And this holds true even if with a bureaucratic dictatorship where basic means of production are nationalised and the accumulation of capital is put an end to. But, of course, the qualitative difference between the two situations is obvious when we look into the problem from the standpoint of the position of the proletariat in the production process. While it will plan and maintain the social production as its own master in a workers’ state, the proletariat completely loses this

¹⁶⁵ We will not go into the reasons here, as we deal with the view that appraises these regimes as “state capitalism” in another chapter.

superiority under the bureaucratic state. In the latter, it does not sell its labour power to capitalists and generally there is no capitalist to buy its labour power. However, it cannot allocate its labour power to its own rule as it would be in a workers' state. Under the bureaucratic state, the proletariat allocates its labour power to the state which embodies the domination of the bureaucracy. For this reason, the position of the working class is not like that in the capitalist society. It is dependent on the bureaucratic state and collectively exploited by the dominant bureaucracy.

At this point let us note two important points in order to avoid some misunderstandings. First, in spite of the different position of the working class in a bureaucratic regime compared with capitalism, the concept "working class" can still be used to define this class now exploited under different conditions; and this attitude is correct. Because this class is neither a completely "new class" nor a "slave class" contrary to the claims of some writers who make varied appraisals of the nature of the bureaucratic regimes. As we deal with this kind of wrong views in another chapter, here we will limit ourselves with a brief remark. Under bureaucratic dictatorship the "worker" is neither a "free" wage labour like under capitalism, nor a "slave" belonging with all his/her being to the master. The right to use his/her labour power belongs to the state and he/she gets in return a share again determined by the state. Although the quantity of this share is calculated in terms of money and the worker is paid in cash, this is not the wage determined by the rules of market like under capitalism. But, once we have clarified the difference of labourers from free wage labour under capitalism, there is nothing wrong with calling the payment to labourers under the bureaucratic dictatorships "wage".

Under the bureaucratic regime where the production of surplus value is brought to an end in general, the specific form of appropriating surplus-labour of the proletariat will reveal the secrets of this socio-economic formation. About this rule Marx says the following in the third volume of *Capital*:

The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and, in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form.¹⁶⁶

How can "the specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers," be expressed in the bureaucratic regime? By the fact that the bureaucracy, who owns the state, is the sole power to decide in the distribution of the products of social labour, being the centralised dominant power that employs the whole workforce. This situation is the expression of the production relations in the bureaucratic regimes and it determines the relations between the ruling bureaucracy and ruled proletariat. Also it is the material basis upon which the political form of the bureaucratic regime arises. While the proletariat is the political and economic source of sovereignty in a workers' state, which, being the master of production process, decides "what, how

166 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, p.919.

much, how” to produce in the planning of production, this source of power under the bureaucratic regime belongs to the bureaucracy. The aim of the dominant bureaucracy is to sustain the expanded reproduction process in order to maintain the existence of the bureaucratic state. Since the economy, which is generally based on bureaucratic central planning, does not aim at producing exchange values and does not have to submit to the rules of capitalist market, it may be perceived in a sense as a planning of use value production to meet the necessities of society. But in fact, due to the interests, internal conflicts, and whims of the dominant bureaucracy, this planning is not always rational, and, above all, is far from meeting the genuine needs of the producers. The essence of the bureaucratic regime is that the bureaucracy rules the conditions of production, regulates the production process not from the point of view of the historical interests of the working class, but of the maintenance and strengthening of the bureaucratic state.

On the basis of central planning by the bureaucracy, social product is divided into three parts: 1) the part that the bureaucracy appropriates in order to meet its consumption (luxury and comfort included), 2) resources allocated for social development and growth, 3) the part necessary for the workers to reproduce their labour power, various social funds, etc. It is clear that the share of the proletariat is quite small compared with what it could have been under the domination of the proletariat, if we consider that this distribution is planned by the dominant bureaucracy which has an absolute say on the state property.

In addition to the fact that the proletariat has no say in the determination of its share in the national income (no independent trade union organisation, no wage bargain, no strike!), it serves for the satisfaction of the consumption of a huge horde of bureaucrats. It would be ridiculous under these circumstances to imagine that the bureaucracy could do justice to the proletariat in determining its wages. Compared with the situation in advanced capitalist countries, the living conditions that the workers’ wages can afford in these countries are generally below the average level. One reason for this is that the productivity of labour in these countries is well below the level in world market. But statistical figures show that the wages paid to the workers is much more below their productivity. It means that under the conditions where the “sole employer” of the workforce is the bureaucratic state, the wages determined by it do not at all indicate a real guarantee of life. For this reason, the fight for increasing living standards in spite of legal obstacles continued also under the bureaucratic dictatorship and in practice there appeared two separate economies: official and unofficial economy! Because of the frustration caused by the official economy from the point of view of the working class (that is, the inadequacy of workers’ share from the product) there emerged an unofficial labour market on the basis of unofficial additional jobs.

But it would be wrong to regard this unpleasant picture in distribution of products from the point of view of the proletariat as only a picture of inequalities in distribution process and not to dwell on the facts underlying it. Because the conditions of distribution of products is a result of distribution of production conditions, that is the distribution of the mutual positions of the classes in the production process. Marx expresses this fact in his article *Introduction to the Critique of the Political Economy*:

Distribution according to the most superficial interpretation is distribution of products; it is thus removed further from production and made quasi-independent of it. But before distribution becomes distribution of products, it is (1) distribution of the means of production, and (2) (which is another aspect of the same situation) distribution of the members of society among the various types of production (the subsuming of the individuals under definite relations Of production). It is evident that the distribution of products is merely a result of this distribution, which is comprised in the production process and determines the structure of production.¹⁶⁷

In terms of distribution of the means of production, under the bureaucratic regime the dominant bureaucracy collectively retains the monopoly of the right to dispose (the right to decide how to use and where) the means of production that are in the possession of the state. Under these conditions the proletariat does not hold the position of the “producing and ruling” class, which it can enjoy in a workers’ state. The division of “producer-ruler”, which will disappear, merging in the heart of the proletariat in a workers’ state, continues to exist in the bureaucratic regime. The proletariat’s lot is “to produce”, and bureaucracy’s lot is “to rule”.

For this reason, the appropriate criterion to reveal the inequalities in the distribution of products under the bureaucratic state is not only a comparison of the wages of bureaucrats and workers, but a comparison of their different positions within the conditions of production. As long as direct producers are “ruled” in the production process, they have to produce the consumption goods necessary for a living of the “ruling” class. This necessity will continue to exist under the bureaucratic state, while it can come to an end from the standpoint of the working class in the case of existence of a workers’ state. In a bureaucratic regime where there is no wealthy classes of private propertied sort, the bureaucracy, enjoying the authority of collective domination over state property, is the dominant class that appropriates the social surplus-labour of the proletariat, and *exploits* it. Thus although the exploitation is not a surplus-value exploitation under bureaucratic regime, which is characteristic to capitalism, there is an exploitation of surplus-labour and these regimes belong to the set of *exploitative societies*. Thus Marx’s generalisation in *Capital* is valid for them, too:

Wherever a part of society possesses the monopoly of the means of production, the labourer, free or not free, must add to the working-time necessary for his own maintenance an extra working-time in order to produce the means of subsistence for the owners of the means of production, whether this proprietor be the Athenian *χάλαρος χ’αγαθός*, Etruscan theocrat, *civis Romanus*, Norman baron, American slave-owner, Wallachian Boyard, modern landlord or capitalist.¹⁶⁸

Thus, the privileged position of the bureaucracy in these countries is something much beyond the corruption and the injustice in the distribution of the means of subsistence. The lion’s share bureaucracy gets in the distribution of the means of subsistence at the expense of the working class flows from the fact that the former is a ruling class while the latter is a ruled class. This is the main point we should look at in judging the

167 Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p.201-202

168 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, p.226

dominant bureaucracy from the view point of the historical interests of the working class. Otherwise it would amount to being content with dealing only with the special privileges of bureaucrats, their dachas etc. and obsessing with appearance and failing to see the essence. As a matter of fact it is the international bourgeoisie that tries to do it. In order to blacken socialism, in a bid to exploit this reality, it has to divert the attention away from the essence, namely that these regimes are not socialist.

Historical Gain?

The fact that the working class continues to be a “ruled” class in the bureaucratic regime, inevitably finds its most striking expression in the labour regime of the bureaucratic state. The fact that under the bureaucratic state the right to work has been “ensured” by laws and unemployment has legally been put an end to, is not enough to describe this situation as a “historical gain” of the proletariat. Such “job security” of the working class under the bureaucratic state and a genuine job security such that the proletariat can enjoy thanks to a state of its own should not be mixed. To see these two as identical would mean to appraise state ownership as a historical gain even under conditions that a proletarian revolution does not take place but a bureaucratic domination is established from the very outset. And such an attitude would mean to equate the position into which the bureaucratic state has driven the working class (being the workers of despotic-bureaucratic state) with the historical gains of the proletarian revolution (the proletariat as the dominant class, master of itself). In this case the idea that a proletarian revolution is necessary will fade away and such an idea that even without such a revolution the working class may well attain a historical gain *only through state ownership* will gain ground.

It is true that the working class obtained a chance of employment under the bureaucratic regime based on state ownership, which it can never have under capitalism. This situation may seem to them as a guarantee compared with the fear of dismissal and unemployment that the working class would experience under capitalism; and they may want to preserve this right. But, still all these are not sufficient to make the job security under the bureaucratic regime a historical gain of the working class revolution.

Apart from the principle of free market of capitalism (workers are free to sell their labour and bosses are free to buy it), the bureaucratic regimes in general have to employ every individual who is able work under a labour regime the terms of which are determined by the state. We say in general, because the unemployment could not completely be overcome even under the bureaucratic regimes. “Job security” is the condition of maintaining the sovereignty of the bureaucratic regimes based on state ownership. Because, in order to maintain the status quo and keep the working class at a standstill the bureaucratic state has to lean on some structural concessions. However, there is no rational point in appraising such a labour regime as a “historical gain”, in which the working class is deprived of all rights of union, strike etc. in the face of an alienated state and where wages and work conditions are determined unilaterally by the dominant bureaucracy. In fact the reality that should be grasped is this: there must be a special way

to preserve stability in a situation where the working class is not dominant and is deprived of democratic rights to defend itself against the state of the dominant bureaucracy. It is this compulsion, and not the loyalty (!) of the bureaucracy to the working class, which is the reason for “job security”, low rents, free health services, free nursery and education, a general scope retirement right, etc. in the bureaucratic regimes. And the removal of these assurances with the dissolution of bureaucratic regimes and that the proletariat has no other option but its own actual struggle to secure its job and life guarantee is an indication of this situation.

“Labour discipline” based on bureaucratic hierarchy from above also determined the attitude of the working class towards the obligation to work. The “lack of discipline at work” which was considered a “passive resistance” of the worker against the state in the USSR and countries alike is an expression of the deep alienation workers find themselves in. While we were examining the features of transition period we said: Although it will not amount to the comfort of the future classless society, a labour regime controlled by workers themselves as their own bosses will not create the kind of problems that would emerge when the proletariat is forced by an alien power like the dominant bureaucracy. We can now add: a situation where the proletariat itself holds the ropes of the production process, and makes its own conscious decisions to sacrifice if need be, is by no means similar to a situation where workers are forced to work by an alien power, i.e. the bureaucracy.

In the former case workers will not be alien to the production process even if they eventually feel tired. In the latter case, though, workers take their revenge from an alienating labour regime by passive resistance, dodging, etc. Although such a “job security” that propels the proletariat to laziness, dodging, alcoholism, degeneration out of an instinct of resistance to the bureaucratic regime can be significant compared with the evil of capitalist unemployment, it cannot be counted as a genuine historical gain of the proletariat. On the other hand –a peculiarity of the bureaucratic regime– the dominant bureaucracy can well become unconcerned about the production process once it is satisfied by its own subsistence. However, this does not change the fact that the labour regime in these countries is set up in such a way that the destiny of workers as to their employment lies between the lips of the bureaucrat.

Bureaucracy is a State-Based Class

Marx points out in *Critique Of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* to the fact that state bureaucracy possesses the state, that state is the “private property” of the bureaucracy. This situation does not lift the state bureaucracy to a position of an independent class in capitalist society, although it is granted a privileged position. Even though this bureaucracy can acquire a relatively independent position in political sphere in periods of severe crisis that shake the bourgeois order, in the final analysis it could not go beyond a governing caste, a social layer within the bourgeois class. Marx and Engels give a general clue in *The German Ideology* for the analysis of a possible conflict between capitalists as part of bourgeoisie and the politicians, writers, managers, etc. that are experts in the

administration of the bourgeois state:

The division of labour, ... as one of the chief forces of history up till now, manifests itself also in the ruling class as the division of mental and material labour, so that inside this class one part appears as the thinkers of the class...

And they continue:

Within this class this cleavage can even develop into a certain opposition and hostility between the two parts, which, however, in the case of a practical collision, in which the class itself is endangered, automatically comes to nothing, in which case there also vanishes the semblance that the ruling ideas were not the ideas of the ruling class and had a power distinct from the power of this class.¹⁶⁹

Therefore the Marxist approach determines that, in the final analysis, the rulers will be those who privately own the means of production in the class societies based on private property. In this kind of societies political sphere is dependent on economic sphere, although it can acquire a relative independence under certain conditions.

The problem of *state* lies at the heart of the difference between class societies based on private property on the means of production and class societies based on state ownership on the means of production (Asiatic form of society as a historical category). In all the social formations in the first category, however “independent” it may appear in the face of society, the state, in the final analysis, is the state of the economically dominant class, that is, the class holding the private property on the means of production. In the social formations in the latter category, though, economic sphere and political sphere are intertwined such that the problem of sovereignty turns into the problem of “the ownership of the state”. In the social formations where ownership on the basic means of production takes the form of state ownership those who hold the state –that is, political power– will also hold the economic power. In such a case, the position of owning the state will determine who is the sovereign in economic sense.

It is this very fact that constitutes the basic starting point in explaining the sovereign position of the proletariat in the dictatorship of the proletariat. Marxism stipulates that the proletariat, after having lifted itself to the position of political sovereignty by a political revolution, should also lift itself to the position of economic sovereignty by nationalising the basic means of production. Since as long as these means of production are privately owned by the bourgeoisie, it could only be a daydream for the proletariat to preserve the political sovereignty it has acquired. The proletariat can maintain its sovereignty if and only if the workers’ state takes into its monopoly the ownership of the basic means of production. But, here another vital problem comes to the fore. If the state is the organisation of new masters (the bureaucracy) who substitute themselves for the proletariat, instead of the proletariat organised as the sovereign class, then we can speak of neither political nor economic sovereignty of the proletariat. Because in a situation where ownership, the basis of economic sovereignty, is concentrated into state ownership, those elements who possess the state would also possess both political and

169 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, pp.47-48 and 48

economic power.

In the bureaucratic regimes which we deal with, the state is the property of the bureaucracy. Therefore this bureaucracy is a dominant class in both political and economic sense. It represents an organised collective power that has become independent from society and placed itself at the top of it. Here the bureaucracy is a “collective exploiter” dominant class, collectively possessing the right to dispose the state ownership of the means of production.

At this point we should return to the starting point and recall Marx’s idea that says “the bureaucracy possesses the state”. In the class societies based on private property, however independent it becomes, the bureaucracy remains, in the final analysis, as a dependent element of that class who has the economic sovereignty (i.e. the private property owning class). Yet in a social formation which is based on state ownership, if the state is possessed by the bureaucracy, then this “bureaucracy” will not be a dependent element of or an addendum of any other power.

Or, should we ask “can it be?” rather than saying “it will not be”? Is there a wealthy class upon which the bureaucracy will in the final analysis be “dependent” under circumstances where the means of production are nationalised, abolishing the conditions of sovereignty of the wealthy classes. Of course, there is not. And, again in this case, can we define the bureaucracy who possesses the state as a social force, a social caste “dependent” in the final analysis on the proletariat? In order to make such a definition, the proletariat should have in its hands the source of sovereignty to make the bureaucracy dependent on itself. However, since the proletariat is not a private property owning class, the one and only fortune it can enjoy is, so to speak, “to possess the state”, i.e. to organise itself as a ruling class. And this could be nothing but the practical existence of a workers’ state, the embodiment of the political domination of the proletariat in the form of state organisation.

Under conditions where we cannot speak of a political sovereignty of the proletariat, we can never speak of its sovereignty over the state, its possession of the state. For this reason, both in examples which are from the outset established as bureaucratic states and in the example of the USSR where the working class has lost its power to the bureaucracy by a bureaucratic counter-revolution, the working class is not a dominant class in economic sense as well. And there is no class society without a dominant class.

The peculiar character of the bureaucratic regimes comes to the fore right at this point. In these regimes that are based on state ownership, the bureaucracy who possesses political and economic power is not a political caste but a dominant class. So the phenomenon of “bureaucracy” in the bureaucratic regimes means much more than it does in the class societies based on private property. It no longer finds its *raison d’être* in serving a dominant class; on the contrary it is a dominant power itself that makes others serve.

This peculiar position of the bureaucracy that has established a peculiar class sovereignty in the so-called “socialist” countries is the main reason for the historic error of the majority

of the world left on the nature of this regime. Why do we use the word “peculiar”? For the following reason: until the 20th century history has never witnessed that, in the western societies based on private property, bureaucracy constituted an independent class and thus became a dominant class. This took place in the archaic-Asiatic despotic states (Egyptian, Indian, Chinese civilisations) and the later despotic structures like Russia, Mongolia, Seljuks and Ottomans.

As a matter of fact, the position of the bureaucracy has always remained the same in the ancient (slavery) state, in the feudal state and in the modern capitalist state. Of course it has gone through some changes from the point of view of the forms of organisation in connection with the transformations the state has gone through over these historical periods. But it has always remained the same in its essential character, that is, its social function. A social layer serving and dependent on the dominant class in the social organisation. From the first emergence of class societies—and thus of the first states—until the 20th century we cannot come across one single exception in the Western societies, which represents a change in this position of bureaucracy.

Only the societies of the East provide us with historical examples in which the bureaucracy constitutes an independent class while it remains as a social layer dependent on the dominant class in the class societies that emerge in the western development line (slave, feudal, capitalist). When we study the historical evolution of the Asiatic Societies, we see that the bureaucracy has managed there to constitute an independent class and even become a dominant class who controlled the despotic state. Although this peculiarity we observe in the East or ancient societies based on Asiatic mode of production has been considered as an “exceptional” line of development, in fact it occupies an overwhelming place in the historical evolution of human societies and especially in the birth of early civilisations.¹⁷⁰

Thus the main point that constitutes the error in those views that claim the bureaucracy in the despotic-bureaucratic dictatorships is a “privileged caste” rather than a class lies in the fact that they consider the phenomenon of bureaucracy on the basis of the character it bears in those class societies based on private property (western line of development). However, the general characterisations of Marxism about the “class” phenomenon do not mean that the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and alike countries cannot be an independent class. On the contrary they point to the need to investigate this bureaucracy on the basis of the peculiarities (state ownership) of these social formations.

In a brief description Trotsky touches upon the class phenomenon in *The Revolution Betrayed* with the following words: “Classes are characterised by their position in the social system of economy, and primarily by their relation to the means of production.”¹⁷¹

And Lenin defines classes in the following way:

170 Marx was the first to note this peculiarity and attempt to scientifically explain the historical reasons of this. It is known that Asiatic mode of production and Oriental despotism occupied an important place in his works. (see *Grundrisse* and *Capital*)

171 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.248

Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated in law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it.

And he goes on to say: “Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy.”¹⁷²

Is it possible to speak of such an exploitation in the Soviet Union and countries alike? We have tried to show in the section devoted to the investigation of “the characteristics of the bureaucratic regime” that this is a reality rather than a possibility. This is a kind of surplus-labour exploitation which is the peculiarity of the bureaucratic regime. And it is certainly different from the surplus-value exploitation of capitalism. Besides, it is impossible for those who start from a view that exploitation is related only to class societies based on private property to distinguish the place of the bureaucratic regimes in the general picture of social formations. Those who make such an error would mix up the social formation under the bureaucratic state with the transition period where classes are to be abolished under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Or those who acknowledge the existence of exploitation in these countries, but appraise it as surplus-value exploitation, would define these bureaucratic regimes as “state capitalism”.

However, when we approach the problem on the basis of Marx’s materialist conception of history, we see that such things that emerged in the course of social evolution as the phenomenon of “exploitation”, the division between “the ruler and the producer” and the division of society into classes in general, do not necessarily depend only on the birth of private property. These have all emerged also in societies based on the Asiatic mode of production where there is no private property and all land belongs to the state. But, in the Asiatic mode of production in which state ownership is dominant, the phenomenon of exploitation and class division have different and “disguised” aspects compared with the western class societies based on private property. Marx points to this difference of social structure in the ancient East in his writings in which he analyses the Asiatic mode of production. In the third volume of *Capital*, where he stresses the character of the “state in Asiatic society”, Marx writes:

Should the direct producers not be confronted by a private landowner, but rather, as in Asia, under direct subordination to a state which stands over them as their landlord and simultaneously as sovereign, then rent and taxes coincide, or rather, there exists no tax which differs from this form of ground-rent. Under such circumstances, there need exist no stronger political or economic pressure than that common to all subjection to that state. The state is then the supreme lord. Sovereignty here consists in the ownership of land concentrated on a national scale. But, on the other hand, no private ownership of land exists, although there is both private and common possession and use of land.¹⁷³

172 Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 29, s.421

173 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, p.919

And irrespective of whether it is on the basis of private property or state property, he goes on to say, “The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and, in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form.”

In our previous analyses on the basis of this understanding of Marx, we explained “the specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers” in the bureaucratic regime in the following way: “the fact that bureaucracy, who owns the state, is the sole power to decide in distribution of the products of social labour as well as being the centralised dominant power that employs the whole workforce.” Besides, it has been emphasised that the phenomenon of class division and exploitation bore much more “disguised” aspects in class societies based on state ownership compared with class societies based on private property. We should simply remember a certain part of Ottoman history, if we would like to give an example for the *state-based* class sovereignties in the form of Oriental despotism in history.

We are interested here in the *dirlik system* [*the Ottoman land system in its classical age*] of the Ottoman State which constitutes an example for *despotic*¹⁷⁴ *states that existed in Asian societies. That is, the situation before this system which is based on the ownership of the Ottoman state on land had been dissolved. This system gave the central state an image of safeguard and observant on the land and its subjects. According to the official state ideology, the land was under the reign of the Ottoman State in the name of God. And land could only be cultivated under the authority of the state-based class* (the Ottoman bureaucracy). Niyazi Berkes, a scientist known for his researches on the Ottoman social structure, says the following about the concept of “mülk” [which means “property” in contemporary Turkish] in the Ottoman system:

When we say “mülk” today we understand possession as required by the right called “the right of property”. Yet in the Ottoman system “mülk” means the thing owned by the state and this is a power; the image of power on land. In the Ottoman

174 In relation to the concept of “despot” Niyazi Berkes says: “ ‘kapı’ [literally means gate] (later became Supreme, Sublime kapı) is the symbol of power, of political power. Its equivalent in the west is ‘dominium’; coming from Latin ‘dominus’. In fact it meant ‘the master of house’. Its equivalent in Greek is ‘despotis’.... The term ‘despotis’ faded in the west during the Medieval ages, but retained in the east. Thanks to Aristotle it became a title attached to Oriental sovereigns like Iranian sovereigns.... There are two meanings of “kapılınma” [entering the service of despot’s kapı]: to go into the refuge of someone, be subordinate. Or, to become attached to someone, be called with his name, obtain a status thanks to this. (*Türkiye İktisat Tarihi* [*Economic History of Turkey*], v.1, pp.99)

Aside from this, speaking of misinterpretations of the term “despotism”, Berkes points out that this term does not mean arbitrariness, tyranny, slave-ownership, but the authority that rules the kul [which means both the mortal human in relation to God and a sort of slave]: “Being master means a general power, an authority over public; i.e. it has a political meaning; it has not a meaning of private property or of owning a person. It does not mean owning slaves or serfs, but owning authority. (*ibid*, p.132)

system “mülk” is the power in the hands of the state. The equivalent of this Arabic-origin word in western languages is “dominium”. Yet, if we take French, the equivalent of mülk in the sense of being the subject of property is “propriété”. The word “mülk” in our contemporary use means the latter. In the Ottoman system, however, “mülk” and “state” are the same. State is founded on mülk, that is the reign and “dominium” over land.

And the state ownership on land (i.e. mülk in the Ottoman sense) cannot be bought, sold, abandoned, and transferred by way of heritage. As long as political authority exists, that right exists as well and they stand together. If that right does not exist, the political authority does not exist as well, or, put in reverse, when the political authority is non-existent, that right is non-existent as well.¹⁷⁵

The Soviet Union and the regimes alike resemble the reality described in the above lines with respect to the consequences of the state ownership on the basic means of production. The common point in both is the state property that cannot be “bought, sold, abandoned or inherited”. The existence of a state-based class (ruling elite) is the point of matter here. Just as in the case of old Asiatic sovereignties, “that right” (the right of sovereignty on state property) exists in the despotic-bureaucratic dictatorships (for example in the USSR) as long as political authority exists and they stand together. When that right ceases to exist, the political authority does too, and vice versa. In the USSR and those alike there had developed a right of sovereignty of bureaucracy (as the representative of the state) on the means of production. The economic sovereignty of the bureaucracy rooted in here.

Another argument of those who insist that in these societies bureaucracy cannot be taken as a dominant class is that the bureaucracy in effect does not own the property of the means of production. However the source of class domination should be sought somewhere else in a society based on state ownership. It is the collective right of sovereignty on the state property. Unlike a private property owning class, bureaucracy has neither capital nor position of being capitalist to transfer by way of inheritance. But since they hold the privilege of raising their children as the future bureaucrats (the privileged position in the educational system offered to the children of bureaucrats), they can transfer the position of “owning the state” from father to son in this way. Besides, as seen in the dissolution of state property (the *dirlik* system on land) into private property (the formation of a sort of system of landlordism on land) in the Ottoman Empire, we observe a similar dissolution of state ownership in the capitalist restoration process of the bureaucratic regimes under question. Thus many elements from among bureaucracy are obtaining the effective right of property and becoming bourgeois in the process of dissolution. In the past they had had the collective authority over state property. As if he was foretelling what is happening today Trotsky was saying in 1936:

One may argue that the big bureaucrat cares little what are the prevailing forms of property, provided only they guarantee him the necessary income. This argument ignores not only the instability of the bureaucrat’s own rights, but also the question of his descendants. The new cult of the family has not fallen out of the clouds.

175 Niyazi Berkes, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi [Economic History of Turkey]*, v.1, pp. 60-61

Privileges have only half their worth, if they cannot be transmitted to one's children. But the right of testament is inseparable from the right of property. It is not enough to be the director of a trust; it is necessary to be a stockholder. The victory of the bureaucracy in this decisive sphere would mean its conversion into a new possessing class.¹⁷⁶

But, of course, we are not interested here in that the bureaucracy has lost its state-based class character and begun to appear before us as bourgeois enjoying the right of private property as the bureaucratic regime collapsed. We are trying to explain the character of the dominant bureaucracy under the bureaucratic regime.

The characteristic feature of the state-based class is that it exists thanks to state office. Thus for example, the Western feudality where the feudal lord owns both effective and legal property of vast lands differs from the Ottoman land system (*dirlik*) in that the dominant class in the latter can hide behind the smoke screen of state ownership. Behind this smoke screen the state-based class can assume a misleading appearance of “holy official” who “knows everything best”, does everything “for the sake of society” (!) and wants nothing but to maintain the “divine” order. Of course, the real situation is just the opposite. The state-based class that controls the surplus-product in despotic states, also controls whole society and “hangs and murders” when necessary to maintain its order.

Due to the difference of historical ages the ideology of the state under “modern” despotic-bureaucratic regimes was naturally based on something different from “religious” or “divine” arguments which was the case in the past. Religious mysticism, which was the prevalent ideology of the state in oriental despotic societies, was replaced by another myth of contemporary sort, i.e. the “socialism in one country”, under the modern bureaucratic states. But the common point was the importance attributed by the state-based class to maintaining the “status quo”. In the Ottoman Empire, for example, this need found its expression under the name of maintaining the “order”.

Such a state order mentioned can only stand on such a static society that is likened to a flock of sheep. It cannot stand on a society that tends to change all the time. It would be toppled over. That is why the Ottoman administrators and writers always speak of “order”.¹⁷⁷

The bureaucratic state order has also survived thanks to a *static* social order. Thus it is not an accident that the policy of the Stalinist bureaucracy finds its expression in the principle of “maintaining the status quo”. The dominant bureaucrats, who can stay as member of the state-based class as long as they hold their state office, have maintained their power in a constant state of anxiety to keep their positions even when they occupy the highest offices. The bureaucrat can maintain his/her dominant position as long as he/she is not defeated in the table of wolves of deadly war within the state-based class. Only in this way can he/she get his/her share from social surplus-product appropriated collectively by the bureaucracy. Therefore we should not be surprised at the similarity between the intrigues in the power struggles of the Stalinist bureaucracy and the palace

176 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.254

177 Niyazi Berkes, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi [Economic History of Turkey]*, v.1, pp. 58

intrigues in oriental Asiatic societies.

Our point in giving these examples is not to put forward an argument that the social formations like the Soviet Union or those alike are the exact counterparts of despotic-Asiatic mode of production of the past. But still we need to make such an analogy for the purpose of reminding that such dominant classes that are based on state ownership and such socio-economic formations that regulate the distribution of surplus-product thanks to this mode of domination do exist in history. On the other hand, there is of course an essential similarity between them, with the difference that the despotic bureaucratic regimes of twentieth century do not stand on Asiatic agricultural communes of the past, but on a campaign of industrialisation to catch up with the modern level of productive forces.

The production relations that are based on state ownership are as if a reappearance of a mode of dominance of the past (oriental despotism) in industrial era, under the forms of production relations conditioned by state ownership. Therefore this situation that appears in modern era is as if an anachronism.

It is also of great importance from the point of view of explaining the class nature of the dominant bureaucracy to approach the specific features of despotic-bureaucratic regimes in the light of historical examples. Since if specific features of such a socio-economic formation are not grasped correctly, then misconceptions of any type could prevail. Because this socio-economic formation appears in the age of capitalism as a consequence of bringing an end to the workings of capitalism and is based on state ownership. For example, those who cannot put forward a consistent and clear explanation to the nature of these regimes often describe them as “the domination of the petty-bourgeoisie”.

However, the dictatorship of the dominant bureaucracy in no way means the dictatorship of the petty-bourgeoisie. This class is a dominant class that came to power apart from the two fundamental classes of the modern age, i.e. the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. If we analyse the components of this state-based class in the framework of its own peculiarity, we can of course consider a petty bourgeois element. To be more explicit, now that the dominant bureaucracy does not consist of extra-terrestrial creatures, there are elements that have come from old social classes (workers, petty-bourgeois, etc.) but have been totally cut off from their original class roots socially and ideologically. But this fact does not make the dictatorship of the dominant bureaucracy a dictatorship of some section of the working class. Nor does it present a scientific point of support for those who try to explain the dictatorship of the dominant bureaucracy as a sort of petty bourgeois dictatorship. In other words, it does not legitimise attempts to explain the nature of Stalinist regimes as the rising of the petty bourgeoisie to an independent position and its “eventual” seizing of power, which has a middle position in capitalist society.

The main point is not to overlook the difference of the dominant despotic class in the Stalinist regimes from the dominant classes in the societies based on private property. That is, the dominant bureaucracy is not a class which has specific roots in historical context and which has already begun taking shape within the capitalist society that has

been overthrown. It is a *collected* class of bureaucrats who, on the basis of owning the state, have come to form a dominant class.

Bureaucratic Regime has no Future

If we are to draw lessons from the October Revolution as a great historical experience and the subsequent developments, we can briefly say the following: If as a result of isolation of a proletarian revolution in a relatively backward country like the Russia of 1917 the workers' state comes to an end and a bureaucratic domination is established, then the historical movement from capitalism to communism ceases. From then on a new process sets in, where economic development strengthens the bureaucratic domination and sustains it. The economic development accomplished under bureaucratic domination constitutes the main subjective obstacle on the progress of the world revolution, let alone bringing it forward, and may cause the emergence of similar bureaucratic states. Consequently, in a situation where a proletarian revolution takes place in a backward country and is not supported by revolutions in advanced countries, it is inevitable that workers' power will be overthrown and the social revolution that has started will cease.

The first workers' state that had been born with the October Revolution remained alone under an imperialist siege and, in addition to this, faced the danger of a bureaucratic domination (which in the final analysis was a product of these conditions, i.e. the isolation). In the end this danger turned into a reality. Having established its power within the party and state, the bureaucracy stopped the progress of the revolution, breaking entirely with the aims of the October Revolution. The transition process that had begun with the proletarian revolution in October 1917 was blocked with a bureaucratic counter-revolution and it completely came to an end after the liquidation of the power of workers' soviets. And a process of “national development” began under the leadership of the bureaucracy. On the basis of state ownership the bureaucracy regulated the economy with a central planning system and proclaimed that the industrialisation and economic development accomplished under its domination was the “establishment of socialism”. It presented its own bureaucratic planning system as “socialist planning”. Yet the Soviet economy was under the pressure of capitalist market outside as well as it was under the grip of bureaucratic domination inside.

Stalinists have defended for years that the Soviet economy was an economy free of crises, using a tautology: “now that socialism is an economy free of crises and the Soviet Union is socialist; then there cannot be a crisis in the Soviet economy.” However, though different from the crises of capitalist system, a very deep crisis that had already been felt and have eventually surfaced with all its might in Gorbachov's period revealed the unsoundness of this view. Economic crises are not magical things that appear and disappear according to the practices of individuals. They are objective facts. In order to discover the reasons of the deep economic social political crisis that has broken out in Gorbachov's time with all its consequences, one should try to understand the nature of the bureaucratic regime starting from Stalin's period. Trotsky hinted about the crises of Soviet economy in 1930:

... the crises of Soviet economy are not merely maladies of growth, a sort of infantile sickness, but something far more significant—namely, they are the harsh curblings of the world market, the very one ‘to which,’ in Lenin’s words, ‘we are subordinated, with which we are bound up, and from which we cannot escape.’¹⁷⁸

Trotsky was completely right in this assessment. Because in an epoch when productive forces acquired a social character on an international scale, it was impossible to ensure a long term development on a national scale by cutting off from the global workings and relations of the economy. Although a significant industrial advance was accomplished and an economic growth was achieved in vast countries like the Soviet Union and China or on the basis of inter-national economic relations called “socialist bloc”, there remained an objective factor which cannot be escaped from as Lenin and Trotsky pointed out: the existence and pressure of the world capitalist system.

Many assessments have been made in the subsequent years, both positive and negative, about the economic development in the so called “socialist” countries. The story of ostensibly never ending race between the so called two “super powers” of the globe, the USSR and USA, had been raised to the point of “star wars” to be waged in space. Then with the technological advance of world capitalism in electronics, we have entered the new phase which the bourgeois ideologues have begun to call “new world order”. And the news pumped out that the USSR, which was considered one of the “super powers”, has stumbled in this “race”. While it was being debated whether these news were fabrications of the secret services of imperialist powers, the real “bombshell” was exploded by the leader of the dominant bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, i.e. Gorbachov, and the acknowledgement of decadent economic conditions in the “socialist bloc” has become commonplace.

This result was not an unknown or unexpected “surprise” from the point of view of revolutionary Marxism. On the contrary, it was just the vindication of the historical materialist analysis that a social transformation to excel the capitalist system on our planet could only be the result of a breakthrough of the working class on a world scale. On the other hand, life itself revealed in the final analysis that the bureaucratic regimes have been doomed to disintegrate in the face of economic superiority and expansion potentials of the world capitalist system. But all those who had exaggerated the campaign of national development in the SU and alike are either “disappointed” or try to put off closing their eyes to the reality.

The simple fact, however, is this: the despotic-bureaucratic regime is not a historically durable and long-lived socio-economic formation that has a potential to develop on its own foundations in the face of the worldwide superiority of the capitalist mode of production. Since these regimes are not a new mode of production that excels capitalism in the course of historical evolution of human societies, they cannot be characterised as “post-capitalist societies” in this sense. Moreover, it is but an illusion that these regimes can continue a progressive evolution in the long term. The despotic-bureaucratic regime, surrounded by world capitalism in modern industrial era, is a socio-economic

178 Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, p.154.

phenomenon that has no future on the basis of its sui generis character.

Historically, the bureaucratic power has had a past record both dependent and effective on the fate of the progress of world revolution. The bureaucratic domination is a product of conditions in which the progress of world revolution came to a halt and at the same time new upsurges were obstructed by the dominant bureaucracies. And the bureaucratic regimes are doomed either to be overthrown by a new advance of proletarian revolution on a world scale or otherwise to be brought to an end sooner or later by the disintegrating pressure of world capitalism.

The bureaucratic regime, which finds its essential embodiment in the reality of the Soviet Union, is characterised by bringing an end to the "transition process to socialism" launched by the worker's revolution. This regime, while on the one hand stopping the progress of world proletarian revolution, is on the other hand condemned to go on its knees before capitalism sooner or later, under circumstances of capitalist hegemony over world market. Therefore the process that has set off with the establishment of the bureaucratic regime has no open end towards socialism in its natural evolution. There is only one open end, unless this bureaucratic regime is overthrown by the working class: incorporation into world capitalist system.

Today the bourgeois ideology is trying to benefit from the collapse of these bureaucratic regimes in order to earn a historical gain in a bid to blacken socialism. That it presents propaganda material of the sort "communism is the most bothersome road from capitalism to capitalism" is the depiction of the phenomenon of the bureaucratic domination in a way that suits the interests of the bourgeoisie.

On the other hand we can describe the scope of an anti-bureaucratic revolution that can begin if the proletariat conquers the political power in those countries where bureaucratic dictatorships rule as follows: oust the bureaucracy from power as a dominant class; smash the old bureaucratic state apparatus; put an end to the workings of the bureaucratic regime; turn the planning of economy directly by workers' soviets into an effective reality; thus start the transition process from capitalism to communism by ensuring proletariat's political and economic domination!

To attempt to fit a revolution of this scope into a definition of mere "political revolution" would contradict with its real dimensions. Since from a Marxist point of view, a revolution which has to conquer the political power at its first step in order to transform the actual production relations is, in fact, a social revolution in terms of its whole scope. Although anti-bureaucratic revolutions appear, when defined in terms of their political aims, as an action that oust the dominant bureaucracy, their broader content amounts to a revolution that has its task as putting an end to the power of an alien class (bureaucracy) and the production relations under its domination, which means a social revolution.

In conclusion, unless the bureaucratic regimes are overthrown by a working class revolution, the bureaucracy will be -and is- integrating step by step into world capitalism. The bureaucracy will be passing through its own process of transformation which

amounts to a dissolution costing great sufferings and pains to the proletariat in both material and moral sense. Thus there are two possibilities ahead in such a situation:

- Either the bureaucratic regime is overthrown by a new proletarian revolution and the ongoing process towards an integration into capitalism is put an end to,
- Or the collapse of the bureaucratic regime evolving into capitalism by direct or indirect interventions of the world bourgeoisie and attachment of these countries to the world capitalist system.

Although it may seem as a third alternative that a military dictatorship is established by an intervention of civil-military bureaucracy that insists on the continuation of the bureaucratic regime, this would mean, in the final analysis, nothing more than interrupting this two-alternative process for a certain period.

If the second alternative materialises, those bureaucrats who claimed once that they acted in the name of the working class, will become capitalists owning private property. Or another section will become high ranking bureaucrats of the upstart capitalism; i.e. become bourgeois through this way. If such a process reaches its conclusion in its own way, the bureaucratic state and the bureaucratic regime will come to an end and bourgeois state and capitalist order known very well by humanity will resurrect. The fact that the German Democratic Republic has now become part of united capitalist Germany, melting into history, as a result of the storm in the East European countries in 1989, gives a sufficient idea about the nature of such a transformation.

Chapter 6

Trotsky's Views on the USSR

Lenin could not have the chance to follow and draw conclusions from the bureaucratisation of the Soviet state when it developed from a growing danger into an established fact which was then a reality that found its expression in the domination of the Stalinist apparatus. After Lenin's death (1924) Trotsky searched into the reality of the Soviet Union, a socio-economic formation which was in the process of formation and transformation, until he was murdered by an agent of Stalin in 1940. This situation was expressed by Trotsky himself:

Sociological problems would certainly be simpler, if social phenomena had always a finished character. There is nothing more dangerous, however, than to throw out of reality, for the sake of logical completeness, elements which today violate your scheme and tomorrow may wholly overturn it. In our analysis, we have above all avoided doing violence to dynamic social formations which have had no precedent and have no analogies. The scientific task, as well as the political, is not to give a finished definition to an unfinished process, but to follow all its stages, separate its progressive from its reactionary tendencies, expose their mutual relations, foresee possible variants of development, and find in this foresight a basis for action.¹⁷⁹

If we take this way of approach into consideration, we should take Trotsky's explanations not as final and finished conclusions, but an attempt to grasp reality within the dynamic process of investigation and a rich exposition of prospects. His analyses on the nature of the Soviet State constitute a fundamental starting point to grasp the reality of the USSR once they are taken and examined in the context of the dynamism of the process undergone and the prospects he pointed out are eliminated in the course of practice. Once we follow such a way, it could be possible to see the superior aspects (compared with the earlier ones) as well as drawbacks and errors (compared with the subsequent ones) of the conclusions drawn by Trotsky in one certain period. And only by this way we can benefit from the revolutionary richness of the whole of Trotsky's ideas to analyse our times in spite of the errors included in his characterisation of "bureaucratically degenerated workers' state".

From 1929 to 1936

In the foreword of his book *Permanent Revolution* which he wrote in exile at Prinkipo, Trotsky reminded us that the fate of the proletarian dictatorship in one country should be

¹⁷⁹ Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, pp.255-256.

treated within the context of the world revolution:

The maintenance of the proletarian revolution within a national framework can only be a provisional state of affairs, even though, as the experience of the Soviet Union shows, one of long duration. In an isolated proletarian dictatorship, the internal and external contradictions grow inevitably along with the success achieved. If it remains isolated, the proletarian state must finally fall victim to these contradictions. The way out for it lies only in the victory of the proletariat of the advanced countries. Viewed from this standpoint, a national revolution is not a self-contained whole; it is only a link in the international chain. The international revolution constitutes a permanent process, despite temporary declines and ebbs.¹⁸⁰

It has been clearly expressed and defended by Trotsky that unless it proceeds along proletarian lines on the international arena the revolution could lead to a bureaucratic blind alley within national borders and would head towards its own collapse and that this was an indisputable truth. Although this was his essential thought, he started from the point that it could not yet be said that the policies of the Stalinist bureaucracy has led to a liquidation of the workers' state. On the basis of this he asserts in his brochure *The Class Character of the Soviet State* (1 October 1933) that the Soviet bureaucracy has a dual character. Trotsky thinks that the Stalinist bureaucracy which has caused the collapse of the Communist International still preserves a somewhat progressive character in the sense that it defends the conquests of the October Revolution, although it has completely lost its revolutionary character as an international factor.

It shows us how and why the Stalinist apparatus could completely squander its meaning as the international revolutionary factor and yet preserve a part of its progressive meaning as the gatekeeper of the social conquests of the proletarian revolution.¹⁸¹

Was this really the case? Or was the bureaucracy emerging as a class that has liquidated these conquests and therefore been the enemy of the historical interests of the proletariat? Of course the latter was true. Stalinist bureaucracy liquidated the historical conquests of the Soviet proletariat and transformed the soviet institutions into apparatuses of its own sovereignty in the process of counter-revolution during which it reinforced its rule.

Let us accept for a moment that this error of Trotsky in 1933 was due to the fact that he could not yet see that the rise of the bureaucracy had reached such a point. This still does not eliminate one contradiction in his evaluation. Since he himself criticised in the same brochure the inconsistency of such an approach of asserting that the policies of the Stalinist bureaucracy could create different results inside and outside the country:

We Marxists were never patrons of the double bookkeeping system of the Brandlerites, according to which the policies of the Stalinists are impeccable in the USSR but ruinous outside the boundaries of the USSR. It is our conviction that they are equally ruinous in both instances.¹⁸²

180 Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, p.133.

181 Trotsky, *Writings 1933-34*, p.102

182 Trotsky, *Writings 1933-34*, p.101

Another remarkable point in the same brochure is his assessment on the fact that the proletarian dictatorship could not be overthrown by a “gradual” bourgeois counter revolution:

The Marxist thesis relating to the catastrophic character of the transfer of power from the hands of one class into the hands of another applies not only to revolutionary periods, when history sweeps madly ahead, but also to the periods of counterrevolution, when society rolls backwards. He who asserts that the Soviet government has been *gradually* changed from proletarian to bourgeois is only, so to speak, running backwards the film of reformism.¹⁸³

What we must dwell on here is that the condition of existence for a workers' state is made connected to whether a bourgeois counter-revolution alone has taken place or not. Viewed in this way, you must draw such a conclusion that there are only two alternatives for the destruction of a workers' state: either an external assault, or a bourgeois counter-revolution inside provoked by the world bourgeoisie. However there was a third possibility: a counter-revolution of the bureaucracy that could put an end to the sovereignty of the working class without an external assault or a bourgeois counter-revolution. As a matter of fact, this was what took place. In fact Trotsky himself admitted in the subsequent years that a bureaucratic counter revolution had taken place in the Soviet Union. Thus it was not correct to say that the state was still a workers' state –though bureaucratically degenerated– only by considering the fact that a bourgeois counter-revolution had not happened in the Soviet Union.

If it was true that the transition process from capitalism to communism which had started with the October Revolution came to an end under the bureaucratic dictatorship and that another “transition” process (whose only exit is capitalism) had begun unless this dictatorship was overthrown by a new revolutionary upsurge of the proletariat; then, from a historical point of view, the rule of the bureaucracy constitutes an intermediary step in the passage of power back to the bourgeoisie. Of course we have the advantage of looking back from now after fifty years of experiences since Trotsky's death. Yet in his time, Trotsky focused his full attention on utilising even slightest possibility that serves to save the conquests of the October Revolution.

One might say that he went too far in his anxiety to “save” and avoided any early pronouncing of some truths that had to be explained. Although Trotsky had a profound understanding of Marxism in that the workers' state must be a state without bureaucracy, one that has to start withering away from the very onset, there are some examples in which he tried to twist this view. For instance the group of “Democratic Centralists” had introduced the idea that after 1925 “the workers' state no longer existed”. Leaving aside whether this claim is true or not for the specified period involved, we would like to draw attention to the kind of arguments Trotsky uses while objecting these kind of claims. Some reckless arguments used in political discussions paved the way for misconceptions of some Trotskyists in the following years on the nature of a workers' state (that the workers' state can be with bureaucracy). For example Trotsky describes the theses of

183 Trotsky, *Writings 1933-34*, pp.102-103

those who claim that the soviet state no longer bore a proletarian character as “most popular and at first sight irrefutable theses” and goes on: “Is it really possible to identify the dictatorship of an apparatus, which has led to the dictatorship of a single person, with the dictatorship of the proletariat as a class? Isn’t it clear that the dictatorship of the proletariat is excluded by the dictatorship *over* the proletariat?”¹⁸⁴ Trotsky criticises this reasoning:

Such enticing reasoning is constructed not upon a materialistic analysis of the process as it develops in reality but upon pure idealistic schemas, upon Kantian norms. Certain noble “friends” of the revolution have provided themselves with a very radiant conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and they are completely prostrated in the face of the fact that the real dictatorship with all its heritage of class barbarism, with all its internal contradictions, with the mistakes and crimes of the leadership, fails entirely to resemble that sleek image that they have provided. Disillusioned in their most beautiful emotions, they turn their backs to the Soviet Union.¹⁸⁵

Aside from whether the opponent circles which Trotsky criticises took a correct attitude in their struggle against the Stalinist dictatorship or not, the problem, in our opinion, is not related at all with “the mistakes and crimes of the leadership”, “the real dictatorship with all its heritage of class barbarism” as Trotsky asserts. The theses of the opposition can only point to the fact that the workers’ state cannot live on with the growth on its back, and not the opposite. In the above mentioned article Trotsky bases himself on the idea that the bureaucratic caste politically expropriated the proletariat, and that so long as the property forms created by the October Revolution are not overthrown the proletariat maintained its social hegemony. Rather, while accepting that the Stalinist rule politically expropriated the proletariat, Trotsky tries to prove that the dictatorship of the proletariat can still live on in spite of this. In order to be able to do this, he tries to prove on the basis of an analogy with the bourgeois state that the workers’ state may have different forms as well.

Trotsky gives the example of Hitler fascism. He states that the bourgeoisie has fallen under the rule of this fascist horde and although he politically expropriated the bourgeois Hitler thus prevented their economic expropriation. He draws attention to the fact that the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie prevailed since the property and hegemony of the bourgeoisie are preserved. On the basis of this, Trotsky claims that the dictatorship of the proletariat still prevails in the Soviet Union now that the state ownership is preserved. He thinks that while politically expropriating the proletariat, the bureaucracy safeguarded it from economic expropriation, and for this reason it cannot be argued that the proletariat has lost its social hegemony. He says:

So long as the forms of property that have been created by the October Revolution are not overthrown, the proletariat remains the ruling class.¹⁸⁶

Thus the indispensable condition of a workers’ state, that is “the political sovereignty

184 Trotsky, *Writings 1933-34*, p.103

185 Trotsky, *Writings 1933-34*, p.103

186 Trotsky, *Writings 1933-34*, p.104

of the working class” (workers’ democracy), is reduced to the level of a secondary component, “a form of state”, of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is preferable but not necessary as it does not invalidate the existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Trotsky says, “the proletariat is the spine of the Soviet state. But insofar as the function of governing is concentrated in the hands of an irresponsible bureaucracy, we have before us an obviously sick state.”¹⁸⁷ He tries to prove his view on the basis of an analogy with the different forms of bourgeois state. After his death this approach led Trotskyists to appraise the character of the state and the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union on the basis of this analogy.

However, a change in property forms, i.e. nationalisations, is not sufficient for the proletariat to be the ruling class. In order to fill it with the working class sovereignty and turn it into a social conquest, it is necessary for the fundamental conclusions drawn by Marx from the experience of the Paris Commune to be in actual existence, implemented and preserved. And that depends on whether the proletariat being not contend with only destroying the old state apparatus takes necessary precautions to prevent new rulers from becoming a privileged sovereign class. Otherwise, such a change on the basis of state ownership inevitably would pave the way for the birth of a new privileged class; and that was the case.

In order to criticise the views of those who claim that the Soviet state was no longer a workers’ state and it could only be defined as a kind of Bonapartist government, Trotsky took the issue of *Bonapartism* on his agenda. First, in order to reveal some misconceptions, he states that Bonapartism in the bourgeois regime does not mean “a supra-class government” and that it is just one of the forms of capitalist domination. And he explains that a Bonapartist interpretation could be accepted only on condition that its social content is clearly defined. According to Trotsky the Soviet Bonapartism does not exclude soviet regime, but stands on it.

It is absolutely correct that the self-rule of the Soviet bureaucracy was built upon the soil of veering between class forces both internal as well as international. Insofar as the bureaucratic veering has been crowned by the personal plebiscitary regime of Stalin, it is possible to speak of Soviet Bonapartism. But while the Bonapartism of both Bonapartes as well as their present pitiful followers has developed and is developing on the basis of a bourgeois regime, the Bonapartism of Soviet bureaucracy has under it the soil of a Soviet regime.¹⁸⁸

Trotsky’s approach here is not correct in essence. True, the political sphere (the state) can acquire a relative independence from the economic sphere within the bourgeois regime. But in a regime under the domination of the proletariat, these two spheres merge in the bosom of the proletariat which has organised itself as the ruling class. In the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie which is based on private property, whatever the political form of the state the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie prevails as long as the bourgeoisie maintains its property. But under the dictatorship of the proletariat which is based on state ownership, the proletariat can preserve its ruling position only as long as it maintains its political

187 Trotsky, *Writings 1933-34*, p.105

188 Trotsky, *Writings 1933-34*, p.108

sovereignty and keeps the state in its hands. Only under this condition can the dictatorship of the proletariat (workers' state) live on. Thus, it is not correct to assume that one can see state forms other than workers' democracy under the dictatorship of the proletariat by making analogies with the state forms in bourgeois society (for example Trotsky's analogy of "proletarian Bonapartism" for Stalin's despotic-bureaucratic dictatorship).

One other point in Trotsky's brochure *The Class Nature of the Soviet State* that caused misconceptions in the following years is the thesis which proposes that the Soviet bureaucracy is not a dominant class, but "a privileged caste". However, while emerging at first as a caste, the bureaucracy lifted itself to a ruling-dominant position through a bureaucratic counter-revolution process that took place in the course of 1924-1928 and reinforced itself towards 1936.

Trotsky's assessments on the nature of the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union changed in time. But his view that the bureaucracy cannot constitute a dominant class (he tried to prove this starting from the place of the bureaucracy in the bourgeois society) remained to be the basis for misleading assessments on the nature of the Soviet bureaucracy and those alike. Trotsky took the place of bureaucracy in class societies based on private property as a starting point in understanding the nature of the Soviet bureaucracy:

A class is defined not by its participation in the distribution of the national income alone, but by its independent role in the general structure of the economy and by its independent roots in the economic foundation of society. Each class ... works out its own special forms of property. The bureaucracy lacks all these social traits. It has no independent position in the process of production and distribution. It has no independent property roots. Its functions relate basically to the political *technique* of class rule. The existence of a bureaucracy, in all its variety of forms and differences in specific weight, characterises *every* class regime. Its power is of a reflected character. The bureaucracy is indissolubly bound up with a ruling economic class, feeding itself upon the social roots of the latter, maintaining itself and falling together with it.¹⁸⁹

We must remember here that there is a complete difference between the place of the Soviet bureaucracy and of the bureaucracy in bourgeois society. Trotsky's generalisations about the nature of bureaucracy are correct for class societies and states based on private property (slave, feudal, capitalist). However, under conditions of nationalised means of production, if the working class loses its state organs and therefore of its power to the bureaucracy, then the power of this ruling bureaucracy will not be a "reflected power" but its own power. In such a case the bureaucracy will gain an extraordinary independence and assume a *sui generis* character. That is the bureaucracy itself will "possess the state" and, on the basis of it, become a dominant class over society. When these conditions become real, the bureaucracy ceases to be a dependent section (layer) of the working class and gets the position of an independent class. The difference of the Soviet bureaucracy from the classical position of the bureaucracy in class societies based on private property lies here: Soviet bureaucracy is defined "not by its participation in the distribution of the national income alone" but by its independent role in the general

189 Trotsky, *Writings 1933-34*, pp.112-113

structure of the economy and by its independent roots in the economic foundation of society (that is, the sovereign position of the bureaucracy within the production relations that are based on state ownership).

Treating the nature of the Soviet bureaucracy as the “dependent” position of the bureaucracy in bourgeois society, Trotsky states that it will always remain a “servant” even if it devours a big part of the national income. He gives the example of the fascist bureaucracy in Italy and Germany and asserts that although they wrest the most delicious part from the bourgeoisie they cannot go beyond being “an evil servant”. And he makes another generalisation about the bureaucracy: “Always and in every regime, the bureaucracy devours no small portion of surplus value.”¹⁹⁰ Since Trotsky thinks what is said for the fascist bureaucracies in capitalist society is also applicable to the Stalinist bureaucracy with necessary modifications, he emphasises that although the privileges of the Soviet bureaucracy indicate an unwanted inequality, such inequalities would exist in the transition period:

Inequality, moreover such crying inequality, would, of course, be absolutely impossible in a socialist society. But contrary to official and semiofficial lies, the present Soviet regime is not socialist but transitional. It still bears within it the monstrous heritage of capitalism, social inequality in particular, not only between the bureaucracy and the proletariat but also within the bureaucracy itself and within the proletariat.¹⁹¹

Yet, at that moment, the problem could not simply be glossed over by indicating the inequalities that a transitional regime –which no longer existed in the Soviet Union– may have in comparison with the socialist society. As a matter of fact, a questioning of what kind of qualitative changes the Soviet regime was undergoing on the basis of state ownership that reflected the sovereignty of the bureaucracy, should have been given priority. Since the privileges of the bureaucracy in that case pointed to not only an inequality in the conditions of distribution but also the fact that the proletariat had lost its domination within the production process. But Trotsky approaches the problem from such a point of view that the existence of state ownership can be considered a sufficient proof for the existence of the workers’ state. Hence he did not clearly name the new position acquired by the bureaucracy and the qualitative change in the regime. Since Trotsky takes for granted the unchanged character of the Soviet society imparted by the October Revolution, he limits the trouble of bureaucratisation to “social parasitism” although he observes the change in the regime. However, it has come to light with the enormous change in those years that the position of the Soviet bureaucracy meant something more than “social parasitism”.

As Trotsky conceives the end of the dictatorship of the proletariat only in the form of a possible bourgeois counter-revolution, he thinks that the workers’ state continues to exist albeit the very parasitic character of the bureaucracy. And so long as he did not change his mind he claimed that the bureaucracy would have a dual character:

190 Trotsky, *Writings 1933-34*, p.113

191 Trotsky, *Writings 1933-34*, p.113

We call the Stalinist apparatus *centrist* precisely because it fulfils a dual role; *today*, when there is *no longer* a Marxist leadership, and none forthcoming *as yet*, it defends the proletarian dictatorship with its own methods; but these methods are such as facilitate the victory of the enemy *tomorrow*. Whoever fails to understand this dual role of Stalinism in the USSR has understood nothing.¹⁹²

The idea that the Stalinist apparatus “defends the proletarian dictatorship with its own methods” has nothing in common with the reality. As a matter of fact, this idea was so unjustified in the face of concrete facts that as the contradicting character of Stalinism with the conditions of existence for a workers’ state became clear, Trotsky felt the need in the subsequent years to emphasise the “evil role” of the bureaucracy rather than its “dual character”.

* * *

Trotsky looks back and makes a reassessment in his brochure entitled *The Workers’ State, Thermidor and Bonapartism* (1935). He reminds that many debates have been made on the question of “Thermidor”, i.e. counter-revolutionary reaction, and that this problem is also closely linked with the history of the Left Opposition. He states that the Left Opposition has used this term around 1926 to underscore the contradictory position of the bureaucracy standing between the growing rural bourgeoisie and the working class. But according to the appraisals of that period, “Thermidor” was yet an unrealised danger. Re-handling this question Trotsky explains that this view of theirs had been wrong, and that, in fact, the Soviet Thermidor had begun in 1924. But he adds that he makes this point on condition that the term Thermidor should not be understood as such a counter-revolution that has put an end to the social revolution. According to Trotsky, the 1794 Thermidor in the French Revolution did not abolish the social results of the bourgeois revolution but transferred the power from one layer of the victorious “people” to another layer. This was the content of that Thermidor. He claims that the Soviet Thermidor transferred the power from the hands of the proletariat to the hands of the bureaucracy, but this change has not abolished the social foundation of the 1917 October Revolution but rather stood on it.

Thus Trotsky repeats his mistake related to the concept of “Soviet Bonapartism”, when he explains the content of “Soviet Thermidor”. Because the Thermidor in the French Revolution was the exclusion of propertyless, “sans-culotte” layers of people that joined the revolution seeking to advance the bourgeois democratic revolution with popular demands. It was also the liquidation of the Jacobins that paces with them. One day before the Thermidor, Robespierre was shouting at the Convention Assembly: “They are destroying the Revolution! The Republic is at stake!” And that was what happened. Napoleon’s Bonapartist empire was established resulting eventually from the Thermidor. The French Thermidor eventually took measures that would reinforce the development of the bourgeois order; but at the same time it stopped the advance of the revolution that had found its expression in the “popular-radical” demands of social transformation.

192 Trotsky, *Writings 1933-34*, p.116

Soviet Thermidor, on the other hand, had a counter-revolutionary aspect by stopping the advance of social revolution by putting an end to the power of the proletariat and reinforcing the power of the bureaucracy. Whereas the French Thermidor reinforced the social foundations of the bourgeois order (bourgeois property), the “Soviet Thermidor” dynamited the foundations of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The state ownership that was “preserved” under the domination of the bureaucracy meant preparing the material foundations of the dictatorship of the bureaucracy. Thus it would be quite wrong to arrive at a generalisation that “Thermidor” is a counter-revolutionary reaction that does not touch the social foundations of the revolution, ignoring the qualitative difference between the two historical-social cases involved.

Trotsky's appraisal in 1935 did not eliminate the error in his analysis on the nature of the Soviet State; on the contrary it reinforced his wrong attitude on this subject. Since, this time, despite he accepts that the bureaucratic dictatorship is an actual fact, he tries to prove that it can reconcile with the existence of a workers' state. The “complete justification” he emphasises below must have troubled him later on:

In the last historical analysis, Soviet democracy was blown up by the pressure of social contradictions. Exploiting the latter, the bureaucracy wrested the power from the hands of mass organisations. In this sense we may speak about the dictatorship of the bureaucracy and even about the personal dictatorship of Stalin. But this usurpation was made possible and can maintain itself only because the *social content of the dictatorship of the bureaucracy is determined by those productive relations that were created by the proletarian revolution*. In this sense we may say with complete justification that the dictatorship of the proletariat found its distorted but indubitable expression in the dictatorship of the bureaucracy.¹⁹³

But only one year later Trotsky would make a more embracing analysis of the reality in the Soviet Union in his book *The Revolution Betrayed*. Thus he would provide very important dimensions that would make it possible to overcome his wrong views after his death. Therefore there is no reason to obsess with his old assessments.

However, in those issues where he did not make clear and definite corrections, some of his followers made these mistakes ossified, transformed them into dogmas as they tried to systematise his wrong views. The category of “bureaucratically degenerated workers' state” and the analogy of “Thermidor Bonapartism that does not abolish the results of the social revolution” are typical examples of this. Yet, when it comes to wrong assessments and correcting them in general, Trotsky provides us with instructive guidelines:

Our tendency never laid claim to infallibility. We do not receive ready-made truths as a revelation, like the high priests of Stalinism. We study, we discuss, we check our conclusions in the light of existence, we openly correct the admitted mistakes and -- we proceed forward. Scientific conscientiousness and personal strictness are the best traditions of Marxism and Leninism. We wish to remain true to our teachers in this respect as well.¹⁹⁴

193 Trotsky, *Writings 1934-35*, pp.172-173

194 Trotsky, *Writings 1934-35*, p.184

We wish all Trotskyists could frequently recall these lines of Trotsky instead of freezing and sustaining certain wrong appraisals.

1936: “The Revolution Betrayed” and After

Studying the change in historical perspective, Trotsky carefully examines the situation in the Soviet Union from different aspects and discloses every lie of the official chroniclers. He states the aim of his investigation materialised in this book with these remarkable words:

The purpose of the present investigation is to estimate correctly what is, in order the better to understand what is coming to be. We shall dwell upon the past only so far as that helps us to see the future. Our book will be critical. Whoever worships the accomplished fact is incapable of preparing the future.¹⁹⁵

The facts Trotsky deals with in this work are so important that, it would be quite impossible to grasp the reality of the Soviet Union without the light shed by a revolutionary leader of this calibre who has personally witnessed that period. For example the real plight of the working class under the bureaucratic dictatorship finds its expression in his lines in the face of the official lies of the bureaucratic regime. After making clear that the new state applies the old methods of oppression on the muscles and nerves of the worker in order to raise the technological level, Trotsky continues:

There grew up a corps of slave drivers. The management of industry became superbureaucratic. The workers lost all influence whatever upon the management of the factory. With piecework payment, hard conditions of material existence, lack of free movement, with terrible police repression penetrating the life of every factory, it is hard indeed for the worker to feel himself a “free workman.” In the bureaucracy he sees the manager, in the state, the employer. Free labour is incompatible with the existence of a bureaucratic state.¹⁹⁶

In this book Trotsky takes as fundamental the necessity to start from the “sine qua non” requirements of Marxism concerning the workers’ state in order to grasp the nature and fate of the Soviet state. He has also left his bitter tone as exemplified in the expression “those friends of the revolution who cling to the idealist, pure schemas”, which was formerly directed towards those who defended the idea that “there cannot be a workers’ state with bureaucracy”.

At the turn of 1936 Trotsky concentrates his attention on the fact that the Soviet state is a bureaucratic one and cannot do without it whereas this is incompatible with the Marxist conception of the workers’ state. He recalls the words of Lenin saying that “the proletariat needs only a dying state”. According to Lenin, a loyal follower of Marx, the workers’ state must be a state constructed in such a way that it immediately begins to die away and cannot help dying away. Trotsky emphasises that only opportunists can forget this fact and say: “the proletariat needs a state”. As a matter of fact, the prevailing

195 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.3

196 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.241-242

conception in the party programme which was adopted one and a half year after the proletariat's seizure of power by the October Revolution is a manifestation of Lenin's uncompromising attitude on the workers' state:

A strong state, but without mandarins; armed power, but without the Samurai! It is not the tasks of defense which create a military and state bureaucracy, but the class structure of society carried over into the organisation of defense....

The regime of proletarian dictatorship from its very beginning thus ceases to be a "state" in the old sense of the word – a special apparatus, that is, for holding in subjection the majority of the people. The material power, together with the weapons, goes over directly and immediately into the hands of the workers' organisations such as the soviets. The state as a bureaucratic apparatus begins to die away the first day of the proletarian dictatorship.¹⁹⁷

However, the situation in 1936 points to a bureaucratic state that has no intention of dying away and on the contrary gets stronger as if ridiculing the revolutionary Marxist conception of the question of state. Trotsky expresses this situation with these words:

Worse than that, it has grown into a hitherto unheard of apparatus of compulsion. The bureaucracy not only has not disappeared, yielding its place to the masses, but has turned into an uncontrolled force dominating the masses. The army not only has not been replaced by an armed people, but has given birth to a privileged officers' caste, crowned with marshals, while the people, "the armed bearers of the dictatorship", are now forbidden in the Soviet Union to carry even nonexplosive weapons. With the utmost stretch of fancy it would be difficult to imagine a contrast more striking than that which exists between the scheme of the workers' state according to Marx, Engels and Lenin, and the actual state now headed by Stalin.¹⁹⁸

The sharp contrast between the objective situation resulting from the isolation of the proletarian revolution in a backward country like Russia and the conditions of existence required for a new type of state indicated by Marxism has been expressed in the existence of a state with bureaucracy. With a view to drawing conclusions from the fact that the Soviet state is one with bureaucracy Trotsky says:

The social demand for a bureaucracy arise in all those situations where sharp antagonisms need to be "softened", "adjusted", "regulated" (always in the interests of the privileged, the possessors, and always to the advantage of the bureaucracy itself).¹⁹⁹

Taking the problems of the proletarian revolution in the context of the progress of world revolution, Lenin started not from the idea that "there can be a state with bureaucracy" in Russia, but from such a perspective that "there should not be a state with bureaucracy". That's why Trotsky says that Lenin did not succeed in drawing all conclusions as to the nature of the state from the backwardness and isolatedness of the country. Trotsky, who, unlike Lenin, had the opportunity to observe the real situation for years after the revolution,

197 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, pp.50-51

198 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, pp.51-52

199 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, pp.49-50

draws conclusions on the impossibility of avoiding the danger of bureaucratism under conditions of “material want and cultural backwardness” :

The tendencies of bureaucratism, which strangles the workers’ movement in capitalist countries, would everywhere show themselves even after a proletarian revolution. But it is perfectly obvious that the poorer the society which issues from a revolution, the sterner and more naked would be the expression of this “law”, the more crude would be the forms assumed by bureaucratism, and the more dangerous would it become for socialist development. The Soviet state is prevented not only from dying away, but even from freeing itself of the bureaucratic parasite, not by the “relics” of former ruling classes, as declares the naked police doctrine of Stalin, for those relics are powerless in themselves. It is prevented by immeasurably mightier factors, such as material want, cultural backwardness and the resulting dominance of “bourgeois law” in what most immediately and sharply touches every human being, the business of insuring his personal existence.²⁰⁰

From the point of view of explaining the real situation in the Soviet Union, Trotsky’s assessments on the “state with bureaucracy” shed light on very important objective realities and reveal the material sources of the evil of bureaucratism. As to analysing the phenomenon of “bureaucratic state” in the Soviet Union and countries alike, Trotsky’s explanations are much to the purpose. We can put it this way: the workers’ state should not have been with bureaucracy, but the Soviet state is one with bureaucracy. Then what are the objective reasons for this and is it possible to regard such a state as workers’ state?

In fact the clues provided by Trotsky enable one to answer these questions while they indicate the impossibility of characterising such a state as workers’ state. Discussed in this context, there is no problem. But it is not possible to agree with taking the objective conditions explained by Trotsky as the basis for the argument: “the workers’ state should have been one without bureaucracy; but unfortunately it turned out to be one with bureaucracy; then, despite everything, the Soviet state is a workers’ state.” Moreover, after revealing the real character of the Soviet state, Trotsky himself falls into contradiction with his own profound analyses whenever he tries to twist his assessments so as to back such an idea that “there may exist a workers’ state with bureaucracy”.

Trotsky stresses the need to call things with their proper names as to characterising the Soviet state and emphasises that the material privileges of a minority persisted in the Soviet Union:

If the state does not die away, but grows more and more despotic, if the plenipotentiaries of the working class become bureaucratized, and the bureaucracy rises above the new society, this is not for some secondary reasons like the psychological relics of the past, etc., but is a result of the iron necessity to give birth to and support a privileged minority so long as it is impossible to guarantee genuine equality.²⁰¹

Yet, if such a law that corresponds to a “workers’ democracy” cannot be enforced due

200 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, pp.55-56

201 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.55

to economic and cultural backwardness, then this means there is no material ground of talking about a workers' state. In other words, a workers' state can only correspond to an effective leap forward launched for the liquidation of the inequalities and privileges inherited from capitalism. Those material conditions that unavoidably lead to the birth and permanence of a privileged minority like bureaucracy are not compatible with the conditions of existence of a workers' state. Otherwise the state will become one that defends with special oppression methods and apparatuses the material privileges of a minority against the majority. That this may be the case with the state in the Soviet Union is fair enough. But can it be called a workers' state? That is the problem!

The correct attitude is to see that the soviet state of workers has undergone an enormous degeneration under conditions of isolatedness of the revolution in a backward country like Russia and thus has come to an end by the counter-revolution of the rising bureaucracy, and draw the conclusion that the dictatorship of the proletariat can not live on under similar conditions. To seek to categorise such a reality as "bureaucratically degenerated workers' state" or to defend the generalisation "even the workers' state will be a state with bureaucracy" is such a mistake whose negative effects have been growing as time goes by.

Trotsky pointed to the two essential lever that are necessary in order to take the planned steps for the transition from capitalism to communism: "... the political lever, in the form of a real participation in leadership of the interested masses themselves, a thing which is unthinkable without Soviet democracy; and a financial lever, in the form of a real testing out of a priori calculations with the help of a universal equivalent, a thing that is unthinkable without a stable money system."²⁰² And he supplied a lot of data that prove that both levers did not exist in the Soviet Union. That's why it was impossible to talk about a transitional regime from capitalism to communism operating in the Soviet Union. As a matter of fact, after 1935 he was very cautious about the concept "transitional regime" and described the situation in the Soviet Union with expressions like "a *preparatory regime transitional* from capitalism to socialism"²⁰³, "a transitional regime whose destiny history has not yet finally weighed."²⁰⁴

While investigating the fate of the Soviet state, Trotsky never approached the problem in the context of narrow national borders. On the contrary, he emphasised that what would determine the fate of the Soviet Union was, in the final analysis, its position in the face of the world capitalist economy. He explained that the money system of the Soviet Union has a shut-in character, the "ruble" does not exist for the world market, and that this was the objective condition that would determine the future. By this way he was trying to show again and again, that the fate of the Soviet Union is closely linked to the fate of the world revolution. From a historical point of view, the Soviet Union has, in a short period of time, avoided strangling in the clutches of autarchy and managed to proceed forward thanks to the state monopoly of foreign trade and natural wealth of the country. But the point was not simply "to avoid strangling". The survival of the Soviet state could

202 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.67

203 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.47

204 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.61

be possible only if it reaches a position that allows it to resist the crushing effect of the world market. For this reason, Trotsky pointed chiefly to this fact:

The historic task, however, is not merely to avoid strangling, but to create face to face with the highest achievements of the world market a powerful economy, rational through and through, which will guarantee the greatest saving of time and consequently the highest flowering of culture.²⁰⁵

It was not possible to reach such a point within the context of a national economy and under the rule of the bureaucracy with a bureaucratic planning. Thus, the sin of the bureaucracy lied not in the question “why did it fail to develop further the national economy” but in the fact that it was a factor that hinders the progress of the world revolution.

The bureaucracies spurred the working class with capitalist methods in order to increase production with an effort to strengthen the conditions of the sovereignty of their own nation-states. It was a sufficiently warning lesson that they presented these acts as “a situation in perfect conformity with socialism” and that this idea has been advocated within world communist movement in the name of socialism. While exhibiting the shames of Stalin who has presented the Stakhanov movement as the preparation of the conditions for transition from socialism to communism, Trotsky also condemned the petty-bourgeois mentality that worships state ownership in the means of production without questioning:

The consideration that in the Soviet Union the workers work “for themselves” is true only in historical perspective, and only on condition –we will anticipate ourselves to say– that the workers do not submit to the saddle of an autocratic bureaucracy. In any case, state ownership of the means of production does not turn manure into gold, and does not surround with a halo of sanctity the sweatshop system, which wears out the greatest of all productive forces: man.²⁰⁶

This evaluation is an expression of the fact that state ownership alone is not sufficient to raise the working class to the position of economically dominant class. Although Trotsky does not speak openly of a need to change his earlier positions, he shows signs of having made different appraisals of the position of the bureaucracy in *The Revolution Betrayed*. A case in point is his comments on the changes introduced by the 1936 Constitution in relation to the soviet system. In the light of his comments we can ask the question: in spite of these comments, is it still a consistent attitude to define the bureaucracy as a growth on the back of the working class rather than a ruling class? He says the following:

Representing, as it does, an immense step back from socialist to bourgeois principles, the new constitution, cut and sewed to the measure of the ruling group, follows the same historic course as the abandonment of world revolution in favour of the League of Nations, the restoration of the bourgeois family, the substitution of the standing army for the militia, the resurrection of ranks and decorations, and the growth of inequality. By juridically reinforcing the absolutism of an “extra-class”

205 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.68

206 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.82-83

bureaucracy, the new constitution creates the political premises for the birth of a new possessing class.²⁰⁷

In contrast to his earlier writings where he tries to prove that in the final analysis the Soviet bureaucracy cannot be independent of the proletariat, Trotsky takes it seriously to emphasise the independent position of the bureaucracy in this book. For example:

The young bureaucracy, which had arisen at first as an agent of the proletariat, began now to feel itself a court of arbitration between classes. Its independence increased from month to month.

The bureaucracy conquered something more than the Left Opposition. It conquered the Bolshevik party. It defeated the program of Lenin, who had seen the chief danger in the conversion of the organs of the state “from servants of society to lords over society”. It defeated all these enemies, the Opposition, the party and Lenin, not with ideas and arguments, but with its own social weight. The leaden rump of bureaucracy outweighed the head of the revolution. That is the secret of the Soviet's Thermidor.

...the Soviet state has acquired a totalitarian-bureaucratic character.²⁰⁸

What does it imply that, having turned itself into an independent social force, the bureaucracy dominated the proletariat, and established its monopoly of power over whole society, or that the turning of the regime into a “totalitarian - bureaucratic” one, to use Trotsky's words? Perhaps not that “the state is still a workers state despite all bureaucratic degeneration” or that “the working class continues to be the dominant class”! On the contrary it means that the Soviet state can no longer be described as a workers' state, that we can no longer talk about a working class domination in the Soviet Union. Even though Trotsky, who has provided all these hints, continued to call this reality a “bureaucratically degenerated workers' state” with a political “reservation”, this never justifies the inclination to cling to this formulation in the subsequent years. Since, although Trotsky did not call this reality with its proper name, he exposed its substance in a striking manner:

The deposed and abused bureaucracy, from being a servant of society, has again become its lord. On this road it has attained such a degree of social and moral alienation from the popular masses, that it cannot now permit any control over either its activities or its income.

The means of production belong to the state. But the state, so to speak, “belongs” to the bureaucracy. If these as yet wholly new relations should solidify, become the norm and be legalized, whether with or without resistance from the workers, they would, in the long run, lead to a complete liquidation of the social conquests of the proletarian revolution.

... very existence of the state – no longer now as an instrument for the socialist transformation of society, but as a source of power, income and privileges to the

207 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.272

208 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.90, 94 and 108

ruling stratum.²⁰⁹

The bureaucratic dictatorship, which had already been established by the time Trotsky wrote the above lines, was to “solidify”, become “the norm” and be “legalized” in the coming years in a way as if to give a full confirmation to his prediction. It was quite clear that this meant the liquidation of the social conquests of the proletarian revolution. Thus, there is no understandable reason that Trotskists still treat the nature of the Soviet state on the basis of his old assessments. Take the following words of Trotsky, for instance: “As a conscious political force the bureaucracy has betrayed the revolution. ... To betray it is not enough. You have to overthrow it. The October revolution has been betrayed by the ruling stratum, but not yet overthrown.”²¹⁰ To repeat such wrong assessments of Trotsky years after means, in fact, to neglect the task of re-questioning the nature of the bureaucratic regime, which has become more and more obvious with time.

* * *

In the last few years of his life after 1936 Trotsky gave new hints such that would change his earlier assessments of the Soviet reality. Besides, rather than exclusively linking the danger of capitalist restoration to the prospect of a bourgeois counter-revolution, he explained that the Soviet bureaucracy could also play the same role in bringing about the same result: “In reality, the *new constitution* ... opens up for the bureaucracy ‘legal’ roads for the economic counter-revolution, i.e., the restoration of capitalism by means of a ‘cold strike’.”²¹¹ In his last writings, he was pointing out that the bureaucracy could function as an instrument of the international bourgeoisie, let alone preserving the historical conquests of the proletariat. However, he did not abandon the concept of “bureaucratically degenerated workers’ state”. For example in *The Transitional Programme* of 1938, while on the one hand emphasising the historical opportunity that would be provided by the domination of the bureaucracy to the world bourgeoisie, he was trying, on the other hand, to reconcile his prediction with the category of “degenerated workers’ state” which, in fact, no longer existed under those conditions:

The USSR thus embodies terrific contradictions. But it still remains a *degenerated workers’ state*. Such is the social diagnosis. The political prognosis has an alternative character: either the bureaucracy, becoming ever more the organ of the world bourgeoisie in the workers’ state, will overthrow the new forms of property and plunge the country back to capitalism; or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the way to socialism.²¹²

However there was no convincing reason to reconcile a bureaucratic rule that would become the organ of the world bourgeoisie in the Soviet state with the concept of “degenerated workers’ state”. The concept of “workers’ state” in the expression “the organ of the world bourgeoisie in the workers’ state” used by Trotsky in underscoring the

209 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, pp.113, 249 and 271

210 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, pp.251-252

211 Trotsky, quoted in T. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, p.184

212 Trotsky, *The Transitional Programme*, Workers Revolutionary Party Pamphlet, pp. 35-36

possible role of the Soviet bureaucracy was totally flimsy. As for the “state ownership” which has been referred to above along with the possibility that the bureaucracy could “overthrow the new forms of property”, the fact that the state ownership is “still” preserved under the rule of the bureaucracy did not mean that the conquests of the proletarian revolution are preserved. Moreover, this state ownership, as Trotsky has stated, does not mean a guarantee to prevent the bureaucracy from starting a process of dissolution into private property in collaboration with the world bourgeoisie. On the contrary, under the rule of the bureaucracy the state ownership could, after a prolonged isolation, well be dissolved by the bureaucracy acting as an instrument of the international bourgeoisie in the Soviet state; and this is exactly the case. After all, Trotsky himself pointed to such an end result awaiting “a prolonged isolation”:

The longer the Soviet Union remains in a capitalist environment, the deeper runs the degeneration of the social fabric. A prolonged isolation would inevitably end not in national communism, but in a restoration of capitalism.²¹³

Thus, Trotsky was not mistaken in his prediction that the bureaucracy could act as an instrument of the international bourgeoisie, despite the fact that he did not abandon the definition of “bureaucratically degenerated workers’ state”. By this attitude, Trotsky thus points to the possibility that the bureaucratic regime could dissolve into capitalism without a counter-revolution led directly by the bourgeoisie. For example, in August 1939, in his article *The Three Conceptions of the Russian Revolution* he openly speaks of the direct link between the existence of the Stalinist bureaucratic rule and restoration of bourgeois regime:

Without the aid of a proletarian revolution in the West, Lenin repeated, restoration in Russia was inevitable. He was not mistaken: the Stalinist bureaucracy is nothing else than the first phase of bourgeois restoration.²¹⁴

These lines signify a prediction that the Stalinist Soviet bureaucracy is a class without future in the face of world capitalism and that it could in the subsequent years start a process of dissolution towards bourgeois relations. This means, whereas a bourgeois counter-revolution is necessary for the liquidation of state ownership under workers’ power, under the power of the bureaucracy, there is no guarantee for the maintenance of state ownership under bureaucratic dictatorship and in this case a bourgeois counter-revolution is not necessary for the liquidation of it. In conclusion, the bureaucratic regime has no other open end than capitalism and if you talk about a counter-revolution, it has already taken place against the working class power with the establishment of the dictatorship of the bureaucracy long ago.

In his article *The USSR in War* (September 1939) Trotsky’s emphasis on the norm of a workers’ state is remarkable. Stating that the concrete fact in the Soviet Union, i.e. the bureaucratic dictatorship, departed from the norm of the workers’ state, Trotsky says: “This does not signify, however, that it has overthrown the norm; on the contrary, it has reaffirmed it, from the negative side. ... The contradiction between the concrete fact

213 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, pp.300-301

214 Trotsky, *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1938-9)*, Merit Publishers, 1969, p.114

and the norm constrains us not to reject the norm but, on the contrary, to fight for it by means of the revolutionary road.”²¹⁵ On the other hand the course of real events like the “German-Soviet pact” signed by the Stalinist bureaucracy in the conjuncture of the Second World War, etc., to defend its own nation-state presented difficulties in effect to Trotsky’s view, i.e. “degenerated workers’ state”. Hence, in a way that suggests that he is on the eve of a radical re-examination on this issue, Trotsky points to the fact that they defend similar things anyway with those who consider bureaucracy a dominant class as far as the political conclusions are concerned. According to Trotsky, the problem is rather “terminological”.

“Let us concede for the moment that the bureaucracy is a new ‘class’ and that the present regime in the USSR is a special system of class exploitation. What new political conclusions follow for us from these definitions?”²¹⁶ asks Trotsky. According to him, now that the Fourth International has long ago adopted the view that the bureaucracy must be overthrown by a revolutionary uprising of toilers, what else can be proposed? On the other hand, even when the bureaucracy is overthrown this revolution will be a political one in essence as the planned economy and state ownership will be preserved. Hence it will not make any difference when you call it a “social revolution”. After naming these points, with those in mind who criticised his views, Trotsky makes the following assessment: “The sole accusation they bring against us is that we do not draw the necessary ‘conclusions’. Upon analysis it turns out, however, that these conclusions are of a purely terminological character.”²¹⁷ Stating that unless there is an important difference in taking up the political tasks it would be a “monstrous nonsense” to cause a split with those having different views about the sociological nature of the USSR, Trotsky says: “But on the other hand, it would be blindness on our part to ignore purely theoretical and even terminological differences...”²¹⁸

In fact, when you put together his arguments in the context of the concrete reality of the Soviet Union, even Trotsky, as can be perfectly seen, has to circle around the fundamental issue, as it was so impossible to prove that the bureaucracy was not a dominant class. For example he argues:

But if we consider the Soviet bureaucracy a “class,” then we are compelled to state immediately that this class does not at all resemble any of those propertied classes known to us in the past; our gain consequently is not great. We frequently call the Soviet bureaucracy a caste, underscoring thereby its shut-in character, its arbitrary rule, and the haughtiness of the ruling stratum which considers that its progenitors issued from the divine lips of Brahma whereas the popular masses originated from the grosser portions of his anatomy. But even this definition does not of course possess a strictly scientific character. ... All of us, however, continue to call the Soviet bureaucracy a bureaucracy, not being unmindful of its historical peculiarities. In our opinion this should suffice for the time being.²¹⁹

215 Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism*, Pathfinder Press, p.3

216 Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism*, Pathfinder Press, p.4

217 Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism*, Pathfinder Press, p.4-5

218 Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism*, Pathfinder Press, p.5

219 Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism*, Pathfinder Press, p.6

Trotsky is right. Indeed, the bureaucracy had nothing in common with the past classes based on individual private property. But here was the distinctive point. True, the Stalinist bureaucracy was not like the dominant classes in possession of private ownership seen in the West; however, it was like the dominant class of oriental despotism (collectively-governing class made of military-civil-religious bureaucracy) based on state property. Marx had discovered the difference between thousands-of-year-old oriental despotism and western class societies and made striking analyses of this difference. However, while investigating the nature of the Soviet State, Trotsky did not dwell on this important point which, in fact, would shed light on the matter.

In the stormy years of Second World War, the existence of fascist regimes in Germany, Italy, and the despotic-bureaucratic dictatorship in the Soviet Union, created in general a pessimistic mood and fed counter-tendencies like completely losing faith in the historic mission of the working class. In the face of those who claim that the world as a whole was going towards a totalitarian formation, i.e. a “bureaucratic collectivism”, Trotsky was at that time talking about mainly two alternatives: Either the war would lead to a proletarian revolution and thus the bureaucracy would also be overthrown (in that case the debate on the nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy would automatically drop), or if the war led to a collapse on the part of the proletariat, capitalism would leave its place to a totalitarian regime in capitalist countries as well and this would mean the collapse of civilisation. Trotsky expressed the conclusion he drew from this analysis in these words:

The historic alternative, carried to the end, is as follows: either the Stalin regime is an abhorrent relapse in the process of transforming bourgeois society into a socialist society, or the Stalin regime is the first stage of a new exploiting society. If the second prognosis proves to be correct, then, of course, the bureaucracy will become a new exploiting class.²²⁰

But, as he reasoned here in a way that as if the logical result of the fact that the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union rose to the level of a dominant class was that the capitalism on the whole was to leave its place to a new exploiting society, which is called “bureaucratic collectivism”, Trotsky made an unusual point which was to create a further confusion among his followers. He said the following:

However onerous the second perspective may be, if the world proletariat should actually prove incapable of fulfilling the mission placed upon it by the course of development, nothing else would remain except only to recognize that the socialist program, based on the internal contradictions of capitalist society, ended in Utopia. It is self-evident that a new “minimum” program would be required -- for the defense of the interests of the slaves of the totalitarian bureaucratic society.²²¹

This kind of reasoning which is limited to the evaluation of the possibilities suggested by the theory of “bureaucratic collectivism” resulted in ignoring another possibility which was in fact highly likely and realised in practice. In fact the Stalin regime was an exploiting society different from capitalism; and the dominant bureaucracy was an

220 Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism*, Pathfinder Press, p.9

221 Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism*, Pathfinder Press, p.9

exploiting class different from bourgeoisie. By the end of Second World War it was clear that the bureaucratic regime survived in the Soviet Union. But unlike the thesis of those who defend the theory of “bureaucratic collectivism”, such a regime materialised not in the whole world including capitalist countries, but only in the Soviet Union due to certain peculiar conditions. And now there remained no logical reason to refrain from characterising the bureaucracy, on the basis of this regime, as a dominant class. The reality in fact was pointing to a different conclusion Trotsky was questioning:

If the Bonapartist riff-raff is a class this means that it is not an abortion but a viable child of history. If its marauding parasitism is “exploitation” in the scientific sense of the term, this means that the bureaucracy possesses a historical future as the ruling class indispensable to the given system of economy.²²²

The possibility Trotsky mentioned as an “if” clause, in fact realised, in the very context Trotsky explained, in the reality of bureaucratic dictatorship which became a ruling class indispensable to the “given system of economy” based on state ownership in the Soviet Union. On the other hand it was an indisputable fact that this class constituted a historical reality such that would put its seal on the world history for a certain period and pursued a considerable life unlike what Trotsky had thought in the beginning, though it did not have a “historical future” in the long run.

In conclusion, it is obvious that the ideas of Trotsky on the nature of the regime and state in the Soviet Union displayed a very important change and mobility in the last years of his life. Thus, it is clear that, in order to be able to start from where he left, we cannot move on by fixing his analyses at certain points. On the contrary, if this way was done, it is certain that one would fall behind even that reflection of the reality elaborated by Trotsky at that time, although it had some drawbacks and points that need to be corrected.

222 Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism*, Pathfinder Press, p.24

Chapter 7

Freezing Trotsky's Analyses

The idea that predominates the views of Trotsky when he made his assessments on the fate of the Soviet Union can be summarised as follows: when a proletarian revolution that has failed to proceed on an international scale, isolated within national borders is hindered by the formation of a bureaucratic power, it will end up with its collapse. Examining the problem in the concrete context of the Soviet Union, Trotsky thought that the gains of the October Revolution were not abolished and the revolution did not completely collapse yet, while revealing by all evidence on the other hand that the Stalinist power constituted a bureaucratic structure. He maintained this view up until the eve of the Second World War. As soon as the war became a fact, he reconsidered the problem and tried to find out the possibilities in relation to war.

One possibility he expressed was that, by overthrowing the bureaucratic dictatorship, a proletarian revolt could save the “betrayed revolution” from collapsing. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Just the opposite happened. By building similar bureaucratic dictatorships in the countries of its sphere of influence after the Second World War the Stalinist dictatorship gained a central hegemonic position over these countries militarily and politically, and became more powerful. The new conditions meant that even a somewhat understandable ground for Trotsky's “cautious” attitude in assessing the character of the Soviet state no longer existed now. Now the apparent reality had nothing to do with the dictatorship of the proletariat and preserving of the gains of proletarian revolution. This reality implied the existence of a ruling class that had raised itself to the position of a dominant class over workers and toilers, through the domination of the state ownership in a society where the predominant form of property was state property. This class was neither like the dominant classes based on private ownership, nor the proletariat, the producing class of modern industrial society. This dominant class took its strength neither from bourgeoisie nor from the working class. It was a dominant class that subsisted itself resting upon the state property and despotic-bureaucratic power apparatus it created. Furthermore, this class had become an international power by creating similar examples after the Second World War.

Trotsky unfortunately did not live long enough to see this new post-world war scene and the scale of the international power of the despotic state established by the Stalinist bureaucracy alongside the capitalist states. If he did, we believe that he would re-assess

his analyses concerning the nature of the Soviet State and cleanse his theses of certain shortcomings and faults, reaching more integral and coherent views.

After his death, his analyses should have been carried on and his theses re-examined in the light of new circumstances that emerged in the aftermath of the war. But who was to do that? This task was of course the responsibility of Trotsky's followers, and in the first place of the leadership of the Fourth International. And what happened then? Have the "Trotskyists" who claim to be the followers of Trotsky fulfilled this task adequately? To be honest, it is hard to answer this question in the affirmative.

Those who took on the leadership of the Fourth International after Trotsky's death have frozen the theoretical analyses he had made for his own period and have transformed his theses into dogmas instead of grasping the essence of his ideas and trying to develop them under changing conditions. In fact this attitude meant turning a revolutionary theoretical legacy into a finished stencil rather than keeping it alive. Since a proper theoretical discussion could not be managed within the Fourth International, Trotsky's theses could not be taken up and improved. As a result, every Trotskyist circle interpreted the ideas of Trotsky as they wished and tended to establish a separate political sect.

However, in order to be genuine followers of Bolshevik-Leninist tradition, as Trotsky named it, a course should have been followed where this tradition is kept alive not verbally but in reality and a revolutionary internationalist unity should have been formed accordingly. What happened was just the opposite. After the death of Trotsky, a deep political-organisational crisis took place within the Fourth International the foundations of which had been laid by Trotsky. What lied behind this crisis was the incapability of the Fourth International leadership to provide theoretical solutions for the problems of the postwar period and especially the fact that it continued to define the Stalinist dictatorship in the Soviet Union and the other new bureaucratic dictatorships established under its hegemony as a kind of "workers' states despite everything". A similar mistake can be seen in their attitudes towards national liberation movements, which was a result of a misconception of the theory of permanent revolution.

In the end, the failure to improve Trotsky's theoretical analyses under changing circumstances and the turning of his theses into finished stencils, caused the crisis in the Trotskyist movement to deepen and organisational-political splits and disintegrations occur frequently. These sects that appeared after these splits, in turn, moved away from the perspective of getting themselves organised on the basis of the proletarian class and leaned towards petty bourgeois elements and increasingly built on them. This made the Trotskyist movement, in a broad view, a political movement that is constantly in crisis and constantly suffering from splits. Of course it is not the concern of this book to elaborate on the details of this question which is about the organisational-political aspects of the problem. However, there certainly is a correlation, and a strong one, between the organisationally-politically divided state of the Trotskyist movement and the problem we are dealing with here.

After dealing with the ideas and appraisals of Trotsky on the controversial theoretical

problems, our subject matter inevitably extends towards his successors. In this context, the views of Mandel, who, after Trotsky's death, has been a prominent figure as an official representative of the Fourth International tradition, are the main focus of attention. When we look into the views of Mandel as a whole, it is hard to say that the tendency he represents has grasped the essence of Trotsky's views and developed correct theoretical answers to the present problems. Even we can say that, in many respects Mandel plays one of the most leading roles in freezing Trotsky's theoretical analyses and ossifying his views and turning them into finished stencils in the name of "deepening" them.

We shall try to reveal here, on the basis of certain important examples, that the tendency Mandel represents has not proceeded on the road opened by Trotsky, and that it has frozen his ideas in many points. It will help clarify the problems to be discussed if we deal with these examples in the company of Trotsky's views.

The principal theoretical question Mandel blurred in the name of deepening and carried to a wrong conclusion is the question of "workers' state" and, in connection with it, the class nature of the state in the Soviet Union and the peculiar position of the bureaucracy. Although he claims to base his positions upon Trotsky, his "theory" on this subject is completely "original" and, from a Marxist point of view, one based on errors. Mandel draws a wrong theoretical conclusion on the question of workers' state on the basis of the assumption that the state in the Soviet Union is "still a proletarian dictatorship despite its bureaucratic degeneration". According to him a workers' state can be with bureaucracy, and moreover, if a workers' revolution takes place in a backward country, the workers' state will inevitably be with bureaucracy.

If we accepted this "theory" of Mandel, then the Marxist position that the workers' state should be one without bureaucracy would be nothing more than wishful thinking. However, we know that the prediction of Marx on this matter, far from being wishful thinking, is a possible and necessary goal for the existence of a workers' state. Whereas it is a rightful effort to consider out of what objective and subjective reasons this goal could not be, or cannot be, achieved, it is, on the other hand, a wrong attitude to endeavour to prove that a workers' state can be with bureaucracy on the basis of an example in which this goal could not be achieved. This is precisely what Mandel does with his generalisation of "workers' state with bureaucracy", and this constitutes an example of the kind of wrong attitude that diverges from the Marxist understanding of workers' state.

It has been stated in the previous chapter that Trotsky's assessments also had erroneous aspects. But in the final analysis, Trotsky's starting point was the Marxist understanding that "the workers' state cannot and should not be one with bureaucracy". He was just dealing with the phenomenon of "bureaucratic degeneration" in an endeavour to reveal the causes of the change taking place in the Soviet Union in those years. On the other hand, Trotsky gave important hints that "a monstrously degenerated workers' state" would after all cease to be a workers' state. But Mandel continued to base his theory on Trotsky's earlier appraisals despite the bare reality being more and more explicit with time. By doing this he has frozen the moving analyses of Trotsky. Thus Mandel's theory

implanted a kind of understanding that suggests “bureaucracy will never disappear as long as the state exists” or “bureaucracy will always exist” into the Trotskyist movement.

This idea of Mandel leaves the door open for a possibility that even a workers’ state without bureaucracy would not perhaps exist if the proletarian revolution was not isolated in one country and a backward one such as Russia. And this line of thinking fosters a tendency so as to accept the idea of “workers’ state with bureaucracy”, to submit to the existing reality and even to envisage the future on this basis. This is indeed what happened. It is not difficult to find the traces of an implicit submission and various concessions in the face of the reality of the Soviet Union, all of which flow from this point.

Trotsky, who came near to defining the bureaucracy as a dominant class in the course of the process of bureaucratic counter-revolution in the Soviet Union, emphasised openly in his last writings that the bureaucratic rule was a counter-revolutionary force which should be overthrown by the proletariat. He was saying that, far from defending the historical conquests of the proletariat, the bureaucracy could function as an instrument of the international bourgeoisie in the heart of the Soviet state. But if you say that, then it becomes senseless to talk about the dual character of the bureaucracy which suggests that “while it is conservative on the one hand, it continues to defend –although by its own methods– the workers’ state on the other”. What is to be concentrated on is the counter-revolutionary character of the bureaucracy, which emerges as a hindering factor in front of the world revolution.

But Mandel’s explanations on “the dual character of the bureaucracy” are in contradiction with what Trotsky hinted in his last writings, and moreover he bends the stick in favour of the bureaucracy to such an extent that Trotsky never had done. Mandel says the following in 1968s:

This role reflects the essentially contradictory and dual nature of the Soviet bureaucracy. On the one hand it is really dependent on the new social order that emerged in the Soviet Union out of the October Revolution and of the repression by way of violence of private agriculture through forced collectivisation by Stalin and seeks to protect this order –which is the basis of its power and privileges– in a way that suits its own narrow private interests. By protecting the Soviet society it serves objectively to spread the revolution on an international plane independently of its desires and motives.²²³

Such kind of assessments made by Mandel also constitute the basis for the arguments of the apologetics of Stalinism, who say that “despite all subjective errors of the bureaucracy, the Soviet Union objectively continues to be the centre of the world revolution”. Mandel has not made any essential modification in his analyses of the dual character of the bureaucracy. And he has carried on resting his thesis that the bureaucracy does not constitute a dominant class upon the allegation that it has an aspect of defending – although by its own methods– the social order that had come into being with the October revolution.

223 E. Mandel, *Barış İçinde Birlikte Yaşama ve Dünya Devrimi*, 1975, p.22 [*Peaceful Coexistence and World Revolution*, our translation]

On the other hand Mandel states in an interview with him in 1978 on “the class nature of the Soviet state” that those who label bureaucracy as “a new class” would be bound to admit its progressive role compared to the bourgeoisie. Such kind of arguments have caused an effect of stifling those intellectual efforts within Trotskyist movement with a view to finding out the truth. They had also the effect of obscuring the fact that the Soviet bureaucracy constitutes not a caste but a dominant class.

On the other hand, in his mentality, Mandel himself attributes a “progressive” role to the bureaucracy and points to the enormous economic and cultural achievements of the USSR as a proof of this. In fact this progress, as noted by Trotsky, was the product of the labour of the proletariat forced to work under the whip of the bureaucracy. To assess the bureaucracy in terms of a comparison with the bourgeoisie and not in terms of its reactionary role in the face of the working class and world revolution is a great concession made to the bureaucracy, as well as to count the achievement of industrialisation in the USSR as the success of the bureaucracy in the final analysis. And this is despite the fact that Trotsky himself expressed that the bureaucratic rule was not an advancing but a hindering factor for the development in the USSR. Trotsky said: “The further unhindered development of bureaucratism must lead inevitably to the cessation of economic and cultural growth, to a terrible social crisis and to the downward plunge of the entire society.”²²⁴

It was again Mandel who created the “theory” that the Soviet economy under the dictatorship of the bureaucracy recorded such a progress that even excels capitalism. The thesis, which he has defended for years and tried to implant into Trotskyist movement, is as follows:

Plan after plan, through successive decades, the Soviet Union has been sustaining a somewhat balanced economic growth without the accumulation of past progress creating an obstacle on the possibilities of future growth... All laws of capitalist development that reduce the speed of economic growth has been eliminated.²²⁵

In the context of revealing that the regime in the Soviet Union was not state capitalism, Trotsky was right when he said that the bureaucracy was not a dominant class in the sense that the bourgeoisie was. On the other hand, although he did not draw the necessary conclusion when he defined the Soviet bureaucracy as the gendarme of distribution process, Trotsky, by doing this, was implicitly pointing to the fact that under these conditions the working class could not be considered as the lord of production process. The ultimate meaning of this was that the bureaucracy, as a dominant force in control of the production process, was something more than a privileged layer, a *sui generis* class controlling the social surplus-labour and basing itself on state property, unlike those classes that own private property. Unfortunately, Trotsky could not advance his analyses up to this point.

Under conditions where the bourgeoisie was expropriated but the working class was not

224 Trotsky, *Writings 1933-34*, p.115

225 quoted in: C. Harman, *Doğu'da Fırtına Koptu*, 1991, p.83 [*The Storm Breaks in the East*, our translation]

able to maintain its domination and the means of production was under state ownership, the bureaucracy who owns the state was something different from the bureaucracy in the service of classes based on private property. It has clearly turned out that the bureaucracy had lifted itself to the position of a ruling class which has based itself not on private ownership but on state ownership and that it had formed a state class.

Trotsky's expositions about the condition of the working class "which is forced to work under the whip of the bureaucracy" revealed clearly the dominant position of the bureaucracy over the working class. Should this position be legalised and solidified, he noted, all social conquests of the proletarian revolution would be liquidated. Despite the fact that years have passed and events have developed in the very same direction pointed out by Trotsky (as a matter of fact, that was the case even before he stated that), some Trotskyists still tried to prove that "the historical conquests of the working class would continue to be preserved as long as the state ownership lasts". But they were gravely mistaken. And what lies behind this mistake was the erroneous tendency to identify state ownership with socialist property in an exaggerated way. Yet the fallacies of petty bourgeois-socialism on such problems as "statism" and "state ownership" had been subjected to a lot of criticism from Marx's time onwards. The theoretical criticisms directed by Marxism against petty bourgeois socialism on this issue constitute a rich revolutionary Marxist literature.²²⁶

In fact, the effort to rationalise such claims that are at variance with reality inevitably leads to contradictions. Ignoring the important hints given by Trotsky and constraining himself into finished stencils Mandel confined his appraisals on the nature of the Soviet state into a vicious circle. When compelled, by force of questioning, to go beyond the thesis of "bureaucratically degenerated workers' state", he dared to fall into contradiction with himself but he did not dare to abandon this finished stencil. This is exactly the case, for instance, when he re-asserts the nature of the Soviet state under changing conditions. He keeps claiming that the bureaucracy is still a very crowded social group made of people of working class origin. Since the definition of "bureaucratically degenerated workers' state" cannot withstand criticism by 1978, he seeks apologetic excuses for his attitude of maintaining this definition. He says that this Trotskyist definition is by no means the same with a workers' state. But, in spite of this, he prefers keeping the word "workers" in this definition, since, in his opinion, its elimination will make things more confusing. Mandel's excuses represent a call for giving up the endeavour to find out the truth for the sake of avoiding confusion. Or they are manifestation of concessions to the bureaucracy. Mandel says:

If we allow that the bureaucracy is a new class, are the Communist Parties in power then "bureaucratic" parties? (...) Or is the bureaucracy the only class in history that becomes a class only after seizing power, although it was not a class prior to the

226 By the way, let us remember Engels's lines where he makes fun of erroneous approaches in relation to state ownership: "But since Bismarck became keen on nationalizing, a certain spurious socialism has recently made its appearance -- here and there even degenerating into a kind of flunkeyism -- which without more ado declares all nationalization, even the Bismarckian kind, to be socialistic. To be sure, if the nationalization of the tobacco trade were socialistic, Napoleon and Metternich would rank among the founders of socialism." (Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p.144)

seizure of power?

In the end Mandel has “avoided confusion” by ignoring the hints given by Trotsky and taking refuge once again in the old safe haven:

... when the Fourth International –following Trotsky- asserts that there is still a bureaucratically degenerate workers’ state in the Soviet Union, and that in this sense the Soviet Union still preserves a form of dictatorship of the proletariat, it does so in a quite precise way which implies no more than it says. Up to now this state has objectively continued to defend the structures, the hybrid relations of production, born of the October Revolution. Thus up to now this state has prevented the restoration of capitalism and the power of a new bourgeois class; it has prevented the re-emergence of capitalist property and capitalist relations of production.²²⁷

Yet the fact that the bureaucracy had not yet accomplished capitalist restoration by the time Mandel wrote above lines (1978) does not mean that the Soviet Union “preserved a kind of proletarian dictatorship”. It is not correct that the Soviet state “objectively defends the institutions flowed from the October Revolution”. As the Soviet state completely ceased to be a workers’ state after a bureaucratic counter-revolution, the idea that “the bureaucracy is a social caste dependent on the institutions that had flowed from the October Revolution” lost any objective ground after 1929. Thus, what the bureaucracy defends “by preventing the rule of a new bourgeois class, not allowing capitalist ownership and capitalist relations of production to emerge” is not any more “the institutions flowed from the October Revolution”. It has preserved the workings of the bureaucratic regime which is linked with the interests of its own nation-state.

Avoiding from a reassessment of the objective nature of the Soviet state and Soviet bureaucracy, Mandel has not managed to elevate his analyses to a level which enables one to grasp the changes of our time, and thus he was caught unaware by the process of collapse of the bureaucratic regimes. That’s why his positions (which we demonstrated by examples from 1978) are essentially wrong and they serve as the source of the inadequate understanding of the changes of our time. Because Mandel has insisted on his argument that the conquests of the October revolution have not been abolished in spite of the counter-revolution the bureaucracy has accomplished before. For this reason, he has contented himself with reiterating that a capitalist restoration is possible in the Soviet Union and countries alike only through a bourgeois counter-revolution.

Clinging to old appraisals for the sake of “avoiding confusion” Mandel seeks to overcome his uneasiness resulting from the incompatibility of these appraisals with concrete reality by playing with the content of Marxist concepts. However, it is precisely such attitudes that lead to confusion. Mandel says:

... if one interprets “dictatorship of the proletariat” to mean “direct government by the working class”, then this dictatorship certainly does not exist. For us, the dictatorship of the proletariat exists in the Soviet Union only in the derived,

227 Mandel, *Revolutionary Marxism Today*, New Left Review Editions, 1979 London, pp. 145-6

indirect, and socio-theoretical sense of the term.²²⁸

“The direct government of the working class”, which is the condition of existence for the dictatorship of proletariat, is presented here as if one of its versions. Thus Mandel provides us with a new definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat: a proletarian dictatorship in a “socio-theoretical” sense, “derived” from the definition of the dictatorship of the proletariat, signifying the “indirect” government of the working class. As a matter of fact, this kind of explanations have no meaning beyond theoretical sophistry.

Mandel’s effort to demonstrate that the bureaucracy cannot constitute a dominant class independent from the proletariat, that the Soviet state, despite everything, is in the final analysis a “bureaucratically degenerated workers’ state” defending the conquests of the October Revolution compels him to make interpretations which are incompatible with reality. For this reason he is so heedless as to talk about “unfinished processes” years after Trotsky who said that the Soviet bureaucracy had “outweighed the head of the October Revolution with its leaden rump” and that the existence of the bureaucracy was “the dialectical negation of Bolshevism”. The following lines are a meaningful testimony:

... although the bureaucracy may try to sever entirely the umbilical cord with its past, the working class and Marxist ideology, it is one thing to try and quite another to succeed. What is involved here is an ongoing process which is far from completed; and it is obvious that there may be very violent reactions.²²⁹

Whatever the intention be, these kind of explanations turn into concessions to the bureaucracy. Mandel and his followers, who theorised the phenomenon of the “bureaucratic dictatorship” on the basis of a conception of “workers’ state with bureaucracy”, make even the “national revolutionary powers” that are product of national liberation revolutions fit into the category of “workers’ states”. The revolutions of Yugoslavia, China and Vietnam, which kept the working class away from power from the very beginning and only had an anti-capitalist content on the basis of national socialism, are appraised as “socialist revolutions deformed from the beginning”. About the revolutions in these countries Mandel says the following:

The partial and not total break with their Stalinist past meant the leadership of these parties still held bureaucratic organizational positions both in terms of their internal regime and their relations with the masses. Consequently these revolutionary victories were not accompanied by the institutionalisation of direct (soviet) workers’ and people’s power. From the beginning the party apparatus was identified with the state. Bureaucratisation and depoliticisation of the masses - both of which were reinforced by the rapid emergence of exorbitant material privileges of a new bureaucracy - become more and more firmly established. So we can legitimately speak of socialist revolutions bureaucratically manipulated and deformed from the start.²³⁰

Thus Mandel enriches Marxist literature with another “theoretical” concept after “the

228 Mandel, *ibid*, p.147

229 Mandel, *ibid*, p.144

230 Mandel, *Reasons for the Founding of the Fourth International*, Html version

bureaucratic workers' state": "socialist revolutions deformed from the very beginning!"

Besides, Mandel and his followers define the revolutions in Cuba, Nicaragua and Grenada as "genuine popular socialist revolutions" just because they were not led by parties of Stalinist origin (!):

Later in Cuba, Grenada, and Nicaragua, authentic socialist popular revolutions took place that are clearly distinguished from the Yugoslav, Chinese, and Vietnamese revolutions because they were led by revolutionary parties coming not out of Stalinism but from differentiation and development of anti-imperialist and socialist currents from their own countries. Consequently the processes of bureaucratisation of power have been much less in these countries compared to the others. Also limited and still insufficient steps have been taken towards an institutionalisation of workers' and people's power, more locally than nationally.²³¹

What is the measure used in these assessments? The scope of revolutions or whether these revolutions take the revolutionary proletariat to power or not? Or that their effective leaderships are not of Stalinist origin, or whether they assumed an attitude against the Soviet bureaucracy without completely breaking away from it? There is no doubt that to make a proper assessment it is not enough to take into account the position of the leaderships of these revolutions in the face of the Soviet bureaucracy. Essentially one has to analyse the class nature of the revolutionary leadership, the scope of revolution and whether it takes the proletariat to power. How far a correct attitude could it be to characterise a revolution that cannot end up in a proletarian dictatorship and can never in the final analysis go beyond a "nationalist" outlook as a "social revolution" just because it starts liquidating capitalist relations (by the way, this happens on the basis of military, political, economic relations with the Soviet bureaucracy) and begins to implement a national development strategy on the basis of "nationalisations".

The fundamental fallacy of the tendency represented by Mandel is so striking that they have kept characterising the Cuban revolution, which developed on the basis of a national liberation revolution and submitted to the Soviet bureaucracy after a national revolutionary power was established, as an "authentic popular socialist revolution". The power of national liberationist "Cadillist" leadership of the Cuban revolution has been compared with the dictatorship of the proletariat flowed from the October Revolution. Again, the power of Sandinist leadership (which included bourgeois elements) of the Nicaraguan Revolution that did not go beyond the scope of a national revolution is characterised as a "much less bureaucratized power" coming out of "an authentic popular socialist revolution". Mandel has always sought to overcome the problem he has faced by simply coupling the concepts of socialism and people.

However, it is well known that the theory of permanent revolution defended by Trotsky puts the founding of the dictatorship of the proletariat as necessary condition for the revolutions to elevate to a level that will comprise the socialist goal of the proletariat. Some Trotskyist tendencies put the October proletarian revolution in the same pot with the other revolutions that remain within limits of national liberation revolutions

231 Mandel, *ibid.*

and end up in the establishment of national liberationist powers. And this attitude of those Trotskyist tendencies is, above all, at variance with the perspective of permanent revolution advanced by Trotsky.

It is a theoretical monstrosity established by the Mandelite tendency to put national liberation revolutions into the category of socialist revolutions and define all national states founded after these revolutions as “workers’ states bureaucratised from the very beginning”. For instance the following lines constitute a typical example for this strangeness: “it must also be stressed that, as long as it is not linked to the emergence of direct power of workers based on democratically elected workers’ councils, those workers’ states that issue from the overthrow of capitalism in many underdeveloped countries are destined to be bureaucratised from the very beginning.”²³² Just as in Mandel’s other theoretical sophistries such as “a derived”, “indirect”, “dictatorship of the proletariat in socio-theoretical sense”, we have here the same strangeness of “a workers’ state bureaucratised from the very beginning” which opens its eyes to life without the birth of “a direct power of workers based on democratically elected workers’ councils”, i.e. without the working class coming to power.

Another thing to be remembered here is the schematic grading system of Mandel on which he bases his assessments such as “bureaucratised workers’ states”. That the soviet power emerged after the October Revolution underwent a bureaucratic deformation as Lenin himself put it and that this evil grew into a fully-fledged bureaucratic degeneration, these two phenomena, have been used to invent a mechanical classification such that we end up with as if there is a generalised distinction of “deformed workers’ states” and “degenerated workers’ states”. Yet, the phenomena such as bureaucratic deformation and degeneration are peculiar to the history of the Soviet Union and it is not correct to apply them to countries where no workers’ revolution has ever happened. But such kind of approaches have been established in the name of Trotskyism for years and even in some cases those Trotskyists who say “deformed workers’ state” and those who say “degenerated workers’ state” in relation to appraising certain historical events could come against each other. However, what is wrong with this is not one of degree, but of the approach itself on the whole.

Mandel’s Concept of “Transitional Society”

Mandel and those who think like him complement their mistake on the character of the Soviet state with their attitude in assessing the socio-economic regime in the Soviet Union. They insist on characterising the socio-economic regime in the Soviet Union as a transitional regime, despite it is marred by the domination of the bureaucracy. Mandel has his theses on the features of transition period from capitalism to communism, which he calls generally as “transitional society”, and he uses these theses to prove that the Soviet Union is a “transitional society”. According to him a “transitional society” is open to both directions (capitalism and socialism). These countries are considered to

232 A Fourth International Document: *Sosyalist Demokrasi ve Proletarya Diktatörlüğü*, 1979, s.72-73 [Socialist Democracy and Proletarian Dictatorship, our translation]

be staying on a bridge unless a capitalist restoration takes place. After stating that the Soviet economy is a “hybrid and contradictory” combination, Mandel says: “It implies that the fate of the USSR as a transitional society between capitalism and socialism, “frozen” at its present stage by the bureaucratic dictatorship, has not yet been settled historically.”²³³ He assumes that the bridge extending from the past to the future (the period of transition from capitalism to communism) keeps staying in its place despite the absence of a working class power. By this assumption he reveals that he has a conception of “transitional society” different from the Marxist understanding of the transition period which has demonstrated that it can only be experienced under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

It is not correct to define the transition period from capitalism to communism as a process with two open ends. Since the transition period that can only be experienced under the direct rule of the working class, i.e. under the dictatorship of the proletariat, will not be a bridge the historical fate of which is uncertain and of which has two ends, one open to the past (capitalism) and the other to the future (socialism). On the contrary this historical period will be a *period of revolutionary transformations* in which ties with the past are broken and a march towards the future is under way. A coming to a halt in the process of social revolution that has been started by the proletariat in power, and furthermore a regression, can only be possible after an overthrow of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This in turn, from a Marxist point of view, means that the necessary condition for a transition period no longer exists and in that case one cannot talk of the existence of a transition period. For this reason Marx put the question from the point of view of the existence of historical movement, which we will describe as the transition from capitalism to communism, in a context of “helical conquest of power by the proletariat”:

Bourgeois revolutions like those of the eighteenth century storm more swiftly from success to success, their dramatic effects outdo each other, men and things seem set in sparkling diamonds, ecstasy is the order of the day- but they are short-lived, soon they have reached their zenith, and a long Katzenjammer [crapulence] takes hold of society before it learns to assimilate the results of its storm-and-stress period soberly. On the other hand, proletarian revolutions, like those of the nineteenth century, constantly criticize themselves, constantly interrupt themselves in their own course, return to the apparently accomplished, in order to begin anew; they deride with cruel thoroughness the half-measures, weaknesses, and paltriness of their first attempts, seem to throw down their opponents only so the latter may draw new strength from the earth and rise before them again more gigantic than ever, recoil constantly from the indefinite colossalness of their own goals -- until a situation is created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves call out: Hic Rhodus, hic salta!²³⁴

The deep insight in these lines written 140 years ago explains the efforts of the proletariat throughout the whole 20th century to conquer the political power and transform the world in a revolutionary manner. A “new beginning” of these efforts is left over to the 21st

233 E. Mandel, “A Theory which has not Withstood the Test of Facts” *International Socialism*, July 1990, p.47

234 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p.401.

century. However, by theorising a situation where the working class has lost its direct rule as a “transitional society”, Mandel and those others who interpret the Soviet experience in the same way, ignore the character of proletarian revolutions returning constantly to the starting point after reviewing its deficiencies and faults in order to leap forward.

In his analyses Mandel has tried to put forward theoretical evidence of why the Soviet economy cannot be defined as “state capitalism”. But his views expressed in the context of that the capitalist law of value does not work in the Soviet Union and that one cannot talk of a generalised commodity production have a dimension that separates him from Trotsky. Trotsky, in his analysis, emphasises the decisive role of the world market in the final analysis and explains that a long period of isolation under bureaucratic rule would end up in the restoration of capitalism. However, Mandel’s emphasis is mainly on the economic workings within national frontiers, as he takes the reality in the Soviet Union within a static framework although he points to its contradictions. He does not pay enough attention to the danger the Soviet economy faces because of the pressure of international factors. Thus, he overstates the abolishment of the generalised commodity production within national frontiers.

That he has drawn attention to a “transition” within national frontiers was not only false in Marxist terms, but also it has turned out to be an incapable theory that could not explain later developments through years. Highlighting the abolishment of the capitalist law of value within national borders as a factor capable of making the economy immune to serious crises and of assuring a stable economic growth compared with capitalism, Mandel thus contributed to the idealisation of the reality in the Soviet Union as a “transitional regime”. However, question marks have begun to appear in minds when the economic-political-social crises of the Soviet Union and other bureaucratic regimes erupted with all their devastating consequences. However, the conception that the “transition from capitalism to communism” can survive in single countries, and even under bureaucratic dictatorships, has taken root so deeply within some Trotskyist circles that they cannot make an adequate questioning to analyse what is happening.

But, with the surfacing of crises in the Soviet economy, it has become inevitable to examine the situation of these economies in the face of the world market. Those who advocate the theory of “state capitalism” drew essentially wrong conclusions from this and equated the economic crises in these countries with those crises that flow from the workings of capitalism. Such a thesis of course does not reflect the real situation in the Soviet Union, its difference from capitalism, its peculiarity.

The crises in the Soviet economy reveal the dissociating effect of the world capitalist system on the bureaucratic regimes. This confirms the fundamental predictions of Marxism on the progress of the world revolution. That is, it reveals the impossibility of perpetuation of the peculiar workings of the economy that are based on state ownership and bureaucratic planning under a bureaucratic dictatorship on a national scale, and that the effect of the world market would sooner or later appear.

Of course Mandel admits that “although the functioning of the Soviet economy is not

under the rule of the law of value, it cannot isolate itself from its influence.” But, on the other hand, while speaking of the possibility of a capitalist restoration, he confines his thinking to a national framework, relating it to the remains of commodity economy on a national scale:

Either what remains of commodity production will finally eliminate most of the direct appropriation and allocation of the social surplus product—in which case, capitalism will be restored. Or society will throw off the deadweight of the bureaucracy and ensure that the direct appropriation and allocation of major resources for the satisfaction of needs as democratically decided by the masses will predominate—in which case, the unavoidable survival of some market mechanisms will no longer be able to put a brake on genuine progress towards socialism.²³⁵

As we have witnessed, the capitalist restoration process in these countries did not flow from the remains of commodity economy on a national scale. This process is the result of dissociating effect of the world capitalist system and, as Trotsky pointed out, transformation of the bureaucracy which behaved as “an instrument of international bourgeoisie” within the Soviet state. As far as capitalist restoration is concerned, it cannot be said that Mandel excluded this possibility completely. On the contrary, in line with Trotsky’s analyses, he points to this possibility and that if a permanent link of material interest developed between individual bureaucrats and certain enterprises this would mean that private property in the economic sense of the word has been reconstructed. Moreover he draws attention to a situation where there can be a de facto change towards private property before there is a change in the juridical sphere. The problem with him is that, at a time when this possibility has turned into a reality, he has not reflected the results of what happened in his analyses and instead he has insisted on old stencils.

Trotsky drew attention to the possibility that capitalist restoration could be carried out in an evolutionary way by means of the bureaucracy without a bourgeois counter-revolution. Yet Mandel has limited himself to repeating the idea that a return to capitalism is possible only through a bourgeois counter-revolution. However, the domination of the bureaucracy had already made the Soviet Union open to an integration to world capitalism without a bourgeois counter-revolution. The reason why Mandel and those Trotskyist circles which have similar appraisals fall into inconsistencies in explaining the developments in the Soviet Union and East European countries since 1989 is that they have insistently avoided a questioning and critique of their wrong evaluations for years.

To go along with the conception of degenerated workers’ state and insist that historical gains of the proletariat are still in effect has also caused an ambiguity in evaluating the struggle of the proletariat against the bureaucratic domination. Because of this ambiguous perspective the Fourth International circles limited the revolutionary strategy of the proletariat in the Soviet Union and other bureaucratic regimes only to a “political revolution”. They limited themselves to repeating Trotsky’s old analogy who analysed the domination of the Soviet bureaucracy on the basis of “Bonapartist” formation in

235 E. Mandel, “A Theory which has not Withstood the Test of Facts,” *International Socialism*, July 1990, p.48

bourgeois states. The same analogy was made a starting point in the determination of the content of anti-bureaucratic revolution as well. They continued assessing the counter-revolution the bureaucracy had carried out against the proletariat's power in the Soviet Union as a counter-revolutionary reaction that did not touch the roots of the new order and did not go beyond a political counter-revolution. The problem was approached under the light of examples from political revolutions and counter-revolutions that took place in Europe in the age of bourgeois-democratic revolutions.

However, according to both Marx-Engels and Lenin-Trotsky, the proletarian revolution is not completed when the proletariat seizes power. On the contrary, seizure of power by the proletariat is the beginning, first step of its social revolution. For the revolution to proceed, the proletariat needs to continue seizing political power on the world arena and, thus, leap forward on the basis of social transformations. Social revolution can only be completed when the classless social order begins its life on a world scale. And it is in this sense that the "socialist construction" is unlike the process of capitalist development which flourishes within the feudal order and forces the old political forms.

That the proletariat has seized power in one country, nationalised most of the means of production, ensured a job security for the proletariat etc. do not mean that social revolution is completed. This is because of the peculiarities of proletarian social revolution. Until the proletarian revolution is completed on the world arena, a process of social revolution, which will endure a quite long historical era, lies ahead before the proletariat which has seized power within national borders. In order to avoid an interruption in this process, the proletariat must keep its political power, and world revolution must proceed with new proletarian revolutions. If the proletariat loses its political power then we cannot talk about the perpetuation of social revolution. For this reason, the problem in the Soviet Union was of a reconquest of power by the proletariat and a restart of social revolution.

Thus, in a country where the bureaucratic regime is in effect, irrespective of whether this country is in the process of capitalist restoration or not, the first political step of the proletarian social revolution is the overthrow of the bureaucratic domination in power. Whether this can be done, of course, depends directly on, just like in capitalist countries, the consciousness, organisation and whether there is an internationalist revolutionary leadership of the proletariat. On the other hand, another concrete fact we see before our eyes when we assess the present day events is this: to the extent that the East European countries (or others) complete the process of capitalist restoration, a proletarian revolution in these countries becomes coupled with the strategy of revolution in capitalist countries.

* * *

The events that took place in the Soviet Union and East European countries since 1989 and the fact that the bureaucratic regimes in these countries dissolved one after another along the lines of capitalist restoration created the need for all socialist organisations and circles to make new assessments. It was a complete disaster for political circles that have long been following the official Stalinist line. The concrete reality has revealed the true colours of "official socialism" that had been defended in the name of socialism for years.

Thus it was not a surprise that the political tendencies of this category were shocked.

Apart from the official socialist current, the situation was different, of course, from the standpoint of those circles that define themselves as the continuation of the Trotskyist tradition. For them, the true face of official socialism was already clear and thus they did not have to be shocked when faced with the dissolution and collapse of the bureaucratic dictatorships. But that was not the whole story. The fast process of change in the so-called socialist countries since 1989 put the assessments of those political circles from the Trotskyist tradition to a test as well. How well prepared were they for such a situation, how did they react, to what degree did they feel the need to make a balance sheet of their earlier theses and what kind of lessons did they draw for the future? Essentially, it is up to these circles themselves to answer these questions.

For us, 1989 storm in East European countries can be characterised neither a revolution nor a counter-revolution for the revolutionary proletariat from the point of view of its results. True, the street demonstrations that swept East European countries, the Soviet Union and China revealed a powerful storm. But under conditions where the proletariat and toiling masses are deprived of organisation and revolutionary leadership, this powerful storm served, in the final analysis, the capitalist restorationists. And the great anger the proletariat and toiling masses felt against the despotic bureaucratic regime they live under led them to hail and support enthusiastically the dissolution and collapse of the bureaucratic dictatorships. Thus, by their attitude they revealed that the regime in these countries had nothing in common with a workers' state.

Having quickly drawn important lessons from the experiences in East Europe, all "shrewd" elements of the dominant bureaucracy in these countries appeared as the new leaders of the "popular movement" that supported the process of dissolution. Thus they showed that they could lead a fast transition to capitalism without a bourgeois counter-revolution. Of course this stormy process was not a "cold" process. Nevertheless the fact that the change towards capitalism has been carried out under the leadership of the "red" bureaucracy in collaboration with the international bourgeoisie is a confirmation of this fact. Because this rapid change was the result of a process of cold evolution which lasted long years from the point of view of the bureaucracy.

Thus one of the prospects pointed out by Trotsky in his last writings had come true. The dominant bureaucracy, as the instrument of world bourgeoisie, has turned out to be a social force which sets out to carry out capitalist restoration without a bourgeois counter-revolution. Despite all boasting of Stalinists, this historical period that lasted long years has confirmed Trotsky: "A prolonged isolation would inevitably end not in national communism, but in a restoration of capitalism."²³⁶

But on the other hand, even in a situation where it was becoming clear that the period of change initiated in 1989 proceeded in the direction of capitalist restoration, the Trotskyist circles in general could not abandon the habit of thinking with old stencils. As they insisted on defining the states in the USSR and East Europe as degenerated workers'

236 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.301

states and assessed the change in the nature of regimes in these countries within the confines of the dilemma of “either bourgeois counter-revolution; or anti-bureaucratic political revolution”, they were condemned to make contradictory assessments and take contradictory attitudes in the face of events.

Since Trotsky appraised the nature of the Soviet state as “degenerated workers’ state”, he stated that the proletariat could make a temporary alliance with the “Thermidorian part of the bureaucracy” in order to save the USSR in the face of a capitalist threat. If Mandel and other Trotskyists who think like him were to be content with reiterating the past positions, they would have to make a temporary alliance with that part of the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and East Europe (like Ligachev, Honecker, Jivkov, etc.), which persists that the state and regime should get along as it used to. But that would only be a very unfortunate act which would serve as nothing else than to blur the line of distinction between Stalinism and Trotskyism at such a critical moment when the progress of history itself reveals who was right and who was wrong. On the other hand, it would be appropriate for those Trotskyist circles that insist on the appraisal of “degenerated workers’ state” to label the 1989 storm in these countries as the realisation of “bourgeois counter-revolution”, as a logical conclusion of their analyses.²³⁷

Nevertheless, Mandel and the United Secretariat of the Fourth International of which Mandel is the spokesman did not behave this way. On the contrary, the mass movement in these countries which in the final analysis supported capitalist restoration was hailed as the beginning of anti-bureaucratic proletarian revolution. Mandel’s words on 13 November 1989 testify this: “The proletarian nature of the revolution started in GDR is particularly confirmed by the extraordinary ferment on the shop floor”²³⁸

The fact that the dissolution and collapse of the bureaucratic dictatorships into bourgeois parliamentarism has been hailed as the beginning of the political revolution of proletarian character, is in full contradiction with the assessments of Mandel, and those who think like him, in the context of “degenerated workers’ state”. Of course they do not need to have an inner coherence on the basis of wrong analyses in order to rid themselves of the dilemma they have fallen in. What must be done today is to draw correct conclusions from the present day events from the standpoint of the struggle of the revolutionary proletariat, and, on this basis, abandon obsolete and wrong positions.

But the orientation of Mandel’s latest writings unfortunately is far from such an effort and moreover it lacks an inner coherence. A typical example of this is that Mandel, still, seeks to prove that “the bureaucracy is against capitalist restoration” at a time when the bureaucracy explicitly heads this restoration. This kind of assertions are at variance with concrete reality and reveal that he has opted for even distorting the facts in order to retain

237 Accordingly, when a few years have passed since the time these lines were written and the results of the events in the former Soviet Union and East European countries became clear, there appeared Trotskyist circles to declare that the counter-revolution has materialized.

238 Mandel, “Siyasal Devrim ve Onu Tehdit Eden Tehlikeler”, *Glasnost ve Siyasal Devrim*, Yeni Yol Broşür Dizisi: 1, 1990, p.59 [*Political Revolution and Dangers that Face It*, Inprecorr no:297, 13 November 1989, our translation]

his theses instead of calling things by their true names. In an article dated October 1989 Mandel says:

It should not be expected that the Soviet “capitalists” would “restore” capitalism in the USSR. It is a sly plan attributed to Gorbachov (and his local allies in Poland, Hungary). Some attributed this purpose to Deng Siao Peng as well.

For the majority, in fact great majority, of the bureaucracy restoration of capitalism would reduce their power and privileges. Only a small minority among them, by transforming themselves, can become private property owners, turning into entrepreneurs of economically independent big industrial and financial companies such that they can transfer their status to their children. As for the broad layers of bureaucrats, ... restoration of capitalism will mean loss of power and material advantages.²³⁹

Seeking to prove that capitalist restoration means a loss of power and material advantages for most of the bureaucracy and that it cannot thus serve with its own hands to such an end, Mandel misses one point. The historical period now we are living in constitutes a historical turning point where nothing will be as before and the end is near for the bureaucracy, i.e. for this “class without future”. Had it been possible for these dominant bureaucracies to sustain their power and social privileges as under old bureaucratic regimes, they would for sure come up against “change” and maintain the status quo. But at a time when the bureaucratic regimes in these countries has gone bankrupt as a result of a ferment taking place for long years the bureaucracy faced a dilemma: either being swept away from the stage of history by a revolt of the working class, or integrating into world capitalism and putting an end to the old regime by turning bourgeois, thus restructuring their social privileges on new foundations!

Should the bureaucracy take the second option, says Mandel, that would mean “assuming that it is ready to make a hara-kiri as a crystallised social caste”. However, by saying so, he ignores the fact that the end of the bureaucracy has already come and, unless the bureaucratic regimes are overthrown by proletarian revolutions, the time has come for the world bourgeoisie to devour these countries into its own system. The bureaucracy had to make “rational” choices in the face of objective realities. Although a sector of the dominant bureaucracy is “reluctant”, there would be “rational” sectors to behave “eagerly”. As a matter of fact the turmoil in these countries since 1989 has promoted the “eager” while eliminating the “reluctant”; raised the “eager” to power, made them the leaders of the process of capitalist restoration.

This result has nothing to do with a “hara-kiri” from the point of view of the bureaucracy. On the contrary we could talk about such a thing only had the bureaucracy on the whole resisted capitalist restoration. The fact that while a significant section of the dominant bureaucracy is in favour of capitalist restoration, some insisted on maintaining old status quo in order not to lose their power and material advantages does not mean that the bureaucracy is against capitalist restoration. It is not possible for the whole of a

239 Mandel, “Glasnost ve Komünist Partilerin Krizi”, *ibid*, p.23 [*Glasnost and Crisis of Communist Parties*, Inprecorr no:295, 9 October 1989, our translation]

“class without future” in the process of collapse to keep in step with the contemporary developments the new situation and “restructure” itself as a whole. Of course some must be losing while others gain.

Speaking of China as an example Mandel is wrong when he says, “Chinese bureaucracy did not make hara-kiri neither in response to ‘spontaneous market forces’ nor to the masses. It clang hopelessly to its power and privileges.” As the primary fear of the bureaucracy is a revolt of the working class and toilers it needs to control the speed and possible results of the process of capitalist restoration. Thus, while capitalist restoration is under way the process is decorated with such images as to create an impression that the old status quo is preserved. If the chief of the dominant bureaucracy in China, Deng Siao Ping, is stripped of this kind of “decorations” then one can see his capitalist restorationist substance.

While Mandel tells a truth by saying “historically, the bureaucracy has no future or fate of its own in the long run” he cannot draw correct conclusions from what is happening since he does not want to admit that “the long run” is already over. His effort in his October 1989 article to present the policy of Kremlin in relation to East European countries as if an evidence that the bureaucracy is against capitalist restoration has been proved wrong by facts. That the powers based on communist parties collapsed just after Gorbachov visited these countries has revealed that Kremlin is not a support for, but an obstacle to the preservation of old status quo. Just like when Europe was divided by agreements among Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill in Yalta, this time Gorbachov and USA president reached a new consensus in Malta. Not only conniving at the collapse of political regimes materialised in one party power of official communist parties in East Europe, Kremlin helped effectively this political change and thus speeded up the process of capitalist restoration in these countries.

In one of his last articles, with a view to proving that the bureaucracy is not a ruling class, Mandel asks a question on the basis of the events taking place in East Europe:

The idea of the bureaucracy as a ruling class really has to be taken with a smile after what has happened in Hungary, Poland and GDR (to quote only those examples). Has any ruling class in history ever been seen to literally tiptoe away from the stage of society, as a significant section of the nomenklatura in those countries is now doing?²⁴⁰

The argument that the bureaucracy has “tiptoed away from the stage of society” is by no means correct. In East European countries the “shrewd” section of the bureaucracy, whose sovereignty in its old form appeared to be reaching its end, not only kept in step with the change, but also set out to head this change. These bureaucrats who tried to cling to their old positions have been eliminated by those “shrewd” elements even by means of force if necessary (i.e. Romania). Besides, the bureaucracy, drawing the necessary lessons from these events, has reached the conclusion that becoming the bourgeois of the new order is more preferable. This is the way of *metamorphosis* that holds good for the

240 E. Mandel, “A Theory which has not Withstood the Test of Facts,” *International Socialism*, July 1990, p.45.

disposition of the bureaucracy that existed on the stage of history with its peculiar nature as a *dominant class that has no future in the long run*.

Mandel, too, finally accepted that “capitalist restoration has been completed in the GDR”, and that “capitalist restoration is proceeding fast in the other European countries”. But he made no self-criticism of his old views. It is possible to see the wrong attitude of Mandel and people who think alike from the results of their political line:

Neither the Fourth International, nor any of its sections, nor any of its leading representatives, has even once lined up “on the side of the bureaucracy against the masses in revolt”. We all gave 100 percent support to the workers’ uprising in the GDR in 1953, to the 1956 Hungarian revolution, to the Polish workers’ struggles in the same year, to the Prague Spring’s resistance in 1968-69 to the Soviet invasion, to the rise of Solidarnosc in 1980-81 and to its subsequent struggle against Jaruzelski’s military coup in Poland, and to the uprisings in China and Eastern Europe in 1989.²⁴¹

These lines do not provide an evidence for the “hundred percent” correctness of the political attitude of the Fourth International. It is doubtlessly correct to demand the revolt of the working class against the bureaucracy; but to support the actual political movements that lead the masses is another thing. Indeed we support or do not support political movements according to the requirements of independent political interests of the working class. This is the criterion; whether this or that political movement leads the masses cannot be a criterion. What is more important is that at times of great events such as those mentioned by Mandel the essential task is to organise independently in order to form the revolutionary leadership of the working class. If this is not accomplished, even the greatest mass mobilisation would inevitably follow other political currents. For this reason, to stand for the target of “anti-bureaucratic political revolution” by no means necessitates giving a “hundred percent support” to a political movement that aims at capitalist restoration such as “the Solidarity movement”. If the proletariat is deprived of a leadership to voice its historical interests, however much it assembles in mass organisations, the result will not be in its favour. Like in Poland where massive actions of the working class under the leadership of the “Solidarity movement” ended up in a return to bourgeois parliamentary regime.

Unfortunately the habit of attaching the expression of “workers’ state” to certain characterisations in defining the concrete situation even when the bureaucratic regimes explicitly dissolved into capitalism is not given up. Besides the definition of “bureaucratically deformed/degenerated workers’ state”, new categories are invented such as “bureaucratically rotten workers’ state”, “workers’ state under bourgeois-parliamentary guise”, etc. This mentality reveals the theoretical plight of those in the face of concrete reality, who freeze the analyses on the nature of the regimes in these countries through the whole historical process and cling to their errors at the cost of distorting the most essential concepts of Marxism.

241 E. Mandel, *ibid*, 60.

Chapter 8

Critique of the Theory of “State Capitalism”

We thought it was necessary to give priority to the thesis of “degenerated worker’s state” in our investigation as Trotsky could not find the chance to complete his analyses which must have been cleared of errors. Therefore, we preferred to begin with the critique of those Trotskyist tendencies, which, in the name of showing loyalty to Trotsky’s ideas, have transformed his living and moving ideas into frozen pictures instead of maintaining and enriching his intellectual legacy. But there are other wrong views as well. Some Trotskyites like Tony Cliff, in the name of transcending the erroneous sides of Trotsky, have thrown themselves into the other extreme and, in pursuit of new analyses, have subscribed themselves to a false theory (“state capitalism”) which, in reality, had already been offered earlier on.

In this chapter we wish to explain in outlines why we do not approve of Cliff’s assessment of the system in the Soviet Union as “state capitalism”.

It was evidently incorrect to characterise an economic system, which does not resemble capitalist economy that operates on the basis of cycles passing through over-production, crisis, bankruptcies and a subsequent revival, as state capitalism. Accordingly, the proponents of this theory explained that instead of the cycle of “over-production and bankruptcies” in capitalism, there was a cycle of “over-investment and extravagance” in those countries under bureaucratic dictatorship. However, what is unintelligible was how such formations could still be accepted as a version of capitalism. At this point, a fitting remark of Trotsky must be remembered:

We often seek salvation from unfamiliar phenomena in familiar terms. An attempt has been made to conceal the enigma of the Soviet regime by calling it “state capitalism.” This term has the advantage that nobody knows exactly what it means.²⁴²

In fact, the details of this matter have occupied a significant place in the literature of different Trotskyist circles. In the polemics between Mandelites and Cliffites a lot of arguments have been raised. However, while one party attempted to demonstrate the existence of state capitalism in the Soviet Union by forced interpretations, the other party, although it raised some correct criticisms in view of this theory, it did not correct its own error insisting on the thesis of “degenerated worker’s state”.

242 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.245

In fact, the process of collapse that has started in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has been the concrete answer of history to all of these circles. However, instead of re-examining their views and correcting the errors they obstinately insisted on their old positions. The Cliffites described the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the other bureaucratic regimes in the direction of capitalism as a “sideways step”.²⁴³ As for Mandelites, they contented themselves with adding some more adjectives to the phrase of “degenerated worker’s state” until the last moment. After that, i.e. *post festum*, they have begun to write about the existence of capitalism in Russia, of course without any attempt to examine the mistakes of the past.

About a question that was settled by history, we do not intend to dwell on the products of this literary struggle waged by these two tendencies in a manner that fed their mistakes. Thus we will limit ourselves to noting only the main deficiencies of the thesis of “state capitalism”.

What is, and is not, State Capitalism?

While criticizing Urbahns who treated the Soviet economic system as a variety of “state capitalism”, Trotsky said that “originally Marxists understood by state capitalism only the independent economic enterprises of the state itself.”²⁴⁴ Likewise, Marxists have always been opposed to the reformists who dreamed of coping with capitalism by means of statising ever-greater portion of transport and industrial enterprises, rightly announcing that “this is not socialism but state capitalism”. Explaining that this concept had acquired a broader meaning and turned wrongly to mean all sorts of state intervention in economy, Trotsky pointed out the difference between “state capitalism” and “etatism”:

During the war, and especially during the experiments in fascist economy, the term “state capitalism” has oftenest been understood to mean a system of state interference and regulation. The French employ a much more suitable term for this *etatism*.²⁴⁵

As for Cliff who employed the term “state capitalism” for Stalin’s Russia, he explains that he has used this term with a different meaning from its usage by Lenin in the period of NEP:

For Lenin state capitalism meant private capitalism under state control (whether the state were a capitalist or a proletarian one). When Stalinist Russia is called state capitalist, this means a regime under which the state is the repository of the means of production, and in which the proletariat is deprived of all political and economic power, while the bureaucracy carries out the functions of capitalism—the extortion of surplus value from the workers and the accumulation of capital.²⁴⁶

243 C. Harman, for instance, remarks: “... the transition from state capitalism to multi-national capitalism is not a forward or backward step, but a sideways step within the same plane.” (*The Storm Breaks*), [our translation]

244 Trotsky, *Writings, 1933-34*, pp.108-109

245 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.246

246 T. Cliff, *Lenin: The Revolution Besieged*, Bookmarks, April 1987, p. 69

Yet the term “state capitalism” can only make sense in the context of a social formation in which the capitalist private property exists alongside with the state property over the means of production. In a situation where almost all the social means of production are under state property, there cannot be talk of either capitalism or its indispensable element, i.e. capitals competing with each other, or, the operation of demand and supply mechanism. Consequently the theory of state capitalism is incompatible with the nature of the bureaucratic regimes based on state property over the means of production.

The term state capitalism as used by Lenin in the NEP period was meant for a situation in which the worker’s state allowed individual private enterprise due to certain economic difficulties. It is used in this limited context. The private enterprises were to be under control and regulation of the worker’s state as described in Lenin’s explanations.

As is known, in capitalist economy, what is to be produced, what amount to produce, and at what price the goods are to be exchanged etc. are, in the last analysis, determined as a result of the interaction in the market on the basis of competition. Monopolisation does not abolish the competition and the dominance of the market. The economic hegemony established by big international monopolies over the world market depends essentially not on a non-economic force, but on a competition now between giant monopolies in control of bigger units of capital with respect to the past. Likewise, the dominance of the market cannot be abolished by the kind of planning made on the level of companies under capitalism. In capitalism, the emergence of the state in economic life as a big capitalist boss never rules out the individual private property. On the contrary, it exists alongside with it strengthening its existence at the same time.

In case of war or severe depression or in a situation where the state takes on itself the function of accelerating the accumulation of capital required by the capitalist development, it is possible that the state throws its weight into play as a direct actor in economic life. In some cases, the state, along with the dominance of its economic enterprises, overshadows the role of the market by its interferences like setting official prices etc. This type of conjuncture of capitalist development can also be described as “state capitalism”. Obviously, this would not be a different socio-economic formation from capitalism, but, on the contrary, an economic setting-up based on the fact that the capitalist state being in the service of the requirements of capitalist development undertakes a dominant role in economic life.

But an economic setting-up, in which there exists neither the private property of the means of production nor the market mechanism and which is being directed on a central level, indicates a socio-economic formation different from capitalism. This kind of economy is based on state property. This is a system in which the exchange of products is carried out not by a price mechanism formed in the market in accordance with the law of value, but by centrally determined “prices”, by obligatory regulations etc., that is to say, by non-economic force. This sort of decree economy would, inevitably, require (and it has required) a planning scheme and executed on a central level. We should remind that what is involved here is not despotic agricultural Asian states of ancient times, but the bureaucratic dictatorships that exist in an environment of modern capitalist world

and that are obliged to rest themselves upon an industrialisation leap forward.

In the bureaucratic dictatorships, the distribution of economic factors are carried out according to calculations and decisions made by the relevant state organs, central planning commissions etc. There is not a quantitative but an entirely qualitative difference between such an economy and capitalist economy in which economic factors are essentially distributed according to the market mechanism, i.e. prices realised in the market. In the bureaucratic regimes, which are based not on the market mechanism, you would also need a quantitative measure of comparison for the articles produced in order to make calculations on a central level. In a sense, we can call this price; but this is a would-be, a “decided”, price which is entirely different from the prices in the capitalist market which are realised as a result of supply-demand relationship between sellers and buyers being essentially the expression of exchange-value.

In capitalism, just as the other economic factors, the price of labour-power, i.e. wages, is again determined on the basis of the market mechanism. Yet in a command economy, in which the means of production are entirely under state ownership and the social production is commanded by a central bureaucratic plan, the distribution of social labour between various enterprises and the portion of the social product to be allotted to the labour are decided by the relevant state organs. In other words, there is neither free wage-labour peculiar to capitalism nor wages determined as a result of the relationship between sellers and buyers of labour-power in the market. The surplus-labour of the Soviet worker is extracted by the state and it allocates this surplus-labour to the consumption funds of the bureaucracy and to the process of expanded reproduction of various use-values. In such a case, there is no labour/capital relationship peculiar to capitalism, and thus no exploitation of surplus-value and its transformation into profit in the market. But there is surely an exploitation in the form of collective disposing of surplus-labour by the dominant bureaucracy. Also we should not be misled by the fact that in such formations labour-power is paid in the form of money.

The commodity production has been replaced by the production of use-values, and in this case, it is not the price mechanism but the state planning commission that decides to produce what, and what amount. Formally prices and wages still do exist but their functions are not the same. Now they do not determine the process of production; they indicate the share of individuals from the portion of the gross product which is allotted to the use of society by the central bureaucracy. In this case, the prices are no longer the regulating factor in the economy, but are solely symbols of distribution. That is to say, while the form is maintained in appearance, a complete functional transformation has occurred in reality. Thus, it is clear that the arguments of those people who describe the bureaucratic dictatorships as state capitalism are destined to collapse in the face of the inner laws of capitalism analysed by Marx in detail.

On the Theory of State Capitalism in General

Although the terms used by Cliff are different, his theory of state capitalism has similarities with Rizzi’s theory of “bureaucratic collectivism”. Because Rizzi’s analysis

rests upon the idea that there is an ongoing transition from individual ownership to collective ownership in capitalist countries as well. This same idea of “transition” appears in the theory of state capitalism as well. The proponents of the theory of state capitalism raise objections to the effect that the Marxist theory has, in fact, analysed the individual private ownership and can, thus, no longer be applied to the period of monopoly capitalism. In his *State Capitalism in Russia* Cliff says that this “transition” process has now led to a phase of “state capitalism” on a world scale. To him, the term “state capitalism” can signify both a capitalist war economy and a phase in which the capitalist state has become the repository of all of the means of production. Cliff states that, although there is no qualitative difference between the two, he chooses to make a distinction between them in order to avoid confusion, describing the capitalist war economy as “state-monopoly capitalism” and the latter as “state capitalism”.²⁴⁷

Here the essential problem lies in the meaning attributed to the terms used. The term “state-monopoly capitalism” was also used by Lenin in the context of describing the imperialist stage of capitalism. Understandably, Cliff refers to Lenin while explaining his own views.²⁴⁸ But, while Lenin was using that term he based himself upon Marx’s analyses and treated the most important aspect of the matter, i.e. the dialectical relation between monopoly and competition under capitalism, in a manner true to life. As Lenin, too, emphasised, although the course of capitalism causes an enormous centralisation of capital, yet in practice the aggregation of all capital into the hands of a single national trust or nation-state is impossible. Whereas according to Bukharin, “Every one of the capitalistically advanced “national economies” has turned into some kind of a national trust.”²⁴⁹ Furthermore Bukharin says that finance capital has created an organised capitalism on a national scale: “Finance capital did away with the anarchy in production within the major capitalist countries”²⁵⁰ Lenin disagreed with this analysis of Bukharin and put a critical marginal note: “not yet”.²⁵¹ Likewise, Trotsky’s approach is similar to that of Lenin. For example, he criticises Urbahns who sees the regime of “state capitalism” as a necessary and, moreover, progressive stage in the development of society: “So fundamental an error in appraising capitalist planning is enough to bury any approach whatsoever.”²⁵²

As indicated by the tendency of capitalist development especially in the second half of the 20th century, the tendency of centralisation of capital has not essentially led to the emergence of “national monopolies”. On the contrary, it has caused the birth of transnational monopolies which represent enormous capitals that have overflowed nation-states and spread into international scale. In fact, did not Marx’s analyses point to these developments long time ago? It is Marx who was right, and not Bukharin or the like, who, in the name of developing Marx’s ideas, misunderstood him, and, as in the

247 T. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, p.201

248 T. Cliff, *ibid*.

249 N. I. Bukharin, *Imperialism and World Economy*, (web version)

250 N. I. Bukharin, *The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, p.60

251 N. I. Bukharin, *ibid*

252 Trotsky, *Writings 1933-34*, p.109

example of “national monopoly”, built theories upon their own fallacies.

The fundamental defect of the theory of state capitalism is that it firstly forms an a priori conception of “state capitalism” in general and then attempts to make the reality of the Soviet Union forcibly fit into this mould by bending and twisting it. Cliff’s theory of state capitalism contends that the world as a whole moves in the direction of state capitalism. Again, according to this theory, the Soviet bureaucracy controls the accumulation process and is “the personification of capital in its purest form”.²⁵³ For Cliff, the difference between Western capitalist countries and the Soviet Union is that, while the former have reached state-monopoly capitalism via a gradual evolution, the latter, as a result of the degeneration of a successful proletarian revolution, had come into view without experiencing such an evolution. Thus, the question of whether the capitalist private property exists or not ceases to be a distinction in determining a social formation. He states:

Historical continuity in the case of state capitalism which evolves from monopoly capitalism is shown in the existence of private property (bonds). Historical continuity in the case of state capitalism which evolves from a workers’ state that degenerated and died, is shown in the *non-existence of private property*.²⁵⁴

What an easy business is to set up a theory arbitrarily! Such a theory could be possible by “surpassing” (!) Marx, and cooking a soup of eclecticism by taking a pinch from Hilferding and another pinch from Bukharin, and so on.

The Question of Accumulation

As Marx stated, the motive that sets the capitalist into action is not the pleasure of use-values, but the profit of exchange-value and the desire to increase it. Thus the capitalist transforms the biggest possible part of surplus-value into capital and the law of capitalism is “accumulation for accumulation’s sake, production for production’s sake”.

What is vain on the part of the proponents of the theory of state capitalism is that, despite they admit that there is no generalised commodity economy and capitalist profit in the bureaucratic dictatorships, they seek to demonstrate the existence of the accumulation of capital. In fact, the basis upon which such kind of hollow assertions are rested is completely unsound. The main defect is that they present the accumulation in general and the accumulation of capital which is particular to capitalism as if one and the same thing. Harman, for example, while summarising Cliff’s views on this score, says the following:

Russia is a bureaucratic state capitalism, because the bureaucracy collectively controls the means of production and is thus compelled to use this control in order to exploit the workers all the time and further increase the accumulation of “dead labour” just like a western capitalist.²⁵⁵

253 T. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, p.169

254 T. Cliff, *ibid*, p.176

255 C. Harman, Introduction to *State Capitalism in Russia*, [our translation]

This approach is, in fact, a product of being unable to grasp the mechanism of the accumulation of capital and the essential operation of capitalism. Because neither the collective control over the means of production nor the accumulation of “dead labour” can be an evidence of the existence of capitalism. It is quite possible to observe these things in other modes of production. For example, in the Asiatic mode of production, which is a pre-capitalist mode of production, the means of production (land) and the accumulation of surplus-product were under the collective control of the state or of a despotic power. But this did not make that economy a capitalist one.

Generally speaking, the accumulation of products and of the means of production have always been part of the history of human communities and a necessary precondition for their leap into the stage of civilisation. Of course there were different modes of production in different geographical conditions that came into being along the course of history. Generally speaking, the mode of the realisation of accumulation and the mode of the extraction of surplus-product from the direct producers led to different types of formations of class societies. Likewise, the exchange of products, the formation of the market, the development of trade, the selling of excess products inside or outside the country, i.e. transformation of these products into commodities, its transformation into money, the accumulation of wealth thereupon etc., all of these are historical facts that had come into existence in pre-capitalist ages.

But the capitalist mode of production could be created only on the basis of historical changes such as the separation of labourers on a massive scale from the objective conditions of production and their transformation into wage labour, (i.e. transformation of labour-power into a commodity), the breaking of provincialism and self-sufficiency in economic life, the growth of production for the sake of selling in the market into tremendous dimensions and the turning of the motive of production into “exchange for the sake of exchange”, that is to say, the leap from the level of simple commodity production to the level of generalised commodity production. And these are the indispensable, fundamental elements of capitalism. As the capitalist mode of production has put an end to the production for the sake of use-values in general and is based on the production of exchange-values in general, the exploitation of surplus-product materialises as the exploitation of surplus-value. The accumulation of wealth in general has been therefore replaced by the accumulation of capital. But such transformations presuppose individual private property of the means of production and the existence of capital and wage-labour. Accordingly, the capitalist relations of production found their conditions of development in the heart of feudal society in which private property and individual accumulation of wealth had existed and in which the premises of wage-labour and capital had come into being. As for the pre-capitalist despotic Asiatic formations based on state ownership and the exploitation of surplus-product, they dissolved not as a result of their internal dynamics, but under the impact of the spread of capital when they came into contact with the external capitalist world, and then they entered into the process of incorporation into the capitalist world.

On the other hand, capital is neither a stationary sum of money nor a stock of means of production, but an economic relation. Competition is the intrinsic nature of capital.

Capital can exist only as many capitals. Thus capitalism continues its operation on the basis of the unity of many capitals in competition. The competition between individual capitalists or corporations works as an inner law of economy that determines how much will individual capitalists or corporations get from the accumulation of capital as their shares.

In the third volume of *Capital*, Marx notes the formation of joint-stock companies while he studies the role of credit mechanism. Necessitating the social concentration of the means of production and labour-power, in the process of its development, capital thus begins directly to take the form of social capital, i.e. the capitals of not mere individuals but of individuals who have directly come together. Marx assesses this fact as “the abolition of capital as private property within the framework of capitalist production itself.”²⁵⁶ What is meant by this is that the socialisation of productive forces, even under capitalism, is not compatible with the form of capital controlled by single individuals and that this socialisation has been replacing this form of private property with *collective private property* as in the example of joint-stock companies, big capital corporations. In this way, the road to social ownership, which would become a reality only on condition that capitalism is overthrown, is prepared.

As can be seen easily, neither the thesis that “Marx examined primarily the capitalism of free competition era” has a basis nor the idea that “capitalist system has now risen to a new stage that excludes in effect the private ownership” is true. Those who have no intention of understanding Marx base their theories such as the theory of state capitalism upon the idea that that phase of capitalism based on private ownership has become a thing of the past. Yet the capitalist development does not abolish capitalist private property. The old competition between capitals controlled by single individuals has been leaving its place to capitalist private property on a higher level and to a cut-throat competition between big capital corporations. Marx therefore points to the limits of this trend of “expropriation” on the individual level operating under capitalism:

However, this expropriation appears within the capitalist system in a contradictory form, as appropriation of social property by a few; and credit lends the latter more and more the aspect of pure adventurers. Since property here exists in the form of stock, its movement and transfer become purely a result of gambling on the stock exchange, where the little fish are swallowed by the sharks and the lambs by the stock-exchange wolves. There is antagonism against the old form in the stock companies, in which social means of production appear as private property; but the conversion to the form of stock still remains ensnared in the trammels of capitalism; hence, instead of overcoming the antithesis between the character of wealth as social and as private wealth, the stock companies merely develop it in a new form.²⁵⁷

On the other hand, the fact that in the process of concentration of capital the capitalist state possesses a larger amount of capital and productive forces compared to the past, is, as Marx put it, a symptom of the socialisation of productive forces and of their rising

256 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III

257 Marx, *ibid*

to a level that is incompatible with individual private ownership. But this contradiction cannot be solved under capitalism. Even if you may call the tendency of concentration of capital, the development of productive forces in the direction of acquiring social character, “state capitalism”, this will not be something different from capitalism and the result will not change. But on the other hand, this tendency of development in the capitalist system shows us the way, the form, of solving the contradiction, that is the necessity and possibility of the nationalisation of productive forces by the power of the working class. This is the significance of the tendency which Engels noted in *Anti-Duhring*. Considering the state in a capitalist society based on private property, he says:

The modern state, no matter what its form, is essentially a capitalist machine, the state of the capitalists, the ideal personification of the total national capital. The more it proceeds to the taking over of productive forces, the more does it actually become the national capitalist, the more citizens does it exploit. The workers remain wage-workers -- proletarians. The capitalist relation is not done away with. It is rather brought to a head. But, brought to a head, it topples over. State ownership of the productive forces is not the solution of the conflict, but concealed within it are the technical conditions that form the elements of that solution.²⁵⁸

Basing his theory of “state capitalism” upon this idea of Engels, Cliff claimed that the same tendency has been operating in the Soviet Union too and thus the USSR was in the category of “state capitalism”. First, interpret a tendency that exists and operates in the process of capitalist development as a transition from the old individual-ownership-based capitalism to the collective-ownership-based “state capitalism”, then present it as the basis for putting the Soviet Union, where state ownership dominates, in the same category. Yet the situation with the Soviet Union is completely different. In the USSR, the abolition of capitalist relations of production and the state ownership over the means of production mean that the means of production have lost their character of being capital. To sum up, in a mode of production based completely on state ownership, a general accumulation carried out in the form of appropriation of surplus-product by the state is not an accumulation of capital, but of products.

Just like Cliff’s theory of “state capitalism” that is full of arbitrary and forced interpretations, the views of Worall, who was the earlier architect of this theory, too, has similar defects. According to Worall, the Soviet bureaucracy is essentially different from any bourgeoisie, but the function of accumulating capital remains the same. Hilferding criticises this view:

The fact that, despite great structural differences, the function can remain unchanged is, of course, a miracle that cannot occur in nature but seems (according to Worall) possible in human society.

In any case Worall accepts this as evidence that Russia is dominated by a bourgeois class and thus by state capitalism. He clings obstinately to his confusion of capital and the means of production and seems unable to conceive of any form of accumulation other than capitalist accumulation. He fails to understand that accumulation (i.e., the expansion of production) in any economic system is the

258 Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, pp.330-331

task of the managers of production; that even in an ideal socialist system this accumulation can result only from the surplus product (which only under capitalism takes the form of surplus value), and that the fact of accumulation in itself does not prove the capitalist nature of an economy.²⁵⁹

According to Cliff the year 1928 is the date of the establishment of bureaucratic state capitalism in the USSR. Cliff has exposed many facts regarding the process of overthrow of the workers’ state by a counter-revolution and he is right in regarding the year 1928 as a turning point; but his analysis on the character of the bureaucratic regime is wrong. The central mistake of Cliff’s tendency is that instead of deducing theory from reality, he sets forth his theory as a pre-conceived assumption and then invents some justifications in order to make the reality in the Soviet Union fit his theory.

This tendency proclaims that the USSR has become state capitalist through international competition. According to this argument, international competition became the main determinant of the internal processes of the USSR since 1928:

Once the USSR is viewed in its relation to the world economy, things change. The world system is a system of *competing* states, whatever the temporary play of blocs and alliances, and the USSR is locked into this competition. The SWP dates the establishment of bureaucratic state capitalism in the USSR from 1928 because it is from that point that international competition became the main determinant of the internal processes.²⁶⁰

This is such a weak argument that there is no answer to the question “why”. Moreover, the year 1928 is a turning point which points to the opposite. It is exactly at this turning point that private property was almost completely eliminated by a rapid collectivisation operation and full monopoly over foreign trade was established, i.e. the economy was structured completely on the basis of despotic command.

It is not a scientific way of analysis firstly to enumerate the political and social changes that took place at the turning point of 1928, and then to attempt to explain the internal functioning of the economy with the external pressure of international competition and hence to arrive at the theory of state capitalism. In his explanation Cliff appears as if getting the capitalist elements, which in reality do not exist in the structure of Soviet economy, out of his hat with a magician’s trick. For example he says:

The rate of exploitation, that is, the ratio between surplus value and wages (s/v) does not depend on the arbitrary will of the Stalinist government, but is dictated by world capitalism. ... The same therefore applies to the division of the total labour time of Russian society between production of the means of production and of means of consumption.²⁶¹

If such kind of things told us by Cliff had existed in real life, then we would have been

259 Hilferding, “State Capitalism or Totalitarian State Economy”, *Essential Works of Socialism*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970, p.248

260 D. Howl, “The Law of Value and the USSR”, *International Socialism*, July 1990, p.94

261 T. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, p.209

left no choice but to admit that the Soviet economy had a capitalist internal functioning being a direct component of the world capitalist system. But we know that this is not the case. And for this reason Cliff himself was forced to base his theory not upon a nonexistent “internal functioning” but upon an arbitrary “external pressure”.

In reality capitalist profitability calculations and the market mechanism did not exist in the Soviet Union. The real situation in the face of capitalist world was this: An economy that has no chance of competition with regard to the level of productive forces and technological innovation; an economy that is big but inefficient, that has succeeded in developing heavy industry, but awkward! That is to say, the bureaucratic regime had surely accomplished an economic development compared to the past, but the general level reached was behind the world capitalism. Thus, the pressure of “foreign competition” did not put the Soviet Union and the like into a formation of “state capitalism”, on the contrary, the existence of capitalist world has been the main cause for the inner decay and the final collapse of these regimes.

The Question of Military Competition

There is no comprehensible reason to relate the industrialisation leap in the USSR under the hegemony of the bureaucracy to the pressure of foreign competition. The rulers of a despotic state which re-appeared in modern, i.e. industrial, times was, of course, to take the level of present world as a criterion, not that of agricultural society of Tsarist Russia in order to keep this state alive and consolidate its economic underpinnings. Moreover, the Stalinist regime had to guard itself and gradually broaden its sphere of influence. The importance attributed to war industry by the Soviet Union was a result of this necessity. Thus it is true that the Soviet Union could not completely isolate himself from the capitalist world that exists outside and from which she, willy nilly, has been affected. But it would be completely wrong to bracket these facts in a law of “competition” and regard them as an indicator of capitalism in the form of “pressure of foreign competition”, as if there is a capitalist economy.

Since Cliff’s tendency could not find evidence to back their thesis while they insist on the existence of a state capitalism in the Soviet Union due to the pressure of foreign competition, they interpreted arms race as the most important indication of capitalist competition. For example, one of the proponents of the theory of state capitalism, Derek Howl, says:

The inability of the weak USSR to compete with the West *economically* meant that competition primarily took the form of arms competition. It was this that led to the absolute priority of heavy industry, steel, railways, and so on. These were necessary to underpin military strength.²⁶²

With a zealous attempt to prove his theory, Cliff invented an analysis of “state capitalism based on war industry” so as to embrace not only the USSR but also the capitalist world as a whole. According to him, “because international competition takes mainly a military

262 D. Howl, *ibid*, p.95

form, the law of value expresses itself in its opposite, viz. a striving after use values.”²⁶³ In other words, when the state buys the products of armament manufacturers, these products cease to be exchange-values and become use-values. Why?

Cliff does not provide an answer to this question. Because the thesis is meaningless. First of all, in capitalism all products in general are exchange-values that contain use-value. The result remains unchanged whether the product is, say, a tomography device used in the health sector or a tank used in “killing” sector. On the other hand, whether the buyers of these products are individuals or private corporations or the state itself makes no difference, which means they are still exchange-values containing use-value. Therefore, Cliff’s argument is artificial and, moreover, amounts to distorting and hollowing Marxist concepts in the name of demonstrating that the capitalist law of value operates in the Soviet Union through the arms industry. Here is an example:

It makes no difference to the individual armament manufacturer whether he invests his capital in the production of guns or butter, provided he makes a profit. But the state to which he belongs is extremely interested in the use value of his products. His relations with the state are those of seller and buyer, the former being interested only in value and the latter in use value. But in fact these relations of exchange are only formal. The state does not offer another commodity in exchange for armaments.²⁶⁴

Nevertheless, the fact that seller is interested “only in value” and buyer “in use value”, is the general rule in capitalist transaction of selling and buying. So why are “these relations of exchange only formal”? In so doing, Cliff seeks to prove that the aim of capitalist system is no longer to produce exchange-values and that it has shifted mainly to the production of use-values. And he did not shy away from expressing this view openly:

The slogan ‘guns before butter’ means that competition between capitalist powers has reached the stage where the international division of labour is disrupted, and competition through buying and selling is replaced by direct military competition. Use values have become the aim of capitalist production.²⁶⁵

As clearly shown by this thesis advanced by Cliff in order to vindicate the theory of state capitalism, this kind of false views have their roots in Bukharin who had said the following:

Military production has an altogether different significance: a gun is not transformed into an element of a new production cycle: gunpowder is shot into the air and does not appear in a different guise in the next cycle at all. The economic effect of these elements *in actu* has a purely negative value...²⁶⁶

As a matter of fact, capitalist war industry produces a very profitable exchange-value, i.e.

²⁶³ T. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, p.210

²⁶⁴ T. Cliff, *ibid*, pp.211-212

²⁶⁵ T. Cliff, *ibid*, p.212

²⁶⁶ Bukharin, *The Politics and Economics of the Transition Period*, Routledge&Kegan Paul, 1979, p.81

arms, whose buyer is, especially in war times, the state itself. General law remains the same in this case as well. That is to say, arms manufacturers produce a very profitable exchange-value that contains a use-value (because, the nature of use-values is not a moral question; even the most lethal weapons are use-values from the point of view of their buyers!). Thus the absurdness of trying to invent a capitalist stage in which the aim of production is not exchange-values but of use-values is self-evident. The incompatibility of such ideas with the realities of capitalism as well as with Marx's analyses is strikingly obvious. In fact, what concerns Cliff is not to agree with Marx, but, on the contrary, to argue that there is a state capitalism in the USSR at the cost of disagreeing with him. After a lot of talk about the issue of military competition Cliff finally relates the matter to the Soviet Union:

The increasing rate of exploitation, and the increasing subordination of the workers to the means of production in Russia, accompanied as it is by a great production of guns but not butter, leads to an intensification, not a lessening of the oppression of the people.

The law of value is thus seen to be the arbiter of the Russian economic structure as soon as it is seen in the concrete historical situation of today – the anarchic world market.²⁶⁷

Once you stop regarding arms production as being production of exchange-values in capitalist countries as well, then you may certainly be able to speak of a law of value operating on the basis of production of use-values! And, in order to make yourself believe in the existence of state capitalism in the Soviet Union, you need also to devote yourself to seeking the evidence of commodity production not on a national scale, but on an international level when the economic relations are organised by the state! In fact, Cliff's mentor on these issues is Bukharin and understandably he shows Bukharin as his witness. Cliff states that Bukharin had pointed out that "if the national state were to organise the national economy, commodity production would remain 'in the first place [in] the world market', and the economy would be, therefore, state capitalist."²⁶⁸

Can we label an economic formation as "state capitalism" just because it exists beside a capitalist external world in a military competition with it? An economic formation in which capitalism was abolished, the generalised commodity production do not exist, the central aim of planning is fixed to achieve heavy industrialisation, and, decisions of investment, contrary to the situation in capitalism, are not determined by the motive for profit? If we do that, this would amount to abandoning all Marxist criteria and opening up a very broad terrain of "freedom" for ourselves. In that case, there would be no obstacle to declare that, for example, the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century was "state capitalist"!

267 T. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, p.212

268 T. Cliff, *ibid*, p.213

The Question of the Law of Value

If we are to summarise the main characteristics of the law of value, which is unique to capitalism, we can say the following. The exchange-value of goods is determined by the average socially necessary labour time for their production. As a tendency the commodities are exchanged with each other according to this average labour time contained in them. The realisation of this inner law of capitalism in the market means that the price of a commodity is, in the long term, equal to its exchange-value. Of course, the most important point in this context is that in capitalism the labour-power is a commodity that can be sold and bought, and that the exchange-value of this commodity is also determined by the necessary labour time for its reproduction.

Marx's theory of value explains that, in capitalist society, the total social labour time is distributed between various fields of production not according to a general plan, but in an automatic manner through the market mechanism. The law of value is not a general law of exchange of products which is valid throughout whole human history, but the expression of the relation of exchange which is peculiar to capitalist mode of production.

The main element of the theory of value that the products are exchanged with each other, as a general tendency, according to “socially necessary average labour time” contained in them presupposes a developed capitalist society, a community of producers who are in mutual relationship with each other through commodity exchange. “Socially necessary average labour time” is not a concrete criterion that can be measured by a given amount of labour time being actually spent for the production of a given article by a given number of workers. This criterion is an abstraction, which, as we know, realises in the last analysis through the medium of the capitalist market and presupposes the distribution of total social labour-time into products on the basis of an average skilled labourer given the level of development of productive forces. And this abstraction is realised in the fact that those enterprises that fail to maintain the average will come to stomach the losses as the cost of their “unnecessary” labour-time spending and in that they will submit to the market prices formed in the last analysis according to those averages mentioned. In this way the law of value takes on its concrete expression in the capitalist market by the elimination of the inefficient on the basis of competition between capitalists. It is naturally illogical to speak of the exchange of products according to the average necessary social labour time contained in them under conditions where the productive forces have not become socialised, the producer has not become a proletarian, the capitalist market that put an end to provincialism and isolation has not yet formed, the relations of production are not based on capitalist private ownership and thereof the production of exchange-values has not become generalised. Therefore, the law of value can by no means be related to the exchange of products in the pre-capitalist or non-capitalist formations.

On the other hand, in a national economy, *direct* distribution of total labour-time into various fields of production on the basis of a central plan is the anti-thesis of distribution in the capitalist market by the law of value. The central plan under a workers' power firstly takes as its goal the meeting of social needs and bases itself on actual labour-time

spent for production as a criterion for calculation. What is aimed at here is the producers to get not only the equivalent of the cost of their labour-power but, after necessary social reductions are done and funds secured, the equivalent of the actual labour time they spend.

But when we deal with a despotic-bureaucratic regime like in the example of the USSR, it is obvious that the logic of central plan is based neither on meeting the social needs of producers nor giving the equivalent of the actual labour-time spent by labourers. But on the other hand, in the bureaucratic regimes such as the USSR and the like, it is impossible to speak of the distribution of social labour-time through the market mechanism, i.e. on the basis of profitability, as in capitalism. Because, in contrast to capitalism, in these countries there is not exchange-value production in general and the law of value does not operate.²⁶⁹

Hence the most important distortion introduced by the theory of state capitalism is the reduction of the theory of value, which is, in fact, peculiar to capitalist society, to the exchange of labour products in general. Reducing an inner law of capitalism, the law of value, to the distribution of products in general opens the door for a false conclusion that this law is valid for almost all kinds of social forms. For instance, there is an incorrect approach of this kind in Bukharin's assessments, which thus provides a basis for the theory of state capitalism. Comparing the operation of capitalist economy with that of the Soviet Union, he said that the relations of value are not particular only to capitalist society and have a material content that can be applied to both formations.

According to such an incorrect interpretation, it makes almost no difference whether the distribution of total labour-power into various fields of economy is based on a market mechanism or on a central plan. Because, this false approach reduces the phenomenon of "exchange-value", which is particular to capitalism, to a direct measuring of the necessary labour time to produce the products, and hence invents a law of value operating even if capitalism does not exist!

The law of "exchange for exchange's sake", a hallmark of capitalism, does not operate in bureaucratic command economies like the USSR in which private ownership and the market do not exist. However, the products exchanged outside the domestic field of the bureaucratic dictatorship ("socialist bloc" countries by and large are also included in

269 Although those people who described the regimes in these countries as socialism and then blended the law of value and socialism did nothing but to bury Marxism by inventing theories like "socialist law of value", "socialist commodity production", "socialist market economy", such inventions were very popular alongside with the myth of "living socialism". "The great teacher" Stalin had already said, "Sometimes we are asked if we have the law of value in our socialist regime, and if it affects our economy: yes, we have the law of value too and it affects our economy." (Stalin) But what is bizarre is that, it was impossible even for the despotic-bureaucratic regimes, where the means of production are stasised, to speak of the operation of the law of value, let alone socialism. Only after these regimes began to dissolve and insofar as capitalist market relations permeate the organism, the law of value has started to operate. In this process of dissolution, some pedants who still described the existing system as "socialism" have busied themselves with "socialist value" relations or "socialist market" relations.

this field), i.e. at the capitalist market, turn into commodities, in one sense, not initially but finally. But while it is obvious that this does not signify a generalised commodity production, it is, in the last analysis, a foreign dynamic which causes the dissolution of despotic structures. In other words, the fact that part of the surplus-product, accumulated in the hands of the state, becomes subject of trade on the capitalist world market is just like the case in simple commodity production; i.e. it does not mean that exchange-values are produced inside the country. The point that must be stressed is that although when these products produced as use-values in the bureaucratic regimes are exchanged with other commodities in the world market, they do not lose their character of being use-values in the original place where they have been produced. As long as labour products are produced not as exchange-values but as use-values, the social relations that lay beneath the production of these products are not capitalistic. Therefore, the fact that part of these products become commodities through foreign trade does not transform the workers in the bureaucratic state into free wage-labourers of capitalism.

In response to the criticisms levelled against the theory of state capitalism, Howl, who seems to proceed from more logical arguments, says that:

For 60 years these market mechanisms have not operated inside the USSR. Prices have not been based on the labour value of goods, nor have they moved with supply and demand. Money has not determined the allocation of resources between enterprises (although it is a mechanism whereby consumer goods are allocated between individuals). “Profit”, in the absence of genuine prices, has been an artificial construct without the social content it has in the West. The relationship between different producers is not just through the exchange of their products. The existence of central administration, even if not real planning, means that labour has a relationship to the total social labour *prior* to the exchange of the products of labour. The allocation of workers to work, the ratio by which goods exchange, the profit to be made—none of these are governed by market signals. Instead they are results of decisions by bureaucrats. How then can the USSR be *capitalist*?²⁷⁰

This is a very appropriate question. But the author’s motive, here, is not to give a correct answer, but to re-state the familiar theory of state capitalism. Arguing that there is a bureaucratic state capitalism in Russia, Cliff has advanced this point on the basis of the relation with foreign capitalist world. He admits that there cannot be talk of the existence of the law of value on the level of the inner mechanisms of that economy:

Hence if one examines the relations within the Russian economy, abstracting them from their relations with the world economy, one is bound to conclude that the source of the law of value, as the motor and regulator of production, is not to be found in it.²⁷¹

The assertion that the law of value operates inside the Soviet Union through foreign competition is based not on the reality but on extremely arbitrary conclusions. The explanation provided by Howl as “the key to the theory of state capitalism”, an explanation whose scientific worth can be appreciated perhaps only by their own

270 D. Howl, *ibid*, p.90

271 T. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, p.208

supporters, is as follows:

To pose the operation of the law of value in the USSR in the form of the question, “Is there commodity production in the USSR?” is to pose it in an artificial and static way. Looked at *in isolation* production in the USSR cannot be the production of exchange values, it is rather production of use-values as the result of concrete labours co-ordinated centrally. Once the analysis is raised to the level of international competitiveness, however, it can be seen that goods in the USSR take on the social role of commodities—of being the embodiment of abstract labour. The Russian bureaucratic ruling class *compares* the costs of producing goods inside the USSR with the costs of production elsewhere, and this comparison relates concrete labour to abstract labour on a world scale.²⁷²

The truth of the matter is that all these explanations tell us a fact that is avoided from being expressed: that is, the socio-economic formation in the USSR has a similarity with the Asiatic mode of production mentioned in *Grundrisse* and *Capital* by Marx himself. In this ancient mode of production formed under oriental despotism, in Marx’s own words, the products (use-values) produced by direct producers in agricultural communes under the administration of a despotic state, which appears as the owner of land, did not have a function of commodity on a domestic plane. These products could become commodities only after they were appropriated by the state and then become subject of foreign trade via the state. Nevertheless these products as subjects of foreign trade, still did not have the character of commodity in the eyes of the central authority. Because the central authority was exchanging these products not for the sake of exchange and reproduction, but in order to meet its need for use-values (articles of luxury, military needs, etc.).

Yet capitalism is based on the fact that the market mechanism itself, thanks to its inherent forces, distinguishes the efficient from the inefficient and then eliminates the inefficient. This is not a question of a priori calculation but an inner law in operation in the market. Such a law has not operated in the USSR. If the law of value had operated through the world market, then the enterprises that could not compete with the exchange-values formed in the foreign market would have had to go bankrupt. Yet the attempt to prove that the law of value operates through foreign competition, this vain attempt, has propelled the followers of “state capitalism” to caricaturing of the reality with a lack of seriousness. According to them, the Soviet bureaucracy, allegedly, compares the costs of producing goods with that of foreign world! So it was up to the Soviet bureaucrats whether to know or not to what extent they lagged behind the productivity level of world capitalism in these comparisons. But it is a frivolity to say that abstract labour is related to concrete labour by this way. The “reasoning” pursued by the advocates of the theory of state capitalism is the following: even if it is impossible to speak of capitalism in the inner operation of these economies, since there is a calculation and the costs are compared with the standards of advanced capitalist countries, then that means that abstract labour is related to concrete labour! Here you are! A genius explanation of why the bureaucratic regime in Russia is state capitalist!

²⁷² D. Howl, *ibid*, p.97

One of the main arguments advanced in order to answer the criticisms against these unfounded assertions is that: “the issue is the systematic subordination of workers’ consumption to the requirement to accumulate.”²⁷³ The unsoundness of this argument becomes evident when we ask a counter-question: in which class society is the case different? For instance, in ancient despotic oriental states, which have nothing in common with capitalism, was not direct labourers’ consumption subordinated to the requirements of despotic state to accumulate?

Is Labour-Power a Commodity in the USSR?

In *Capital* Marx states the condition of labour-power to appear as a commodity as follows:

... labour-power can appear upon the market as a commodity, only if, and so far as, its possessor, the individual whose labour-power it is, offers it for sale, or sells it, as a commodity. In order that he may be able to do this, he must have it at his disposal, must be the untrammelled owner of his capacity for labour, i.e., of his person. He and the owner of money meet in the market, and deal with each other as on the basis of equal rights, with this difference alone, that one is buyer, the other seller; both, therefore, equal in the eyes of the law. The continuance of this relation demands that the owner of the labour-power should sell it only for a definite period, for if he were to sell it rump and stump, once for all, he would be selling himself, converting himself from a free man into a slave, from an owner of a commodity into a commodity.²⁷⁴

When we approach the issue from the standpoint of the arguments of the theory of “state capitalism” on whether the labour-power in the bureaucratic regimes is a commodity or not, we encounter similar errors with those mentioned above. That is, to prove that the law of value operates inside the USSR, it is necessary to prove, first of all, that the labour-power is a commodity. But it is impossible to make such an assertion if one looks at solely the inner operation. So what? At this point, once again “the connection with world economy” is introduced and hence the theory of state capitalism is rescued! So we see a similar sequence. The authors who stand for the theory of state capitalism first enumerate Marx’s views on this issue. As Cliff did:

In order to see whether labour power in Russia is really a commodity, as it under traditional capitalism, it is necessary to see what specific conditions are necessary for it to be so. Marx states two conditions for this: first, that the labourer *must* sell his labour power as he has no other means of subsistence, being ‘free’ of the means of production; secondly, that the labourer *can* sell his labour power as he is the sole owner of it, that is, he is free to do so.²⁷⁵

Then he states that these conditions are not present in Russia under the domination of the bureaucracy:

273 D. Howl, *ibid*, p.98

274 Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Penguin Books, 1976, p.271

275 T. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, pp.206-207

If there is only one employer, a “change of masters” is impossible, and the “periodic sale of himself” becomes a mere formality. The contract also becomes only a formality when there are many sellers and only one buyer.²⁷⁶

Again according to the interpretation of Pete Binns, a member of the same tendency, one cannot speak of a wage-labour in Russia as in the capitalist system: “... it would not make any difference if Russian workers were paid in buttons.”²⁷⁷

Howl’s interpretation is more interesting:

Cliff is establishing that the USSR viewed in isolation could not be seen as capitalist. But even when we move to the level of seeing the USSR in its international context there is practically no competition for *labour* between the USSR and its rivals. If labour is to be real wage-labour there must be a labour market inside Russia.²⁷⁸

Well, what about the conclusion? The point reached after a correct introduction is this: if you see that the theory does not fit into reality, then make the reality fit into the theory in order to overhaul the arguments of the theory of state capitalism to make them more acceptable. Hence Howl continues as follows:

The labour market in the USSR has “imperfections”, but this is true of any labour market. The point is that the worker is no slave, and even if not able to choose which master to work for, can still exercise the classic “freedom” Marx talks of – the freedom to exercise some control over the terms of exploitation.²⁷⁹

Chris Harman criticise those who do not consider the USSR a state capitalist but still speak of “the working class” without making any explanation. He says, “the working class is the particular product of the capitalist mode of production alone. The theorists of ‘new class’ must use a term like ‘state slaves’ from a logical point of view.”²⁸⁰ If the whole point was to demonstrate that the workers under the Stalinist regime were not slaves, then a correct analysis should have been made. But even if the point was to criticise solely the views of Bruno Rizzi and the like who argued that the working class in Russia was a “new class”, one would not need such a false argument that a labour market does exist in Russia despite everything. Or do two wrongs make one truth?!

As labour-force is a commodity under capitalism, it has also a market just like all other commodities. Although we use the term “the worker” in the Soviet Union and the like where there is no labour market and “the state worker” has no freedom to sell his labour-power as he wishes, this “worker” is not the one who freely sells his labour-power as in capitalism. But, in contrast to the case in slave society, he is not a slave either. Because the bureaucratic state has a right to dispose merely over the labour-power of worker, not over his/her body. On the other hand, even if under the domination of the bureaucratic state, in an industrialised society, the producer who is deprived of the means of production is

276 T. Cliff, *ibid*, p.207

277 quoted in D. Howl, *ibid*, p.101

278 D. Howl, *ibid*, p.102

279 D. Howl, *ibid*, p.104

280 C. Harman, *The Storm Breaks*, [our translation].

not, of course, a peasant but essentially an industrial labourer, and in this sense, a worker. After all, the term worker in general is not peculiar to capitalism and there were workers even in ancient societies as Marx himself said.

Has the Operation of the Law of Value Altered?

To be able to “demonstrate” the existence of state capitalism in the Soviet Union, Cliff needed to state that the law of value no longer operates within the capitalist system in general. And he did so. His writings reflect various examples of this view:

In *Capital*, Marx took as the norm of capitalism a system of absolutely free competition. The only Marxian economist who discussed in detail the law of value in relation to monopoly capitalism was Rudolf Hilferding in his book, *Das Finanzkapital*.²⁸¹

Well, what was the conclusion Hilferding reached? Let us read Hilferding as quoted approvingly by Cliff:

The objective price law is realised only through competition. When the monopolist associations abolish competition, they remove with this the only means by which an objective price law can be realised. Price ceases to be an amount determined objectively, and becomes a problem of calculation for those who determine it with will and consciousness; ... The realisation of the Marxian theory of concentration – the monopolistic merger – seems to lead to the invalidation of the Marxian theory of value.²⁸²

Hilferding based his theses on the hypothesis that monopolisation abolishes competition. According to this, it was possible to overcome the anarchic nature of the market and arrive at an organised capitalism. In this way, the contradictions on an international scale were also to soften and thus a peaceful epoch would set in. Hilferding’s expectation for a “peaceful epoch” broke into pieces by the world war that broke out owing to the competition between monopolies and the tendency of capital to spread. But he helped reformism with his views such as that in imperialist epoch the economy would be organised by the state and competition would be abolished, the anarchy of production would come to an end. As for Bukharin, he defended the thesis that while capitalist anarchy would be abolished within individual national states, it would continue to exist on an international level, i.e. between states. Thus, with his conception that it is possible to plan an economy on a national level, he laid the basis for both the theory of “socialism in one country” and an incorrect theory of *state capitalism*. Basing their analyses on this kind of false theses, Cliff and his followers set out to demonstrate that a state capitalism could exist in the Soviet Union as well.

Let us give another example from Howl’s article. He says, “The absence of a fully operational market in the USSR, our critics argue, means that commodities are not being produced, and as capitalism is ‘generalised commodity production’ the USSR cannot be

281 T. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, p.198

282 quoted by T. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, p.198

capitalist.”²⁸³ And once again he attempts to justify his view by saying that these critics are making an analogy with the capitalism of 1860’s. The excuse is again the same: The development of capitalism itself has changed the operation of the law of value!

As it is not possible to demonstrate that the law of value operates in the Soviet Union, i.e. as the reality of the bureaucratic regime is not compatible with the law of value, in order to make the law of value fit into this reality, the law itself is moulded and softened. Just as in the argument advanced by Howl: “Under state capitalism and generally under modern capitalism, the operation of the law of value is mediated through the attempt to plan.”²⁸⁴

Yet the emergence of certain factors that soften the operation of the law of value, which is particular to capitalism, does not signify that capitalism has changed its nature, that the market mechanism has lost its significance and a fairly planned operation has replaced it, etc. Consequently, the view that the formations called “state capitalism” can be grasped in comparison not with “old” capitalism, but only with “modern” capitalism has no scientific basis.

In an attempt to make the operation in capitalist countries similar to the operation in the Soviet Union, they claim that capitalism is also based on planning in the imperialist epoch. But this is unfounded. Because planning in capitalist system cannot go beyond the bounds of making plans that provide certain guiding for companies through market researches. The necessity to make certain plans on a company level due to the complex operation of modern capitalism is one thing, but a planned economy is a completely different thing. For instance, “... when we pass on from joint-stock companies to trusts, which dominate and monopolise whole branches of industry, this puts an end not only to private production but also to planlessness” said Engels.²⁸⁵ But with these words he was explaining, on the one hand, that the socialisation of the means of production has been forcing a transition to a planned mode of production by overcoming capitalism, and on the other hand, that even under capitalism it has now become inevitable to introduce some sort of planning. “Interpreting” these analyses in the direction of his own theses, Hilferding developed his theory of “organised capitalism”. Chris Harman, on the other hand, defends this theory against its critics and diverts the issue as if the analyses of Lenin and Trotsky are in the same direction with Hilferding.²⁸⁶

To rescue the theory of state capitalism some other authors who follow a similar line advanced the idea that the theory is not a specific theory of the Soviet Union but a general theory of global trends in the development of capitalist system. For instance, P. Binns and M. Haynes argued that despite the difference in its emergence the Soviet society constitutes “the most extreme case” of the evolution of capitalist system:

After a while it has been clearly understood that the peculiarity of the Soviet Union was not in its structure and dynamic, but in that, in a very exceptional process, it

283 D. Howl, *ibid*, p.97

284 D. Howl, *ibid*, p.98

285 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 3, p.432

286 see C. Harman, “Criticism which does not Withstand the Test of Logic”, *International Socialism*, July 1990, pp. 66-7

has emerged as the degeneration of a successful workers’ revolution. Therefore we argue that, in the age of matured, militarised capitals that control the economic and social life, Russia, as part of the world system, represents only one of the most extreme examples of this system.²⁸⁷

The unsoundness of this argument becomes evident when we remember that the proponents of the theory of state capitalism have described the dissolution of the bureaucratic regime in the USSR and the beginning of its incorporation into world capitalist system as a “sideways step”. The question arises then: how could it be that this “extreme” form of capitalism has collapsed in the face of more backward forms and transformed into them? Would not this, say, be something like going from monopolies back to free competition?

It is to play with words to invent a category of “state capitalism” into which different social systems could be squeezed, by depicting capitalist system untruly. When a person insists on his mistakes he/she usually tends to put forward useless evidence at the cost of falling into contradiction with the reality. This is exactly the case with the authors who stand for the theory of “state capitalism”.

In conclusion, the attempt of Cliffites to explain Russia, which has a despotic bureaucratic structure, with the theory of state capitalism does not rest upon sound proofs. Accordingly there is a dilemma in the explanations of Cliff himself. He admits that a bureaucratic dictatorship was founded in Russia in the year 1928 by a bureaucratic counter-revolution. He states clearly that from that time on the state in the Soviet Union cannot be defined as “degenerated workers’ state”. He acknowledges that the fact that the bureaucracy is a ruling class does not signify an opening up of a new age in history, but on the contrary, it is a “historical anomaly”. However, after all these establishments, which are correct in general, an ill-conceived qualification, i.e. “capitalism”, is attached to them when it comes to the description of the reality being analysed.

For example, Cliff says, “Already in its first years as a ruling class the bureaucracy has adopted the totalitarian characteristics of decaying, ageing capitalism; it already proves its nature as a historical anomaly with no future.”²⁸⁸ This conclusion reveals the speculative nature of the theory of state capitalism. Because, it is obvious that, like every class society, capitalist society is not an eternal order and will be thrown away into the dump of history. But his fact does not enable one to qualify this order as a “historical anomaly”. Such a qualification can describe only a despotic bureaucratic formation that emerged in modern times due to extremely peculiar conditions and that has no future in the face of capitalist system.

Accordingly this is a point where the theory of state capitalism remains quite defenceless. The observations or analogies made by Cliff, in fact, reveal true secret of the bureaucratic regime. Let us give only a few examples. Cliff interpreted the nature of the Stalinist state as follows:

287 P. Binns and M. Haynes, “*New theories of Eastern European class societies*”, *International Socialism*, Winter 1980, [our translation]

288 T. Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, pp.253-254

In Russia the state is a weapon in the hands of the bureaucracy for the oppression of the mass of toilers. But this alone does not describe all the functions of the Stalinist state. It answers also to the direct needs of the social division of labour, of the organisation of social production. A similar task was fulfilled, *mutatis mutandis*, by the states of ancient China, Egypt and Babylonia. There, because big irrigation works which could be organised at all only if done on large scale were so wholly necessary, the state developed not only as a result of the appearance of class divisions, and so *indirectly* as a result of the social division of labour, but also *directly*, as part of the process of production.²⁸⁹

These words express not only the reality of despotic-bureaucratism in the USSR in an excellent way, but they also reveal the unsoundness of his fabricated “state capitalism”.

Another example is about the division of total labour time through state planning in the bureaucratic regimes, in contrast to the operation of the market mechanism in capitalist system. Cliff explains this issue making an analogy with Egypt in Pharaoh period:

Pharaoh had to calculate how to divide the total labour time – which is the real cost of production in any society – of his slaves among the needs of his society. His method of doing so was direct. A certain number slaves was put to the production of food, a certain number to the production of luxury goods, others to the construction of the irrigation system, yet others to the building of the pyramids, and so on. ... In Russia, too, the state directly makes an almost complete plan of the division of the total labour time...²⁹⁰

While referring to the terror applied by the bureaucratic state to its own bureaucrats, he quotes from Ciliga:

This original method of calming the anger of the people [the terrorist purges] reminded me of Marco Polo’s report of the Mongol Emperor who reigned in Peking at that time. It was customary once every ten or fifteen years to deliver over to the crowd the minister most abhorred by it, which allowed the emperor quietly to oppress his people for the next ten or fifteen years. What I saw in Russia was to bring this Mongol Emperor repeatedly to my mind.²⁹¹

It is as though these references to the ancient states of Egypt, Babylon, China and the examples given from Asiatic despotic Mongol Empire tell the despotic dictatorships of modern times (the USSR and the like) that “De te fabula narratur!”.

There remains a last point that must be noted which is very important from the point of view of the controversial issues. If you make historical analogies to understand the nature of a given social formation, you must, in the first place, correctly analyse and interpret the historical examples involved. For example the Mameluk state in history was of Asiatic despotic nature. A state-based class that rested upon state property was the dominant class. It would be completely wrong to make an analogy between such a social formation in the East and the slave or feudal states of the West. Such an attempt, just

289 T. Cliff, *ibid*, p.178

290 T. Cliff, *ibid*, pp.205-206

291 quoted by T. Cliff, *ibid*, p.255

like the efforts to put the despotic bureaucratic dictatorships based on state ownership into the same category with capitalist countries based on private ownership, would mean busying himself with trifles. This is exactly the case with Cliff when he refers to the Mamelukes:

Let us examine the main characteristics of Arab feudalism under the Mamelukes. Here the subjugation of the peasants to the strong feudal state was much harsher than in medieval Europe, but the individual member of the ruling class had no individual property rights whatsoever. The Sultan was the only landowner and he used to divide the right to collect the rent in the various regions among the different nobles (called Multazims). While in Europe every feudal lord was the owner of a certain domain which was handed down from father to son, in the Arab East the feudal lord had no permanent domain of his own, but was a member of a class which collectively controlled the land and had the right to appropriate rent.²⁹²

The references to the different characteristics of the Mameluke state from the feudal states of medieval Europe are correct. However, it is a downright confusion to introduce the concept “feudal”, which is not compatible at all with the fundamental character of the Mameluke state, despite the difference has been mentioned. Putting a feudal state together with an Asiatic state into the same sack is, above all, contrary to the Marxist method which is so sensitive on the distinctions between social formations. Cliff says:

The mode of production, the form of exploitation, the relation of the toilers to the means of production in the Arab East, was the same as in medieval Europe. The source of income of the ruling class was also the same; the only difference was in the mode of appropriation, in the legal expression of the right to exploit.²⁹³

When we remember Marx’s famous idea that the difference in the mode of appropriation of surplus-product reveals the distinctive lines between different social formations, then Cliff’s fallacy becomes obvious –a fallacy which is made much more evident by himself when he stresses the words “only difference”. It must be said in conclusion that it is quite natural for those, who fall into this mistake when they interpret the earlier periods of history, to exhibit a similar error in their interpretation of the history of 20th century.

292 T. Cliff, *ibid*, p.273

293 T. Cliff, *ibid*, p.275

Chapter 9

Different views on the USSR

As distinguished from Trotsky's analyses, many writers dwelled on and searched into the thesis that the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union was not a privileged caste but a *new dominant class*. Although at first glance there appears to be a semblance among them, in reality there are significant differences as to the conclusions drawn and the political attitudes of the writers. However, the reason why we add this chapter is not to provide a detailed list of the various studies on the class nature of the Soviet state. Our aim is to dwell on some eminent views that had a significant impact on these debates and thus to stress our differences.

We will first deal with Rakovsky's and Shachtman's assessments as they occupied an important place in the debates that took place around Trotsky in his days. Then we will briefly dwell on another host of people, including Hilferding, who claim that the world in general heads towards a "totalitarian state economy" or a "bureaucratic collectivism".

On Rakovsky's Assessments

It is known that Rakovsky in a way described the bureaucracy as a new dominant class before Hilferding and Shachtman put forward the same argument. His article entitled "Bureaucracy and Soviet State" exposes his appraisals on the issue, which was written as a letter (dated 1928) to Valentinov who was an oppositionist exiled by Stalin. In another article later, Rakovsky wanted to draw attention to a different phenomenon apart from the factors presented as the objective reasons of the bureaucratic degeneration of the regime (such as the economic and cultural backwardness of Russia, the destruction caused by the civil war and the small size the proletariat compared with the whole Russian population). He investigated the degenerating effects of power on a class that had never possessed it before, even under most favourable conditions. Rakovsky argued that a bureaucratic state and a great class of rulers had been taking shape before the eyes of the then Bolsheviks:

From the workers' state with bureaucratic perversions –as Lenin defined our form of government– we have developed into a bureaucratic state with proletarian-communist survivals.

Before our eyes, a great class of rulers has been taking shape and is continuing to develop.... The unifying factor of this unique class is that unique form of private property, governmental power: "The bureaucracy has the state in its possession"

wrote Marx, “as rights of private property.”²⁹⁴

Building upon Marx’s idea, Rakovsky’s emphasis on the bureaucratic state power when he speaks of the “*unique form of private property*” is very important. As it is known, in class societies based on private property of the means of production, the state is, in the last analysis, the state of that class owning the property. In those societies, the bureaucracy, regardless of its weight in political life, cannot elevate to the level of a new dominant class seizing the private property of the means of production.

The problem occurs where the dominant property form on the means of production is the state property. Whether in the Asian despotic states or in the despotic-bureaucratic states of modern times such as the USSR, the phenomenon of state property which excludes the private property on the means of production by and large, equips the bureaucracy with a very different privilege: the state becomes its own private property.

Driven by the intention of examining the reality of the bureaucracy in the USSR, Rakovsky’s emphasis on the issue is to the point. However, the main point of his analysis is to examine the degenerating and seductive effects of power on the class that had never used it before, i.e. the proletariat. Rakovsky emphasised on the “professional risks of power”:

You understand that these difficulties would continue to exist up to a certain point even if we were to suppose for a moment that the country was populated only by proletarian masses and if, on the outside, only proletarian states existed. These difficulties might be called the *professional risks* of power. Indeed, the position of a class fighting for the conquest of power and that of a class which holds it in its hands, are different. I repeat that in speaking of dangers I do not have in mind the relationships which exist with the other classes, but rather those which are created in the ranks of the triumphant class.²⁹⁵

To support his theses Rakovsky gives examples from the process of the French Revolution. His point of departure is that when a class seizes power only one section of the class becomes the agent of power and thus the tide of the affairs changes. According to Rakovsky, a functional differentiation occurred also within the proletariat, which came to power through the October Revolution and founded the Soviet state, on the basis of the fact that the power was used by only certain representatives of the class. Later on, the differentiation transformed into an insurmountable abyss and elevated to the level of a social differentiation:

When a class seizes power, one of its sections becomes the agent of this power. Thus the bureaucracy comes forward. In a socialist state, where capitalist accumulation is forbidden by the members of the ruling party, this differentiation commences by being functional; then it becomes social.²⁹⁶

It is evident that a social differentiation came into being in the workers’ state as the

294 quoted by Irving Howe, *Essential Works of Socialism*, p.178

295 Rakovsky, “Bureaucracy and Soviet State”, *Essential Works of Socialism*, p.179

296 Rakovsky, *ibid*, p.179

bureaucracy seized the political power in the Soviet state. However, though the differentiation originally occurred within the proletariat, it moved out of the bounds of the proletariat as it matured and thus caused a qualitative transformation annihilating the workers' state. Once this transformation took place, it is not correct to explain the privileged position of the bureaucracy with a split within the proletariat or with the "professional risks of power". Though it is meaningful to point to such an objective danger, is not the solution of the problem already linked to the spread of the revolution to other countries and the building of a semi-state by the proletariat such that it immediately begins to wither away (i.e. a different sort of state organisation)?

Though the October Revolution in Russia temporarily created such a state, the workers' state later on disappeared. Nevertheless, Rakovsky was still investigating the "professional risks" threatening the proletariat in power. Furthermore, with the generalisation of his opinion that a similar bureaucratisation could realise even under most favourable conditions, he nearly comes to the conclusion that a workers' power and its semi-state has almost no chance to survive.

The principal mistake in this analysis of Rakovsky is that he did not give a central place to the sweeping aside of the proletariat from power by the bureaucracy, which transformed into a dominant class on the basis of owning the state. Thus it was meaningless to speak of the "professional risks of power". However, Rakovsky proved that he tried to analyse the qualitative change under the rule of the bureaucracy by saying that "the bureaucracy of soviets and the party is the phenomenon of a new order". The following lines of Rakovsky pointed out to a fundamental problem of the time that the Marxists should have considered:

It is not a question here of isolated cases, of hitches in the conduct of some comrade, but rather of a new social category to which a whole treatise ought to be devoted....²⁹⁷

On Max Shachtman's Assessments

The appraisals of Shachtman that we will dwell on here are only limited to his article "Stalinism: A New Social Order" [This is the title supplied by Irwing Howe in his compilation *Essential Works of Socialism*. The original title is "Is Russia a Workers' State?"], written after his split from Trotsky in 1940. Shachtman, criticising Trotsky's theory that the USSR is a degenerated workers' state, wrote in his article:

In our analysis, we must necessarily take issue with Leon Trotsky, yet, at the same time, base ourselves largely upon his studies. Nobody has even approached him in the scope and depth of his contribution to understanding the problem of the Soviet Union....²⁹⁸

Leaving aside the subsequent political evolution of Shachtman who was also effected by the general process of disintegration and degeneration of the Trotskyist movement after

297 Rakovski, *ibid*, p.182

298 Shachtman, "Stalinism: A New Social Order", *Essential Works of Socialism*, p.254

Trotsky's death, we must admit that there are many important points in this article on the nature of the Soviet state, which belonged to his earlier period of the split.

One of the remarkable points in Shachtman's analysis is the stress on the distinction between property forms and property relations.

It is just as obvious that no matter what has been changed and how much it has been changed in the Soviet Union by Stalinism, state ownership of the means of production and exchange continues to exist. It is further obvious that when the proletariat takes the helm again in Russia it will maintain state property.

However, what is crucial are not the property forms, i.e., nationalized property, whose existence cannot be denied, but precisely the relations of the various social groups in the Soviet Union to this property, i.e., *property relations*! If we can speak of nationalized property in the Soviet Union, this does not yet establish what the property relations are.²⁹⁹

This issue was key to examine the phenomenon of "state property" that constituted the basis for Trotsky's characterisation of Russia as a degenerated workers' state notwithstanding the founding of the Stalinist regime. Because the main element in Trotsky's characterisation of the bureaucratic regime as workers' state was the survival of the state property despite his correct analyses on the bureaucratic repression on the proletariat, the privileged position of the bureaucracy, its anti-revolutionary role on a world scale, etc. Thus Trotsky characterised the historical action of the proletariat against the Stalinist bureaucracy as a political revolution instead of a social revolution. Because he thought that a revolution to re-establish and spread the workers' democracy would not create a fundamental change in property relations and that property would still remain state property. On the other hand, he stated that the existence of nationalised property was necessary and sufficient to characterise the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers' state. For Trotsky the Stalinist bureaucracy was a caste. In order to be a dominant class it must have created new property forms.

Thus Trotsky accepted the state property in Russia as the fundamental point of support of the degenerated workers' state without making a distinction between property forms and property relations. However, far from being a simple conceptual variation, the distinction between property relations and property forms illuminates a very important distinction that lies beneath the problem.

In capitalist society, as we know, there is state property as well as private property on the means of production. However, property relations are still capitalist and they rise above both private and state property. Whereas, under conditions such as those in the Stalinist USSR, wherein capitalist private property was abolished and the proletariat was ousted from power, the ruling bureaucracy, the owner of the monopoly of state government, would be in a despotic relationship with society, dominating the state property. Under these conditions, survival of state property as a form would never make the proletariat a dominant class. On the contrary, the class of direct producers, workers and peasants,

299 Shachtman, *ibid*, p.256

would live under the rule of the dominant bureaucracy as the subjects of the state.

Thus Shachtman put forward a very important matter of discussion when he wrote “Trotsky speaks interchangeably of the ‘property forms’ and the ‘property relations’ in the country as if he were referring to one and the same thing.”³⁰⁰ Nevertheless, instead of investigating such questions, many Trotskyist circles, later on, maintained the attitude of sacrificing the truths to narrow political interests.

On the question of whether the Stalinist regime be accepted as a kind of Bonapartism, similar to the Bonapartist regimes in capitalist society, Shachtman, again, exhibited a correct approach in his article. He stated that the social power of the capitalist class lies fundamentally in its ownership of the means of production and thanks to this economic supremacy it maintained to be the dominant class despite the different forms of state such as Bonapartist, fascist etc. However, when we analysed the USSR and approached the issue from the standpoint of the proletariat, we would face a qualitative difference incompatible with the analogy of Bonapartism:

How do matters stand with the proletariat, with its state, and the property forms and property relations unique to it? ... By its very position in the old society, the proletariat has no property under capitalism. The working class acquires economic supremacy *only after* it has seized political power.³⁰¹

Indeed there is a historical difference between the source of supremacy of the capitalist class and of the proletariat. Only if the proletariat founds and maintains a workers’ democracy, a semi-state such that begins to wither away from the very start, it can become dominant in economic sense. Just as Shachtman rightly put it:

Thus by its very position in the new society, the proletariat still has no property, that is, it does not own property in the sense that the feudal lord or the capitalist did. It was and remains a property-less class! It seizes state power. The new state is simply the proletariat organized as the ruling class. The state expropriates the private owners of land and capital, and ownership of land and the means of production and exchange becomes vested in the *state*. By its action, the state established new property forms – nationalized, or state-ified, or collectivized property. It has also established new property relations. So far as the proletariat is concerned, it has a fundamentally new relationship to property. The essence of the change lies in the fact that the working class is in command of that state-owned property *because* the state is the proletariat organized as the ruling class (through its soviets, its army, its courts, and institutions like the party, the unions, the factory committees, etc.). There is the nub of the question.³⁰²

Shachtman concluded that what is described as political expropriation of the proletariat in Trotsky’s analysis was nothing else than the overthrow of the class rule of workers and the end of the Soviet Union as a workers’ state. And at this point, he reminded an appraisal of Trotsky:

300 Shachtman, *ibid*, p.256

301 Shachtman, *ibid*, p.257

302 Shachtman, *ibid*, p.257

A change in class rule, a revolution or counterrevolution, without violence, without civil war, gradually? Trotsky has reproached defenders of such a conception with “reformism-in-reverse.” The reproach might hold in our case, too, but for the fact that the Stalinist counterrevolution was violent and bloody enough.³⁰³

Following the traces of important hints given by Trotsky, Shachtman had developed his inquiry and put a crucial question that must be asked in order to bring a solution to the problem.

If the workers are no longer the ruling class and the Soviet Union no longer a workers’ state, and if there is no private-property-owning capitalist class ruling Russia, what is the class nature of the state and what exactly is the bureaucracy that dominates it?³⁰⁴

Trotsky, too, in his article “USSR and The War”, admitted that the characterisation of the bureaucracy as a caste was not wholly scientific. Moreover, the years that have passed had so clearly enlightened many features (features that previously could not have been comprehended sufficiently) of the bureaucratic regime that it was meaningless to still characterise the bureaucracy as a caste. Rather, the bureaucracy had lifted itself to the position of a dominant class under peculiar historical conditions such as those in Stalinist Russia. And at this important moment of the debate, Shachtman, in disagreement with Trotsky, concluded that the bureaucracy was a dominant class. He wrote:

Rather, it [bureaucracy] is the product of a conjunction of circumstances, primarily that the proletarian revolution broke out in *backward* Russia and was not supplemented and thereby saved by the victory of the revolution in the *advanced* countries. Hence, while its concrete characteristics do not permit us to qualify it as a viable or indispensable ruling class in the same sense as this historical capitalist class, we may and do speak of it as a ruling class whose complete control of the state now guarantees its political and economic supremacy in the country.³⁰⁵

There remains one important subject of discussion to dwell on in relation to Shachtman’s article: Is this dominant bureaucracy a “new class” in the sense of a dominant class distinct from the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, which is limited to certain peculiar historical conditions that emerged in the Soviet Union (or later in the likes of it), having no future? He responded:

The workers of the Soviet Union were unable to hold power. That they lost it in a peculiar, unforeseen, and even unforeseeable way –not because of a bourgeois restoration, but in the form of the seizure of power by a counterrevolutionary bureaucracy which retained and based itself on the new, collectivist form of property– is true. But they did lose power. The old crap was revived, in a new, unprecedented, hitherto unknown form, the rule of a *new bureaucratic class*. A class that always was, that always will be? Not at all...

Can this new class look forward to a social life span as long as that enjoyed, for

303 Shachtman, *ibid*, p.258

304 Shachtman, *ibid*, p.259

305 Shachtman, *ibid*, pp.259-260

example, by the capitalist class? We see no reason to believe that it can. Throughout modern capitalist society, ripped apart so violently by its contradictions, there is clearly discernible the irrepressible tendency towards collectivism, the only means whereby the productive forces of mankind can be expanded and thereby provide that ample satisfaction of human needs, which is the precondition to the blooming of a new civilization and culture. But there is no adequate ground for believing that this tendency will materialize in the form of a universal “bureaucratic collectivism.”³⁰⁶

We are not interested here in whether Shachtman changed his views in one way or another. Because the question is neither to seek and find the rights or wrongs of Shachtman nor to get stuck in such sort of arguments that took place among the Trotskyist circles in the past. As a matter of fact, in the present epoch of history, it is not proper to overshadow the search of truths in the light of revolutionary Marxism with the political quarrels of the past.

Those who Consider “Bureaucratic Collectivism” as a Worldwide Tendency

Because of the factors such as the deep crisis in the capitalist system, the rise of fascism, the increase in state intervention in economy before the World War II, theories comparing the trend of the capitalist states to the centralist system in the Soviet Union erupted. Too many writers interpreted the then increasing state intervention and the spread of state monopolies in capitalist countries as the herald of a new historical epoch. According to these writers, the capitalism of private enterprise was becoming history and giving way to a totalitarian social order based essentially on state control.

In this context, various writers offered analyses such as “bureaucratic collectivism”, “totalitarian state economy”. The theory of bureaucratic collectivism saw the social system in the USSR as a new and general social system following capitalism in the schema of social evolution and characterised the USSR as the already materialised extreme expression of this worldwide general tendency. According to the theory, humanity was progressing towards a new social phase that emanates from internal tendencies of capitalism and replaces it. However, the theory that dissimilar social formations were converging to a single system on the basis of certain common facts such as state repression and increasing role of the state in economy was fundamentally wrong.

Burnham with *The Managerial Revolution*, Hilferding with *State Capitalism or Totalitarian State Economy*, Bruno Rizzi with *The Bureaucratization of the World* were among the outstanding writers of this trend. Meanwhile, it must be noted, the origin of this sort of theories, in a sense, was based on the theses of Max Weber, who is said to be the founder of modern sociology. Because in 1918 Weber handled the problem of an extreme bureaucratic order that would lead to the dictatorship of state officials.

American writer James Burnham interpreted the increasing state intervention in capitalist countries as the waning of the existence and the importance of capitalist property. Briefly,

306 Shachtman, *ibid*, p.261

he wrote: “The position held by capitalists as a dominant class is being undermined and soon they will collapse”. On the basis of this idea Burnham criticised the theory of “state capitalism”. His theory bore, by and large, the same common error with the other similar ones; however, his criticism of the theory of state capitalism in particular was significant against those who construct theories by using this concept to understand a situation where no capitalism exists. He wrote: “When the latter [capitalist-controlled part of the economy] disappears, or becomes negligible, then the capitalism has disappeared.”³⁰⁷ According to him the existing situation in countries like the USSR, Germany, Italy was not state capitalism but a totalitarian formation under the dictatorship of a new-emerging managerial class. In his theory Burnham underscored this “new class”.

As for Hilferding, he also characterised both the social order in the Stalinist Russia and the fascist order in Germany and Italy as “totalitarian state economy”. He asserted that as the existence of a totalitarian state, which made the economy subject to its own aims, was the decisive factor in all these countries, the economic differences between them were not so much important. For him, a new order was taking shape that would include both Western and Eastern countries. Thus, Hilferding invented similarities between the economic system in Stalinist Russia and the economic systems in Germany and Italy of 1940 and laid the basis for a conception of “totalitarian state economy” which is supposed to embrace all these countries.

In point of fact, it was feasible to find parallels between the oppressive, totalitarian nature of the Stalinist regime and the political practices of the Nazi Germany and Italian fascism. But that should be the end of it. Because, it was groundless and non-Marxist to attempt to liken entirely different socio-economic phenomena to each other on the basis of some similarities between various oppressive regimes. For while the dominant property form in one of them is state property, it is the capitalist private property in the other. In fact, Hilferding revealed that he did not bother to stick to Marxist premises by asserting that it is the policy of the dominant class in these regimes that determines the nature of the economy. He did not hesitate to lump all the oppressive regimes into a single category no matter what differences are involved in terms of material economic base. Instead of investigating the specific conditions underlying the fact that the state has acquired such an importance, as in the case of the USSR, he had chosen to present it as if it was a result of the policy implemented. He said:

Therefore neither the Russian nor the totalitarian system in general is determined by the character of the economy. On the contrary, it is the economy that is determined by the policy of the ruling power and subjected to the aims and purposes of this power.³⁰⁸

Hilferding would have touched upon an important issue when he stated that “the emergence of the state as an independent power greatly complicates the economic characterisation of a society in which politics (i.e., the state) plays a determining and decisive role,”³⁰⁹

307 Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution*, Penguin Books, 1962, p.114

308 Hilferding, “State Capitalism or Totalitarian State Economy”, *Essential Works of Socialism*, p.249

309 Hilferding, *ibid*, p.250

if he had specifically meant the Stalinist Russia where the capitalist private property was abolished. That is, Hilferding's statement could have been meaningful only within the framework of specific conditions where the dominant bureaucracy owned the state and thus had the right to possess everything and where a despotic sovereignty existed similar to the Asiatic states in history. Nevertheless, Hilferding and the like elevated their analyses to the level of a generalisation that would also embrace the capitalist world. What is wrong was that.

On the other hand, those people like Hilferding essentially intended to distort the meaning of the October Revolution by extending the scope of their characterisations such as "totalitarian dictatorship" so as to include the period of the leaders such as Lenin and Trotsky. This was the already-known attitude of the Austrian Marxist School and it was based on the intention to picture the dictatorship needed by the proletariat in the transition period from capitalism to communism as a totalitarian dictatorship. Thus Hilferding's aim was not to expose the reality that a true workers' state, i.e. a workers' democracy, was founded following the October Revolution and then overthrown by a counter-revolution. He sought the source of the evils in the Leninist-Bolshevik way of struggle and organisation.

Italian writer Bruno Rizzi popularised this theory presenting it along with the concept of "bureaucratic collectivism". In his work, *The Bureaucratization of the World*, he claimed that the capitalist private property was in the process of giving way to the collective ownership of property and on this basis a new economic system was emerging across the world. Rizzi wrote that it was bureaucracy who controlled the collective property in this new society which he called "bureaucratic collectivism" and that a transition was taking place from individual exploitation, which is based on capitalist private property, to a collective exploitation by the bureaucracy. And, according to this odd analysis, a new oppressed class, a new type of "slave class", was stepping into the stage of history. Bruno Rizzi was clear on it and stated that the exploitation was henceforth realised as if there was a slave society. His ideas later on influenced some other writers as well.

Under the concrete conditions and amid the debates of the late 1930's, Trotsky, too, analysed the questions such as whether the bureaucracy could be accepted as a class, not only on the basis of the particular case in the USSR, but also of the general trend across the world. On the other hand, he also dealt with the question as to what would happen in the next period in the world if the proletariat could not seize the power. His answer was that in such a case the immanent collectivist tendencies of capitalist society could lead to a new exploiting society ruled by a new bureaucratic class. He wrote:

If, however, it is conceded that the present war will provoke not revolution but a decline of the proletariat, then there remains another alternative: the further decay of monopoly capitalism, its further fusion with the state and the replacement of democracy wherever it still remained by a totalitarian regime. The inability of the proletariat to take into its hands the leadership of society could actually lead under these conditions to the growth of a new exploiting class from the Bonapartist fascist bureaucracy. This would be, according to all indications, a regime of decline,

signalizing the eclipse of civilization.³¹⁰

The prospects such as the becoming of the bureaucracy a new dominant class in capitalist societies, and thus the replacement of the capitalist system by a new worldwide social system, a bureaucratic collectivist system as it was contended by some, were shown to be disproven hypotheses by the postwar developments. However, while the bureaucracy lifted itself as a result of certain peculiar conditions to the level of a new dominant class in the USSR under the Stalinist regime, the existence of the world capitalist system on the other hand determined the fate of this new class and rendered it a temporary phenomenon with no historical future.

In consequence, the Stalinist type bureaucratic regimes never meant the emergence of a new social system surpassing the capitalist system in the course of historical development of human society. These regimes were the products of peculiar conditions created by the strangling of the workers' power in the USSR by a bureaucratic counter-revolution. The only alternative that would surpass the world capitalist system is a workers' power.

310 Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism*, p.9

Chapter 10

What Events Say

It is inevitable for the bureaucratic command economies based on state property, though they are presented as “socialism” by the Stalinist bureaucracies, to come to a halt exhausting with time their potentials to develop. In the age of world economy, there are but two options: either to surpass capitalism with a world proletarian revolution or, under the influence of world capitalist system, to become, in the last analysis, integrated with it.

To take the example of the USSR, the initial industrial accumulation and an advance of national development in this country were accomplished by quantitative rises in the use of labour-power and other means of production. The enormous potential sources lying in the vast lands of the USSR were suitable for such kind of enormous development. However, the level of development provided by the *extensive growth* is condemned to lag behind the kind of productivity rise offered by advanced technology. Thus the Soviet economy lagged behind the intensive development capacity of world capitalism. Despite this fact, the Stalinism depicted the progress in the Soviet economy as the proof that “socialism has been constructed”! There was no essential change in this attitude of the bureaucracy after Stalin’s death.

No matter how pompously the bureaucracy attempted to decorate its showcase in order to show its strength, the economic crises in the USSR and the other countries of the “socialist bloc” have been manifesting themselves with various social unrests and explosions. It was an objective necessity for the bureaucracy to reform the economy. The main problem of the bureaucracy was to increase the productivity of labour by achieving technological development and to try to close the gap with the level of development of Western capitalism. The problem of economic development, presented by the bureaucracy as “an endeavour to construct the advanced socialist society”, was no more than an endeavour to save from collapse an economy which lagged far behind the technological development and productivity rise in the capitalist world market. And this endeavour, within the framework of given conditions, inevitably based itself upon seeking to utilise the “blessings” of the capitalist world market. Briefly, the tale of “advanced socialism” told by the bureaucracy, who sought to catch up with capitalism and beg for its help, was in fact the indication of the bankruptcy of its conception of “socialism in one country”.

It is not surprising that, confronted with a serious crisis in the economy the bureaucracies in power begin to seek after reforms in the direction of capitalist restoration, since one side of the bureaucratic regimes is inherently open to world capitalism. The economic reforms, started with Khrushchev after Stalin’s death, were also manifestation of crisis in

the bureaucratic regime. The attempts for economic reform in the mid-60s also revealed the desire of the bureaucracy to get integrated into the world capitalism even in the period of Brezhnev who maintained the orthodox devotion to the Stalinist conception of socialism. Thus, the desire for economic reform was not a personal choice of leaders like Khrushchev as some Stalinists, who sanctify the Brezhnev era, put it. It was by and large the product of the endeavour to overcome the crisis in the economy with the “elixir” of the world market.

That the bureaucracy attempted to suppress in those periods the mass movements in the Eastern European countries and gave up advancing the process of economic reform due to fear of political destabilisation did not mean that the bureaucracy was against incorporation into world capitalism. While the bureaucracy desired that the economy should possess the necessary potentials to develop along the way towards capitalism, it also intended to preserve its own system as it was. As if it was possible!

Since when the potentials for economic development were frozen under the bureaucratic regime, and an all-embracing crisis and stagnation set in, the main problem of the bureaucracy has become to overcome this contradiction. Accelerating of reforms in the direction of capitalist restoration has threatened the existence of the bureaucratic system and bringing of reforms to a halt has aggravated the severe contradictions of the economy. Thus the bureaucratic regime has demonstrated its incapacity to survive on its own foundations for a long period of time, although it survived in a certain period of history. It was a *temporary* and *sui generis* historical phenomenon. Although the Khrushchev era seemed like a *de-Stalinization* period, that the criticism remained superficial and limited in reality and that the Stalinism was glorified again with Brezhnev era, revealed how desperate the bureaucracy was in keeping its system alive.

The bureaucratic dictatorships had already entered a process of corruption and disintegration for years, as the world proletarian revolution could not make a new advance so as even to destroy the bureaucratic regimes in these countries. One of the most typical indications was that the dominant bureaucracies headed for a close relationship with world capitalist system in every field under the pretext of *peaceful co-existence*, having entirely disowned the aim of world proletarian revolution. The efforts to overcome the stagnation and recession in the economy through establishing closer relations with the world market has caused, for instance in Hungary, the adoption of capitalist market and its system of values for long. In countries such as the USSR, where the bureaucratic regime has tighter measures in legal framework, an illegal market was formed on the basis of the same relations.

The bureaucracy drew its lessons from all these experiences for the future. And the majority of the bureaucracy came to the conclusion that there was no other way out than to sacrifice the old in order to be able to get new revenues. When the survival of the bureaucratic regimes through reforms seems hardly possible, it is not surprising that those who understand this fact start to take a new course.

When a dominant class loses its faith in the future a division arises among its ranks as

soon as they realise this. While some insist on the old, the others intend to find out a new course. The formers are by and large those who are most integrated with the old system and are thus unable to change. And the latter are those who have already taken steps in the direction of the new course and see their interests in sacrificing the old. Similar divisions occurred among the dominant bureaucracies of the Asiatic states that had entered into a process of collapse with the rise of capitalism. Among the dominant bureaucracies a division between those civil and military bureaucrats who are for the preservation of the bureaucratic rule and those bureaucrats who head for capitalist entrepreneurship seeking for becoming bourgeois has been going on for long. The bureaucrats who have entered into the process of becoming bourgeois will come out as bourgeois before us once the process has been completed. If the disintegration of the bureaucratic regime in the direction of capitalism reaches its conclusion, or this happens as a result of a sudden collapse, the old regime will become history.

The crisis of the bureaucratic regimes had already acquired tremendous dimensions when even the bureaucracy itself had to admit this at the turn of 1980. The pressure, the surfacing of which was delayed by repression in Brezhnev period, (the pressure of both the world capitalist economy and the discontent of the masses) has now burst out in Gorbachov era. In the new period, commenced with Gorbachov, the tales that “advanced socialism has been constructed” were left aside and the bureaucracy started to express the need to have a “realistic” point of view. Gorbachov declared that “the economy is on the verge of a thorough collapse, the transition to intensive growth has not yet started, and even the potential for extensive growth has receded.” Now the bureaucracy, surrendering in the face of economic collapse, was abandoning the propaganda of “real socialism” as it saw the salvation in getting integrated into the world capitalist system. It has ushered in a new era during which it was going to stand up for the “superiorities” of the capitalist market economy.

While it wanted to get integrated into the world capitalism, the bureaucracy, however, desired a controlled transition without upsetting the “stabilisation”. The bureaucracy’s nightmare was an upsetting of the “stabilisation” with the outbreak of a powerful storm. Thus the bureaucracy avoided revealing its hostile feelings to the ideal of socialism as much as it could and undertook the task of creating a new confusion with the introduction of a new concept of “socialism” amalgamated with capitalist market economy. The noisy proclamations that “socialism does not exclude market economy” proved once again that the bureaucracy was a “rootless” class that would never hesitate to bargain even with the devil when it saw its future at risk. Instead of losing everything by being overthrown by the proletariat, the bureaucracy took control of the process of capitalist restoration and thus demonstrated that it was a “baseborn” class ready for scrapping its old identity to the dustbin of history and reconstructing itself on a capitalist basis.

In the new period that started in 1985 when Gorbachov took office a general mobilisation has been launched in the direction of legalising and generalising the efforts to get integrated into the capitalist world market and clearing away of the obstacles along this course. This mobilisation accelerated the disintegration in all these countries called “socialist bloc” by the Stalinist bureaucracy and brought sudden collapses to the agenda.

The collapse of the bureaucratic states in the Eastern Europe and the transition to bourgeois parliamentarism at full speed demonstrated the historically “flimsy” character of the bureaucratic states. The agreement in Yalta was annulled in Malta.

The call of Gorbachov for *perestroika* found its echo in all “socialist” countries consecutively. However, the speed with which the events unfolded stunned those ignorants of Marxist conception of socialism who daydreamed that the *restructuring* would improve “real socialism” further. On the other hand, it was merely the reflection of the petit-bourgeois mentality on the part of those who came up against Gorbachov era without condemning the bureaucratic regime. The petit-bourgeois socialists, who accepted and sanctified the existing situation for the sake of “socialism” until the crap under water came to the surface and the unofficial began to become legal with the Gorbachov era, rebelled when the reality manifested itself. It revealed the petit-bourgeois mentality which bases itself upon not the existing reality but what it wishes to see: “We wish it had remained as it was before and we could have continued to deceive ourselves!” That is the meaning of tears shed by the Stalinist socialists after the disintegration and collapse of the bureaucratic dictatorships.

Adapting themselves eagerly to the *perestroika*, the East European countries have set out to take their places in the camp of world capitalist system, breaking away from the so-called socialist camp spearheaded by the Soviet Union. The overthrow of the bureaucratic regimes by a proletarian revolution would mean that the dominant bureaucracy would vanish once and for all, in return for nothing, leaving the stage of history for the proletariat. Yet, in a process of restructuring coupled with incorporation into international capitalism new advantages would still be coming out even if the bureaucracy has lost its former position, which was based on one-party dictatorship in the bureaucratic regime. Thus an open scramble took place among the bureaucrats on how they would maintain their privileged social positions in the face of these two options for the future. The events demonstrated that the bureaucracy, as a whole, was not very much sensitive about the capitalist restoration. Its main interest was to secure its own future in one way or another. Therefore, the real scramble among the bureaucracy was about what shape the integration into capitalism would take, what political changes would it bring, what political decisions would not damage their interests etc.

Thus no voice of opposition to the capitalist restoration with socialist intentions was heard among the bureaucracy, neither in the East European countries which promptly became integrated into the bourgeois political system, nor in China where democratic mass demonstrations were suppressed bloodily, nor in Romania where Ceausescu’s head was offered to the international capitalism in return for transformation, nor in the USSR where the disorder on the basis of change still continues. Therefore, both the “conservative” and the “reformist” wings of the bureaucracy, as the Western press introduced, revealed that they have no fundamental differences with regard to the desire for integration into world capitalist system.

Even the most “conservative” sections of the bureaucracy had to recognise the danger of collapse awaiting the bureaucratic regime. The popular masses, crying out their rages

against the bureaucrats in the streets, tolled the bells for the collapse of the bureaucratic regimes, announcing that it would no more keep on going as it was before. The events since 1989 have shown both the “conservative” and the “reformist” sections of the bureaucracy how far they can go. “The conservatives” have seen that they could save nothing by insisting on the old system. As in the most recent example of Albania, the attitude of Ramiz Alia-type bureaucrats demonstrated that the bureaucracy was a class in the process of collapse and that those who want to survive should seek the salvation in liberal reforms (the reforms they seemed to stand against for some time). Thus the Stalinists’ flimsy interpretation of the concept “conservative” as the “conservation of the socialist system” completely lost its credibility. As for the so-called “reformists”, it was revealed that the bureaucratic system could not be improved through reforms, that the liberal reforms could not be a vaccine of youth and that these could bring nothing but the collapse of the decomposing bureaucratic regime.

Those sections of the bureaucracy who are impotent to abandon the liberal reforms, but also fearful of collapse, as in the case of Gorbachov, proved, with their wavering attitudes, that they were unable to gain confidence neither of their people nor of the international bourgeoisie in the long run. That the impossibility to improve the bureaucratic regime through reforms became apparent, propelled, on the one hand, those sectors of the bureaucracy that are highly expectant of benefiting the rapid capitalist restoration (like Yeltsin) to become openly bourgeois. On the other hand, it propelled the other sectors fearful of the collapse of the bureaucratic regime to control the process by military measures and oppressive means.

The mist created by the winds of change in the “socialist bloc” blurred mostly the minds of the proletariat in these countries. Because of the suffocating atmosphere caused by the years of unbearable bureaucratic one-party dictatorship, these people were in desperate need of democracy like oxygen. Although the bureaucracy’s “glasnost” seemed like complementing the missing part (democracy) of “socialism” to some, soon it became evident that it was no more than a new trickery of the bureaucracy. In fact, glasnost was a hoodwinking attempt in order to prevent the working class from conquering the democracy by its own direct action. Under the cover of a pretended democratisation the bureaucracy wanted to make the working class believe that the economic liberalisation leading to capitalism is a salvation!

Hence, the perestroika of Gorbachovs could not have been without “glasnost”. The cynical steps taken by the bureaucracy towards integration into capitalism could not have been foisted on the proletariat without a pretended democracy show, which served to deceive the proletariat: “If you want glasnost, then accept liberalisation!” This is how the “reformist” bureaucracy conducted the mass mobilisation in order to carry out its plans. Briefly, in this process where the plight of the working-class and toilers is deteriorated, and which brought unemployment and high prices, the bureaucracy beguiled the popular masses with glasnost and thus condemned them to support the liberal economic change. In the absence of a revolutionary leadership and organisation both in these countries and on a world scale to motivate the proletariat in the direction of a proletarian revolution, the popular masses easily fell into this trap of the bureaucrats who are now becoming

bourgeois.

In the first place the East European countries experienced a rapid, staggering change. In the process, the former stars of the bureaucracy and the new ones who came onto the stage as heralds of bourgeois political system flushed and waned one by one. Most of them are now forgotten. The “conservative” bureaucrats of the evening woke up as the “reformists” of the morning. In the end the old political systems based on the bureaucratic one-party dictatorships in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, East Germany, Poland and Romania collapsed. East Germany ceased to exist, uniting with the bourgeois Germany. With the liquidation of the former political system, multi-party bourgeois parliamentarism was launched in these countries. The entire legal obstacles on the way to capitalist integration were successively eliminated. And what is left behind are the kind of problems about how the European capitalism would assimilate these countries with economies on the rocks.

Those socialists who sought to understand the change in East Europe in terms of the dilemma “either revolution or counter-revolution” could not be credible at all. Neither they could have been. Because in order to be able to describe the change in the Eastern Europe as a revolution, the toiling masses must have stood up with a view to seizing power and proceeded by forming their own organisations. However, they could not help but serving as the mass support for the interior and exterior forces acting in the direction of capitalist restoration and bourgeois political system.

Nor were the events in Eastern Europe a counter-revolution from the standpoint of the proletariat. Because of the character of the old regime and of the political power, this change could be taken as a counter-revolution only from the point of view of the bureaucrats and their offshoots, politicians, who saw their interests in the preservation of the old bureaucratic system. However, one could not interpret the collapse of the bureaucratic regimes, which were obstacles erected before the proletarian revolution, as a counter-revolution from the standpoint of the proletariat. Despite the palace coups carried out by the bureaucrats themselves in order to put an end to the bureaucratic political regime might have been supported by the world bourgeoisie, the proletariat had no common interest with Ceausescu.

After all, what should be the main point to be underscored by those socialists intended to defend the interests of the proletariat is the indisputably bureaucratic character of the regime in these countries which, even before the recent developments, had nothing in common with a workers’ state, i.e. a workers’ democracy. Therefore, the debate as to whether the disintegration and collapse of the bureaucratic regimes was a “revolution or counter-revolution” makes no sense from the point of view of advancing the proletarian revolution.

Of course the situation with the USSR and China, as countries of enormous importance on a world scale, is different. In these countries, there are bureaucracies that have pursued their rule despite world capitalism and that have gained an enormous power on a world scale thanks to their bureaucratic power. These ruling bureaucracies are embodied in

the huge party and state machinery, in the existence of giant armies. That means that the bureaucratic sovereignty in these countries, contrary to the East European countries, is not a flimsy shirt to be thrown away easily.

As with the solution of the problem of nationalities in the USSR, the problem has been transformed into an insurmountable dilemma for the global bourgeoisie and the Gorbachov administration which is in close collaboration with it. The direct dominance of the world capitalism over the nascent Russian market and a political stabilisation is desired at the same time. Stability is needed for the foreign capital to invest in these countries. But in order the USSR to achieve stabilisation the economic situation must be improved. How will it be done? When the interrelated factors are considered, it seems that there is as if a vicious circle, a chaos, prevailing. Although it is impossible to foreknow the course of events, we can say this: As once Trotsky noted, it is impossible for the bureaucratic sovereignties to overcome their crises through liberal reforms.

The only solution that will remove the chaos created by the disintegration of the bureaucratic regimes in vast lands of the USSR and China is a triumphant proletarian revolution. And this is also the only way that the great damage that is being done, and will be done, by capitalism in these lands as in the rest of the world can be prevented. Neither attempts of military coup to prevent the collapse of the bureaucratic regime nor the march of the process of capitalist restoration can stop the unrest in these countries.³¹¹

The disintegration of the bureaucratic regimes destroys and overturns the “stability” of the cold war period, the fake stability that found its expression in the formulation “peaceful co-existence”. Although this situation might whet the appetite of the imperialist countries for a re-division of the world, the end of the “stability” might also become the beginning of a new process that would trigger world revolution. That is why Marxists are concerned with the disintegration of the bureaucratic regimes. Apart from how the process of capitalist restoration will develop in two vast countries like the USSR and China or whether the world capitalism will eventually be able to devour these two giants, the most important thing to be underlined is the need to overthrow these bureaucratic regimes by a proletarian revolution, which are being disintegrated by the ongoing

311 **Additional Footnote:** It is appropriate to briefly remind the events after these lines were written.

The attempt of military coup in August 1991 by certain sections of the bureaucracy who desired to preserve their former privileged positions failed. It was such a different situation that even a major section of the Army and KGB did not support the coup attempt. As Yeltsin (the representative of the now-bourgeois bureaucracy) called for resistance from the parliament building as if a champion of “democracy” for “reform” process, which meant incorporation into world capitalist system, and managed to find an echo, the attempt of military coup collapsed within three days. This also marked a new turning point in which Gorbachov, having fulfilled his function, was abandoned and replaced by Yeltsin. Accordingly, the republics of the former USSR consecutively declared their independence beginning with the Baltic States. The USSR officially ceased to exist with the signing of an agreement by the representatives of the republics in Alma-ata (Almaty) on 21 August 1991. The Commonwealth of Independent States was founded. Thus, the phenomenon of the USSR, which set its seal on history for a long period of time, passed away into the pages of history with its ample lessons, both positive and negative, to be drawn by revolutionary Marxists as an extraordinary historical experience.

process of capitalist restoration. This is the only way to prevent the world capitalism from destroying the people and the lands of these countries and turning our planet into a capitalist marsh to render the lives of future generations utterly impossible.

The more the sovereign bureaucracy in these countries exercises tyranny and oppression over its own peoples on the domestic plane, the more it develops its relations and dealings with the world bourgeoisie on the international plane. Therefore, the existence of these sovereign bureaucracies is completely incompatible with the interests of the proletariat. These powers must be overthrown by the historical action of the working class. That they have continued their existence until today does not mean that the historical gains of the proletariat are preserved. Because the sovereign bureaucracy is a kind of power that empties, annihilates or hinders the gains. In conclusion, the bureaucratic dictatorships that existed during a certain period of history in countries like the USSR and China, are the historical realities which make the revolution necessary as they impede the march of the proletarian revolution, as Trotsky once noted in his analysis of the Russian tsarist autocracy.

Chapter 11

The Conclusions Drawn from the Historical Experience

1. The historical experience proved what the Marxist theory anticipated: that there is no other way than the fight of the proletariat in power to ensure the perpetuation of revolution on a world scale in order its social revolution to proceed, against those petit-bourgeois trends that would seek to contain the revolution within national boundaries. Any capitulation to petit-bourgeois revolutionism, to the petit-bourgeois trend of “national socialism” means to condemn the revolution to death.

2. It is impossible for the workers’ powers in any kind of countries, whether economically backward or advanced, to survive on their own or in isolation with one another for a prolonged period of time. And, unless the world revolution makes headway in advanced capitalist countries with the outbreak of revolutions so as to strike the capitalist system in its heart, the chance of isolated revolutions in backward countries to survive is objectively limited. Although it may be relatively easier, under certain conditions, to achieve the political revolution in backward countries, it is, on the other hand, extremely difficult to preserve the power and make the social revolution proceed. As a matter of fact, it is impossible in the last analysis, unless the world revolution helps.

3. Historical experience verifies the Marxist theory. As the proletarian revolution by its nature implies surpassing capitalism, Marx, rightfully, focused his attention on the question of revolution in the advanced capitalist countries. However, when he analysed the sharpening contradictions of tsarist Russia, he also considered that the revolution could break out in such countries without waiting for Europe and this, in turn, could stimulate the revolution in Europe. That the proletariat coming to power on a backward economic and cultural foundation such as in tsarist Russia can only survive thanks to the proletarian powers to be established in advanced countries is one of the basic premises of Marxism. Therefore, the outbreak of the proletarian revolution in Russia in 1917 does not mean that Marx was mistaken or the world revolution, henceforth, will always follow a similar course. On the contrary, the process from the October 1917 to this day signifies that Marx was not mistaken and unless the world revolution makes headway in advanced capitalist countries, the unilateral efforts of the proletariat of backward countries would not be sufficient to save the revolution viewed in a historical perspective.

4. The revolutionary explosion of 1917 in Russia forced the proletariat into power,

although Russia was not ripe in terms of historical-social conditions that would constitute the material basis of a proletarian power. While it was correct, under those conditions, on the part of the Bolsheviks to give a leadership to the revolutionary proletariat for it to set up its class dictatorship, one must not, on the other hand, ignore the fact that the events during those years that followed the October 1917 testify to the historical rightfulness of Engels' concern expressed in his lines written in 1853:

I have a feeling that one fine day, thanks to the helplessness and spinelessness of all the others, our party will find itself forced into power, whereupon it will have to enact things that are not immediately in our own, but rather in the general, revolutionary and specifically petty-bourgeois interest; in which event, spurred on by the proletarian *populus* and bound by our own published statements and plans — more or less wrongly interpreted and more or less impulsively pushed through in the midst of party strife — we shall find ourselves compelled to make communist experiments and leaps which no-one knows better than ourselves to be untimely. One then proceeds to lose one's head — only *physique parlant* I hope —, a reaction sets in and, until such time as the world is capable of passing *historical* judgement of this kind of thing, one will be regarded, not only as a brute beast, which wouldn't matter a rap, but, also as *bête*, and that's far worse. I don't very well see how it could happen otherwise. In a backward country such as Germany which possesses an advanced party and which, together with an advanced country such as France, becomes involved in an advanced revolution, at the first serious conflict, and as soon as there is *real danger*, the turn of the advanced party will inevitably come, and this in any case will be *before* its normal time. However, none of this matters a rap; the main thing is that, should this happen, our party's rehabilitation in history will already have been substantiated in advance in its *literature*.³¹²

5. Does not whole human history marches with victories as well as defeats such that teach the oppressed and exploited masses how to win?

The experience indicates that the outbreak of socialist revolution in a relatively backward country before advanced countries was not the result of voluntary decision of individuals but of certain objective conditions in the historical process. Therefore, it is not the business of revolutionaries to get involved in a pedantic debate as to whether "it should or not have taken place". The point is to proceed forward by learning from an already accomplished fact. The entire historical experience must be comprehended as part of the progress of the struggle of the proletariat for emancipation, which displays a helical nature with reverses and leaps.

There has never been, and will never be, a revolution that alters everything at once and marches forward on the basis of victories alone. This is all the more the case with the world proletarian revolution, whose aim is to put a definite end to the contradictions generated by the five-thousand-year-old class society, to the exploitation of man by man, showing that the task of proletarian revolution will never be easy at all.

It is impossible to agree with those views which argue that the events since 1917 October

312 Marx and Engels, Engels to Joseph Weydemeyer in New York (12 April 1853), *MECW* Volume 39, p.308-9

Revolution necessitate a “revision” of Marxist perspectives, in other words, that the theory “must now be reconstructed” in light of practice experienced so far. Because, what has been experienced did not come about as a result of applying the necessary premises of Marxism, but, on the contrary, of infringing them. This was the confirmation, by way of refuting the opposite, of the correctness of the fundamental perspectives of Marxism. The historical experience verifies the Marxist prognosis that the proletarian revolutions could return to the starting-point again and again in order to overcome the deficiencies and put an end to the errors until they find out the accurate course.

... proletarian revolutions, ... constantly criticize themselves, constantly interrupt themselves in their own course, return to the apparently accomplished, in order to begin anew; they deride with cruel thoroughness the half-measures, weaknesses, and paltriness of their first attempts, seem to throw down their opponents only so the latter may draw new strength from the earth and rise before them again more gigantic than ever, recoil constantly from the indefinite colossalness of their own goals -- until a situation is created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves call out: *Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*

6. With the setting up of the bureaucratic regime symbolised in the personality of Stalin, the historical movement of transition from capitalism to socialism in the Soviet Union ceased to exist in reality. Despite this reality, the process under the bureaucratic dictatorship was identified with “socialism”, which dealt a very heavy blow to the revolutionary fight of the world proletariat. In order to recover from the consequences of this blow, the fundamental difference, the antagonism, between the Stalinist conception of “socialism in one country” and the Marxist conception of socialism must clearly be explained to the proletariat.

Perhaps the fact that those years that passed with the fairy-tale of “socialism in one country” under the Stalinist dictatorship did nothing but verify the genius prognosis of Marx and Engels might be the most meaningful answer to the petit-bourgeois conception of “national socialism”:

And, on the other hand, this development of productive forces (which itself implies the actual empirical existence of men in their world-historical, instead of local, being) is an absolutely necessary practical premise because without it want is merely made general, and with destitution the struggle for necessities and all the old filthy business would necessarily be reproduced; and furthermore, because only with this universal development of productive forces is a universal intercourse between men established, which produces in all nations simultaneously the phenomenon of the “propertyless” mass (universal competition), makes each nation dependent on the revolutions of the others, and finally has put world-historical, empirically universal individuals in place of local ones. Without this, (1) communism could only exist as a local event; (2) the forces of intercourse themselves could not have developed as universal, hence intolerable powers: they would have remained home-bred conditions surrounded by superstition; and (3) each extension of intercourse would abolish local communism. Empirically, communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples “all at once” and simultaneously, which presupposes the universal development of productive forces and the world intercourse bound up

with communism.³¹³

7. The main thing to be judged from the point of view of historical experience is not Stalin as a person, but the Stalinist conception of socialism, personified in Stalin and totally alien to the proletarian socialism. This conception is the “nationalist” conception of narrow-minded, selfish petit-bourgeois mentality characterised by its fear from the idea of world revolution.

Stalinism, like all social-political phenomena, is, in the last analysis, a product of objective conditions determined by the given historical conditions. It was not the will of a single person that altered the course of the history. There were strong objective factors to affect the course of events in a direction that is unfavourable for the interests of the proletariat. That the proletarian revolution took place in a backward country like Russia and that the world revolution could not proceed on the basis of revolutions in advanced countries created a favourable ground that would enable narrow-minded leaders in the type of Stalin, moulded with petit-bourgeois spirit and culture, to gain influence.

This course of events could be reversed only if there would have been such events that would develop and strengthen the world proletarian movement. Nevertheless, the progress of world revolution in Europe came to a halt and this gave a historic opportunity to Stalins. Their seizing of this historic opportunity, in turn, constituted a subjective impediment on the progress of the world revolution.

In reality, from 1917 October Revolution to the historical turning point when Stalinism managed to establish its absolute rule, there was a cut-throat struggle taking place in the USSR between those subjective elements who were acting to carry the revolution forward (the revolutionary leaders like Lenin and Trotsky who had matured and steered on the basis of long international revolutionary experience; the Bolshevik revolutionaries who clung to the proletarian fight following the ideas of these leaders) and those subjective elements who represented the backward tendencies (Stalin-type “revolutionaries” who were product of the petit-bourgeois soil of Russia with an ingrained “nationalist” understanding of socialism; the narrow-minded leaders who consider that the point is not to change the world, but to rule an apparatus, who do not seek to gain superiority by revolutionary ideas, but by bringing into line the individuals through administrative means).

Because the given objective conditions were less favourable for the progressive elements, such a leader in the type of Stalin and those aparatchiki in his command could dominate the party and the state. From then on Stalinism turned into a *subjective factor* affecting the course of the world revolution. Stalinism drew the communist parties to a conception of socialism which is based on the conciliationist line of the Second International, to the policies of “people’s front” which means conciliation with the bourgeoisie, to the programme of revolution in stages. The Marxist perspective of the social revolution of the proletariat, the perspective of permanent revolution, was strangled; workers of the world were condemned, on the basis of the monstrosity called “socialism in one

313 Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p.37.

country”, to a strategy in which socialism was identified with a bureaucratic campaign of industrialisation.

8. The fact that there is an objective explanation for the appearance of Stalinism on the stage of history can never be used as an excuse to rid Stalin of his sins. On the other hand, that such a tendency hostile to the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat is symbolised in the person of Stalin must never serve as an excuse to gloss over the problem by a light approach of comparing the rights and wrongs of a “single person”. The question is not the bookkeeping of the rights and wrongs of a mortal person in the course of history. The question is to explicitly admit what an impediment the tendency of Stalinism constituted on the progress of the world revolution, how it blackened the fight for socialism. It is the question of condemning such a tendency without slightest hesitation.

Only a philistine who fears from revolution, from changing the world, can shy away from admitting the truth. It is they who might try to palm off an outcome which must not be accepted from the point of view of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, as a “success” in order to ease themselves and escape from the struggle. This is the predicament of the apologetics of Stalinism who still insist on the old.

But the facts are merciless! The results of the Stalinist sort of socialism have been revealed all out with its collapse. And it is the task of the revolutionary Marxists to convey the lessons of the historical experience to the struggle of the proletariat and to reveal the true face of Stalinism which counterfeitingly identified itself with Leninism.

9. Should we be mere spectators of history by putting all the blame on the historical “inevitability” for the fact that the course of events acted to clear the way for Stalin-type leaders for a certain period of time, rather than leaders like Lenin and Trotsky? Absolutely no! On the contrary, despite its negative aspects, this historical experience, with its richness, enables us to comprehend the world in which we live, showing us what is to be done in order to change it.

The domination of Stalin-like people for a certain period of time in the course of historical process never eliminates the importance of the conscious intervention of the revolutionary vanguard in the process and of its historical function. On the contrary, it reveals its bitter importance in a most dramatic way.

10. The Stalinist brand of socialism is destined to get exhausted at a certain point of its development and yield to international capitalism. Given the domination of capitalist world market, the aim of catching up with and surpassing the world capitalism within national framework is a reactionary utopia which has got nothing to do with the Marxist conception of socialism, without any chance of materialising.

It is the Gorbachov period when the bill of the sixty-year reactionary utopia was paid. In this context, there is nothing surprising in Gorbachovs’ or Yeltsins’ endeavours to get integrated into international capitalism. This is exactly the destination where such a bureaucratic regime can arrive.

In a moment when the bureaucratic regimes in the so-called “socialist” countries went bankrupt as a result of a prolonged process, the dominant bureaucracy faced a dilemma: either being swept out of the pages of history by the struggle of the working class or reconstructing its privileged social position on a different basis (i.e. the bourgeois order) by getting integrated into world capitalism and turning bourgeois.

Thus the principal task is to teach the world proletariat that these bureaucratic sovereignties with all kinds of their leaders, Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachov, etc., are enemies of the struggle of the world proletariat for emancipation.

11. Humanity moves ahead by correcting its own mistakes in making its history. However, this progress has never been spontaneous, nor will it be. Marxism is not necessary for revolutions to break out, but in order proletarian revolutions to succeed and proceed, a leadership is necessary, capable of equipping the proletariat with the revolutionary Marxist consciousness.

12. The experience so far does not prove the bankruptcy of Marxism but of such a brand of “socialism” that represents its negation. Nevertheless, the collapse of Stalinism does not automatically bring along a rise of revolutionary Marxism. However, as long as the unbearable consequences of capitalism exist, the vindication of Marxism, the necessity of resolving the social contradictions of our age in favour of the proletariat and the suppressed, will be coming to light time and again.

The founders of Marxism did not have a limited vision of just the 20-30 years ahead of themselves. They dwelled on the problems and perspectives of an entire historical epoch, i.e. the age of proletarian revolutions, which would put an end to capitalism and enable the transition to classless society. To the extent that capitalism did not develop into a world system linking up the entire world, the profound content of the theoretical prognoses of Marx and Engels with regard to future could not be comprehended adequately. Nevertheless, in the period after the death of Marx and Engels until the present day, their prognoses with regard to future have become much more understandable in a more vivid and profound way, as capitalism turned into a tremendous world system, connected the destinies of nations to each other, made the national borders become reactionary, brought capital and labour face to face on a world scale.

13. The current social unrest throughout the world is the universal-historical struggle of the past and the future, of the right and wrong. Unless the revolutionary internationalist content of the emancipation struggle of the proletariat is understood correctly and a corresponding struggle is organised on an international level, the limited revolutionary efforts on a national scale will prove inadequate.

14. In her assessments on the October Revolution, Rosa Luxemburg stated that the Bolsheviks’ unintentional mistakes forced upon them by the pressure of the objective conditions were fair enough, but “they [would] render a poor service to international socialism for the sake of which they have fought and suffered; ... [when] they want to place in its storehouse as new discoveries all the distortions prescribed in Russia by

necessity and compulsion.”³¹⁴ The danger she pointed out came into being when the rule of Stalinism was founded. While putting an end to the power of the working class, Stalinism entirely distorted the worldview of the working class, i.e. Marxism. And the order of the bureaucracy has been theorised as “socialism” for long years.

And thus lies replaced the truth and unpleasant realities were hidden behind a mist, an illusory screen. And it was this illusory screen that was presented as the superiority of socialism for years. However, the sharp arrows of historical reality have punctured this screen. In the face of this fact those people who could not face the shock are shedding tears for the gone screen instead of facing the reality however bitter it is.

Yet this is not a revolutionary attitude. In order to change the world, we need to know the truth and truth alone and act on the basis of concrete reality. Remember that the most devastating for the revolution are illusions; the most useful is sincere and plain truth.

314 Rosa Luxemburg, “The Russian Revolution,” in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, p.539