

The DSP's attempt to
Dress Trotsky

in Lenin's

Clothes
A reply

by David Matters

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Introduction

In writing *Putting Lenin's clothes on Trotskyism*, David Matters has contributed to the task of clarifying ideas and maintaining the validity and truth of Marxism.

From the very beginning, Marx, Engels, Lenin and others have continually fought against distortions of scientific socialism. From both right and, supposedly, "left" directions, there have been many attacks and misrepresentations.

The attack on Marxism in the name of Marx, or on Leninism in the name of Lenin, is a particularly pernicious form which can easily mislead those who are not familiar with what Marx, Engels and Lenin actually said and wrote.

The pretension that Trotsky was a great Leninist is one of these misrepresentations and was refuted time and again by Lenin himself.

Trotsky's followers today in Australia continue this misrepresentation. The distortion of Leninism is no more obvious than in their attitude to trade unions. They echo the views of Trotsky on this question, views that Lenin severely criticised in the early days after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. The same divisive actions and views as were expressed by Trotsky, found expression during the MUA dispute, as David Matter's booklet recalls.

He has put the record straight on this and some other matters.

Peter Symon

PUTTING LENIN'S CLOTHES ON TROTSKYISM

By David Matters

Doug Lorimer, a leading ideologist of the Democratic Socialist Party has written a booklet entitled *Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution — A Leninist Critique*. One is entitled to be intrigued when a dedicated and long-standing member of a Trotskyist Party purports to become a critic of Trotsky. It is not so surprising that he has attempted to do this in the name of Lenin. It has been a long-standing practice of Trotskyist organisations to claim that Trotsky was the greatest Leninist after Lenin. It is necessary to have a look at this “critique” and to ask the question: “Why?”

About 25 per cent of the book is made up of direct quotes from Lenin with about another 25 per cent being the author's paraphrase of Lenin. Instead of examining fresh experiences with real examples we have an abstraction of quotations and paraphrases. The book is yet another “neo-Trotskyist” attempt to use the legacy of Lenin to attack and depart from Marxism. It is petty-bourgeois politics at its best (or worst), and is reactionary and anti-communist in its direction.

It is not difficult to anticipate a response to this critique of his critique. No Marxist is allowed to make criticisms of Trotsky without being branded a “Stalinist”. But it is important to put the record straight and to read what Lenin actually had to say about Trotsky on important questions.

The author's historical perspective is stuck in the prism of the world of Trotsky, Stalin, Lenin, Kamenev, Zinoviev and others. In presenting himself as a defender of Lenin and an alleged opponent of “permanent

revolution”, Lorimer dresses up Trotsky’s permanent revolution in a Leninist garb. On page 16 of the pamphlet Lenin is paraphrased:

“Thus the October revolution began as a worker-peasant democratic revolution and, then, eight months later, developed uninterruptedly into a proletarian-socialist revolution. It was the continuity of proletarian political leadership that gave the transition from the bourgeois revolution to the socialist revolution its uninterrupted character, ie, made them two stages of a single, uninterrupted revolutionary process”.

But this is what Lenin actually wrote about this period:

“In October 1917 we seized power together with the peasants as a whole. This was a bourgeois revolution, in as much as the class struggle in the rural districts had not yet developed . . . the real proletarian revolution in the rural districts began only in the summer of 1918. Had we not succeeded in stirring up this revolution our work would have been incomplete. The first stage was the seizure of power in the cities and the establishment of the Soviet form of government. The second stage was one which is fundamental for all socialists and without which socialists are not socialist, namely, to single out the proletarian and semi-proletarian elements in the rural districts and to ally them to the proletariat in order to wage the struggle against the bourgeoisie in the countryside. This stage is also in the main completed.” (*The Paris Commune and the Tasks of the Democratic Dictatorship*” LCW Vol. 28 p 203)

The author of the booklet actually quotes the above paragraph but then paraphrases it to include references to “uninterrupted revolution”, etc. But there is not a single word in Lenin’s statement that justifies such references.

Doug Lorimer has actually drawn on Trotsky, not Lenin. Trotsky wrote of this same period as follows:

“I proceeded precisely from the bourgeois democratic character of the revolution and arrived at the conclusion that the profundity of the agrarian crisis could raise the proletariat of backward Russia to power.

Yes, this was precisely the idea I defended on the eve of the 1905 revolution. This was precisely the idea that was expressed by the very designation of the revolution as a 'permanent', that is, an uninterrupted one, a revolution passing over directly from the bourgeois stage into the socialist ... What meaning can there be to the permanency of the revolution, that is, its uninterrupted development, if all that is involved is a mere leap?" (Trotsky. *The Permanent Revolution. Results and Prospects* Pathfinder Press, New York edition, 1976, page 136)

The connection between the two quotes from Trotsky and Lorimer is the use of the word "uninterrupted". Lorimer ascribes the concept of an "uninterrupted revolution" to Lenin. This misrepresentation of Lenin belongs to Trotsky. If anyone has any doubts I quote again from Trotsky's *Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-25)* p. 102, Pathfinder Press, New York:

"The expression '*permanent revolution*' is an expression of Marx, which he applied to the revolution of 1848 (in Germany — DM). In Marxist literature, naturally not in revisionist but in revolutionary Marxist literature, this term has always had citizenship rights. Franz Mehring employed it for the revolution of 1905-07. The permanent revolution, is an exact translation, is the continuous revolution, the uninterrupted revolution."

Concepts of "permanent revolution", "uninterrupted revolution" and "continuous revolution" take no account of the class forces involved or the specific circumstances that will vary from time to time and place to place. Transitional stages may be short or long. Another factor is the necessity to consolidate gains made, train new forces, rest forces after a particularly hard struggle, etc. The imposition of dogmatic theories of uninterrupted or continuous offensives inevitably leads to errors.

It is this concept of permanent or uninterrupted revolution that has led to theoretical errors and turned revolutionaries towards reactionary positions when the aspirations for a "permanent revolution" are not fulfilled. This muddle arises because there is no analysis of the time,

place and circumstances of the revolution and the dogmatic assertion that a revolution must necessarily be “permanent”, “uninterrupted”, “continuous”. All these words are used interchangeably.

The February revolution of 1917 in Russia represented the overthrow of the Tsarist autocracy by the revolutionary workers and peasants. But it was a bourgeois democratic revolution in essence. A Provisional Government was established but few real changes were introduced. The war between the imperialist rivals continued between Germany on the one hand and France, England and Russia on the other.

During the February revolution, however, a new form of people’s power was established — the Soviets (a word meaning council). But the majority political influence in these Soviets was that of the Mensheviks (social democrats) and the left Socialist Revolutionaries whose main influence was among the peasantry of Russia. Instead of these Soviets being able to win effective peoples power, the power was taken by the conservative Cadet Party in the Provisional Government. Up to this stage, the revolution was a bourgeois democratic revolution.

The bourgeois democratic revolution did not fulfill the needs of the workers and peasants who, above all, were turning against the imperialist war. The main issues of the time were peace, bread for the workers and land for the landless peasantry. The Bolsheviks continued their agitation among the revolutionary workers and peasants and shifted the relationship of class forces. A new stage in the revolution process became possible. The Bolsheviks exposed the policies of the bourgeois Provisional Government and won majority support in the Soviets for their policies. To describe this as “continuous”, “uninterrupted” or “permanent” and to adopt this as an inevitable model is a theoretical mistake. A more or less rapid transition is a possibility and did take place in the circumstances of Russia at that time, but it is not inevitable. The time taken for the transition from a bourgeois democratic stage and the socialist stage will vary from one set of circumstances to another from one country to another.

This dogmatic view of revolutionary processes promotes the idea that revolutionary stages are achieved by simply calling for permanent or uninterrupted revolution without any analysis of the reality of the circumstances and the forces struggling for change. It leads to the sectarian mistake that all revolutionaries have to do is to be the most revolutionary and call for the most extreme measures. These mistakes were evident in Trotsky's views in relation to war communism, the Brest-Litovsk Treaty and later, Trotsky's attitude to the trade unions.

The attempt to find a universal schema for revolution is built around the concept that the Russian Revolution was the only model for revolutionaries to follow. It is an approach that has done much damage to revolutionary movements and has to be overcome. Marxists must apply the principles of Marxism-Leninism to the concrete reality of their own country. The revolutionary movements of China, Cuba and elsewhere were successful because they developed their theory in the practice of their own situations.

In Trotsky's hands the concept of permanent revolution had two particular applications. Firstly, the relegation of the peasantry and, secondly, the view that it was not possible to build a successful socialist state in one country.

Trotsky advanced the slogan in 1905: "No Tsar, but a workers' government". He asserted that Tsarism could only be replaced by a worker's government, not by the rule of the working class AND the peasantry. In 1915, Lenin criticised this line of Trotsky:

"Trotsky repeats his 'original' theory of 1905 and refuses to stop to think why, in the course of ten years, life has been bypassing this beautiful theory ... Trotsky is in fact helping the liberal-labour politicians in Russia, who by the 'repudiation' of the role of the peasantry understand a refusal to raise up the peasants for the revolution!" (*Two lines in the Revolution* LCW Vol. 21 p419-420).

On the question of socialism in one country, Trotsky wrote in 1906: "Without direct state support from the European proletariat, the working

class of Russia will not be able to maintain itself in power and to transform its temporary rule into a lasting Socialist dictatorship. This we cannot doubt for an instant.”

In 1922, five years after the 1917 revolution, Trotsky was singing the same song:

“The assertion, repeated several times in *A Programme of Peace*, that a proletarian revolution cannot be carried through to a victorious conclusion within the boundaries of one country may appear to some readers to have been refuted by almost five years’ experience of our Soviet republic. [But] a genuine advance of Socialist economy in Russia will become possible only after the victory of the proletariat in the most important countries of Europe.” (Postscript to *A Programme of Peace*, 1922).

Lenin refuted this assertion:

“Uneven economic and political development is an absolute law of capitalism. Hence, the victory of socialism is possible first in several or even in one capitalist country, taken singly. The victorious proletariat of that country, having expropriated the capitalists and organised its own socialist production, would stand up against the rest of the world, the capitalist world, attracting to its cause the oppressed classes of other countries ... A free union of nations in socialism is impossible without a more or less prolonged and stubborn struggle by the socialist republics against the backward states.” (LCW Vol. 21, p 342 *Slogan for a United States of Europe*).

Lenin and Trotsky on trade unions

At the time of Lenin’s death, Trotsky was actively engaged in factional opposition to Leninist policies within the party. It was on the question of the role of the trade unions in Soviet Russia and their relationship to working class rule that Trotsky came out in opposition to Lenin. This appears to escape our “Leninist” Lorimer who makes no reference in his booklet to this most critical debate and Trotsky’s role at the time.

Instead we have the assertion in the Introduction to the booklet that “Leon Trotsky was one of the outstanding Marxist revolutionaries of the twentieth century and that “During the 1930’s Trotsky made his most significant contributions to the theoretical arsenal of the Marxist movement”. These, according to the author, are his three-volume history of the Russian Revolution, *The Revolution Betrayed*, his analysis of the nature of fascism and his founding of the Bolshevik-Leninist opposition in the CPSU.

It is worthwhile recalling Doug’s view of a few years ago when, in a pamphlet entitled *The Making of a Sect - The Evolution of the US Socialist Workers Party* he quoted a statement by Pedro Camejo (a US Trotskyist) with approval:

“There exists a completely accepted premise amongst Trotskyists that, in the long run, success is assured because the Fourth International has the ‘correct’ program. The correctness of the program is judged quite independently of practice. In fact there is a permanent effort to prove a direct ideological continuity from Marx and Lenin. It is believed that if one is ‘the’ continuity, then one is ordained to be the vanguard of the working class, independent of any material practice to substantiate the claim.”

Camejo goes on:

“This process, to one degree or another, can be seen repeated over and over again. Out of the polemics arises the ‘Trotsky-of-today’ or more commonly the ‘Lenin-of-today’ to defend the true ideological continuity. Reams of documents and books come forth. Years pass and the debates drift off into forgotten corners of historical footnotes since the debating participants are invariably dissociated from living struggles.” (Lorimer. *The Making of a Sect* p 13-14)

Lorimer should have heeded this quote before he tried to become the ‘Lenin of today’.

But to return to the debate on the role of the trade unions between Trotsky and some others on the one hand, and Lenin and the majority of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on the other. Trotsky had written a pamphlet called *The Role and Tasks of the Trade Unions* and was severely taken to task by Lenin. This debate remains of considerable interest because the views put forward by Trotsky at that time remain the attitude of Trotskyist organisations towards trade unions today.

Commenting on Trotsky's pamphlet Lenin in December 1920 said: "I am amazed at the number of theoretical mistakes and glaring blunders it contains". (Lenin *Collected Works* Vol. 32 p19)

Lenin went on, "Trade Unions are not just historically necessary; they are historically inevitable as an organisation of the industrial proletariat and, under the dictatorship of the proletariat, embrace nearly the whole of it. This is basic, but Comrade Trotsky keeps forgetting it; he neither appreciates it nor makes it his point of departure, all this while dealing with *The Role and Tasks of the Trade Unions*, a subject of infinite compass.

"It follows from what I have said that the trade unions have an extremely important part to play at every step of the dictatorship of the proletariat. But what is their part? ... On the one hand, the trade unions, which take in all industrial workers, are an organisation of the ruling, dominant, governing class ... But it is not a state organisation; nor is it one designed for coercion, but for education. It is an organisation designed to draw in and to train; it is, in fact, a school: a school of administration, a school of economic management, a school of communism ... Within the system of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the trade unions stand ... between the Party and the government. In the transition to socialism the dictatorship of the proletariat is inevitable, but it is not exercised by an organisation which takes in all industrial workers. Why not? ... What happens is that the Party ... absorbs the vanguard of the proletariat and this vanguard exercises the dictatorship of the proletariat. The dictatorship cannot be exercised or the functions of government performed without a foundation such as the trade unions ... the trade unions are a link between the vanguard and the masses,

and by their daily work bring conviction to the masses, the masses of the class which alone is capable of taking us from capitalism to communism. On the other hand, the trade unions are a 'reservoir' of state power." (*Ibid.* p 20)

In concluding what was a very important discussion, Lenin said: "The net result is that there are a number of theoretical mistakes in Trotsky's and Bukharin's theses: they contain a number of things that are wrong in principle. Comrade Trotsky's 'theses' are politically harmful. The sum and substance of his policy is bureaucratic harassment of the trade unions. Our Party Congress will, I am sure, condemn and reject it." (*Ibid.* p 41-42)

The Congress resoundingly rejected Trotsky's ideas.

In another document of which Lorimer speaks highly, the *Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*, written in 1938 almost 20 years after his debate with Lenin, Trotsky's mistakes towards the trade unions continue. He had, apparently, learnt nothing from the sharp debate with Lenin years before:

"... the Fourth International resolutely rejects and condemns trade union fetishism, equally characteristic of trade unionists and syndicalists", wrote Trotsky.

"(a) Trade unions do not offer, and, in line with their task, composition, and manner of recruiting membership, cannot offer, a finished revolutionary program; in consequence, they cannot replace the party. The building of national revolutionary parties as sections of the Fourth International is the central task of the transitional epoch.

"(b) Trade unions, even the most powerful, embrace no more than 20 to 25 percent of the working class, and, at that, predominantly the more skilled and better-paid layers. The more oppressed majority of the working class is drawn only episodically into the struggle, during the period of exceptional upsurges in the labor movement. *During such moments it is necessary to create organisations ad hoc,*

embracing the whole fighting mass: strike committees, factory committees, and, finally, soviets. (My Italics — DM)

“(c) As organisations expressive of the top layers of the proletariat, trade unions, as witnessed by all past historical experience, including the fresh experience of the anarcho-syndicalist unions in Spain, developed powerful tendencies toward compromise with the bourgeois-democratic regime. In periods of acute class struggle, the leading bodies of the trade unions aim to become masters of the mass movement in order to render it harmless. This is already occurring during the period of simple strikes, especially in the case of the mass sit-down strikes, which shake the principle of bourgeois property. In time of war or revolution, when the bourgeoisie is plunged into exceptional difficulties, trade union leaders usually become bourgeois ministers.

“Therefore, the section of the Fourth International should always strive not only to renew the top leadership of the trade unions, boldly and resolutely in critical moments advancing new militant leaders in place of routine functionaries and careerists; but also to create in all possible instances independent militant organisations corresponding more closely to the tasks of mass struggle against bourgeois society, and, if necessary, not flinching even in the face of a direct break with the conservative apparatus of the trade unions” (my italics — DM) (*Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution* 1977 edition p117 - 118)

This position of Trotsky’s and his followers can only be described as bureaucratic bullying from below. If they do not get their own way or do not approve of leaders chosen by workers they reserve the right to split the trade unions and cause disunity in the working class by establishing networks outside and even opposed to the trade unions.

The MUA experience

The Democratic Socialist Party published a pamphlet MUA here to stay following the MUA dispute of 1998. In this pamphlet James Vassilopoulos says the following:

“While we will hear words of support from the ALP for the Maritime workers, there is no way they will support national strikes, or organise a people’s movement against the coalition.

“Now is not the time for words but action. What is needed is for unions and the ACTU to mobilise, to demonstrate and to strike, in order to defeat the liberal’s attacks.

“Faced with Patrick’s assault on the MUA, the Democratic Socialist Party demands that the ACTU launch an immediate industrial campaign by the whole of the trade union movement, that it involve bans and limitations on operations crucial to the functioning of the Howard government, Lang Corporation and the National Farmers’ Federation, while causing as little inconvenience as possible to the community and be run by mass meetings of union delegates.” (James Vassilopoulos *MUA here to stay* p5)

It is worthwhile recalling the words of Leon Trotsky again:

“In periods of acute class struggle, the leading bodies of the trade unions aim to become masters of the mass movement in order to render it harmless.

“Therefore, the section of the Fourth International should always strive not only to renew the top leadership of the trade unions, boldly and resolutely in critical moments advancing new militant leaders in place of routine functionaries and careerists; but also to create in all possible instances independent militant organisations corresponding more closely to the tasks of mass struggle against bourgeois society, and, if necessary, not flinching even in the face of a direct break with the conservative apparatus of the trade unions ...Trade unions are not ends in themselves, they are but means along the road to proletarian revolution.” (Leon Trotsky *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution* p 118)

The statements of James Vassilopoulos represent no departure from the above views of Trotsky on the trade unions. Every elected trade union official, by the very fact of being elected, is regarded as a

bureaucrat, not to be trusted. This is associated with the demand that they must carry out the tactics demanded by the Democratic Socialist Party.

Furthermore, the leadership of the dispute should be dispersed to mass meetings of union delegates. This represents the view that “in critical moments” new leaders should be advanced and “if necessary” a break with the trade union leadership should occur. In this way an attack is launched against the trade union leadership and trade union unity at the same time as the bosses are attacking the union. This is the only conclusion that can be drawn from the reference to “critical moments”. It is the use of such tactics that puts these forces on the side of disunity precisely at times when the utmost solidarity is required.

According to the advocates of this position, the only viable tactic is the national stoppage or the general strike. This tactic is raised irrespective of the actual conditions, the timing or the circumstances surrounding the struggle.

The use of the tactic of general strike has historical links with the view that an economic strike would lead to a general strike and that all that has to be done to achieve socialism is to generalise the strike struggle. This opinion was prevalent among members of the International Workers of the World and represents a mistaken understanding of the development of the revolutionary movement and the struggle for socialism.

The use of the political general strike requires careful planning and preparation, a high degree of consciousness among the working people and a well-organised vanguard. The Democratic Socialist Party pamphlet recalls the struggle against anti-trade union legislation when, in 1968, Clarrie O’Shea, a trade union leader, was jailed under this legislation. Many trade unions had taken protest action over a period of years against the legislation. The jailing of Clarrie O’Shea was a virtual “last straw”. Labor Councils called for action and stoppages erupted across Australia. Workers walked off jobs demanding the release of Clarrie O’Shea from jail and that the penal powers legislation

be repealed. These events were a high point in the movement but would not have occurred without years of campaigning and the political leadership of communists and a widespread unity on the issue involving almost the whole labour movement. Many unions led by officials who were members of the ALP immediately joined the action and had been part of the long campaigning.

In the article written by James Vassilopoulos that recalls this dispute and calls on today's trade union movement to emulate this dispute, there is no analysis or understanding of the differences between 1968 and today. It is used as a means to attack the leadership of the MUA and the ACTU. There is no talk about unifying the forces opposed to the employers' attacks.

Dick Nichols, who is also a leader of the Democratic Socialist Party and is that Party's national industrial organiser, writes in the same booklet (*MUA here to stay*) that corporate Australia is "increasingly confident that the union movement is made of papier mache [and that] the bosses of Australia smell a big kill in the MUA dispute." (p 54) He obviously repeats this estimation with approval.

He claims that "ACTU advocates cower before the Reserve Bank of Australia's big stick: Ask for wages that are too high and we will have no choice but to raise interest rates ..." (p 55)

In a paragraph that is remarkable for its sneering tone, Dick Nichols writes:

"Then there's the present wharf dispute. Whatever happened to the demand to nationalise the stevedoring companies? Of course, you just couldn't raise it now, could you? You'd be laughed out of the room. I mean, we all know that private is more efficient, don't we? What are you, a brontosaurus? Or were you asleep when the Soviet Union collapsed?" (Ibid. p 55)

Nichols goes on: "Those with any profile in the official trade union movement either agree with these views or, at best, haven't the faintest idea about how to counter them."

And the blame for all this:

“Of course, we all know that behind this ideological shambles lies the retreat of those who in the past were most responsible for imparting a broadly radical class-consciousness to the union movement — the Communist Party of Australia and its various off shoots. Their promotion of the Accord combined with the collapse of the USSR produced total ideological devastation among the old union left, which either didn’t understand these events or thought it could get away with not understanding them, shrinking back into militant trade unionism. The result has been an entire layer of rank and file militants, the working class’s natural fighters, have become prey to all sorts of rubbish. Today it is not uncommon to come across young militants who are leading the fight against the boss on one hand and then telling you how good Pauline Hanson is on the other.” (*MUA here to stay* Dick Nichols p56)

Thus, Trotskyist “wisdom” has it that only those who adhere to uninterrupted revolution, the general strike and rank and file committees qualify as true revolutionaries. It seems that militancy is measured by the virulence of one’s attacks on the leadership of the trade union movement and the ACTU.

Anti-union forces and backward elements exist in the working class today and in the trade union movement of Clarrie O’Shea’s day. They also existed in Lenin’s time. There was strong support among the Australian working class for the White Australia Policy during the 1950s, 60s and 70s. This did not stop the Communist Party and its “off-shoots” from leading workers in militant action and developing widespread working class unity. The Unity Tickets of that period united communists, labor party members and those not belonging to any party. This form of unity was the target of hostile attacks by the employers and the mass media. It was, however, a period of many trade union successes. By levelling vicious attacks on the Labor Party in its entirety, union “bureaucrats”, meaning every trade union leader, and the ACTU in its entirety, the DSP, in effect, echoes the campaigns of the employers.

What sort of a Party?

An important issue here is the clarity of ideas and the cohesiveness of the vanguard within the working class. The difficulty that overtook the Communist Party of Australia during the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s was a loss of ideological direction. The introduction by the Aaron's faction of "new left" thinking and the admittance of Trotskyist ideas into the Communist Party weakened and confused the Party membership and many of its supporters. It was during this period that Trotskyism experienced a revival and the Communist Party suffered splits and decline.

The Democratic Socialist Party had its origins in the "New Left" radicalism of the struggle against the Vietnam war. An organisation was founded by the Percy brothers that, after a time, became Resistance and then the Socialist Workers' League. The Socialist Workers' League was affiliated to the section of the Fourth International associated with James P. Cannon, a US Trotskyist, in opposition to the group around the Communist League which adhered to Ernest Mandel, a Belgian Trotskyist.

The Socialist Workers' League formed the Socialist Workers' Party and this merged with the Communist League. It published a newspaper called Direct Action taking the original name of the IWW paper in Australia. The organisation practised "entrism" into other political parties, initially the Australian Labor Party, then the Nuclear Disarmament Party and later the Greens. When entering the Greens, the paper was changed to Green Left Weekly. When the counter-revolutionary Gorbachev and Yeltsin dismembered the Soviet Union, the name Democratic Socialist Party was adopted. The Democratic Socialist Party was a fervent supporter of "Gorby".

At about this time and along with some other sections of the Fourth International the then Socialist Workers' Party made what was called a turn to industry — "to colonise industry". After the turn to industry other positional changes including distancing itself from the Fourth International took place.

Revolution and Counter-revolution

However, the Socialist Workers' Party vigorously supported Solidarinocz and Lech Walesa in Poland. In Czechoslovakia they supported "Charter 77". This was a group of "dissidents" led by Vaclav Havel who turned out to be a CIA agent and became President of the Czech Republic with the overthrow of socialism in that country.

Recently they vigorously supported the Kosovo Liberation Army despite its obvious fascist links. Prior to the dissolution of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia they supported the formation of a so-called Socialist Party of Croatia. A number of prominent members left the Socialist Workers' Party in protest when the Socialist Party of Croatia recognised Croatia's previous Ustashi government as a legitimate national liberation movement. (The Ustashi was the government of Croatia in the period of the Nazi occupation of Croatia during World War II).

Green Left, under the byline of Eva Cheng, supports the so-called "democracy" activists in China. These Chinese "freedom fighters" are given support although these individuals have no difficulty in finding a home and a welcome in the United States and a warm embrace from the capitalist media. There is a mish-mash of rhetoric maintaining that China is taking the capitalist road, a viewpoint that is also assiduously spread by all the media. A series of articles have supported the independence of Taiwan and Tibet.

Doug Lorimer who, in his booklet, gives some coverage of China fails to come to terms with the leading role of the Communist Party of China in Chinese society. There is very little understanding or acknowledgement of the role of the Chinese Communist Party in uniting the nation and defending China's sovereignty and its struggle to build a modern socialist society. China had been torn to pieces by imperialism. Its people were subjected to endless atrocities at the hands of Japanese, British, Portuguese and American imperialism. But it was the Chinese armies that subjected the Americans to their first military defeat — in Korea. Under the leadership of the CPC,

China has emerged with a rapidly developing economy which, given another 20 years of peace, will outstrip that of the United States.

In all this, Lorimer's party provides objective support to the counter-revolutionaries — Gorbachev, Lech Walesa, Havel, the Croatian and Bosnian separatists and a number of others. These “dissidents” and “reformers” all prepared the way for the overthrow of socialism in their respective countries and helped to re-establish capitalism.

If the so-called “democratic” activists had come to power in China, China would have suffered the same fate as has overtaken the Soviet Union. The return to power of the Dalai Lama in Tibet would restore a theocracy and a slave society. The Democratic Socialist Party supports secessionist movements no matter what the political aim or direction of these movements.

There are some that seek to understand the problems of the setback to socialism in the Soviet Union within the context of the Trotsky/Stalin era. In the main, however, history has already judged this period and its mistakes and errors. It also has to be judged as a period of huge achievements. The set-back in the Soviet Union needs to be discovered in the post-Stalin era and in the introduction of “new thinking” and the abandonment of many socialist tenets, particularly by Gorbachev who literally opened the gates to imperialism and sold his own country and socialism to imperialism.

Trotsky and fascism

Trotsky's errors were not solely confined to the question of permanent revolution and the trade unions. They also involved questions of strategy and tactics, the role of the working class and the question of political alliances. Trotsky's analysis of fascism was also flawed and led Trotsky to attack the movement against fascism before the outbreak of World War II. Trotsky and his followers condemned the popular front government in France.

In *The Transitional Program*, Trotsky had this to say:

“In France, the great wave of sit down strikes, particularly during June 1936, revealed the wholehearted readiness of the proletariat to overthrow the capitalist system. However, the leading organisations (Socialists, Stalinists, Syndicalists), under the label of the popular front, succeeded in canalising and damning, at least temporarily, the revolutionary stream.

“The unprecedented wave of sit down strikes and the amazingly rapid growth of industrial unionism in the United States (the CIO) is the most indisputable expression of the instinctive striving of the American workers to raise themselves to the level of the tasks imposed on them by history. But here, too, the leading political organisations, including the newly created CIO, do everything possible to keep in check and paralyse the revolutionary pressure of the masses.

“The definite passing over of the Comintern to the side of the bourgeois order, its cynically counter-revolutionary role throughout the world - particularly in Spain, France, the United States, and other ‘democratic’ countries - created exceptional supplementary difficulties for the world proletariat. Under the banner of the October revolution, the conciliatory politics practiced by the People’s Front dooms the working class to impotence and clears the road for fascism.

“People’s Fronts on the one hand - fascism on the other; these are the last political resources of imperialism in the struggle against the proletarian revolution.

“A merciless exposure of the theory and practice of the People’s Front is therefore the first condition for a revolutionary struggle against fascism.” (*The Transitional Program* p 112-113)

Trotsky would have done well to have heeded the Bulgarian communist and leader of the Comintern (The Communist International) Georgi Dimitrov, whose direct experience of fascism included his successful defence against the false charge of burning down the Reichstag (the German parliament) which was brought against him by Hitler’s Nazi regime.

In his report to the 7th Congress of the Communist International in 1935, *Against Fascism and War* Georgi Dimitrov described fascism as “*the open terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital.*” (Georgi Dimitrov’s emphasis) (*Against Fascism and War* International Publishers Edition p2)

He added:

“German fascism is acting as the spearhead of international counter-revolution, as the chief instigator of the imperialist war, as the initiator of a crusade against the Soviet Union, the great fatherland of the working people of the whole world.”

“Fascism is not a form of state power ‘standing above both classes - the proletariat and the bourgeoisie’ ... It is not ‘the revolt of the petty bourgeoisie which has captured the machinery of the state,’ as the British socialist Brailsford declares. No, fascism is not a power standing above class, nor a power of the petty bourgeoisie or the lumpen-proletariat over finance capital. Fascism is the power of finance capital itself. It is the organisation of terrorist vengeance against the working class and the revolutionary section of the peasantry and intelligentsia. In foreign policy, fascism is jingoism in its most brutal form, fomenting bestial hatred of other nations.” (*Ibid.* p3)

Dimitrov further explained that fascism was the substitution of one form of bourgeois rule for another and the replacement of the democratic dictatorship of the bourgeoisie by its open terrorist dictatorship.

This clear understanding of fascism is absent from Trotsky. In leading the struggle against fascism the communist movement led the working class which, in its turn, led other classes in a struggle for democratic rights and other demands against the capitalist class. This struggle against finance capital and its restriction of democratic rights is a prerequisite to the struggle for socialism. Without democratic rights such as the right to form trade unions, to participate in elections, to hold public assemblies, etc., the workers’ struggle is restricted. In

winning these “bourgeois rights” the workers are creating the conditions for their own task of winning working class power and building a socialist society.

Following the crushing defeat of fascism, mainly by the Soviet army, a number of socialist revolutions took place in Europe and Asia. The working class and peasantry under the leadership of the various communist parties achieved all these revolutions. None would have occurred if the Communist International had joined the ranks of the bourgeoisie as Trotsky asserted. Furthermore, nowhere has any revolution ever been achieved under the leadership of Trotskyist organisations.

The Spanish experience

During the Spanish Civil War against Franco, Trotsky’s followers created an organisation called the POUM. At a “critical moment”, POUM launched a military attack against the Republican Government and the Communist Party of Spain which supported the Republican Government despite its weaknesses. It was an action that divided and weakened the common front against fascism. La Passionaria, the heroine of the Spanish civil war, wrote about this act of treachery in her book *They Shall Not Pass*:

“In the heat of the war, when the North was in the middle of an enemy offensive, when Malaga was a bleeding wound in the side of the Republican resistance movement, the POUM (the Trotskyist Party) rebelled in Barcelona on May 3, presenting an ultimatum to the Generalitat of Catalonia which in effect was a demand for power ... on the points of the Trotskyite bayonets.”

They demanded that “The Ministry of War, the Ministries of Industry, Transportation, Trade, Finances, Agriculture, the posts of Chief of Police, Police Commissar of Barcelona and all other important police posts” be handed over to them.

La Passionaria goes on: “The instigators of the counterrevolution in Barcelona overestimated their power and underestimated that of the Popular Front parties and organisations fighting for the victory of the Republic.

“The Anarcho-Trotskyites felt the strength of these organisations when their counterrevolutionary putsch, encourage by the fascist radio, ended in defeat.

“Everyone in Spain was outraged.”
(*They Shall Not Pass* La Passionaria p 281-286)

It is a small historical footnote that the noted anti-communist George Orwell found his inspiration in the legends and myths of Trotsky and Orwell’s own experience in the Spanish Civil War.

What Lorimer missed in his critique of Trotsky is Trotsky’s failure to account for the conscious role of a communist party in crystallising the experience of the working class, in providing leadership, in understanding trends and moods within the class and in overcoming capitalist and petty bourgeois influences. Anarchistic moods can sweep the working class reflecting feelings of desperation and powerlessness, the lack of organisation and struggle against the savage exploitation of the capitalist class. They are not, however, the things to build a movement on. The organisation of the most advanced and politically conscious elements of the working class into a communist party and the conscious application of leadership within the class and to other classes in society, is the way forward.

As a consequence of his theory of permanent revolution Trotsky concluded that the CPSU had become a bourgeois organisation and had to be overthrown. This objectively placed him on the side of imperialism whose aim was also to remove the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from power.

The following from *The Transitional Program* (p 144-145) is illustrative of Trotsky's errors. He talks of a "right, bourgeois wing of the bureaucracy" and says "we can expect even more determined attempts in the next period to revise the social regime of the USSR and bring it closer in pattern to 'western civilisation' in its fascist form ... the chief political task in the USSR still remains the overthrow of this same Thermidorian bureaucracy."

Trotsky goes on to claim that "a fresh upsurge of the revolution in the USSR will undoubtedly begin under the banner of the struggle against social inequality and political oppression. Down with the privileges of bureaucracy! Down with the Stakhanovism! Down with the Soviet aristocracy and its ranks and orders! *Greater equality of wages for all forms of labor!*" (*The Transitional Program*, p 144-145).

However, it was Gorbachev, over 50 years after this was written, who destroyed socialism in the Soviet Union and dismembered the country — all under the pretext of building "a better socialism".

Trotsky's statement about "greater equality of wages" was yet another point on which Lenin took Trotsky to task in the debate on the role of trade unions in the Soviet Union. It is based on a mistaken view that wage levels should be similar or the same for different forms of labour. A platform adopted by trade unions at the time and supported by Lenin had this to say on this question:

"... in the present social conditions, when all of production is geared to the satisfaction of the working people's needs, *wage rates and bonuses must be closely tied in with and must depend on the extent to which the production plan is fulfilled.* Bonuses in kind and partial payment of wages in kind must be gradually transformed into a *system of workers' supply which depends on the level of labour productivity.*" (Italics in the original) (LCW Vol. 32 p 39)

Throughout the essay Lorimer fails to understand the fundamental differences between Lenin's position and Trotsky's position on many issues and, in so doing, attempts to portray Trotsky's position as Lenin's

position. In fact, Trotsky opposed Lenin on many occasions and on many important and fundamental issues.

History has judged the question of political revolutions as supported by Trotsky and his followers. Such revolutions led to the removal of Communist Parties from power, the collapse of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the resumption of capitalist rule.

Consequences

In Poland, Hungary, the German Democratic Republic, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Albania and in most of Yugoslavia, successful counter-revolutions have occurred. In the USSR under the guise of political reforms a counter-revolution occurred in which the state power of the working class was replaced with that of the newly emergent capitalist class. Imperialism directly supported and funded these movements. Renewed clericalism and the role played by the clergy represented a disturbing trend within these nations. It cannot be forgotten that organisations such as the Vatican were complicit in the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union during the Second World War and assisted the racist acts of genocide associated with fascism. Today, the rising forces of Islamic and Christian fundamentalism are well known for their reactionary positions in a number of current conflicts. Another important element is splitism, using narrow nationalism and ethnic separatism.

As a result of the success of counter-revolution in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, the world-wide revolutionary and progressive movements have been weakened while imperialism, US imperialism and aggression in particular, have been strengthened.

US imperialism has been actively engaged in a more aggressive foreign policy. Iraq has been attacked and continues to be regularly bombed by US and British planes. The savage trade embargo remains and has resulted in thousands of deaths of Iraqi people, including children. Panama and Somalia have been invaded, Libya and Sudan bombed, and Yugoslavia divided and in 1999 invaded and bombed. The Chinese

Embassy in Belgrade was deliberately bombed as a “warning” to China. Military bases are now being built in Kosovo that all states recognise as a province of Yugoslavia. The United States has been involved in counter-insurgency against the Kurdish people, and is openly or clandestinely interfering in the internal affairs and sovereign rights of other nations. It maintains its decades-long blockade of Cuba, a heroic country that has defied US aggression and interference to maintain its sovereign rights.

The absence of the Soviet Union and other socialist governments as a counter-weight to imperialism is clearly a significant setback for working people and for the national liberation movements. It is important that in dealing with this setback that we do not adopt incorrect ideas.

A clear understanding is needed that the dictatorship of the proletariat is a description of working class rule. It is expressed in worker and farmer soviets or councils, backed by trade unions that remain the main mass organisations of the working class. Working class rule is also dependent on a Party of the working class, which applies Marxist-Leninist ideology to all its work and activities and defends and advances the interests of all the working people. Every single one of the socialist regimes that have so far existed is proof of this.

The precise, detailed form that working class rule will take is not pre-ordained but must be worked out in the struggle. It will arise in different forms in different countries and the manner of its achievement will vary. The only continuity is of the principles involved.

The mechanical approach

Doug Lorimer is correct about one aspect of Trotsky’s theories. He writes that the theory of “uninterrupted revolution was based upon a *mechanical-fatalistic conception of the class struggle.*” (Italics in the original) (*Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution* p 24)

An understanding that quantitative changes lead to qualitative changes is absent from Trotsky’s Marxism. For example, in 1917 it was a change

in the quantitative support for the Bolsheviks in the Soviets that created the possibility for a successful revolution in October 1917. It was this change that made the socialist revolution possible. It did not occur through a mechanical application of slogans. The concept of uninterrupted revolution is mechanical in the extreme. It does not analyse or understand the actual revolutionary processes — the movement of classes, the changes in class relationships, the actual level of political consciousness, etc.

It is no accident that Trotsky's mechanical approach leads to other errors, such as in trade union work. Another of these errors involves the failure to build alliances based on the broadest possible forces in support of progressive issues. In the present period the establishment of a socialist government remains a strategic objective but it cannot be achieved by one big leap. A tactic towards achieving this aim is to establish a people's government by way of a left and progressive people's unity.

The use of strike struggles, demonstrations and political protests are associated with a strategic objective while every strategic aim can only be fulfilled by adoption of the appropriate tactics.

The substitution of permanent revolution as a strategic objective bears no relationship to reality. When this ideology is applied within the trade union movement it involves the substitution of "permanent", "continuous" strike struggles, a permanent state of warfare without regard to the relationship of class forces, the preparedness of workers to struggle, the state of leadership, etc.

Those who adhere to this ideology end up condemning all those who may have achieved a successful outcome of this or that struggle because they did not continue the struggle until capitalism had been overthrown — no less! On this basis others are attacked as betrayers of the movement even though the objective demanded by the critics

has no basis in reality. This approach represents an idealised view of the world based on fantasies. The objectives may in themselves be desirable but their immediate attainment remains a fantasy when related to the conditions, time and place. The demands may sound revolutionary but are fantasies none-the-less.

