

# THE BULLETIN OF MARXIST STUDIES

## CONTENTS

### INCLUDE:

DRAFT LAW ON WORKERS' MANAGEMENT - A Document  
from Czechoslovakia. First English Translation

WORKERS' STATES - PROBLEMS OF TRANSITION  
by B. Biro

TOWARDS A REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST PARTY  
by Denis Francis

THE BULLETIN OF MARXIST STUDIES

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CONTENTS

Spring 1969

Page	2	Editorial: The Tasks for Marxists
"	6	Workers' States - Problems of Transition by B. Biro
"	21	Document: Draft Law on Workers' Management - Czechoslovakia
"	25	Towards A Revolutionary Socialist Party by Denis Francis

This Issue

The present issue is somewhat smaller than originally planned. This is because we have had several other items submitted for publication which had they all been included would have made the current number impossibly large. We have decided therefore to issue this number and bring out another number in a short time.

We feel that the article by B. Biro is an important event in the short life of our journal and in the British Marxist movement. For the first time in many years a serious attempt is made to grapple with the very real problems - political and methodological - that transitional societies present to the workers movement. The scope and complexity of the issues has forced us in this instance to carry over this particular article into our next issue. We hope our reader will bear with us and understand our editorial problems in this respect.

The document from Czechoslovakia needs little mention, other than to say that publication does not necessarily imply approval. We publish it as a service to our readers.

The article by Denis Francis is taken from the December issue of the Australian journal International. Although some of this article is directly relevant to Australia, the majority of it has a direct bearing on questions that face Marxists here in Britain. Without endorsing all of Comrade Francis's views, we feel that he has attempted to break out of the stereotyped concepts of a revolutionary socialist party and have a fresh look at the question. This is an issue that follows our own concerns, and we feel that the article will be a contribution to the present discussion going on here in Britain.

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the editors.

## THE TASKS FOR MARXISTS

With the present disastrous electoral position of the Labour Party there is a mood growing among some sections of the left that needs to be discussed and ventilated. This mood could be summed as 'if the Labour Party is smashed at the next election, this will be a good thing because it will leave the way clear for revolutionaries'. Such assumptions or moods need to be discussed in all their implications.

Let us first begin by putting into question the basic assumption, i.e. the defeat of the Labour Party at the next general election. Whilst as Marxists we should not fall into the error of accepting all the findings and conclusions of the psephologists, we should neither ignore them. Despite the present situation all the electoral cards are stacked in favour of the Government (any government). Moreover, given the possibility of a favourable turn in the economic situation this year, it is still not absolutely certain that Labour will go down to defeat in 1970 or '71.

However, let us grant that it will be very difficult to climb out of such a catastrophic run of by-elections, and the devastating local election results of last year. Let us also grant that it would be hard to find a comparable situation as has been shown in the opinion polls over the last few months. Granted all this, the situation does indeed look very gloomy for the Labour Party. But does it look so much better for Marxists?

It is argued that the Social Democrats act as a brake on the development of the revolutionary process by containing opposition within the general framework of capitalism; therefore all that is necessary is to smash these institutional blocks to clear the way for the revolutionary party. Such simplistic thinking has resulted in the creation of more abortive groups on the left than perhaps any other single factor. Insufficient consideration has been given to analyse the ways in which reformist organisations maintain their dominance, and why the many attempts to build a revolutionary party have failed. It is quite insufficient simply to launch a frontal attack on the Labour Party and proclaim the new revolutionary party, or indeed the revolution. The truth is that the stability of capitalism depends not only on the presence of transmission belts of bourgeois hegemony such as the Labour Party, but also on the absence of correct revolutionary politics.

Let us return to the question of the next general election. If the Labour Party suffers a catastrophic defeat at the hands of the Tory Party, what are the likely consequences and implications? These rather depend on the actual situation. Let us recall a few historical facts about the 1931 debacle. Firstly, in terms of seats the Labour Party was almost wiped out, plummeting from 287 to 52. But in terms of votes it only lost two million compared with 1929, and still had more votes than in 1924 when it formed its first administration.

A similar situation could arise at the next election, i.e. Labour could be reduced to a rump in the Commons without necessarily losing an equal proportion of its votes. The vagaries of the system always

over magnify the victory of the winners in terms of seats. But should the Labour Party not only suffer a great loss of seats but also of votes, this would present a rather different situation. In the first eventuality it is true that it would mean a return to a more reactionary government, and a more right-wing climate, but the Tories would still have to tread somewhat warily; although there can be no doubt they would extend many of the avenues opened up by Wilson, e.g. new anti-strike laws. But in the second case, one would expect to see far more draconian measures, and the institution of an authoritarian state, with all that that entails. This means that far from there being a danger of a Powellite cum fascist regime - which would entail extra-parliamentary organs to smash the trade unions - there would be an emasculation and shackling of the unions in a perfectly legal and 'democratic' manner, no doubt all done to the tune of 'Land of Hope and Glory'.

This result, for Marxists, would be devastating. Not as some fondly hope a situation of euphoria. Can anyone seriously think that at that stage there would automatically result a swing by large sections of the working class behind one or other of the sects of the British left? (It is noteworthy that even the tremendous upsurge in the working class activity in May '68 in France, proved incapable of sloughing off the dominance of reformist parties, in spite of the clear-cut betrayal of the leadership.)

Let us re-examine the situation. It is perfectly true that there are many elements present today which make the social and political situation unstable. These elements can be enumerated, 1) a general tendency for western capitalism's secular boom to slow down, 2) the re-emergence of significant numbers of unemployed, 3) a radicalisation among large sections of youth, 4) widespread disillusionment with the present Labour Government, 5) attacks on trade unions which evoke partial responses. The French events indicated that a combination of such, and allied, factors can generate an explosive situation. But what were the crippling factors? They were (and are) the absence of an organic cadre or vanguard with a clearly defined strategy, the low level of consciousness among even the most militant sections of the working class and the lack of even a sizable section of the working class willing to accept the leadership of such Marxist revolutionaries as there are around.

In sum, this means that even now the working class is dominated by bourgeois ideology. Only at rare, split second, intervals, has there been a gleam of light to suggest that this is being broken. In the large majority the working class is still wedded to seeking solutions within the given framework. Those sections of the class who today have turned away from Labour have done so to become apathetic, indifferent or downright cynical towards politics. There is no evidence as yet that any appreciable section has turned towards revolutionary ideas. On the contrary, workers who decide that there is no difference between the parties are likely to go even further to the right in their search for solutions. Thus we get vicious right-wing movements of the type of Wallace and Powell. The existence of such movements indicate a minor crisis in the system, but can

only be viewed by alarm by all those except fatalists who believe there are such things as the 'final crisis of capitalism', which then inevitably brings socialism in its wake. Such primitive apocalyptic visions miss out a whole series of mediations required to resolve such crises in a socialist direction. The absence of such necessary mediations at all levels both ideological and organisational, is quite frightening.

This is why we say that a catastrophic defeat along the lines of the second variant outlined above could be devastating for Marxists. Only those who are suffering from some sort of 'third period' delirium could think otherwise. To assume that the installation of an authoritarian Tory Government would pave the way for the creation of a revolutionary party is to indulge in daydreams. The German Communist Party in 1933 thought that after Hitler came to power and 'had shot his bolt' their turn would come, and it did - in concentration camps. Moreover, the historical evidence we have points to the fact that the only Communist Parties of any significance that were built after 1919 were those that arose out of a split in the main working class parties and trade unions, i.e. they were grounded in the existing labour movements. They were led, in the main, by men who already had mass influence and following. The Communist Parties that were created by sewing together a collection of sects never got off the ground. One has only to look at the history of the C.P.G.B. The only time it began to play a meaningful role was during the twenties with the growth of the Minority Movement and the Labour Left Movement. When it destroyed these it destroyed its chance to emerge from its sectarian existence.

Is the situation hopeless then? Far from it! The next few years could be very fruitful if Marxists learn to grapple with the situation correctly. We said earlier that the reason why Social Democracy dominates within the working class rests partially on the absence of correct revolutionary politics. In effect this means that it is fruitless for Marxists to now indulge in an orgy of verbal denunciations of the Labour Party, from a standpoint not understood by the working class. The way forward will only be found by supplanting bourgeois ideology in a positive and meaningful manner. Ernest Mandel summed up the question very well when he wrote -

"The capitalist 'rationalisation', the speed up, the advance in automation, neo-capitalist economic 'programming', and the concentration and accelerated fusion of enterprises all tend to shift the centre of gravity in the class struggle from disputes over the division of newly created value between capital and labour towards disputes over control and organisation of work and of the process itself. This is why the spread of the campaign for workers' control among the shop stewards in Great Britain assumes a critical importance..."

It is precisely by taking the struggle into those areas which least favour capitalist ideology that we can expect to make the greatest advances. Such campaigns need not, and do not, ignore wage questions so much as re-focus them.

It is through such work that the level of consciousness can be raised for whole sections of workers, and an ideological vanguard created that has solid and enduring roots in the working class.

If out of the defeat of the Labour Government there emerges such a vanguard it will be because Marxists have engaged and convinced workers in Glasgow, Wigan, Birmingham etc that they should direct and control, not merely their 'free' time, but also that part of their lives vital to them as workers. It will not emerge from defeating Michael Foot or other weary Tribunites in debate. Revolutionary rhetoric will not serve our purpose, only a slow, patient elaboration of basic ideas and practice, (which takes into account the existing modalities of bourgeois hegemony presently structuring working class consciousness), can succeed.

To sum up. It is very dangerous to naively expect that the self induced collapse of one institutional prison of the working class will lead to the workers dropping into our laps. The bourgeoisie has more, and worse, alternatives ready to hand. The urgent task is to build a movement capable of positively supplanting the Labour Party, before the ruling class organises itself to inflict an historical defeat on the working class, the electoral moment of which could take the form of a massive defeat of Labour at the hands of the Tories, boosting ruling class self-confidence and increasing the existing (ex hypothesis) demoralisation and isolation of the militant workers.

March 1969

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continued from page 21

15. These provisional laws - if justified in practice - along with the findings of the National Business Council, will be taken into consideration for preparation of legislation on the nature of socialist enterprise. The relations of union organisations in the forms vis-a-vis collective bodies for democratic control of the enterprise and of management will be regulated.

One can only proceed to changes in methods of organisation in firms after long reflection, fully respecting, in the course of these changes, the principles employed and adopted by the government (Government decree of April 25th 1968. No.128)

16. It is possible to proceed to the provisional installations of Workers' Councils in firms before the publication of the law on socialist enterprise, after consultation with and in agreement with, the body which in conformity with present regulations, has the right to appoint and dismiss company directors.

The Workers' Councils can be established successively in three stages according to the firms capacity, i.e. on July 1st 1968, October 1st 1968, and January 1st 1969. Prague June 6th 1968

## WORKERS' STATES - PROBLEMS OF TRANSITION

by B.Biro

It can hardly be said that the theory of regimes obtaining in such countries as the Soviet Union, has advanced much since Trotsky wrote Revolution Betrayed over thirty years ago. Indeed a vulgarisation of Trotsky's views has even occurred. This received doctrine, shared by all groups basing themselves on the Fourth International, founded by Trotsky in 1938, revolves around the Trinity of concepts (a) Workers' State; (b) Political Revolution as opposed to (c) Social Revolution. The doctrine is that in the Workers' State a bureaucratic degeneration or deformation has occurred which requires a political revolution to establish socialism proper, but that no social revolution is required because capitalist property relations have, broadly speaking, already been replaced. The objection that a Workers' State can hardly be said to exist when the workers have no rights and are tyrannised over by bureaucratic gangsters is got round by pointing out that the political form of bourgeois dictatorships can vary from parliamentary to fascist without affecting the social base of society because that is determined primarily by the economic form. Even Bonapartes who are interested only in the State and couldn't give a damn for the susceptibilities of the so-called ruling class, and dip their fingers in the till as they please, have to have a till filled up somehow, and how this is done determines the nature of society.

It is this doctrine, and in particular the idea that we can counterpose political and social revolution in our programme so slickly, that I propose to re-examine. I hope that other people will participate in a collective refining of our analytical concept in this area - and I don't pretend to offer here anything finished.

### 1.

In the first place let us just note the unfortunate ambiguity in the term 'Workers' State'. By this, of course, is meant the basic character of society as a whole. The state in the narrower sense of the word (i.e. the institutions of coercion) is acknowledged by Trotskyists not to be in the hands of the proletariat but of the party bureaucracy, which has expropriated the proletariat politically. Even so, it is held that insofar as the interests of the bureaucracy itself are connected with nationalised property, it will in some way or other be likely to defend the latter against capitalist encroachment and thus be partially a defender of proletarian interests.

So far, so good. However the neat dichotomy political/social begins to disintegrate when Trotsky argues that it is inexplicable how such a degeneration could occur solely on the political level and fill out his account of the political expropriation of the proletariat by giving this a social basis.

"This whole stratum which does not engage directly in productive labour, but administers, orders, commands, pardons and punishes -

- teachers and students we are leaving aside - must be numbered at five or six million...In the whole mass of the bureaucracy, the communists together with the Communist Youth constitute a block of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 million - at present, owing to continued purgations, rather less than more. This is the backbone of the state power. These same communist administrators are the backbone of the Party, and the Communist Youth. The former Bolshevik Party is now no longer the vanguard of the proletariat, but the political organisation of the bureaucracy.... Hypothetically, we may assume that the labour and collectivised peasant aristocracy, the Stakhanovists, the non-party 'active', trusted personages, their relatives and relatives in law, approximate the same figure we adopted for the bureaucracy, that is five to six million.... Twelve per cent, or perhaps 15 per cent of the population - that is the authentic social basis of the autocratic ruling circles. "

(1)

Thus Trotskyists always argue that even the personal dictatorship of Stalin had social roots in a stratum of society - a stratum that Trotsky had little difficulty in showing had very considerable material privileges which sharply differentiated their interests from those of the masses.

A question that immediately arises is that if even allowing for relative autonomy of the political sphere, we find this political expropriation has a social basis in such a stratum, can we talk about a merely political revolution when such a revolution would clearly involve dispossessing this stratum not only of its political expression but also of its material privileges? Especially when Trotsky computes over 12 per cent of the population may be involved?

In Revolution Betrayed Trotsky bases his argument primarily on antagonisms in the sphere of distribution flowing from a low level of productivity. However far more important than its effects on distribution will be the effect of the so-called political revolution on production itself. Trotsky doesn't stress this, partially because of the 'administrative' bent Lenin noted no doubt, partially again perhaps because of the low level of the masses in his day makes my point academic. This point is that the social character of production in the Soviet Union sets fetters on the most important productive force of all, namely the initiative and creativity of the worker himself. The completely hierarchical command structure of the Soviet economy makes the individual worker the same kind of labour-power machine and nothing else that he is in a capitalist factory. Who can doubt that a new upsurge of proletarian revolution, sweeping away bureaucratic privilege, would also restructure production itself so as to provide avenues of expression for the enthusiasm and ingenuity of the workers. It is not at all a question, as the bourgeois press and the C.P.S.U. right-wing <sup>tell us</sup> duey, of personnel changes, i.e. replacing politically reliable but stupid cadres with technically competent ones; but of the entry of an educated working class into the arena.



Such an access of strength to the productive forces again requires us to ask if it can be comprehended by a merely political revolution.

Moreover (if with some trepidation) one is also forced to speak of cultural revolution here. A new upsurge of proletarian revolution in the Soviet Union could not possibly succeed in changing organisational forms in abstraction from the forms of thought, values, and character of the population. It is perfectly clear that, in many respects, bourgeois values and ideology, superstition, religion, all kinds of vice, profoundly permeate Soviet society.

One small example from Wolfgang Leonhard's book Child of the Revolution illustrates this. He relates that in Berlin in October 1945 a communist from the West accosted him in the Central Committee building.

"I am a K.P.D. official invited here from the West. I have been given some chits for meals, but I don't know where the dining room is."

"That depends on what sort of ticket you have"

He looked at me in surprise and showed me his ticket. It was category III - a ticket for less important members of staff. I showed him the way.

"But tell me - are the meals different for different members of staff in the Central Committee?"

"Yes, of course. There are four different kinds of ticket, according to the class of work one is doing. The last two categories are for technicians and clerks."

"Yes but...aren't they all members of the Party?"

"Yes, of course. They are all certified members, including the charwomen and chauffeurs and night-watchmen."

He looked at me in astonishment and said, "Different tickets - different meals - and they are all members of the Party!"

He turned and went without another word. A moment later I heard the creak of the front door. My comrade had left the Central Committee building. Thoughtfully, I crossed the courtyard to the dining room. I went through the rooms in which Categories III and IV - the lower classes - were fed: and for the first time I had an uneasy feeling as I opened the door into the dining room reserved for our category. Here, at a table covered with a white cloth, the senior members of staff enjoyed an excellent meal of several courses. Curious, I thought, that this had never struck me before!" (2)

What is important in this example is not so much that such a hierarchy exists even in the Party - but that no-one thinks it particularly odd. Values have to change with structures - large-scale transformations of people's understanding of themselves and their social relationships, if socialism is to come out of this. In connection with these questions it is instructive to ponder the following remarks by Marx:

"Do not say that the social movement excludes the political movement. There is never a political movement that is not at the same

time social. It is only in an order of things in which there are no more classes and class antagonisms that social evolutions will cease to be political revolutions. Till then, on the eve of every general reshuffling of society, the last word of social science will always be: combat or death... (3)

It is true that Marx's main thrust here seems to be against those socialists who wish to duck the question of political confrontation. It is noteworthy however, that he does assert the contrary connection - "There is never a political movement which is not at the same time social." If one considers the violence of the confrontations that have taken place in Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, etc., one is forced to conclude we have here no 'evolution', no merely political transformation but real social antagonisms working themselves out.

#### 11.

There is a related vulgar Trotskyist belief that needs some attention before proceeding. It is held that the case of the Soviet Union and its degeneration is an 'exception' easily explicable by certain special circumstances we have no reason to expect to obtain generally - backwardness, isolation, encirclement, and so on. However, though it is obvious enough that the circumstances cited clearly conditioned the development, the 'exception' theory begins to seem over-simple when we take into account other experiences. There are now some dozen or more 'workers' states' and, although there are enormous differences between them, none of them corresponds to the expected 'model' of socialism. (This leads some undialectical thinkers of an either-or type simply to reject them as therefore capitalist, with brutal logic (formal) and capacity for flying in the face of realities.)

All of these regimes, just like the U.S.S.R. are, in various ways, in a transitional state somewhere between capitalism (or colonialism) and socialism. Indeed only abstract moralisers with no Marxist understanding, could expect otherwise than that a more or less long period of transition towards socialism is unavoidable. Furthermore this period cannot be expected to be one of continuous smooth transition. It too must have its dialectic, its periods of decline and renewal. It should be stressed that historical experience proves that any revolution inevitably enters a period of ebb, of degeneration, more or less severe according to the circumstances obtaining. There is a sense therefore in which the swift rise of bureaucracy in post-revolutionary Russia was conditioned not only by the 'allegedly exceptional conditions of the time but must also be understood, as having, in addition, endemic roots in the revolutionary process itself.

When the Left Opposition was grappling with the frightening phenomena of degeneration Rakovsky was the one who saw this most clearly and Trotsky rightly quotes his document on the subject several times in Revolution Betrayed. Rakovsky stressed in his analysis of the 'professional dangers' of power that "I do not refer here to the objective difficulties due to the whole complex of historical conditions, to the capitalist encircle-

ment on the outside, and the pressure of the petty bourgeoisie inside the country. No I refer to the inherent difficulties of any new directing class, consequent on the taking, and on the exercise of power itself, on the ability or inability to make use of it." (4)

The main such inherent feature is that proletarians do not automatically become supermen on taking power. They are the same proletarians whose behaviour before the revolution fluctuated wildly as their confidence rose and sank, as they were limited by their political and cultural experience. The revolutionary seizure of power by a previously oppressed class that has lived all its life under the hegemony of another class, represents by definition an extraordinarily high peak of activity, unity and consciousness on its part. Is it surprising that when all problems are not solved the day after taking power, the revolutionary tide begins to ebb?

Apathy, cynicism, fragmentation, selfishness, withdrawal, disperse the masses from the stage of history again, leaving behind the apparatus thrown up by them, but no longer representative of, or controlled by, the class in whose name it rules. Now the road is open for negative developments in the apparatus itself which reinforces the demoralisation of the class; bureaucratic arrogation of power and privilege, careerism, corruption and finally instead of expressing the dictatorship of the proletariat the apparatus exercises dictatorship over the proletariat. How far such tendencies actually go, of course, will be conditioned by the kind of circumstances usually cited in explaining the degeneration that took place. Also it goes without saying that we have here not simply an objective process but one which is mediated by particular people and their subjectivity - Stalin etc. - so that there is a certain openness about the situation within which area subjective factors e.g. Stalin's jealousy and suspiciousness, help to determine the outcome. Nevertheless, as Marxists, we have to recognise that the objective forces do set limits to what even the greatest individual can achieve.

It is not a question of saying that if Trotsky had been leader he would have done the same as Stalin. That is terribly abstract. For Trotsky to have been at the head of affairs, either the objective circumstances would have had to have been other than they were, or, Trotsky would have had to have been ...Stalin!

On any objective consideration in retrospect the Left Opposition was doomed to defeat. This is not to say that their struggle was worthless, that they should have helped Stalin or retired into private life. Apart from the psychological impossibility of such a course by a man like Trotsky, at the time they were not in a position to know all the relevant considerations. It was always possible that some new revolutionary breakthrough in the West might have come to the aid of the U.S.S.R., which would have changed the conditions of their struggle. Then again it could be argued that a stubborn rearguard action might ameliorate or slow-down a process of degeneration. Finally it is possible for a revolutionary tendency, even if defeated, to make a positive contribution from the long term

point of view. For when a new upsurge of the revolution comes it can go back and learn from the struggle and analyses of the heroic groups that kept alive the programme of the revolution instead of capitulating to 'realities'. That is why today Revolution Betrayed is still an important book, and why Trotskyism gains more adherents and influence yearly - because it represents not only the dying embers of one revolutionary upsurge but also a point of renewal for the future.

To return to the main point, we have enough experience of transitional regimes to see now that tendencies towards bureaucratic degeneration are endemic to the transitional situation, are internal to it and would have to be guarded against even if imperialism no longer existed.

Another notion that is found in the traditional analysis is that of "Bonapartism". However this too is not unproblematical. A "Bonapartist" regime is one that performs a balancing act between various social classes, holds only state power, and, although gaining considerable independence and privilege for itself, on collapse leaves existing class relations more or less intact.

However it is extremely implausible to argue that the Soviet bureaucracy is thus related to any social stalemate inside the U.S.S.R. so normally it is argued that it forms a "Bonapartist" mediation between imperialism and the Soviet proletariat.

This stretches an already ill-defined concept to dubious lengths. It is true that the Soviet bureaucracy accommodates itself to imperialism and demobilises world revolution by playing the 'peaceful co-existence' game. Nevertheless, although this illustrates something about the nature of the regime, I find it not plausible to use this to explain its basis. After all, any conservative national bureaucracy has to pay some attention to the international conjuncture in its policy.

All of these queries impel one to try to develop a more sophisticated methodology for analysing transitional regimes.

111.

It is necessary to grasp the fact that the historical dialectic is not one-dimensional; nor are its phases of single amplitude. Indeed it might be more accurate to speak of an infinitely large number of dialectics, of differing social levels (economic, ideological etc.); of differing historical specificity (contrary to Marcuse in Reason and Revolution there is no reason to suppose that with the abolition of classes dialectic becomes obsolete); and of differing generality with regard to space and time. (Thus from the point view of a very general historical dialectic proletarian revolution may represent a simple moment of transition, but judged internally it reveals enormous complexities which require a more specific historical analysis to supplement the other.) Those who think all that dialectics has to say about the transition from capitalism to socialism is bourgeoisie v. proletariat results in classless society, or relations of private property v. socialised productive forces results in a new

mode of production, or even both, inevitably fall into mechanistic or fatalistic views with regard to questions posed at more concrete levels; they tend to reduce the related but autonomous dialectics to a single simple contradiction; and they treat transitional phases with the criteria of formal abstract categories (often of highly 'moral' content) instead of grasping their historicity, of seeing them as a moment of a development, and of analysing their specific contradictions.

What I am pointing to here, to put it crudely, is the 'chinese box' character of the historical dialectic - we have totalities within totalities, dialectics with dialectics.

This involves not only seeing that the transitional period has its own phases and stages, but also of seeing that an epoch like capitalism is not just a stage of history but has its own history, i.e. is made up of a series of transitions. It does not just grow smoothly up to its limit, it has its own internal dialectic in which various subordinate contradictions work themselves out and various fetters are overcome. The Common Market project, for example, is an outstanding case of an attempt by the more far-sighted European capitalists to overcome the fetters of tariffs and piddling markets, and to resolve the contradictions between national capitals, by creating European firms in a European market.

Once one gets away from concentrating on the single, simple, global contradiction and begins to develop the idea of dialectics of different levels of generality it begins to seem less extraordinary that post-revolutionary societies may exhibit all kinds of contradictions, and may ossify into various forms of partial supercession of previous conditions, which forms then become partial fetters on further development.

The disjunction political revolution/ social revolution obscures this reality because it locates the trouble (at any rate in its terminology) at only one level, thus introducing a radical discrepancy between this level and others. In fact a more sophisticated analysis would surely show contradictions at other levels. The terminology is an attempt to express theoretically the progressive character of Soviet society over capitalism; but because of poverty-stricken methodological assumptions it can only visualise being able to do this by locating its 'good side' in the base and its 'bad side' in the superstructure.

There is a utopian apocalyptic strain in Marxism that views socialism as the final resolution of all contradictions. Personally I take such talk with a grain of salt, preferring to regard such a resolution as an asymptomatic limit never reached. In particular I reject Marcuse's claim that since dialectic was developed to analyse the history of class societies, socialism makes it obsolete and a new development must be understood as a 'purely rational' one. I see no warrant for reducing the manifold contradictions of social life to a single class-based dialectic. If one considers this allegedly purely rational social development, would it not presuppose that social structures were perfectly transparent, that individuals knew exactly what all other individuals were thinking and had

instant means of mediating their activity. (There is also the relation of society to Nature to consider). This looks suspiciously like the reinsertion of Hegel's absolute.

Surely we must recognise that although you can define socialism's development as proceeding from the free decisions of the voluntarily associated producers, this is easier said than done. In any complex society there is always the possibility that the institutions that mediate the activity of people can grow away from them, become so independent and autonomous that eventually antagonisms begin to make themselves felt, requiring a new adjustment in order to restore harmony. (cf. Lenin on the Trade Union controversy).

The language of the last sentence has an obvious bearing on the question of alienation. Does alienation exist in the 'Workers' States' - and if so, what? Once again one has to guard against reductionism and formalism. On the one hand, at the Kafka Conference organised by the Czechs some years ago, the East German delegates stoutly maintained that there was no alienation existing in their country because alienation is obviously a characteristic of capitalism. On the other hand, the ultra-left C.L.R. James agrees with them, but concludes that because alienation obviously exists in these societies they must be capitalist! +

These complementary views clearly rest on the crude assumption that with the expropriation of the capitalists all problems, including that of alienation are solved.

It is necessary to stress that the category of alienation is an extremely general one which permeates capitalist society in manifold ways, expressing itself in a number of different manifestations. Very generally one can define a process, or state, of alienation as one in which certain expressions of human power, or activity, become lost to their originator, assume an independent form, and become external, hostile determinants of his behaviour.

The concept has been used in the critique of religion (e.g. in Feurbach), of the state (in Marx's critique of Hegel), of Capital (1844 Mss. and Capital) of commodities (Capital again, especially section on Commodity Fetishism) and in the critique of capitalist consumption (e.g. Fromm). It is clear from the generality of the definition that, although alienation, reification, fetishism and the rest are especially acute in capitalist society, one can apply the category to situations of different historical specificity by discerning the particular ways, the specific structures, which can helpfully be described in these terms without assuming we are thereby dealing with identical cases.

The form of alienation that is historically specific to capitalism is that which expresses itself in the rule of private property, or more concretely, of capital and of commodities, which are, of course, products of alienated labour. The relations between men in production are mediated by one form of estrangement, namely capital. The relations between producers and consumers is mediated by a related form of estrangement, - the

+ see International Socialism No.16

fetishism of commodities. These mediations constitute the profoundly anti-human content of capitalist society. That is, if one asks about two men going into a factory why <sup>one</sup> can boss the other about, the answer cannot be given in terms of any human characteristics such as superior intelligence, force of personality, or whatever. The answer has to be given in terms of their different relation to the non-human entity, capital. That is why Marx so often talks, not about the rule of the capitalists, but of the 'rule of dead matter'. Capital mediates and even seems to determine, the relations of one man to another. Of course in this relationship the capitalist finds confirmation of his power, while the worker is subjected. Even more ironic is that capital itself is <sup>the</sup> nothing but crystallised labour so that the worker is being subjected to <sup>the</sup> externalised product of his activity. The more he works, the more products he produces for the capitalist the more surplus value is realised by the sale of these products, the greater grows the store of capital possessed by the capitalist, the non-possession of which determines the workers' subordination. So we see that in his activity the worker continually reproduces the means of his own domination.

'Dead matter' also rules in the sphere of commodity exchange. Relations between producers and consumers are mediated by and disguised as relations between things. The latter relations, the exchange values, Marx says are determined 'behind the backs' of the producers, and, in association with the general compulsion to accumulate capital, condition what is produced.

Now, what happens when all the important concentrations of capital, and external trade, are expropriated by the revolution and constituted as state property? Clearly this must have a drastic effect on the laws of motion of the economy, it must profoundly modify the character of the estrangements constitutive of previous times, and represents the first step in the supersession of specifically capitalist forms of estrangement. It can hardly be said that the accumulation of capital, and the movement of the commodity market determines production in the U.S.S.R. in the same crucial way that they do in capitalism, though clearly they still play a role of greater or lesser extent (in the case of Yugoslavia, to a greater extent.) For example the domination of man over man is now no longer mediated directly by property ownership - rather we have an administrative hierarchy (such as you might have in the Army or Civil Service.)

It is true of course that state property still plays a mediatory role and that this constitutes a form of estrangement. However (just as private property itself as a matter of fact) this moment is an historical necessity. Trotsky says on this question:

"In order to become social, private property must 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 .... 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..."(5)

Clearly though, in the case of the U.S.S.R. State property is more than a convenient juridical mediation, because of the role played by the bureaucracy which Trotsky did not hesitate to compare with the fascist bureaucracy. There has always been a somewhat intractable problem of locating the State bureaucracy in the class structure of society. Marx criticised very early on Hegel's idealisation of bureaucracy, and writes in a striking passage in The Eighteenth Brumaire of "this executive power with its enormous bureaucratic and military organisation, with its ingenious state machinery, embracing wide strata, with a host of officials numbering half a million, besides an army of another half million, this appalling parasitic body which emeshes the body of French society like a net and chokes all its pores."

This is very reminiscent of Trotsky's description of the Soviet bureaucracy. However the problem is compounded here by two further features:

"In no other regime has a bureaucracy ever such a degree of independence from the dominating class. In bourgeois society, the bureaucracy represents the interests of a possessing and educated class, which has at its disposal innumerable means of everyday control over its administration of affairs. The Soviet bureaucracy has risen above a class which is hardly emerging from destitution and darkness, and has no tradition of dominion or command."

Secondly, "...the very fact of its appropriation of political power in a country where the principal means of production are in the hands of the state, creates a new and hitherto unknown relation between the bureaucracy and the riches of the nation. The means of production belong to the state. But the state, so to speak, "belongs" to the bureaucracy." (6)

We will have to come back to this "hitherto unknown relation" but here I want to argue from the point of view of the analysis of the degree of estrangement involved, one must still insist that the character of the subordination of the proletariat by the bureaucracy is distinct from their subordination to capital. One way of seeing this is to approach it via Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism in Capital. In commodity production "it is a definite social relation between men that assumes in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things." He then goes on to contrast this with feudal production.

"...For the very reason that personal dependence here forms the groundwork of society there is no necessity for labour and its product to assume a fantastic form different from reality. They take shape, in the transactions of society, of services in kind and payments in kind... every serf knows that what he expends in the service of his lord is a definite quantity of his own personal labour power..... The social relations between individuals in their performance of their labour appear at any rate as their own mutual personal relations, and are not disguised under the shape of social relations between the products of labour."

Again Marx contrasts commodity relations with a community carrying on their work with the means of production held in common, in which labour power of



individuals is consciously applied as the combined power of the community. Here the total product is a social product. Labour time would be apportioned in accordance with a definite social plan tailored to the real needs of the community.

"The social relations of the individual producers, with regard both to their labour and its products, are in this case perfectly simple and intelligible..."

It seems that one can plausibly argue that the structures and associated consciousness of Soviet society can to a great extent be contrasted with capitalist society in a similar way. Social relations would seem to appear as mutual personal relations rather than taking the fantastic form of things. Every worker knows who it is that is pushing him about from the factory manager up to the Praesidium. It is partly because the bureauacracy cannot cloak its privileges with the mystifications of commodity fetishism that a huge apparatus of physical repression is needed. The irrationalities of the economy are not so hidden as those in capitalism. If a sudden shortage or surplus of some product occurs everyone knows that 'the bureuacrats have messed it up again.' There is some individual identifiable in principle, who was too busy lining his own pockets or ensuring his political survival, to perform his role in the planning system effeciently. In spite of the existence of the mediation of state property the relationships of subordination seem defined primarily in terms of personal dependence - though of course, unlike the identity of a person and social position in feudalism, the bureaucrat in his person is only contingently related to his official position. It is an administrative hierarchy open to talent (of a sort!).

However although state property represents the negation of private property, this antithesis is still posed within the sphere of property, i.e. of estrangement. As Marx says of what he calls "crude communism":

"The role of worker is not abolished, but is extended to all men. The relation of private property remains the relation of the community to the world of things." (7)

Again - "The community is only a community of work and of equality of wages paid out by the communal capital, by the community as universal capitalist. The two sides of the relation are raised to a supposed universality; labour as a condition in which everyone is placed, and capital as the acknowledged universality and power of the community." (8)

State property is therefore, par excellence, an intermediate form. From one point of view it is the first form of communism - from another the final term of the property system, universalised private property - hence property in the process of being negated. It has to be added, of course, that though in the Soviet Union everyone is juridically equal in respect of state property - some are 'more equal than others'. This means that Russia represents the future but as yet underdeveloped, permeated by conflict and unsure of itself. It has its own false consciousness because instead of seeing the activity of each of its members as its own self-sustaining basis, it sees the state as the incarnation and guardian of the socialised economy.

This state, unlike the proletarian dictatorship exercised by the armed working class envisaged by Marx, is seen as an external constraint and the individual is subjugated to a hypostatized universality which nominally includes him but which is just the ideological covering of the exercise of the interest of the new ruling group. Marx had already criticised this idealism in advance when he wrote:

"What is to be avoided above all is the re-establishing of 'Society' as an abstraction vis -a- vis the individual. The individual is the social being". (9)

This ideology includes the usual tired equations, the workers = the party = the leadership. People believed this to some extent, especially in the early stages, but now it is known to be a hypocritical figleaf and there exists in popular consciousness a definite them/us dichotomy (alienation) even though this may not be understood by a theory which transcends the given categories.

So far we have concentrated on capital and commodity fetishism as forms of alienation. However these are only specific ways in which man may become alienated from his own activity. In a more general sense, any social system which fails to constitute itself as the free, creative expression of its members must to some degree be one of estrangement.

After noting the subordination of the worker to his product Marx goes on to deal with the alienation of the worker from labour itself.

"How could the labourer be opposed to the product of his activity in an alien fashion if he were not estranged in the act of production itself? The product is only a resume of activity, of production... ..In the alienation of the object of labour is only crystallised the alienation, the renunciation, in the activity of labour itself."

(10)

The most vital expression of the life of man is his activity as a creative many-sided producer. This is what distinguishes him from the stereotyped, instinctual, one-dimensionality of animal existence. Marx does not look to communism to provide people with a condition of contented somnolence, but to provide the gateway to enormous possibilities of self-development, and fulfillment of the universality of men's powers, that are being brought to birth by the whole historical process.

The condition of alienated labour, however, is one in which labour is not free self-activity, the conscious exercise of all man's powers, but is merely a means to something outside itself, a means to physical (i.e. animal) existence. It is in the literal sense "forced labour". Work in capitalist society is an inhuman degradation. Labour power is treated as a commodity like any other. The worker is reduced to the level of a machine with the result that the machine faces him as a competitor. He is reduced even to a cog in a machine, executing plans he does not form, obeying orders the rationality of which doesn't concern him, and unable to gain any satisfaction in his work. His very adaptability and univer-

sality is taken advantage of in the division of labour to reduce everyone to a particular, one-sided, stunting form of labour.

Work in a capitalist factory today is an insult to the human spirit. This despotism at the point of production undoubtedly provided more steam for the events of the French May than did the question of consumption (i.e. wages). One concedes that, though implicitly challenging instead of withdrawing from the structures, by occupying the factories, the movement did not articulate a correct programme of workers' control demands. Instead impossibly high money demands were made. In effect the workers were saying that the slavery we have put up with simply cannot be adequately recompensed.

But what of the Soviet Union? A rationalisation of the organisation of industry has taken place. This has been achieved by constituting at the level of the economy the rationality of the capitalist workshop. This is good. But it is not enough.

"The same bourgeois mind which praises the division of labour in the workshop, life-long annexation of the labourer to a partial operation, and his complete subjection to capital, as being an organisation of labour that increases its productiveness- that same bourgeois mind denounces with equal vigour every conscious attempt to socially control and regulate the process of production, as an inroad upon such sacred things as the right to property, freedom and unrestricted play for the bent of the individual capitalist. It is very characteristic that the enthusiastic apologists of the factory system have nothing more damning to urge against a general organisation of the labour of society, than that it would turn all society into one immense factory." (11)

Though the workshop organisation is more rational than the macro-economic anarchy, it remains despotic, maintains a division of labour, especially crippling in the form of the division between mental and physical labour, and makes the labour of the producers a meaningless routine. It is clear that this estrangement from the activity of production, this 'forced labour' is characteristic of the Soviet Union's industry as much as of capitalist industry.

In ideology this is denied. The Soviet worker has a quite different attitude to his work, finds meaning in it, because he is now working for himself instead of for the capitalist - this is the story. It follows he has no right to strike because that would be striking 'against himself'.

This purely ideological connection of the worker with the purposes of despotic hierarchy above him has no empirical meaning because there exists no mediating institutions which would enable the workers in reality (not in ideality) to control their collective organisation, to set its purpose, rules, etc. Even if it was true, which of course the workers know it isn't, that the purposes of management were to minister to the interests of the workers, these purposes would still not be the workers' purposes, i.e. not an expression of themselves. Paternalism is still despotism. In this case

the state would incarnate the alienated essence of socialist man. The sociality of man would be recognised but only in an externalised form. Instead of subsisting in the individual and his activities, it becomes displaced into the state and the administration generally.

The Stalinist ideology attempts to paint up the estrangement by talking about 'the State of the whole people', in a recent programmatic declaration. This is an obvious mystification. The state is an instrument of coercion - as such it must incarnate the power of one class in society over another. Why 'the whole people' would wish to exercise coercive power over itself is a mystery known only to Hegel (who provided a similar metaphysical disguise for the Prussian autocracy +) and the Stalinist epigones.

In fact the aforementioned logical possibility of beneficent paternalism - though having some application perhaps to the Castro regime - is empirically very dubious. Generally speaking we can say that in the absence of concrete institutions of proletarian democracy - Soviets, rights of tendency, workers councils, etc., talk of 'the state of the whole people' is a mystification of sinister interests. Just as capitalism lurks behind commodity fetishism, the fetishism of the Soviet State conceals the interests of the bureaucratic stratum.

In On the Jewish Question Marx writes:

"Human emancipation will only be complete when the real individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a species-being; and when he has recognised and organised his own powers as social powers so that he no longer separates this social power from himself as political power."

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+ It is interesting to look at Marx's early critique of Hegel on the bureaucracy. "Hegel proceeds from the separation of the 'state' and 'civil society', from 'particular interests' and the 'completely existent universal'. And bureaucracy is indeed based on this separation ..... For the individual bureaucrat the state's purpose becomes his private purpose of hunting for higher positions and making a career for himself.... In bureaucracy the identity of the state's interest and particular private purpose is established in such a way that the state's interest becomes a particular private purpose opposed to other private purposes. The transcendence of bureaucracy can mean only that the universal interest becomes the particular interest in actuality and not, as with Hegel, merely in thought and abstraction. This is possible only when the particular interest becomes universal. Hegel proceeds from an unreal antithesis and hence develops it only to an imaginary identity really antithetical to itself. Such an identity is the bureaucracy."

(Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the State. 1843)

In appearance the U.S.S.R. has overcome the separation of the individual life and estranged social power (the State) - but it has done it by taking the estrangement to its limit by making every aspect of the individual life a political question. The unity is a unity of bondage. It is an imposed and degrading unity, which, (while it does have progressive aspects by taking for granted the right to work, education and welfare provisions), conceals a terrifying atomisation, isolation, and insecurity at the heart of the individuals experience of this false and hypocritical brotherhood. C.L.R. James, in the above-mentioned article of the forties, describes the situation as follows:

"The bureaucracy has no free-will. It consumes more than the proletariat. But its social life within itself is a form of jungle existence. No member of the bureaucracy, except perhaps Stalin, knows whether tomorrow his whole life may not be cut short and he himself and all his family, his friends, and assistants disgraced, murdered, or sent into exile. The various strata of the bureaucracy address each other in the same tone and manner as the bureaucracy as a whole address the proletariat. If the proletariat is imprisoned in the factories, the members of the ruling party are subjected to a regimentation, and unceasing surveillance and inquisition that make the coveted membership in the party a form of imprisonment. The Stalinist official, from the highest to the lowest, excludes his wife and family from any participation not only in his public or political life but even in his thinking. It is a measure of protection so that when the arm of the NKVD falls upon him, they will be able to say with honesty that they knew nothing of his political ideas. That is their slender hope of salvation. Friendship is a permanent suspicion. The risk of betrayal by one false word is too great. This catalogue of crime, fear, humiliation, degradation, the alienation from human existence of a whole class (or caste), is the fate of those who benefit by the alienation of labour."

Marx criticised bourgeois individualist ideology for making the rest of society and the state a means for the individual's egoism. Stalinist ideology makes the individual simply a means for the egoism of the state. Such a bizarre notion clearly forms the mystificatory complement to a material estrangement - the subjection of the Soviet people to the Frankensteinian monster they brought forth from their revolutionary agony.

/to be concluded/

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## DOCUMENT

✓ The following has been translated from the French publication Sous le drapeau du Socialisme. We understand that this is the first English translation of this particular document. Needless to say, although this law was actually approved in June last year, it was not put into operation due to the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia. We feel that this document is of some importance because it is indicative of the process that was unfolding within Czechoslovakia which prompted the Soviet invasion. The translation was done by M. Rosa. Editors. ✓

### STATUTES OF THE WORKERS' COUNCILS

Provisional legal framework for the establishment and control of the activity of collective structures for democratic control and managerial structures in enterprises. (Approved by the Czechoslovak Government 6.6.68).

The complex process of the renewal of our economy demands the activity and initiative of all enterprises; they must now become autonomous subjects, responsible for their economic activity - not merely objects of control as they have been.

The creation of Workers' Councils as democratic and collective structures for control of the enterprise is an important gauge of whether the enterprise is autonomous and whether autocratic methods of control have been eliminated. The existence of Workers' Councils is proof that the workers are both socialist producers and joint supervisors, directly interested in the firms prosperity. The workers will, consequently, participate in the orientation of the firm's economic policy as well.

The setting up of Workers' Councils does not merely indicate that an important stride has been made towards democratisation of the management and control of firms. Their creation will also ensure a high quality of control, will reinforce the authority of the management and will put the enterprise on a firm footing.

In the setting up of Workers' Councils all spontaneity must be avoided - it is necessary to proceed in a conscientious and organised way so that the democratisation of control is ensured continuity and results in a renewal and consolidation of the firm's internal and external relationships. Responsibility must be assumed by the firm's managers and by the newly-established Workers' Councils; both are agents for guiding and controlling the economy. Workers' Councils are created in the interests of the Workers. Consequently the setting up of these Councils must be effected in close collaboration with the unions.

The setting up of Workers' Councils and the new system of management must in this first attempt, be observed in practice before being regulated by law (anticipated for the end of this year.) An integral purpose of this draft bill must be to inspire the new regulations for the management of business, as well as regulating the judicial aspects and methods of control of State enterprises. Concerning the setting up and control of the activity

of collective structures for democratic control and management structures in firms, the Government publishes the following provisional laws (subject to modification in practice):

1. In accord with the principle of the collective ownership of the means of production, the socialist enterprises act independently, one with the other, as units of production in the service of the collective (within the framework of the above principle). These units comprise a Workers' Council being the agency for the democratic control of the firm, and a management, exercising managerial functions.

2. The management includes the director and his assistants and, in some firms, higher administrative staff. The composition of management, when proposed by the director, must be approved by the Workers' Council. Those in management must not be, on principle, members of the Workers' Council.

The director regularly takes part in meetings of the Workers' Council. The powers and responsibilities of the director, in all matters not within the Councils' preserve, remain the same.

3. The director of the firm guides and carries out the firm's policy; he defines its development programme, organises market surveys, and the firm's adaption to these. He sees to any modernisation necessary for the highest quality in production, and to the technical standard and the selling terms of products.

He guides and rationalises all activity within the firm and he creates a rational system of inter-relationships. He solves any problems relating to administrative staff and collaborates with those organs of the Party and the unions with whom the firm draws up any collective agreement. He is answerable to the Workers' Council for all his activities.

4. The Workers' Council, while keeping in mind the conditions of industrial work laid down by the government, decides fundamental questions relating to the development of any enterprise; in particular the following:

- (a) the whole conception of the development of the enterprise.
- (b) the principle orientation of investment activity and investment projects.
- (c) the principles of any formation and division of gross revenue (including those relating to shares in economic results)
- (d) fundamental measures relating to the method of management, organisation (including management's agenda) and the firm's internal relationships.
- (e) an end-of-year balance sheet of the firm for which, usually, a report by an independent agency (e.g. an authorised auditing office) will be required.

The Workers' Council can ask that management present other major basic problems to it. The Council makes decisions on a simple majority of those present.

5. Management is obliged to apply the Councils' advice in concrete decisions. If the Council's view-point is not in accord with the proposals of

management, management must present the scheme again for discussion. If agreement between them cannot be reached, management continues along the lines of its initial proposal. As for large investment, the Council can exercise its right of veto, if such projects are considered too risky or particularly if they threaten the positive growth of wages. In such cases the veto must be approved by two-thirds of Council members. During discussion of the end-of-year balance sheet, the Council evaluates managements' activities.

6. The Workers' Council settles the following questions:

- (a) appointment and dismissal of (i) the director (after close consultation with a higher body) and (ii) the director's assistants (nominated by the director)
- (b) approval of wage rises and shares in economic results (in consultation with the director) and any rise in the remuneration of management whose salaries exceed the base level.
- (c) such statutory questions as participation in any association, disassociation or merger of the firm. These decisions are taken with a two thirds majority of the Council members.

7. The Workers' Council is answerable for all its activities before the assembly of workers. It is obliged to present reports of its activities to them.

8. The appointment of managerial and supervisory workers to vacant posts is made on the basis of an interview. Future regulations concerning these workers, appointed and dismissed by the Council, must consider a longer period of notice of dismissal than before (say, a year usually, for managers of firms) When the workers concerned object to the Councils decisions to dismiss them, the decision must be approved by a two-thirds majority of the Council members.

According to the decision of the Council, the firm draws up a contract with the director, of at least six years duration, as a rule. This contract defines the rights and duties of the two parties - just as the two determine economic objectives together - in the spirit of which the manager must direct the firms affairs.

The director can only be dismissed from his post before the date set by the contract, for the following reasons:

- (a) if he infringes or violates the legal regulations, exceeds his powers, and does not respect the decisions of the Workers' Council, when the latter is within its rights.
- (b) if, due to bad management, there is unfavourable progress, major losses, violation of the collective contract or serious neglect of the needs of the economy.
- (c) if there is violation of the activities of socialist enterprise entailing the loss of confidence of the workers.

Then, the Workers' Council can only decide on the confirmation of a director (or his assistants) in their positions, or dismissal from these positions, on the basis of an analysis of the results of their work, respecting the legal work regulations.



The director cannot be dismissed even if he proceeds in disagreement with the Workers' Council, while within the framework of his powers, conforming to the legal regulations decided on in the work contracts in harmony with the rights mentioned in point 3. above, as long as the firm's economic results have not been adversely affected.

9. The number of members of the Workers' Council corresponds to the size of the firm - anywhere between ten and thirty members. The duration of membership will be established by law.

The great majority of members are to be elected by the workers in the firm. Elections are direct and organised in such a way that all branches of respective firms are represented.

It is recommended that workers elect as Council members, those workers whose moral qualities and technical skills would guarantee that the long-term interests of workers, and long-term employees, of the firm, will be properly defended. The members of Workers' Councils ought to have a material interest in the longterm results of the firms economic activity. The choice of candidates among the workers and their direct election by secret ballot will be made through a trade-union intermediary.

10. In large important firms, in those operating in complex marketing conditions, and in those with advanced technological methods, ten to thirty per cent of the Council members ought to be chosen from among independent specialists, working outside the firm. Agricultural enterprises (e.g. machine and tractor depots, agricultural construction firms) the co-operative processing enterprises and commercial enterprises undertaking the purchase of agricultural products, shall elect thirty per cent of Council members from among the representatives of agricultural firms using these services or supplying primary agricultural material.

11. Those enterprises of great importance to State interests, or firms with a monopoly, appoint their own representatives to the Workers' Council as do State bodies. Principle consumers of the firms products do likewise. But this group of State nominees to the Council must not exceed twenty per cent.

12. When a bank has furnished important long-term credit to a firm it has a right to a representative on its Council. The right of adequate representation is recognised even for other firms if they have invested in a particular firm.

13. Workers' Councils will not generally be introduced into joint-stock companies, or state and public undertaking (e.g. railways, communicatory economy, water and forests) until a official legal ruling settles the new nature of these enterprises, their mode of control and the participation of the workers.

Workers' Councils ought not to be introduced into firms making a loss, i.e. in firms in which productivity is consistently declining or in those which are to be shut down.

14. The rights of union organisations as in the Work Codex and other regulations remain intact.

continued on page 5.

## TOWARDS A REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST PARTY

by Denis Francis

There has been a growing awareness in the Australian Left of the need for a revolutionary socialist party, able to contain within a democratic framework, the different revolutionary tendencies existing in Australia today.

This need is in fact one of the main questions being discussed widely in different circles for protest, as such, has reached a certain level where it now needs the political clarification that can only be achieved in a party organisation. In a sense, this is a sign of the growing maturity of the Australian protest movement.

Many factors have contributed to the need for a revolutionary party being placed urgently on the agenda. There is the realisation first of all that none of the existing working class parties - Australian Labour Party or the Communist Party of Australia - offer any real alternative to the system, or provide a framework in which revolutionary politics can be discussed and action determined. In addition, Australia is being affected by the growing revolutionary upsurge in Europe, North America and for that matter the whole world. The French revolt provided an example of the revolutionary potential in the advanced capitalist countries, but also showed the dire need for a mass revolutionary socialist party able to lead the masses to victory despite Stalinist and reformist betrayal.

The French and Czech crises both in their own way highlighted the crisis of Stalinism. Nowhere is that crisis more evident than in the CPA. As the Soviets churn out their falsified propaganda, the pro-Soviet forces step up their campaign and hope to topple the leadership. Much depends on the decision that the Moscow bureaucrats take on whether to split the C.P.'s. The resignation of Thorez's widow points to their possible determination to do precisely that.

A further factor is the feeling in the student movement that <sup>it</sup> is lacking in any real perspective and that a more general political framework is needed to allow proper discussion and analysis. Similarly, in the anti-war movement following the two militant demonstrations (in Melbourne on July 4th, in Sydney on September 20th) and the general growth in militancy both here and abroad there is also a need for a revolutionary political framework in which these problems can be solved.

In the trade union movement there is also a crisis of perspective. Traditional trade unionism is still immersed in deadening routine of arbitration and spends much of its time doing the donkey-work for the state machine. Even at the level of the fight for wages, they appear to achieve little. As a result, the workers retire into apathy, resenting union dues as a waste of money. With very few exceptions are any concepts of workers self-management advanced, that being considered outside the scope of unionism. Only in some of the white-collar unions (teachers, airpilots) are questions of workers control and management raised, but without their full potential

being developed or recognised. Finally, there are many ex-communists and independent socialists, unattracted by either the CPA or ALP, who now, in the present upsurge, feel the need for political organisation and action. They are joined by the youth who have just emerged in political life and feel that need also.

From these different layers has arisen the demand for a new democratically organised revolutionary socialist organisation, which can, in turn, be transitional to a revolutionary socialist party.

### On The Nature Of The Party

If the revolt today is against powerlessness and alienation of the masses from decision making, then it follows that any political organisation which seeks to lead and organise that revolt must itself give real power and decision-making to its members.

It is for that reason that the revolutionary socialist organisation must itself in real terms become a microcosm of the SELF MANAGED society sought for. For it is only in such a democratically organised party that the real problems facing militants can be solved, in an atmosphere of free debate where theoretical study and analysis and research pervades the whole party. But in a real sense, the degree of real democracy will depend on the level of ideological consciousness and education among the membership as a whole, as well as their activism and militancy. No matter how democratic the constitution of a revolutionary organisation there is always the danger of bureaucratisation when there is a wide gap between the leadership, in a general atmosphere of low ideological understanding. It is in such an atmosphere too, that factionalism (as against tendency organisation +) develops into a destructive force.

If a really effective revolutionary force is to be built in Australia, it must be extremely democratic in its organisation and of a high ideological level. Both conditions are interdependent: one cannot exist in real terms without the other.

Let us examine what we mean by "high ideological level".

### Marxism Is Above All Critical And Sceptical

If Marxism is anything, it is materialist, it is critical, it is sceptical; it is dialectical and historical in its method. Marxist method implies that the individual must, by the use of his critical faculties, himself, in

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+ We distinguish between "factionalism" and the right of persons inside a revolutionary organisation to organise and propagate a particular view they may hold in common. Factionalism means rather the attempt to take over a political apparatus by machine politics (stacking meetings, etc.) rather than by political persuasion.

his own consciousness, come to the truth of all questions, as best as he is able. A scrupulous internal intellectual honesty is the real hallmark of the real Marxist. Certainly on some questions, he may accept the opinions and analyses of those whom he trusts, through experience (and not position). But whenever there is debate, the individual must carry out his own independent enquiry, Stalinism and reformism have combined to crush this independence of the militant, to glorify the "Leader", to vaunt the superiority of the collective will and intellect of the Party over that of the individual. In reality, of course, the collective will of the "Party" has meant that of one man, or of a few men.

Any new revolutionary organisation must then reverse this false pattern of thought imposed under Stalinism and reformism and liberate the individual party member with a positive demand for self-expression, self-education and independence of thought. Such independence can only emerge from an abundance of information on the historical background, on the factual material behind the different problems and a complete application of the Marxist method to such problems.

In a sense, the duty of a revolutionary organisation is to provide to all its members the intellectual training which in capitalist society as a whole is provided (in a distorted way) to only a small percentage of the population. In a way, it is not only a question of turning intellectuals into proletarians in outlook, but also of turning proletarians into intellectuals. Indeed, it is part of the revolutionary workers struggle to liberate himself from his proletarian condition to become an intellectual in training. The Stalinist bureaucrats' glorification of the "proletarian" was in fact a glorification of his proletarian condition which arises from his status as a wage slave.

### The Role Of Leadership

Nevertheless, precisely because we do live in a capitalist society in which human development is stunted, all the facilities that the party may make available to its members will still mean that certain of its members will play more of a leading role than others. But such a leading role must arise purely from the critical confidence that the membership has in the leadership, which must be accountable at all times and be subject to the right of recall. Discipline will above all be due to the conscious understanding and conviction of the membership rather than to any artificially imposed rules and regulations.

But given the fact that we still live in a capitalist society, the temptations of bureaucratisation will be ever-present as a short cut, as an easy solution to problems, as a "natural" development from the functions of leadership. Hence, a great deal of responsibility rests on those in leading positions to consciously watch their bureaucratic tendencies and maintain a suitable modesty and a scrupulous intellectual doubt on all their own beliefs and proposals. They should almost welcome defeat or correction on questions as a healthy correction to their own ego and growing sense of infallibility.

Yet of course, it is insufficient to rely simply on self-control by leadership or the high level of awareness among the membership. The constitution of the party must be so conceived so that democratic control over the leadership can be speedily and effectively maintained, and the freest and fullest discussion occur.

The revolutionary socialist party of today must be conceived of as a free voluntary and conscious union of proletarian-intellectuals and intellectual-proletarians around a common programme of struggle for socialist democracy based on the principle of self-management.

The union of these independently thinking workers and intellectuals must be of a type as to allow them to develop to the highest degree possible their autonomous functioning as militants in their own sphere of activity, and their control in the basic unit of the party of their own militant work. The essential function of leadership is to encourage the creative militant work of the self-governing basic party unit +, to provide a forum for an exchange of experiences and the cross-fertilization of ideas and conception of new forms and avenues of militancy, as well as to absorb newly won members in existing areas of work.

Such a concept does not mean a denial of leadership or organisation (as it does to classical anarchism), nor does it mean an abdication of leadership (as occurs sometimes in CP's when the function of leadership is more as a police force to crack down on opposition). The basic party unit is the essence of party activity: all else serves it. The basic party units themselves control and determine their own work; elected leadership can only propose, suggest and convince. It cannot oblige the basic party units to follow any particular pattern.

Similarly, the basic party units should be able to organise fields of activity at higher levels, to hold joint meetings, joint activity and even organise permanent levels of organisation and coordination which can then make decisions at that level. Besides the normal structures determined by territorial groupings, etc., the constitution must be flexible enough to accept basic unit decisions to organise at other levels as well. Given, too, the federative nature of Australian society, we believe that the revolutionary socialist party must also be federative (though probably not on formal State boundaries but on more realistic urban and rural functional units).

Besides this degree of independence of the basic party units and the federative nature of the organisation as a whole, other principles of democratic control should be included in the constitution. At all levels for example, the principle of rotating chairmen should apply - in other words, the bureaucratic and largely decorative function of "president" be abolished. Secretarial functions should be divided among a number of individuals and not concentrated in one person. The right of recall should

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+ "Basic party units" is used here rather than branches, because the last term has bureaucratic-centralist connotations.

apply at all levels. Referenda should be held when balloted for (although this may be questioned as valid and the aggregate meeting found better suited)... All should be done to throw responsibility on the individual and avoid bureaucratisation as much as possible.

Yet that said, the party must also function with certain centralist forms. The functional regional bodies (major city units, rural regions) elect their own regional committee, which divides the secretarial functions among its members. On a national level, a national conference will meet based upon election directly from the basic party units. It then elects in turn a national committee which will in turn divide up the secretarial functions among its members. The exact division of authority between national and regional conference must be rather flexible although a rather obvious division of interest will exist. Basically, however, the national conference must take fundamental decisions on national and international questions.

Such a constitutional "model" for a revolutionary socialist organisation must be matched by the possible organisation within the party not only of functional or territorial units and levels, but also the right to organise according to commonly-held beliefs on one or more issues. This is the right of tendency, granted to those who find they hold a common view on one or more subjects and wish to organise support inside the organisation for their viewpoint, either through discussion organs provided, or, if they judge them insufficient, through their own tendency publications which in turn may in extreme cases be published publicly. But the right of tendency also fundamentally includes the right of organisation around ideas and a platform.

### Some Possible Objections

Perhaps the first type of objection to such an organisation would be that it would be wide open to police spies and lack security.

First, the only real guarantee that police spies will be quickly spotted or be ineffective is the highest possible ideological level. The best atmosphere in which police spies flourish is one of ignorance, elitism and cultism around an individual, and in which an elaborate inner-party police system is set up... itself open to take-over by the police themselves.

The decentralisation of power inside the party will mean that the police will find it near-impossible to find out total party membership and other details by simply working themselves into higher party positions. Because the basic party units is the one where most questions are resolved the police will not find the convenience of highly centralised party organisation waiting for them.

As for political disruption, they will have to first convince a highly-educated and independently-minded membership...

But what of the danger of factionalism developing in such a democratic organisation? Let us note first of all that in the Stalinist or reformist type party, the major "faction" is always the leadership. In the revolutionary socialist party as outlined above, the full freedom to organise on the basis of ideas, plus a high ideological level we are assuming, will be together the best possible preventives for factionalism if by that we mean manipulative efforts to take over the party machine by "getting the numbers", "Stacking meetings", etc. without any political persuasion being involved. If only because the "machine" as such will be of such limited power as to be rejected if such a situation should arise, by the basic party units, while means of democratic control make such methods pointless and doomed to failure.

Let us note, too, that factionalism in the above sense arises when disagreement is driven underground, when there is a low ideological level dominated by an omnipotent bureaucracy, and hence opposition even on a minor point is driven to such means. The best defence against a destructive factionalism is the fullest democracy and the highest possible ideological level.

But what of discipline and unity in action, some will object... The collapse of Stalinism shows that the old-time monolithism of the CP's has passed forever. No more is it conceivable for a party to build on the basis of unquestioning acceptance of the "Leader" and "leadership". Misgivings about the apparent disarray of the Left, about the myriad of groupings and ideas, cannot be overcome by a return to stalinist monolithism. But neither can a situation be accepted as desirable (except as a transition from monolithism). The answer is in a new and higher form of unity, based on a high ideological understanding and analysis, where unity is built on disunity on a whole number of points, but unity around basic questions and around a given number of other points. Essentially too, the minority, if they hold a position deeply, must be allowed to opt out of that decision as an extreme measure (although minority acceptance of majority decisions should be accepted as a general rule, but only as a conscious voluntary act.) Unity, in the new party, will only come from consciousness and voluntary acceptance.

To those who make a facile analogy with a trade union, we can reply that the revolutionary party is the voluntary alliance of the most conscious and vanguard independently minded individuals. A trade union is a union of the most diverse elements of the working class, from the most backward to members of the revolutionary party. In direct confrontation with the boss, unity is essential and if necessary has to be imposed on backward workers after a democratically-arrived at decision. Similar forms cannot however apply among conscious, independently minded revolutionaries, united in a party.

### The Relation between the Party and Workers and Students

The revolutionary socialist party, gathering the most conscious revolutionary workers and students in its ranks, seeks to give leadership to the mass of workers and students. But this leadership must be con-

ceived of in another way than that proffered by reformist or Stalinist parties. For them, leadership is essentially bureaucratic in function. It is given to the workers and students in form of instructions, orders or at best, lessons.

For revolutionary socialists, however, such elitist concepts, profoundly rooted in trade unions and other mass organisations, must be rejected. Leadership for us is conceived as seeking to encourage among the masses their own creative faculties and initiatives and their own revolutionary militancy. That arises from the concept we have of the nature of social change, based upon the demand for self-management and control of all aspects of social life. Thus, the vital thing to develop is the worker and student alliance and their confidence in their own ability to manage society, and their militancy in fighting for such demands and, finally, a taking of power, at each time such a possibility arises, into their own hands, no matter for how long or in what sphere (even minor). It is high time that Marxists forgot the facile analogy of the working class with an army... with generals on top giving the orders and the cannon-fodder below carrying them out. This concept was never correct - it is disastrous today.

#### How to Build a Revolutionary Party Today?

The need for such a party is increasingly felt among different layers. Concretely, there exist a number of revolutionary groups and journals, as well as many individuals, who feel this need. To overcome disparate origins, lack of organisational experience, etc. it is vital that such groups link up first in an alliance which would be transitional to a revolutionary party. Such a party could possibly be achieved through the construction of a militant, youthful, democratically-organised revolutionary socialist alliance, which through its attractiveness and rapid growth would quickly pose to the members of the Communist Party the need and desirability of unity in a single, revolutionary party.

The unity of a left opposition group inside the CPA with the revolutionary socialist organisation would mean that the CPA would be superceded as the major Marxist party in Australia and a new, viable grouping take its place.

It is of interest then that the CPA though Laurie Aarons has circulated a number of left journals and individuals with an invitation to initiate a conference of left groups to thrash out differences and get maximum unity in action. International, while welcoming the initiative has urged that a whole series of groups be invited. Nevertheless, the calling of such a conference shows how widely felt is the need for some new unified grouping and the inadequacy of existing parties.....

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