



# Ernest Mandel

Dictatorship of the Proletariat  
and Socialist Democracy

Ross Collection

Ernest Mandel

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**(1985)**

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*THE CURRENT debate in the international labour movement over differing conceptions of socialist democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat is the most deep-going since the years following the Russian revolution of October 1917. It is a product of the growth of workers' struggles in the capitalist countries since 1968 and of the anti-imperialist struggles, of the parallel crisis of capitalism and the rule of the bureaucratic castes over the bureaucratised workers' states. It is likewise a product of the awareness, inside the international working class, of Stalinism and of bureaucracy in general. All these factors take the debate out of the realm of more or less academic polemics into the field of practical politics. A clear position on this question is required to advance the socialist revolution in the capitalist countries and the political revolution in the bureaucratised workers' states. It is therefore necessary for the Fourth International to state its programmatic positions on this subject. (red. International Viewpoint)*

- I. What is the dictatorship of the proletariat?
- II. Workers-council power and the extension of democratic rights for the toiling masses
- III. Class struggle under capitalism, the struggle for democratic rights, and the emergence of the dictatorship of the proletariat
- IV. One-party and multi-party systems

- V. What do political parties represent?
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- VII. A clear stand on socialist democracy is necessary to win the proletariat for the socialist revolution
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- XI. International revolution and international counter-revolution
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- XIII. The programme of socialist democracy – an integral part of the programme of world revolution

## (Part 1)

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# I. What is the dictatorship of the proletariat?

The fundamental difference between reformists and centrists of all varieties on the one hand and revolutionary Marxists, i.e., Bolshevik-Leninists on the other hand, regarding the conquest of state power, the need for a socialist revolution, the nature of the proletarian state, and the meaning of the dictatorship of the proletariat consists of:

- a. The recognition by revolutionary Marxists of the class nature of all states and of the state apparatus as an instrument of maintaining class rule. In that sense, all states are dictatorships. Bourgeois democracy is also the dictatorship of a class.
- b. The illusion propagated by the reformists and many centrists that “democracy” or “democratic state institutions” stand above classes and the class struggle, and the rejection of that illusion by revolutionary Marxists.
- c. The recognition by revolutionary Marxists that the state institutions of even the most democratic bourgeois states serve to uphold the power and the rule of the capitalist class (and, in addition, in the imperialist countries, the exploitation of the people of the semi-colonial countries), and therefore cannot be instruments with which to overthrow that rule and transfer power from the capitalist class to the working class.
- d. The recognition by revolutionary Marxists that the destruction of the bourgeois state apparatus, in the first place

destruction of its military/police repressive apparatus, is a necessary prerequisite for the conquest of political power by the working class.

- e. The recognition by revolutionary Marxists of the necessity for the development of the consciousness and mass organisation of the workers in order to carry through the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat.
- f. The necessary conclusion drawn by revolutionary Marxists as a consequence: that the working class by itself can exercise state power directly only within the framework of state institutions of a type different from those of the bourgeois state, state institutions arising out of sovereign and democratically elected and centralised workers councils (soviets), with the fundamental characteristics outlined by Lenin in *State and Revolution* – the election of all functionaries, judges, commanders of the workers or workers and peasants militias, and all delegates representing the toilers in state institutions; rotation of elected officials; restriction of their income to that of skilled workers; the right to recall them at all times; simultaneous exercise of legislative and executive power by soviet-type institutions; drastic reduction of the number of permanent functionaries and greater and greater transfer of administrative functions to bodies run by the mass of the concerned toilers themselves. In other words, a soviet type representative democracy, as opposed to the parliamentary type, with increasingly wide-ranging forms of direct democracy.

As Lenin stated, the workers' state is the first state in human history that upholds the rule of the majority of the population against exploitative and oppressive minorities.

“Instead of the special institutions of a privileged minority (privileged officialdom, the chiefs of the standing army), the

majority itself can directly fulfil all these functions, and the more the functions of a state power are performed by the people as a whole, the less need there is for the existence of this power.” (*State and Revolution, Collected Works, Vol.25, pp.419-420.*)

Thus, the dictatorship of the proletariat in the programmatic sense of the word is by no means contradictory with workers democracy:

“By its very essence, the dictatorship of the proletariat can and must be the utmost flowering of proletarian democracy” (L. Trotsky, *Oeuvres, Vol.V, pp.206-7.*)

The concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which summarises all these points, is a basic part of the Marxist theory of the state, of the proletarian revolution, and of the process toward building a classless society. The word “dictatorship” has a concrete meaning in that context: it is a mechanism for the disarmament and expropriation of the bourgeois class and the exercise of state power by the working class, a mechanism to prevent any reestablishment of bourgeois state power or of private property in the means of production, and thus any re-introduction of the exploitation of wage-earners by capitalists.

But it in no way means dictatorial rule over the vast majority of people. The founding congress of the Communist International states explicitly that

“... proletarian dictatorship is the forcible oppression of the resistance of the exploiters, i.e., an insignificant minority of the population, the landowners and capitalists. It follows that proletarian dictatorship must inevitably entail not only a change in democratic forms and institutions, generally speaking, but precisely such a change as provides an unparalleled extension of the enjoyment of democracy by those oppressed by capitalism – the toiling classes ... all this

implies and presents to the toiling classes, i.e., the vast majority of the population, greater practical opportunities for enjoying democratic rights and liberties than ever existed before, even approximately, in the best and the most democratic bourgeois republics.” (*Theses and Report on Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol.28, pp.464-5.)

Such a state is only a state, in the traditional sense of the word, during the period when it is necessary to “violently repress the resistance of the class that has lost political power.” That is the period in which Marxist tradition has called the state dictatorship of the proletariat.

“From its inception, the regime of the dictatorship of the proletariat ceases therefore to be that of a state in the old meaning of the word that is a machine made to keep the majority of the people subservient. Along with weapons, material force passes directly, immediately, into the hands of workers organisations such as the soviets.”

And this state, “a bureaucratic apparatus, begins to wither away from the first day of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thus speaks the programme, unchanged to this day” Trotsky wrote in *Revolution Betrayed*.

It is clear that if this sort of evolution towards the withering away of the state does not take place, when the resistance of the bourgeois class has been broken within the new workers’ state, and if, instead, a process of bureaucratisation develops, then we are not dealing with a “strengthening of the dictatorship of the proletariat” but with its degeneration towards bureaucratic state forms.

It follows that we reject the allegation by the reformists and many centrists – influenced on this point by bourgeois ideology, or apologists of the Stalinist dictatorship – that the



basic difference between proponents and adversaries of the dictatorship of the proletariat lies either in the defence of a one-party system by the former and its rejection by the latter, or in defending the need to severely restrict or even suppress democratic freedoms on the part of the former and the staunch defence of those freedoms by the latter. The argument is all the more hypocritical in the light of historical evidence which shows the willingness of reformists to severely restrict the democratic freedom of the masses when they threaten to overthrow the bourgeois order, even using police and military repression to that end (Noske!), and their inability and unwillingness to effectively defend democratic freedom even within bourgeois society against ultra-right threats, inasmuch as such a defence involves mass mobilisation on the broadest scale, including arming of the masses.

Against the open programmatic revisionism of many communist parties and centrist formations, the Fourth International defends these classical concepts of Marx and Lenin. A socialist society is not possible without the collective ownership of the means of production and the social surplus product, economic planning and administration by the working class as a whole through democratically centralised workers councils, i.e., planned management by the toilers. No such socialisation is possible unless the capitalists are economically and politically expropriated and state power is wielded by the working class. No fully developed socialist society can emerge within the narrow boundaries of the nation state.

Especially after the tragic Chilean experience, which confirmed so many previous lessons of history, the reformist

concept now shared by the communist parties of capitalist Europe, the Japanese CP, and several other CPs as well as centrist formations and the social democrats, according to which the labour movement can fully attain its goals within the framework of bourgeois parliamentary institutions, through reliance on parliamentary elections and gradual conquest of “positions of state power” within these institutions, must be energetically opposed and denounced for what it is: it is a cover-up for abandonment of the struggle for the conquest of state power by the proletariat; a cover-up for abandonment of the struggle for the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, for abandonment of a policy of consistent defence of the class interests of working class; a substitution of ever-more systematic class collaboration with the bourgeoisie for the policy of consistent class struggle; a disarming of the proletariat in the face of violence unleashed by the capitalist class; and, consequently, a growing tendency to capitulate to the class interests of the bourgeoisie at moments of decisive economic, political and social crisis. Far from reducing the “costs of social transformation” or from ensuring a peaceful, albeit slower, transition to socialism, this policy, if it should decisively determine the political attitude of the toilers in a period of unavoidable overall class confrontation, can only lead to bloody defeats and mass slaughters of the German, Spanish, Indonesian, and Chilean type (in the German case, additionally caused by the criminal ultra-left “social-fascism” theory and practice of the Comintern).

## II. Workers-council power and the extension of democratic rights for the toiling masses

The dictatorship of the proletariat in its complete form, workers' democracy, means the exercise of state-power by democratically elected soviets, workers' councils. Marx's and Lenin's whole critique of the limitations of bourgeois democracy is based on the fact that private property and capitalist exploitation (i.e., social and economic inequality), coupled with the specific class structure of bourgeois society (atomisation and alienation of the working class, legislation defending private property, function of the repressive apparatus, etc.) result in the violent restriction of the practical application of democratic rights and the practical enjoyment of democratic freedoms by the big majority of the toiling masses, even in the most democratic bourgeois regimes.

The logical conclusion flowing from this critique is that workers' democracy must be superior to bourgeois democracy not only in the economic and social sphere – such as the right to work, a secure existence, free education, leisure time, etc. – but also because it increases the democratic rights enjoyed by the workers and all layers of toilers in the political and social sphere. To grant a single party or so-called “mass organisations” or “professional associations” (like writers' associations) controlled by that single party, a monopoly of access to the printing presses, radio, television, and other mass media, to assembly halls, etc., would, in fact, restrict and not extend the democratic rights of the proletariat compared to those enjoyed under

contemporary bourgeois democracy. The right of toilers, including those with dissenting views, to have access to the material means of exercising democratic freedoms (freedom of the press, of assembly, of demonstration, the right to strike, etc.) is essential, as is the independence of the trade unions from the state and from control by the ruling party or parties.

Therefore, an extension of democratic rights for the toilers beyond those already enjoyed under conditions of advanced bourgeois democracy is incompatible with the restriction of the right to form political groupings, tendencies, or parties on programmatic or ideological grounds.

Moreover, self-activity and self administration by the toiling masses under the dictatorship of the proletariat will take on many new facets and extend the concepts of “political activity”, “political parties”, “political programmes”, and “democratic rights” far beyond anything characteristic of political life under bourgeois democracy. This applies not only to the combined flowering of more advanced forms of council democracy (congress of councils, with growing manifestations of direct democracy, with political instruments like referendums on specific questions being used to enable the mass of the toilers to decide directly on a whole number of key questions of policy. It applies also and especially to the very content of “politics”.

Under capitalism and even beyond it, under pre-capitalist forms of commodity production, it is the law of value, i.e., objective economic laws operating independently of the will of men and women, which basically regulates economic life. The socialist revolution implies the possibility of a giant leap

forward towards a conscious regulation of humanity's economic and social destiny instead of a blind anarchic one. While this process can only come to full and harmonious completion in a worldwide socialist society, it starts with conscious planning of the socialised economy during the transition period between capitalism and socialism, in the epoch of the dictatorship of the proletariat. While the influence of the law of value cannot be completely eliminated during that period, its domination must be overcome or the economy cannot be planned.

But planning means allocation of economic resources according to socially established priorities instead of according to blind market forces and the rule of profit. Who will establish these priorities, which involve the well-being of tens and hundreds of millions of human beings and whose implications, consequences, and results in turn influence the behaviour of the mass of the producers and the toilers?

Basically, there are only two mechanisms which can be substituted for the rule of the law of value: either bureaucratic choices imposed upon the mass of the producers/consumers from the top (whatever their origin and character may be, from benign technocratic paternalism to extreme arbitrary despotism of Stalin's type), or choices made by the mass of the producers themselves, through the mechanism of democratically centralised workers' power, i.e., through the mechanism of socialist.

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to extreme arbitrary despotism of Stalin's type), or choices made by the mass of the producers themselves, through the mechanism of democratically centralised workers' power, i.e., through the mechanism of socialist democracy. This will be the main content of political debate and struggle, of socialist democracy under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Experience has shown that the first mechanism is extremely wasteful and inefficient. This is true not only because of direct waste of material resources and productive capacities and great dislocations in the plan, but also and especially because of the systematic stifling of the creative and productive potential of the working class. Theoretical and empirical analysis concurs in the conclusion that the second mechanism can and will greatly reduce these shortcomings. In any case, it is the only one permitting a gradual transition to that which is the goal of the dictatorship of the proletariat: a classless socialist community of self-administering producers and consumers.

Experience has, however, also shown that this mechanism of democratically centralised workers' power through a system of workers' councils cannot master all the social and economic contradictions of the building of socialism without the existence of instruments independent of the soviet state apparatus which act as a counterweight. Independent trade unions and a labour law guaranteeing the right to strike are essential in this sense to guarantee a defence of the needs of the workers and their standard of living against any decision taken by workers' councils, particularly against any arbitrary and bureaucratic move of the management bodies. The Hungarian experience of 1956, the Czechoslovak experience of 1968 and the Polish experience since 1980 also confirm that this is a fundamental concern of the proletariat that has gone through the experience of bureaucratic dictatorship. Although in principle revolutionary Marxists recommend

the organisation of the working class in a single democratic trade union, the right to trade union pluralism must not be challenged. Not simultaneously holding central leadership responsibilities in a trade union and a party is an element of trade union independence.

Building a classless socialist society also involves a gigantic process of remoulding all aspects of social life. It involves constant change in the relations of production, in the mode of distribution, in the labour process, in the forms of administration of the economy and society, and in the customs, habits, and ways of thinking of the great majority of people. It involves the fundamental reconstruction of all living conditions: reconstruction of cities, complete revolution in the education system, restoration and protection of the ecological equilibrium, technological innovations to conserve scarce natural resources, etc.

Previously the highest acquisitions of culture have been the property of the ruling class, with special prerogatives and privileges accruing to the intelligentsia. Members of this special grouping function as transmitters and developers of science, art, and the professions for the ruling class.

That intelligentsia will gradually disappear as the masses progressively appropriate for themselves the full cultural heritage of the past and begin to create the culture of the classless society. In this way the distinction between “manual” and “intellectual” labour will disappear, each individual being able to develop their own capacities and talents.

All these endeavours, for which humanity possesses no blueprints, will give rise to momentous ideological and political debates and struggles. Different platforms on these issues will play a very important role. Any restriction of these debates and movements, under the pretext that this or

that platform “objectively” reflects bourgeois or petty-bourgeois pressure and interests and “if logically carried out to the end”, could “lead to the restoration of capitalism”, can only hinder the emergence of a consensus around the most effective solutions from the point of view of building socialism, i.e. from the point of view of the overall class interests of the proletariat, as opposed to sectoral interest.

It should be pointed out that important struggles will continue throughout the process of building a classless society, struggles that concern social evils that are rooted in class society but will not disappear immediately with the elimination of capitalist exploitation or wage labour. The oppression of women, the oppression of national and racial minorities, the oppression and alienation of youth, and discrimination against homosexuals are archetypes of such problems that are not reducible to “the class struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie” unless one challenges their Marxist and materialist definition, as various Maoist and ultra-left currents do.

Political freedom under socialist democracy therefore also implies freedom of organisation and action for independent women’s liberation, national liberation, and youth movements, i.e. movements broader than the working class in the scientific sense of the word.

The revolutionary party will be able to win political leadership in these movements and to ideologically defeat various reactionary ideological currents not through administrative or repressive measures but, on the contrary, only by promoting the broadest possible mass democracy and by uncompromisingly upholding the right of all tendencies to defend their opinions and platforms before society as a whole.



Furthermore it should be recognised that the specific form of the workers' state implies a unique dialectical combination of centralisation and decentralisation. The withering away of the state, to be initiated from the inception of the dictatorship of the proletariat, expresses itself through a process of gradual devolution of the right of administration in broad sectors of social activity (health system, educational system, postal-railway-telecommunications systems, etc.) internationally, nationally, regionally, and locally (communes) to organs of self-management. The central congress of workers' councils, i.e. the proletariat as a class, will only decide, by majority vote, what share of society's overall material and human resources should be allocated to each of these sectors. This implies forms of debate and political struggle that cannot be reduced to simplistic and mechanical "class struggle criteria".

Finally, in the building of a classless society, the participation of millions of people not only in a more or less passive way through their votes, but also in the actual administration of various levels, cannot be reduced to a workerist concept of considering only workers "at the point of production" or in the factories as such. Lenin said that in a workers' state, the vast majority of the population would participate directly in the exercise of "state functions." This means that the soviets on which the dictatorship of the proletariat will be based are not only factory councils, but bodies of self-organisation of the masses in many spheres of social life, including factories, commercial units, hospitals, schools, transport and telecommunication centres, and neighbourhoods (territorial units). This is indispensable in order to integrate into the conscious and active proletariat its most dispersed and often poorest and most oppressed layers, such as women, oppressed nationalities, youth,

workers in small shops, old-age pensioners, etc. It is also indispensable to cementing the alliance between the working-class and the toiling petty bourgeoisie. This alliance is decisive in winning and holding state power and in reducing the social costs both of a victorious revolution and of the building of socialism.

One of the institutional guarantees of the development of socialist democracy is the establishment of correct relations between the organs of this democracy and the apparatuses of the state administration, at all levels and in all fields: political, cultural, educational, military, etc. Socialist democracy is impossible if the purview of these apparatuses is not strictly delineated, if their powers are not reduced to a strict and indispensable minimum and if they are not thoroughly subordinated to the organs of socialist democracy (the councils). The councils should have full sovereignty over the strategic and tactical decisions in their purview. The administrative apparatuses should be responsible for the implementation of these decisions and nothing more.

Administrative officers should be selected on the basis of technical competence and professional experience criteria. They should not be appointed by the higher echelons of the administration, but by the corresponding councils, and should remain subject to recall by these councils.

### **III. Class struggle under capitalism, the struggle for democratic rights, and the emergence of the dictatorship of the proletariat**

The ruling class utilises all the ideological means at its disposal to identify bourgeois parliamentary institutions with the consolidation of democratic rights of the toilers. In Western Europe, North America, Japan, and Australia, for instance, the capitalist rulers seek to appear as champions of “democracy” in the eyes of the workers and plebeian masses, an outlook which has been strengthened by the negative experiences of fascism and Stalinism.

One of the key components of the struggle for winning the masses to socialist revolution, to the dictatorship of the proletariat, consists of responding to their democratic aspirations, of expressing them adequately, and thus counteracting the strenuous efforts of, the reformists to co-opt the struggle for democratic demands and divert it into the blind alley of bourgeois parliamentary institutions.

Whatever democratic rights the masses enjoy under capitalism – from the right to free speech, to the right to organise labour unions and workers’ parties, to the right to universal franchise and free abortion – have been won by them through struggle. Revolutionary Marxists fight for the broadest possible democratic rights under capitalism. The greater the degree of democratic rights, the greater the possibilities for the workers and their allies to struggle for their interests and to improve the relationship of class forces

for the proletariat, in preparation for the showdown struggles with the capitalists for power.

It is in the class interests of the workers to fight to defend every conquest of the masses, including democratic rights, against capitalist reaction. History has shown that the working class is the only class that can consistently do so, and that the workers united front is the best instrument for successfully organising such a fight against the threat of fascist or military dictatorships. Likewise, in the fight against capitalist reaction, we place no confidence in the capitalist state or any of its institutions. Every restriction by the capitalist state on democratic rights will inevitably be used tenfold against the working class and especially its revolutionary wing. Fascism, like any other attempt to impose an authoritarian regime, can only be stopped by independent mass mobilisations by a united working class and its allies, in consciously-led united front mass struggles.

Capitalism in its decay breeds reaction. The extent of democratic rights and freedoms enjoyed by the masses at any particular time in a given country are determined by the relationship of class forces.

In the imperialist epoch, given the increased polarisation between the classes, the long-term tendency for capitalism in the imperialist epoch is to restrict democratic rights.

This is especially true the more a given capitalist class finds itself in economic and social crisis, and the smaller are its material bases and reserves. Today this can be seen most clearly in the many brutal dictatorships in semi-colonial countries.

The task of wresting leadership from the reformists as “representatives” of the democratic aspirations of the masses is thus crucial for revolutionary Marxists. Obviously, programmatic clarification and propaganda, especially the

struggle against reformist and parliamentary illusions, important as they are, are insufficient to achieve this objective. The masses learn through their practical daily experience; hence the importance of going through this daily experience with them and drawing the correct lessons from it.

As the class struggle sharpens, the workers will increasingly challenge the authority and prerogatives of the ruling class on all levels. The workers themselves, through their own organisations – from union and factory committees and organs for workers' control, to workers' councils (soviets) – will begin to assert more and more economic and political decision-making authority, and thereby they will gain confidence in their power to overthrow the bourgeois state. In this same process, in order to carry out their struggles more effectively, with the broadest mass involvement, the workers will see the need for the most democratic forms of organisation.

Through this experience of struggle and participation in their own democratically run organisations, the masses will experience more freedom of action and more liberty in the broadest sense of the word than they ever exercised in the institutional framework of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. This is an indispensable link in the chain of events leading from capitalist rule to the conquest of power by the proletariat. It will also be a vital experience to draw upon in establishing the democratic norms of the workers' state. Self-organisation of the proletariat in the course of the class struggle – from democratic strikers' assemblies and democratically elected strike committees to a generalised system of dual power – therefore is the best school of proletarian democracy under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

## IV. One-party and multi-party systems

Without full freedom to organise political groups, tendencies, and parties, no full flowering of democratic rights and freedoms for the toiling masses is possible under the dictatorship of the proletariat. By their free vote, the workers and poor peasants indicate themselves what parties they want to be part of the soviet system. In that sense, the freedom of organisation of different groups, tendencies, and parties is a precondition for the exercise of political power by the working class. "The democratisation of the soviets is impossible without legalisation of soviet parties." (**Transitional Programme of the Fourth International**) Without such freedom, unrestrained by ideological restrictions, there can be no genuine, democratically elected workers' councils, nor the exercise of real power by such workers' councils.

Restrictions of that freedom would not be restrictions of the political rights of the class enemy but restrictions of the political rights of the proletariat. That freedom is likewise a precondition for the working class collectively as a class arriving at a common or at least a majority viewpoint on the innumerable problems of tactics, strategy, and even theory (programme) that are involved in the titanic task of building a classless society under the leadership of the traditionally oppressed, exploited, and downtrodden masses. Unless there is freedom to organise political groups, tendencies, and parties, there can be no real socialist democracy.

Revolutionary Marxists reject the substitutionist, paternalistic, elitist, and bureaucratic deviation from Marxism that sees the socialist revolution, the conquest of state power, and the wielding of state power under the

dictatorship of the proletariat, as a task of the revolutionary party acting “in the name” of the class or, in the best of cases, “with the support of” the class.

If the dictatorship of the proletariat is to mean what the very words say, and what the theoretical tradition of both Marx and Lenin explicitly contain, i.e., the rule of the working class as a class (of the “associated producers”); if the emancipation of the proletariat can be achieved only through the activity of the proletariat itself and not through a passive proletariat being “educated” for emancipation by benevolent and enlightened revolutionary administrators, then it is obvious that the leading role of the revolutionary party both in the conquest of power and in the building of a classless society can only consist of leading the mass activity of the class politically, of winning political hegemony in a class that is increasingly engaged in independent activity, of struggling within the class for majority support for its proposals, through political and not administrative or repressive means.

Under the dictatorship of the proletariat in its complete form, state power is exercised by democratically elected workers’ councils. The revolutionary party fights for a correct political line and or political leadership within these workers’ councils, not to substitute itself to them. Party and state remain entirely separate and distinct entities. But genuinely representative, democratically elected workers’ councils can exist only if the masses have the right to elect whomever they want without distinction, and without restrictive preconditions as to the ideological or political convictions of the elected delegates. (This does not apply, of course, to parties engaged in armed struggle against the workers’ state, i.e., to conditions of civil war, or to conditions of the revolutionary crisis and armed insurrection itself, to which this resolution refers in a later point). Likewise,

workers' councils can function democratically only if all the elected delegates enjoy the right to form groups, tendencies, and parties, to have access to the mass media, to present their different platforms before the masses, and to have them debated and tested by experience. Any restriction of party affiliation restricts the freedom of the proletariat to exercise political power, i.e., restricts workers' democracy, which would be contrary to the historical interests of the working class, to the need to consolidate workers' power, to the interests of world revolution and of building socialism.

Obviously such rights will not be recognised for parties, groups or individuals involved in a civil war or armed actions against the workers' state. Neither do such freedoms include the right to organise actions or demonstrations of a racist character or in favour of national or ethnic oppression.

In no way does the Marxist theory of the state entail the concept that a one-party system is a necessary precondition or feature of workers' power, a workers' state, or the dictatorship of the proletariat. In no theoretical document of Marx, Engels, Lenin, or Trotsky, and in no programmatic document of the Third International under Lenin, did such a proposal of a one party system ever appear. The theories developed later on, such as the crude Stalinist theory that throughout history social classes have always been represented by a single party, are historically wrong and serve only as apologies for the monopoly of political power usurped by the Soviet bureaucracy and its ideological heirs in other bureaucratised workers' states, a monopoly based upon the political expropriation of the working class.

History – including the convulsions in the People's Republic of China, in Poland, Yugoslavia, Grenada and Nicaragua – has on the contrary confirmed the correctness of Trotsky's position that



“... classes are heterogeneous; they are torn by inner antagonisms, and arrive at the solution of common problems no otherwise than through an inner struggle of tendencies, groups and parties ... An example of only one party corresponding to one class is not to be found in the whole course of political history – provided, of course, you do not take the police appearance for the reality.” (*The Revolution Betrayed*, p.267.)

This was true for the bourgeoisie under feudalism. It is true for the working class under capitalism. It will remain true for the working class under the dictatorship of the proletariat and in the process of building socialism.

If one says that only parties and organisations that have no bourgeois (or petty-bourgeois?) programme or ideology, or are not “engaged in anti-socialist or anti-soviet propaganda and/or agitation” are to be legalised, how is one to determine the dividing line? Will parties with a majority of working-class members but with a bourgeois ideology be forbidden? How can such a position be reconciled with free elections for workers’ councils? What is the dividing line between “bourgeois programme” and “reformist ideology”? Must reformist parties then be forbidden as well? Will social democracy be suppressed?

It is unavoidable that on the basis of historical traditions, reformist influence will continue to survive in the working class of many countries for a long period. That survival will not be shortened by administrative repression; on the contrary, such repression will tend to strengthen it. The best way to fight against reformist illusions and ideas is through the combination of ideological struggle and the creation of the material conditions for the disappearance of these illusions. Such a struggle would lose much of its efficacy under conditions of administrative repression and lack of free debate and exchange of ideas.

If the revolutionary party agitates for the suppression of social democratic or other reformist formations, it will be a thousand times more difficult to maintain freedom of tendencies and toleration of factions within its own ranks. The political heterogeneity of the working class would then inevitably tend to reflect itself within the single party.

Thus, the real alternative is not either freedom for those with a genuine socialist programme (who ideologically and programmatically support the soviet system) or freedom for all political parties. The real choice is: either genuine workers' democracy with the right of the toiling masses to elect whomever they want to the soviets and freedom of political organisation of all those who abide by the soviet constitution in practice (including those who do not ideologically support the soviet system), or a decisive restriction of these political rights of the working class itself, with all the consequences flowing there from. Systematic restriction of political parties leads to systematic restriction of freedom within the revolutionary vanguard party itself.

When we say that we are in favour of a legalisation of all soviet parties, i.e. of those that abide by the soviet constitution in practice, this does not imply that we in any case underestimate the political confusion, errors, and even partial defeats which the propagation of wrong programmes and alien class influences upon the toiling masses by such parties could and will provoke under conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Even more obviously do we not call upon the workers to build parties upon the basis of what we consider wrong programmes, platforms, or policies, nor do we advocate the creation of such parties. We only state that the artificial administrative suppression of such parties – artificial inasmuch as they continue to reflect currents among the masses even if they are legally suppressed – far from reducing these dangers, increases

them. The political, ideological, and cultural homogenisation of the working class, bringing the great majority of its members up to the point where they are capable of substituting a free community of self-administered citizens to the survival of a state machine (i.e., able to achieve the building of socialism and the withering away of the state) is a gigantic historical task. It is not only linked to obvious material preconditions. It involves also a specific political training:

“The existence of critically-minded people, opponents, dissidents, discontented and reactionary elements, gives the revolution life and strength. The confrontation of differences and polemics develop ‘the ideological and political muscles’ of the people. It is a permanent form of exercising, an antidote to paralysis and to passivity.” (*Tomas Borge Speaks, Granma*, weekly French edition, October 7, 1984)

Likewise, Fidel Castro had polemicised against Escalante, saying: the revolution must be a school of unfettered thought. Even if practice continuity of Marxism on the subject and must be defended tooth and nail against all who would deny them.

Historical experience confirms that outside of conditions of genuine workers’ democracy, this process of training the masses for self-administration can only be retarded or even reversed, as it obviously has been in the USSR. Historical experience has also confirmed that no genuine workers’ democracy is possible without political pluralism.

## V. What do political parties represent?

Revolutionary Marxists reject all spontaneist illusions according to which the proletariat is capable of solving the tactical and strategic problems posed by the need to overthrow capitalism and the bourgeois state and to conquer state power and build socialism by spontaneous mass actions without a conscious vanguard and an organised revolutionary vanguard workers' party, based upon a revolutionary programme confirmed by history, with cadres educated on the basis of that programme and tested through long experience in the living class struggle.

The argument of anarchist origin, also taken up by ultra-left "councilist" currents, according to which political parties by their very nature are "liberal-bourgeois" formations alien to the proletariat and have no place in workers' councils because they tend to usurp political power from the working class, is theoretically incorrect and politically harmful and dangerous. It is not true that political groupings, tendencies, and parties come into existence only with the rise of the modern bourgeoisie. In the fundamental (not the formal) sense of the word, they are much older. They came into being with the emergence of forms of government in which relatively large numbers of people (as opposed to small village community or tribal assemblies) participated in the exercise of political power to some extent, while social and especially (but not only) class antagonisms had already arisen (e.g., under the urban democracies of antiquity and of the Middle Ages), i.e., they coincide with the existence of social conflicts based upon conflicting material interests. These are not necessarily limited to conflicting interests

between antagonistic social classes. They can also express conflicting material interests within a given social class.

Political parties in that real (and not formal) sense of the word are a historical phenomenon the contents of which have obviously changed in different epochs, as occurred in the great bourgeois-democratic revolutions of the past (especially, but not only, in the great French revolution). The proletarian revolution will have a similar effect. They will survive as long as conflicts based on material interests or social orientation survive, i.e. until the final building of a fully developed classless socialist society. It can be predicted confidently that under genuine workers' democracy parties will receive a much richer and much broader content and will conduct mass political struggles of a much broader scope and with much greater mass participation than anything that has occurred up to now under the most advanced forms of bourgeois democracy. Many of these parties will be new, i.e., not simple continuations or remnants of parties existing under bourgeois democracy.

In fact, as soon as political decisions go beyond a small number of routine questions that can be taken up and solved by a restricted number of people, any form of democracy implies the need for structured and coherent options of a great number of related questions, in other words a choice between alternative political lines, platforms, and programmes expressing in the last analysis conflicting interests of different social classes and layers. That is what parties represent.

The absence of such overall orientations, far from giving large numbers of people greater freedom of expression and choice, makes government by assemblies and workers' councils practically impossible. Ten thousand people cannot vote on 500 alternatives. If power is not to be transferred to demagogues or secret pressure groups and cliques, there is

need for free confrontation among a limited number of structured and coherent options, i.e., political programmes and parties, without monopolies or prohibitions. This is what will make workers' democracy meaningful and operative.

Furthermore, the anarchist and "councilist" opposition to the formation of political parties under the dictatorship of the proletariat in the process of building socialism either:

- a. represents wishful thinking (i.e., the hope that the mass of the toilers will abstain from the formation or support of groups, tendencies, and parties with different political lines and programmes), in which case it is simply utopian, for that will not happen; or
- b. it represents an attempt to prevent and suppress the attempts by all those toilers who wish to engage in political action on a pluralistic basis to do so. In that case it can objectively favour only a process of bureaucratic monopolisation of power, i.e., the very opposite of what the libertarians want.

In many centrist and ultra-left groupings a similar argument is advanced, according to which the dispossession of the Soviet proletariat from the direct exercise of political power was rooted in the Leninist conception of a democratic centralist organisation itself. They hold that the Bolsheviks' efforts to build a workers' party to lead the working class in a revolution inevitably led to a paternalistic, manipulative, bureaucratic relationship between the party and the toiling masses, which in turn led to a one-party monopoly of the exercise of power after the victorious socialist revolution.

This argument is unhistoric and based on an idealist concept of history. It is also factually wrong. From a Marxist, i.e., historical-materialist point of view, the basic causes of the political expropriation of the Soviet proletariat were material

and socio-economic, not ideological or programmatic. The general poverty and backwardness of Russia and the relative numerical and cultural weakness of the proletariat made the long-term exercise of power by the proletariat impossible if the Russian revolution remained isolated. That was the consensus not only among the Bolsheviks in 1917-18 but among all tendencies claiming to be Marxist. The catastrophic decline of the productive forces in Russia as a result of the civil war, foreign imperialist military intervention, sabotage by the general pro-bourgeois technicians, etc., led to conditions of extreme scarcity that fostered a growth of special privileges. The same factors led to a qualitative weakening of the already small proletariat. In addition, large portions of the political vanguard of the class, those best qualified to fight the capitalist class and the bureaucracy, died in the civil war or left the factories to be incorporated massively into the Red Army and the state apparatus.

After the beginning of the New Economic Policy an economic upturn began, but massive unemployment and continuous disappointment caused by the retreats and defeats of the world revolution nurtured political passivity and a general decline of mass political activity of the toilers, extending to the soviets. The working class was thus unable to stem the growth of a materially privileged layer, which, in order to maintain its rule, increasingly restricted democratic rights and destroyed the soviets and the Bolshevik Party itself (while using its name for its own purposes). These are the main causes of the usurpation by a bureaucracy of the exercise of direct power and of the gradual merger of the state apparatus, and the apparatus of economic managers into a privileged bureaucratic caste.

Lenin, Trotsky, other Bolsheviks, and later the Left Opposition, far from favouring it, tried to fight the rise of the

bureaucracy. The weakening of the proletarian vanguard and not the “Leninist theory of the party” made that fight unsuccessful. One can argue that some measures taken by the Bolsheviks before Lenin’s death – like the temporary banning of factions at the Tenth Party Congress – might have contributed to that weakening.

“Banning opposition parties leads to banning factions; banning factions leads to a ban on thinking otherwise than the infallible leader. The police-like monolithism of the party was followed by bureaucratic impunity which in turn became the source of all kinds of demoralisation and corruption.”  
(Trotsky, *Revolution Betrayed*)

But we are dealing here with secondary causes.

The causes of the bureaucratisation process were objective, material, economic and social. They must be sought in the infrastructure of Soviet society at the time, not in its political superstructure and certainly not in a particular concept of the party. Far from being a product of Bolshevism, the Stalinist bureaucracy had to physically destroy the Bolshevik Party in order to establish its totalitarian rule. The Bolshevik Party was an instrument of the working class and an enemy of the bureaucracy. The political strangling of the party preceded the total expropriation of the working class.

On the other hand, historical experience has confirmed that where a leading or even highly influential revolutionary party is absent, workers’ councils last shorter and not longer than they did in Russia: Germany in 1918-19 and Spain in 1936-37 are the most conspicuous examples not to mention Hungary in 1956 or Chile in 1973.



## VI. The need for a revolutionary vanguard party

The lack of homogeneity of the working class, the unevenness of consciousness of its different layers, the discontinuous character of political and social activity of many of its components, make the separate organisation of the most conscious and permanently active elements of the working class in a revolutionary vanguard party indispensable. This applies to the needs of the class struggle under capitalism as well as after the seizure of power by the working class. The irreplaceable role of such a revolutionary vanguard party increases in those conditions.

A strengthened mass Leninist party must lead the workers in running a state and building a new society, until capitalism has been uprooted on a world scale and a classless society has been fully achieved. The problems of options between various rhythms of economic growth, various allocations of scarce economic resources, various priorities to more rapid or slower increases of different forms of individual and social consumption; the problems of rhythms of reduction of social inequality; the problems of reduction of defence of the workers' state against bourgeois powers; of building a mass revolutionary international to extend the socialist world revolution; the problems of combating prejudices, reactionary ideas and inequalities between sexes, age groups, nationalities, and races, etc., inherited from the past – all these problems essential to the transition period between capitalism and socialism cannot be solved spontaneously. They require the intervention of a party armed with the revolutionary Marxist programme.

The role of the revolutionary vanguard party during the dictatorship of the proletariat will be essential, moreover, in

the struggle against the rise of material privileges and of bureaucratic layers inside the dictatorship of the proletariat. To implement a radical and revolutionary programme of socialist workers' democracy such as the present one – a revolutionary vanguard party of the working class is especially indispensable. It must exercise its authority by free vote and political confidence gained among the masses and not by administrative means.

The dialectical combination of the free and democratic self organisation of the toiling masses and of the political and programmatic clarification and leadership by a revolutionary vanguard party creates more favourable conditions for the conquest and the continuous exercise of power by the working class itself.

In order to prevent any abuse of power by a vanguard party leading the working class under the dictatorship of the proletariat, the following principles are adhered to by the Fourth International:

- a. Fullest internal democracy of the party itself, with full rights for organising tendencies and a refusal to ban factions and possibilities of public debates between them before party congresses.
- b. Broadest possible links and interpenetration between the party and the working class itself. A revolutionary workers' vanguard party can only efficiently lead the working class under the dictatorship of the proletariat if it simultaneously enjoys the political confidence of the majority of the workers and organises in its ranks the great majority of the vanguard workers.
- c. Strict suppression of any material privileges for party cadres or leaders. No party leader, full-timer or member elected in any leading position of the workers' state, its economy or its

other social institutions, should receive a higher wage than the average wage of a skilled worker.

- d. No political or ideological monopoly of the vanguard party in or control over political or cultural activities. Adherence to the multi-party principle.
- e. Strict separation of the party apparatus from the state apparatus.
- f. Real integration of the party in a revolutionary international and acceptance of international comradely criticism by revolutionary organisations of other countries. No control of the international by any party or parties in power in given workers' state(s).

## **VII. A clear stand on socialist democracy is necessary to win the proletariat for the socialist revolution**

The defence of a clear and unequivocal programme of workers' democracy is today an indispensable part of the struggle against the reformist leaderships that seek to inculcate bourgeois democratic myths and illusions in the working class in the imperialist countries. It is likewise indispensable in the struggle against pro-capitalist illusions and anti-soviet prejudices among various layers of rebels and oppositionists in the bureaucratized workers' states in the unfolding process of the struggle for political revolution in these countries.

The disastrous historical experiences of both fascism and other types of reactionary bourgeois dictatorships in the capitalist countries on the one hand, and the experience of the bureaucratic regimes in the USSR, China, Eastern Europe or elsewhere on the other, have aroused in the proletariat of both the capitalist countries and the bureaucratized workers' states a deep distrust of any form of one-party system and of any restricting of democratic rights after the overthrow of capitalism.

If the revolutionary Marxists leave the slightest impression that under the dictatorship of the proletariat the political freedoms of the workers will be narrower than under bourgeois democracy – including the freedom to criticise the government, to have opposition parties and an opposition press – then the struggle to overcome the propagators of

parliamentary illusions will be incommensurably more difficult, if not condemned to defeat. Any hesitation or equivocation in this field by the revolutionary vanguard will only help the reformist lackeys of the liberal bourgeoisie to divide the proletariat and divert an important sector of the class into the defence of bourgeois parliamentary state institutions, under the guise of assuring democratic rights,

It has been argued that all the above arguments apply only to those countries in which the wage-earning class already represents a clear majority of the active population. It is true that where a big majority of independent petty producers exists, the social relationship of forces creates objective obstacles on the road of a full flowering of socialist democracy and has objectively contributed to the phenomenon of bureaucratisation of the workers' states. But it is necessary first to underline the exceptional character of these experiences, which will not be repeated even in most semi-colonial countries.

It is necessary, secondly, to stress that these extreme forms of bureaucratisation of workers' states, even in backward countries, were not simply results of unfavourable objective circumstances, but also products of specific ideological and political deformations of the CPs which had led the process of building these states.

Inasmuch as a growing number of semi-colonial countries are at present undergoing processes of partial industrialisation, their proletariat today is often already of much greater weight relative to the active population than was the Russian proletariat in 1917 or the Chinese proletariat in 1949. This proletariat, through its own

experience of struggle, will speedily rise toward levels of consciousness and self-organisation that will place the organisation of soviet-type organs on the agenda from the beginning of a revolutionary crisis (Chile was an illustration of this). In that sense, and inasmuch as it is particularly applicable to the political revolution in the bureaucratised workers' states, the Fourth International's programme of workers-council democracy as a basis for the dictatorship of the proletariat, in its basic features, is a universal programme for world revolution, which corresponds fundamentally to the social nature, historical needs, and way of thinking and mass activity of the working class itself. It is in no way a "luxury" reserved for the workers of the "richest countries," while its concrete application might suffer certain limitations because of the excessively reduced weight of the working class in some countries.

In the same way it is necessary to make a clear conceptual and theoretical distinction between institutions of bourgeois democracy – which flourish essentially in imperialist countries, as a result of the imperialist super-exploitation of hundreds of millions of peasants and workers in colonial and semi-colonial countries and dependent countries and the vicious repression of their most elementary democratic rights – and institutions of proletarian democracy, including their nuclei within bourgeois society, which are the results of centuries-old struggles, sacrifices and successes in self-organisation and the conquest of various levels of class consciousness by the working class itself. The former are condemned by history and will disappear. The latter will grow and develop as never before during and after the struggle for socialist world revolution, and during the whole historical period of the building of world socialism.

It is obvious that the healthy functioning of workers' democracy presupposes the generalisation of a minimum level of culture and industrialisation in society. When social conditions are such that a major part of the toiling population is illiterate, the bureaucratic degeneration of the forms of rule is made easier. This explains Lenin's insistence, in his last writings, on the need to raise the cultural level of the masses. The literacy campaigns conducted in Cuba and Nicaragua are models that should be followed.

Moreover, in backward countries, during an initial phase, the dictatorship of the proletariat may not follow proportional representation of the different segments of the population. It may openly choose to give added weight to the representation of the working class, particularly in relation to the peasants, as the Soviet Constitution of 1918 did.

## VIII. Why has this programme of socialist democracy not been widely realised up till now?

The definition of our ideas about the dictatorship of the proletariat is not “normative”. It is fundamentally programmatic. In that sense, as with all programmatic positions of Marxism, they are but the conscious expression of an objective historical tendency, of an instinctive thrust of the working class under conditions of revolutionary crisis. History strikingly confirms that from the Paris Commune to the revolutionary explosions of the recent years, through the experiences of the Russian and Finnish revolution of 1905, of the Russian revolution of 1917, of the German revolution of 1918-19, of the Austrian revolution of 1918-19, of the Hungarian revolution of 1919, of the Italian revolutionary upheaval of 1919-20, of the Spanish revolution of 1936, of the Chinese revolution of 1925-27, of numerous general strikes in innumerable countries of practically all continents including many colonial and semi-colonial countries, the working class did manifest its tendency to generalised self-organisation, to the setting up of workers’ councils or similar bodies. We are firmly convinced that this historical tendency – clearly understood and programmatically expressed by Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg – will unfold itself in revolutions of today and tomorrow even more than it did in revolutions of yesterday.

Critics counterpose to this general observation the fact that all victorious social revolutions up to now have led to political systems where power is exercised by minorities, by



a single party, even by the leadership apparatus of this party and not by the toiling masses as a whole.

We do not accept the argument that the delay in firmly and durably establishing workers-council power – which did exist in Soviet Russia for several years, latter-day historical falsifications by both the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy notwithstanding would be due in any way to a congenital incapacity of the proletariat to exercise political or (and) economic power as a class, to its inherent weakness or fatal trend to delegate the exercise of power to a privileged minority. The least one can say is that such a conclusion is historically premature at this stage – as it would have been premature to conclude, after the first experiences of bourgeois revolutions, that bourgeois rule was incompatible with universal franchise.

On the contrary, the basic reason why workers-council power has been up to now the exception and not the rule in the existing workers' states is closely linked with the very limited weight which the proletariat has had in the establishment of these states – and the weakness and even more extreme successive weakening of the proletariat in Soviet Russia between 1917 and 1923.

The interaction of a whole series of historical factors – the backwardness of Russia, the isolation of the Russian revolution, the rise to absolute power of the Soviet bureaucracy, the victory of the Stalinist faction inside the Communist International, the cumulative effects of defeats to a great extent due to this “victory”, the absence of an alternative revolutionary leadership of the international proletariat, the possibility of the traditional bureaucratic

apparatuses to keep control over the working class at the end of World War II, the fact that the rise of the revolution essentially took the form of prolonged rural guerrilla warfare, under leaderships influenced by Stalinist ideology – led to a period in which new workers' states arose with a very reduced weight of the proletariat at their birth, without proletarian forms of struggle and organisation.

In addition, the low specific weight of the working class in countries like China and Vietnam, and the special nature of the problems with which the dictatorship of the proletariat was confronted in these countries – problems of initial industrialisation and initial increase of the agricultural productivity of labour, of even greater scarcity and backwardness than in Russia – created additional objective obstacles on the road to socialist democracy.

As a result of the interaction of all these factors, the dictatorship of the proletariat was bureaucratic in these countries from its inception. At no time did the working class directly exercise political power there. But in the present period, after the qualitative strengthening of the proletariat in a series of workers' states and semi-industrialised dependent capitalist countries, the new rise of revolutionary struggles symbolised by May 1968 in France and by the Portuguese revolution from 1974-1976, the rise of the political revolution in the bureaucratised workers' state (Czechoslovakia, Poland), the weight of the proletariat in the real process of world revolution is much larger today than it was in the period 1945-1968. And this is strikingly confirmed by the re-emergence of general strikes, urban mass insurrections, and soviet-type organs of self-organisation, in the main revolutionary upheavals of the

recent years, not only in Chile and Portugal but also in Iran and Nicaragua.

Simultaneously, after the inevitable delay of mass consciousness upon reality, sectors of the world proletariat have now assimilated the real nature of Stalinism (which they didn't either in 1936 or 1945), and firmly reject "patterns" of "dictatorship of the proletariat" similar to those of the USSR. They do this not only in certain imperialist countries but also in countries like Eastern Europe, China, Brazil etc.

Again, what our programme of dictatorship of the proletariat based upon workers-council democracy expresses is neither "abstract norms" nor utopian wishful thinking but a real basic historical trend, which, having been held down by the objective and subjective results of two decades of defeats of world revolution, now reasserts itself more and more powerfully.

We reject likewise any concept that the workers-council power would be in any way "impractical" as long as imperialism survives, i.e., as long as the problems of self-defence of the victorious proletarian revolution and of its international extension remain central under the dictatorship of the proletariat. On the contrary, we believe that workers-council democracy strengthens the capacity of self-defence of the workers' state, and strengthens its power of attraction to the workers of the capitalist countries, i.e., favours the struggle against imperialism and for an international extension of the revolution.

## (Part 2)

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### **IX. In response to dogmas of Stalinist origin**

The ideology of the ruling bureaucracy has been and remains essentially pragmatic. But a certain number of theories and dogmas underpin this ideology and they have an internal coherence which is contradictory with revolutionary Marxist theory. This ideology of the bureaucracy – of which the key idea is the rule of the single party acting in the name of the working class – although not always explicitly formulated can be synthesised as follows:

- a. That the “leading party” or even its “leading nucleus” (the “Leninist Central Committee”) has a monopoly of political consciousness at the highest level, if not a monopoly of knowledge at least at the level of the social sciences, and is therefore guaranteed political infallibility (“the party is always right”).
- b. That the working class, and even more the toiling masses in general, are too backward politically, too much under the influence of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology and “imperialist propaganda,” too much inclined to prefer immediate material advantages as against long-term historical interests, for any direct exercise of state power by democratically elected workers’ councils to be tolerable from the point of view of “the interests of socialism.” Genuine workers’ democracy would entail the risk of an increasing series of, harmful, “objectively counter-revolutionary” decisions, which would open the road to the restoration of

capitalism or at the very least gravely damage and retard the process of building socialism.

- c. That therefore the dictatorship of the proletariat can be exercised only by the “leading party of the proletariat,” i.e., that the dictatorship of the proletariat is the dictatorship of the party, either representing an essentially passive working class, or actively basing itself on the “class struggle of the masses,” who are nevertheless considered unworthy, unwilling, or incapable of directly exercising state power through institutionalised organs of power.
- d. That since the party, and that party alone, represents the interests of the working class, which are considered homogeneous in all situations and on all issues, the “leading party” itself must be essentially monolithic. Any opposition tendency necessarily reflects alien class pressures and alien class interests in one form or another (the struggle between “two lines” is always a “struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie inside the party,” the Maoists conclude). Monolithic control of all spheres of social life by the single party is the logical outcome of these concepts. Direct party control must be established overall sectors of “civil society.”
- e. A further underlying assumption is that of an intensification of the class struggle in the period of building socialism (although this assumption alone does not necessarily lead to the same conclusion, if it is not combined with the previous ones). From that assumption is deduced the increasing danger of restoration of bourgeois power even long after private property in the means of production has been abolished, and irrespective of the level of development of the productive forces. The threat of bourgeois restoration is often portrayed as a mechanical outcome of the victory of bourgeois ideology in this or that social, political, cultural, or even scientific field. In view of the extreme power thereby attributed to bourgeois ideas, the use of repression against

those who are said to objectively represent these ideas becomes a corollary of the argument.

All these assumptions and dogmas are unscientific from a general Marxist point of view and are untenable in the light of real historical experience of the class struggle during and after the overthrow of capitalist rule in the USSR and other countries. Again and again, they have shown themselves to be harmful to the defence of the proletariat's class interests and an obstacle to a successful struggle against the remnants of the bourgeoisie and of bourgeois ideology.

But inasmuch as they had become nearly universally accepted dogmas by the CPs in Stalin's time and undoubtedly have an inner consistency – reflecting the material interests of the bureaucracy as a social layer and an apology for its dictatorial rule – they have never been explicitly and thoroughly criticised and rejected by a CP since then. These concepts continue to linger on, at least partially, in the ideology of many leaders and cadres of the CPs and SPs, i.e., of the bureaucracies of the labour movement. They continue to constitute a conceptual source for justification of various forms of curtailment of democratic rights of the toiling masses.

It should be noted that organisations 'other than those inspired by Stalinism put forward similar conceptions in this regard, justifying at least partially similar practices in their own ranks. This makes it all the more necessary to stress that all this is absolutely contrary to the teaching of Lenin and Trotsky, not to mention Marx and Engels, and of our historical movement. A clear and coherent refutation of these conceptions and of the practices which they motivate,

is therefore indispensable to the defence of our programme of socialist democracy.

First: the idea of a homogenous working class exclusively represented by a single party is contradicted by all historical experience and by any Marxist analysis of the concrete growth and development of the contemporary proletariat, both under capitalism and after the overthrow of capitalism. At most, one could defend the thesis that the revolutionary vanguard party alone programmatically defends the long-term historical interests of the proletariat, and its immediate overall class interests as opposed to sectoral interests of national, regional, local, special sectors or skill, over-privileged, etc., interests. But even in that case, a dialectical-materialist approach, as opposed to a mechanical-idealist one, would immediately add that only insofar as the party actually conquers political leadership over the majority of the workers can one speak of a real, as opposed to a simply ideal (literary) integration of immediate and long-term, of sectoral and class interests having been achieved in practice, with the possibilities for errors much reduced. Furthermore, this in no way excludes that on particular questions this party can be wrong.

In fact, there is a definite, objectively determined stratification of the working class and of the development of working class consciousness. There is likewise at the very least a tension between the struggle for immediate interests and the historical goals of the labour movement (for example the contradiction between immediate consumption and long-term investment in a workers' state). Precisely these contradictions, rooted in the legacy of uneven development of bourgeois society, are among the main theoretical justifications for the need of a revolutionary vanguard workers' party, as opposed to a simple "all-inclusive" union of all wage-earners in a single organisation.

But this again implies that one cannot deny that different parties, with different orientations and different ways of approaching the class struggle between capital and labour and the relations between capital and labour and the relations between immediate demands and historical goals, can arise and have arisen within the working class and do genuinely represent sectors of the working class (be it purely sectoral interests, privileged sectors, results of ideological pressures of alien class forces, etc.).

Nor can it be excluded that several revolutionary parties might arise in a single country, whose differences might not be settled by a fusion before the revolution, a situation which would lead to the need to seek to form a more or less tightly knit front of these parties that would try to determine their political action in common.

Second: a revolutionary party with a democratic internal life does have a tremendous advantage in the field of correct analysis of socio-economic and political developments and of correct elaboration of tactical and strategic answers to such developments, for it can base itself on the body of scientific socialism, Marxism, which synthesises and generalises all past experiences of the class struggle as a whole. This programmatic framework for its current political elaboration makes it much less likely than any other tendency of the labour movement, or any unorganised sector of the working class, to reach wrong conclusions, premature generalisations, and one-sided and impressionistic reactions to unforeseen developments, to make concessions to ideological and political pressures of alien class forces, to engage in unprincipled political compromises, etc.

However there are no infallible parties. There are no infallible party leaderships, or individual party leaders, party majorities, "Leninist central committees," etc. The Marxist programme is never a definitely achieved one. No new



situation can be comprehensively analysed in reference to historical precedents. Social reality is constantly undergoing changes. New and unforeseen developments regularly occur at historical turning points. The phenomenon of imperialism after Engels's death was not analysed by Marx and Engels. The delay of the proletarian revolution in the advanced imperialist countries was not foreseen by the Bolsheviks. The bureaucratic degeneration of the first workers' state was not incorporated in Lenin's theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The emergence after World War II of many workers' states (albeit with bureaucratic deformations from the start) following revolutionary mass struggles not led by revolutionary Marxist leaderships (Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam) was not foreseen by Trotsky, etc. No complete, ready-made answer for new phenomena can be found in the works of the classics or in the existing programme.

Furthermore, new problems will arise in the course of the building of socialism, problems for which the revolutionary Marxist programme provides only a general framework of reference but no automatic source of correct answers. The struggle for correct answers to such new problems implies a constant interaction between theoretical-political analysis and discussions and revolutionary class practice, the final word being spoken by practical experience. Under such circumstances, any restriction of free political and theoretical debate spilling over to a restriction of free political mass activity of the proletariat, i.e., any restriction of socialist democracy, will constitute an obstacle to the revolutionary party itself arriving at correct policies. It is therefore not only theoretically wrong but practically ineffective and harmful from the point of view of successfully advancing on the road of building socialism.

One of the gravest consequences of a monolithic one-party system, of the absence of a plurality of political groups,

tendencies, and parties, and of administrative restrictions being imposed on free political and ideological debate, is the impediments such a system erects on the road to rapidly correcting mistakes which can be committed by the government of a workers' state. Mistakes committed by such a government, like mistakes committed by the majority of the working class, its various layers, and different political groupings, are by and large unavoidable in the process of building a classless, socialist society. A rapid correction of these mistakes, however, is possible in a climate of free political debate, free access of opposition groupings to mass media, large-scale political awareness and involvement in political life by the masses, and control by the masses over government and state activity at all levels.

The absence of all these correctives under a system of monolithic one-party government makes the rectification of grave mistakes all the more difficult. The very dogma of party infallibility on which the Stalinist system rests puts a heavy premium both on the denial of mistakes in party policies (search for self-justification and for scapegoats) and on the attempt to postpone even implicit corrections as long as possible. The objective costs of such a system in terms of economic losses, of unnecessary, i.e., objectively avoidable sacrifices imposed upon the toiling masses, of political defeats in relation to class enemies, and of political disorientation and demoralisation of the proletariat, are indeed staggering, as is shown by the history of the Soviet Union since 1928. To give just one example: the obstinate clinging to erroneous agricultural policies even on detailed questions such as purchasing prices for certain agricultural products by Stalin and his henchmen after the catastrophe caused by the forced collectivisation of agriculture – which can of course be explained in terms of the specific social interests of the Soviet bureaucracy at that time – has

wreaked havoc with the food supply of the Soviet people for more than a generation. Its negative consequences have not been eliminated to this day, nearly fifty years later. Such a catastrophe would have been impossible had there been free political debate over alternative economic and agricultural policies in the USSR.

Third: the idea that restricting the democratic rights of the proletariat is in any way conducive to a gradual “education” of an allegedly “backward” mass of toilers is blatantly absurd. One cannot learn to swim except by going into the water. There is no way masses can learn to raise the level of their political awareness other than by engaging in political activity and learning from the experience of such activity. There is no way they can learn from mistakes other than by having the right to commit them. Paternalistic prejudices about the alleged “backwardness” of the masses generally hide a conservative petty-bourgeois fear of mass activity, which has nothing in common with revolutionary Marxism. The bureaucracy is in deadly fear of socialist democracy, not for “programmatic” reasons, but because that form of government is incompatible with its material privileges, not to say its power. Marxists favour the fullest possible flowering of socialist democracy because they are convinced that any restriction of political mass activity, on the pretext that the masses would make too many mistakes, can only lead to increasing political apathy among the workers, i.e., to paradoxically reinforcing the very situation which is said to be the problem.

Fourth: under conditions of full-scale socialisation of the means of production and the social surplus product, any long-term monopoly of the exercise of political power in the hands of a minority – even if it is a revolutionary party beginning with the purest of revolutionary motivations – runs a strong risk of stimulating objective tendencies toward

bureaucratisation. Under such socio-economic conditions whoever controls the state administration thereby controls the social surplus product and its distribution. Given the fact that economic inequalities will still exist at the outset, particularly but not only in the economically backward workers' states, this can become a source of corruption and of the growth of material privileges and social differentiation.

“The conquest of power changes not only the relations of the proletariat to other classes, but also its own inner structure. The wielding of power becomes the speciality of a definite social group, which is the more impatient to solve its own ‘social problem’ the higher its opinion of its own mission.”  
(Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p.102.)

Thus, there is an objective need for real control over decision making to rest in the hands of the proletariat as a class, with unlimited possibilities to denounce pilferage, waste, and illegal appropriation and misuse of resources at all levels, including the highest ones. No such democratic mass control is possible without opposition tendencies, groups, and parties having full freedom of action, propaganda, and agitation, as well as full access to the mass media, as long as they are not engaged in armed struggle to overthrow workers' power.

Likewise, during the transition period between capitalism and socialism, and even in the first phase of communism, it is unavoidable that forms of social division of labour will survive, as well as forms of labour organisation and labour processes totally or partially inherited from capitalism, that do not enable a full development of all the creative talents of the producers. These handicaps cannot be neutralised by indoctrination, moral exhortation, or periodic “mass criticism campaigns” as the Maoists contend, and still less by mystifying expedients like having cadres or leaders work

a few days a month or a week as manual labourers. These objective obstacles on the road to the gradual emergence of truly socialist relations of production can be prevented from becoming powerful sources of material privileges only if the mass of the producers (in the first place those likely to be the most exploited, the manual workers) are placed in conditions such that they can exercise real political and social power over any functionally privileged layer. The radical reduction of the work day, the fullest soviet democracy, and full educational opportunities for rapidly raising the cultural level of all workers are the key conditions for attaining this goal.

To protect itself against the professional risks of power, the revolutionary party will have to reject its members accumulating positions in the state apparatus and positions in the leadership of the party.

The present conditions in the bureaucratised workers' states, which make the problem of advancing proletarian democracy difficult, would of course be altered qualitatively if (or when) either of the two following developments occur, or even more if they occur together:

1. A socialist revolution in one or more industrially advanced capitalist countries. Such a revolution would itself give enormous impulsion to the struggle for democratic rights throughout the world and would immediately open the possibility of increasing productivity on an immense scale, eliminating the scarcities that are the root cause of the entrenchment of a parasitic bureaucracy, as explained above.
2. A political revolution in the bureaucratically deformed or degenerated workers' states, particularly in the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China. This would likewise signify an upsurge of proletarian democracy with colossal repercussions internationally, besides putting an end to the

bureaucratic caste and its concept of building “socialism in one country”.

Following a political revolution, common economic planning among all the workers’ states would become realisable, thus assuring a leap forward in productivity that would help remove the economic basis of parasitic bureaucratism.

Finally, it is true that there is no automatic correlation or simultaneity between the abolition of capitalist state power and private property in the means of production and the disappearance of privileges in the field of personal wealth, cultural heritage, and ideological influence, not to speak of the disappearance of all elements of commodity production. Long after bourgeois state power has been overthrown and capitalist property abolished, remnants of petty commodity production and the survival of elements of a money economy will continue to create a framework in which primitive accumulation of capital can still reappear, especially if the level of development of the productive forces is still insufficient to guarantee the automatic appearance and consolidation of genuine socialist relations of production. Likewise, elements of social and economic inequality survive under such circumstances long after the bourgeoisie has lost its positions as a ruling class politically and economically; the influence of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologies, customs, habits, cultural values, etc., will linger on in relatively large spheres of social life and broad layers of society.

But it is completely wrong to draw from this undeniable fact (which is, incidentally, one of the main reasons why state power of the working class is indispensable in order to prevent these “islands of bourgeois influence” from becoming bases for the restoration of capitalism) the conclusion that administrative repression of bourgeois ideology is a necessary condition for the building of a

socialist society. On the contrary, historical experience confirms the total ineffectiveness of administrative struggles against reactionary and petty-bourgeois ideologies. In fact, in the long run, such methods even strengthen the hold of these ideologies and place the great mass of the proletariat in the position of being ideologically disarmed before them, because of lack of experience with genuine political struggles and ideological debates and the lack of credibility of official “state doctrines”.

The only effective way to eliminate the influence of these ideologies upon the mass of the toilers lies in:

- a. The expropriation, along with all major means of production, of printing shops, radios, television channels, that is, the liberation of the media that is capable of massively spreading ideas from the material grip of big business;
- b. The creation of objective conditions under which these ideologies lose the material roots of their reproduction.
- c. The waging of a relentless struggle against these ideologies in the field of ideology and politics itself, which can however attain its full success only under conditions of open debate and open confrontation, i.e. freedom for the defenders of reactionary ideologies to defend their ideas, freedom of ideological and cultural pluralism, as long as they do not go over to acts of violence against workers’ power.

Only those who have neither confidence in the superiority of Marxist and materialist ideas nor confidence in the proletariat and the toiling masses, can shrink from open ideological confrontation with bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologies under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Once the capitalist class is disarmed and expropriated, once their members have access to the mass media only in relation to their numbers, there is no reason to fear a constant, free and frank exchange of ideas. This

confrontation is the only means through which the working class can educate itself ideologically and successfully free itself from the influence of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideas. The validity of Marxism will fully assert itself.

Any monopoly position accorded to Marxism (not to speak of a particular interpretation of Marxism) in the ideological-cultural field through administrative and repressive measures by the state can lead only to debasing Marxism itself from a critical and revolutionary science, as a weapon for the emancipation of the proletariat and the building of a classless society, into a sterile and repulsive state doctrine or state religion, with a constantly declining attractive power among the toiling masses and especially the youth. This is apparent today in the USSR, where the monopoly position accorded to “official Marxism” masks a real poverty of creative Marxist thought in all areas. Marxism, which is critical thought par excellence, can flourish only in an atmosphere of full freedom of discussion and constant confrontation with other currents of thought, i.e. in an atmosphere of full ideological and cultural pluralism.



## X. The self-defence of the workers' state

Obviously, any workers' state must defend itself against attempts at being overthrown and open violation of its basic laws. In a workers' democracy of a stable workers' state, emerging after the disarming of the bourgeoisie and the end of civil war, the constitution and the penal code will forbid private appropriation of the means of production or private hiring of labour, just as constitutions and penal codes under bourgeois rule forbid individual infringements on the rights of private property. Likewise, as long as we are not yet in a classless society, as long as the proletarian class rule survives and the restoration of capitalism remains possible, the constitution and the penal code of the dictatorship of the proletariat will forbid and punish acts of armed insurrection, attempts at overthrowing working-class power through violence, terrorist attacks on individual representatives of workers' power, sabotage, espionage in the service of foreign capitalist states, etc. But only proven acts of that kind or active preparation of them should be punishable, not general propaganda explicitly or implicitly favourable to a restoration of capitalism. This means that freedom of political organisation should be granted to all those, including pro-bourgeois elements, who in actual practice respect the constitution of the workers' state and operate within the legal framework of its institutions, the soviets, i.e. are not engaged in direct action to overthrow workers' power and collective property.

The workers have no need to fear as a mortal danger propaganda that "incites" them to give the factories and banks back to private owners. There is little chance that a majority of them will be "persuaded" by propaganda of that type. The

working class in the imperialist countries, the bureaucratised workers' states, and an increasing number of semi-colonial countries, are strong enough not to have to introduce the concept of "crimes of opinion or anti-soviet agitation" either in their penal codes or in the daily practice of the workers' state.

What is important is to strictly distinguish between activities instigating violence against workers' power and political activities, ideologies, positions, or programmatic statements that can be interpreted as favouring a restoration of capitalism. Against terror, the workers' state defends itself by repression. Against reactionary policies and ideas, it defends itself by political and ideological struggles. This is not a question of "morality" or "softness". It is essentially a question of practical long-term efficiency.

The disastrous experience of Stalinism, which has systematically misused slanderous accusations of "collusion with imperialism", "espionage for foreign powers", "objectively acting in favour of imperialism", "anti-soviet" or "anti-socialist agitation", "sabotage and diversionist activities", to condemn and suppress any form of political criticism, opposition or non-conformism in the countries under the rule of parasitic bureaucratic castes, and which has organised barbaric repression on a mass scale under these pretexts, has created a profound (and essentially healthy) distrust of the abuse of penal, juridical, police or psychiatric institutions for purposes of political repression. It is therefore necessary to stress that the use of repressive self-defence by the proletariat and its state against attempts to overthrow workers' power by violence should be circumscribed to proven acts and crimes, strictly separated from the realm of ideological, political, and cultural activities.

The Fourth International stands for the defence and extension of the most progressive conquests of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions in the field of penal codes and justice and fights for

their incorporation into the socialist constitutions and penal codes. These include such rights as:

- a. The necessity of written law and the avoidance of retroactive delinquency. The burden of proof to be on the accuser, the assumption of innocence until proof of guilt.
- b. The full right of all individuals to freely determine the nature of their defence; full immunity for legal defenders from prosecution for any statements or lines of defence used in such trials.
- c. Rejection of any concept of collective responsibility of social groups, families, etc., for individual crimes.
- d. Strict prohibition of any form of torture or forceful extortion of confessions.
- e. Suppression of the death penalty outside of civil war and war situations.
- f. Extension and generalisation of public trial by juries of peers.
- g. Democratic election of all judges, and the right for the mass of the toilers to recall elected judges.

The workers' state can gradually eliminate a professional judiciary by drawing the masses more and more into the judicial functions beginning at the local level and for less serious crimes.

Obviously, the last word in all these matters, as well as regarding the final draft of the penal code and functioning of the penal system of the proletarian dictatorship after armed resistance by the bourgeoisie has ceased, will rest with the workers' councils themselves, to which we submit our programmatic proposals and in which framework we fight for them by political means. The fundamental guarantee against all abuses of state repression lies in the fullest participation in political activity of the toiling masses, the broadest possible socialist democracy, and the abolition of any monopoly of access to weapons for privileged minorities, i.e. the general arming of the proletariat.

However, as Lenin pointed out, “the fact that the proletariat has accomplished the social revolution will not be sufficient to turn it into a saint and will not shelter it from errors and weaknesses”. This is why the vigilance of revolutionary communists should not let up during the period of transition towards communist society. It will be necessary for the communist vanguard to smoke out the slightest evidence of “bureaucratism”, to denounce and fight all misuses of power in the proletarian state, to make sure egalitarian and democratic principles are respected, to defend the rights of women and racial, national or ethnic minorities; in a word, to play its role of communist vanguard also in relation to the proletarian state.

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This is our programmatic and principled position: unfettered political freedom for all those who in practice respect collective property and the workers’ state’s constitution. This does not mean that these norms can be fully implemented irrespective of concrete circumstances. In the process of establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, a revolutionary crisis culminating in an insurrection is unavoidable. During the period leading to that insurrection and the insurrection itself, when power passes from one social class to another, violent convulsions and the absence of the rule of law which accompany them occur. They will bring victory to the proletariat only if insurrection enjoys the support of the majority of the population – the large majority of wage-earners – at least in all those countries where the wage-earners are already the largest social class. The broader the mass mobilisation of millions accompanying this insurrection, the lesser will be the unavoidable violence and arbitrariness accompanying that giant social transformation.

Likewise, the consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat can be preceded by civil war or foreign military

intervention, i.e. attempts by the former ruling classes and their international allies to overthrow workers' power by force. Under such conditions, the rules of war apply. Restrictions on the political activities of the bourgeoisie may well be called for. No social class, no state, has ever granted full rights to those actively engaged in violence to overthrow them. The dictatorship of the proletariat cannot act otherwise in that respect.

More concretely, all individuals, organisations, and parties that participate in, or can be proven to actively support or prepare counter-revolutionary violence, will be repressed and submitted to conditions in which they cannot pursue these activities. The extent and concrete forms of that repression will depend upon the circumstances and relationship of forces existing at the moment in a given country or group of countries.

During the first phase of establishing a victorious workers' state against armed resistance of the bourgeoisie or attempts by that bourgeoisie to overthrow it, the existence of written penal law – socialist legality – can lag in comparison with the need for the revolution to solve crisis situations, which cannot wait until that legality is finally established. Historical experience has confirmed again and again that the more swiftly and more radically the armed resistance of the bourgeoisie is broken, the shorter will be the period of actual civil war, the lesser will be the costs in human life of the social transformation.

The criteria which determine the general framework of revolutionary long-term efficiency are those which relate measures of immediate expediency with the question of social consolidation of the new socialist order on the basis of the largest possible mass adhesion and mass participation. Only those measures of expediency against the class enemy are really efficient, even under conditions of civil war, which raise

and do not lower the class consciousness and self-confidence of the working class, its faith in its capacity to build a workers' state and a classless society, its active support of and participation in the administration of its own state, its capacity for mobilisation and self-organisation. Even under conditions of civil war, that basic criterion should never be forgotten, particularly since future revolutions will develop within a relationship of forces a lot more favourable than they were in Russia in 1919 or 1920-21.

In that respect, Trotsky expressed himself most clearly in 1940. What he said then applied even more to present conditions:

“By anticipation it is possible to establish the following law: The more countries in which the capitalist system is broken, the weaker will be the resistance offered by the ruling classes in other countries, the less sharp a character the socialist revolution will assume, the less violent forms the proletarian dictatorship will have, the shorter it will be, the sooner the society will be reborn on the basis of a new, more full, more perfect and humane democracy ... Socialism would have no value if it should not bring with it, not only the juridical inviolability but also the full safeguarding of all the interests of the human personality.” (Leon Trotsky, *The World Situation and Perspectives*, February 14, 1940, *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1939-40*, pp.155-156.)

It is likewise necessary to stress the direct political and material responsibility of bourgeois counter-revolution and international imperialism for any restriction of socialist democracy under civil war or war conditions. This means to indicate clearly to society in its totality, and to the remnants of the former ruling classes themselves, that the way they will be dealt with depends in the last analysis on themselves, i.e. on their practical behaviour.

## XI. International revolution and international counter- revolution

As long as imperialism survives at least in major countries – and certainly in the United States of America – it will never give up its attempts to top any further extension of the socialist revolution by economic pressure and military force. Nor will it give up its attempts to reconquer, first part and then all, of the territories lost for direct exploitation by capital. Such a restoration is not possible in a gradual and peaceful way, any more than the overthrow of capitalism can occur in a peaceful and gradual way.

Hence the conclusion that any workers' state arising out of a victorious socialist revolution, and any group of workers' states, whatever the degree of bureaucratisation or socialist democracy which characterises it, will find itself in conditions of armed truce with international capital, which could, under certain circumstances, lead to open war. Therefore, one of the central responsibilities of the dictatorship of the proletariat is to maintain and advance permanent military preparedness (from a material as well as from a human point of view) to meet such a challenge when it arises.

While we reject the idea that nuclear war is inevitable, we likewise reject the idea that propaganda, agitation, and class organisation of the toilers in the capitalist countries alone is sufficient to prevent wars of aggression by imperialism against new and old revolutions. As long as the working class of the main capitalist countries has not actually overthrown

bourgeois class rule at home, the danger of counter-revolutionary wars remains. The proletariat in power must prepare against that danger, as it has to be ready to help the insurgent masses of other countries facing armed intervention of national and international counterrevolution.

To maintain military preparedness against wars of aggression by imperialism means to deviate resources toward arms production which otherwise would speed up the evolution towards socialism. It is a reason the more to reject the reactionary utopia of finally achieving the building of socialism in one or in a few countries.

The workers' and people's militias constitute the basis of the armed self-defence of the workers' state. But the latter also requires the maintenance of an army specialised in the use of sophisticated weaponry, etc. The workers' army will be an army of a new type, reflecting its new class basis. Just as the Red Army created by the Soviet Republic initially did, it will abolish the officer caste and replace it with councils of soldiers and democratically elected commanders. In general "the correlation between regular troops and militia can serve as a fair indication of the actual movement toward socialism." (Trotsky, **The Revolution Betrayed**, p.218.)

But it by no means implies the inevitability of bureaucratic degeneration, or of serious restrictions of socialist democracy because of the outside pressure of imperialism upon the workers' states.

In the first place, the rise and victory of the Stalinist bureaucracy was not a direct and automatic result of the capitalist encirclement of the USSR. It came about as the



result of a unique combination of factors: relative backwardness of Russia; relative weakness of the Russian proletariat; first defeats of world revolution, capitalist encirclement; political unpreparedness by the proletarian vanguard towards the problem of bureaucracy; repercussions of the gradual rise of bureaucratic power upon the outcome of successive waves of revolutionary struggles throughout the world; the absence of an alternative revolutionary leadership of the proletariat outside the Moscow-controlled CPs; factors which were all exacerbated by the cumulative failure of the revolution to extend internationally. It is extremely unlikely that that combination will ever repeat itself again, especially in the case of new victorious socialist revolutions in countries industrially much more advanced than were Russia in 1917 or China in 1949.

Even today, the degree of backwardness of Russia compared to international capitalism is much more limited and the objective strength of the Russian proletariat incommensurably bigger than they were in 1923 or 1927. If to the relative power of the present workers' states would be added that of victorious socialist revolutions in Western Europe, in Japan, or in the biggest Latin American countries – not to speak of the USA – the relationship of forces with international capital would witness a new dramatic deterioration for capitalism of such a depth that the pressure of the capitalist environment and the necessity to keep up military preparedness would not be an objective source for serious restrictions of socialist democracy.

Furthermore, if the survival for the time being of powerful imperialist states and rich bourgeois classes in the world

imposes a situation of more or less permanent potential armed confrontation and potential international war upon existing workers' states for a whole period, the obvious need for the workers' states to protect themselves against the threat of foreign imperialist intervention does not at all imply the identification of conditions of potential war with those of actual war, an argument that Stalinists and pro-bureaucratic elements of all shades have continually used to justify the strangling of workers' democracy in the countries under the rule of parasitic bureaucracies.

Moreover, the main problem today in the Soviet Union, the Eastern European workers' states, and China is not the danger of immediate capitalist restoration under conditions of war or civil war. The main problem facing the working class in these countries is the dictatorial control over the economic, political, and social life by a privileged bureaucratic caste. The tremendous abuses that control has led to have deeply undermined the identification of the masses of these countries with the existing states – thereby, in the long run, weakening their capacity to victoriously withstand a possible future onslaught by imperialist armies.

The defence of democratic rights of all against the restrictions imposed by the bureaucracy, and the struggle for the political revolution is even more necessary. These processes will strengthen and not weaken the workers' states' capacity to withstand any imperialist aggression, including their capacity to actively assist the process of world revolution.

Finally, the whole argument should be turned the other way around. We deny that restrictions of socialist democracy –

not to speak about a bureaucratic dictatorship – are a necessary price to be paid in order to successfully defend victorious revolutions and extend them internationally against the military power of imperialism. On the contrary, we contend that such restrictions weaken the dictatorship of the proletariat politically and militarily against imperialism.

A high level of political consciousness and socialist conviction on the part of the toiling masses; a high level of political activity, mobilisation and alertness; an internationalist education and activity of the proletariat, all help to strengthen the capacity of self-defence and the armed strength of a workers' state in general.

History has proven that in the last analysis the superior capacity of self-defence of any state depends upon two key factors: a higher degree of social cohesion and political identification of the mass of the people with the given state; and a higher level of average productivity of labour and of productive capacity. The broader and less restricted socialist democracy is, the higher the identification of the overwhelming majority of the people with the workers' state and the quicker will be the growth of productivity of labour, including the greater the chance of achieving decisive technological advances compared with imperialism. From that point of view, far from being a "luxury" in a world situation characterised by potential wars of aggression of imperialism against the workers' states or against ongoing socialist revolutions, socialist democracy is a major weapon in the hands of the workers' state even in the purely military field.

This is true from a defensive point of view, as already indicated. It is also true from an offensive point of view. Inasmuch as imperialism cannot embark upon military adventures against past and current revolutions without provoking massive opposition at home and inasmuch as it would have to try to weaken such opposition by increasingly having recourse to repression and restrictions of democratic freedoms of the masses, a high level of socialist democracy existing in the workers' states would at the same time exercise an increasing power of attraction upon the restive and oppressed masses of the capitalist countries, thereby undermining the military strength of imperialism and favouring international expansion of the revolution.

Military preparedness of the workers' states against threats of imperialist aggression must include special measures against espionage, saboteurs sent in from abroad, and other forms of anti-working class military action that could persist for years if not decades. But special technical measures for self-defence by the workers' state should in no way restrict workers' democracy, by calling citizens who are exerting their right of criticism and opposition "spies" or "saboteurs". In fact the higher the political activity, awareness, and social cohesion of the broad masses which can be realised only through a full flowering of socialist democracy – the more difficult does it become for real spies and saboteurs to operate in a resolutely hostile milieu and the stronger becomes the capacity of self-defence of the workers' state.

## **XII. The bureaucratised workers' states, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the rise of political anti-bureaucratic revolution**

From a theoretical point of view, the USSR and the other bureaucratised workers' states are extremely distorted and degenerated forms of the dictatorship of the proletariat, inasmuch as the economic foundations created by the socialist October revolution have not been destroyed by the bureaucracy. In that sense, the necessity of the defence of the Soviet Union and the workers' states against any attempt to restore capitalism which would represent a giant historical step backward – flows from the fact that these are still degenerated or deformed workers' states, i.e. degenerated forms of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

But it does not flow from this that there are various historical forms of dictatorship of the proletariat which we consider all more or less equivalent, socialist workers' democracy as described by our programme being only the "ideal norm", from which reality has deviated and will still strongly deviate in the future.

The dictatorship of the proletariat is not a goal in and of itself. It is only a means to realise the goal, which is the emancipation of labour, of all exploited and oppressed, by the creation of a worldwide classless society, the only way to solve all burning problems facing humanity, the only way to avoid its relapse into barbarism. But under its extremely

degenerated form of the dictatorship of the bureaucracy, the “bureaucratic” dictatorship of the proletariat not only does not allow workers to advance towards that goal, it holds back the transition between capitalism and socialism. It becomes a major obstacle on the road toward socialism, an obstacle which has to be removed by the proletariat through a political revolution. So it follows that far from being only one among different variants of the dictatorship of the proletariat, socialist democracy, the rule by the toiling masses through democratically elected workers’ and people’s councils, is the only form of the dictatorship of the proletariat compatible with our socialist goal, the only form which will make it an efficient weapon for advancing toward world revolution and world socialism. We fight for that form of the dictatorship of the proletariat and for that form alone, not for reasons of morality, humanitarianism, or historical idealism (the attempt to “impose” certain “ideal” patterns upon the historical process), but for reasons of political efficiency and realism, for reasons of programmatic principles, for reasons of immediate and historical necessity from the point of view of the interests of the world proletariat and of world socialism.

Furthermore, the “bureaucratic” dictatorship of the proletariat can only arise – as it did in the Soviet Union – as the result of a disastrous and lasting political defeat of the working class at the hands of the bureaucracy. It is not accidental that Trotsky uses in that context the formula “political expropriation of the proletariat by the bureaucracy”. As proletarian revolutionists we are not neutral or indifferent in front of the question of political victory or defeat of our class. We try to assure its victory. We try to avoid its defeat by all means possible. Again it follows

that we can only fight for that form of the dictatorship of the proletariat which enables such a victory and avoids such a defeat. Only the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat exercised through political power in the hands of democratically elected workers' councils assures that.

Politically, the question is by no means purely academic. It is a burning issue in all those countries – not only the imperialist ones – where the working class has by and large assimilated the crimes and the real nature of Stalinism and of labour bureaucracies in general. Any identification of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” with nationalised property only, irrespective of concrete conditions of exercise of power by the working class in the state and the economy, becomes in all these countries a formidable obstacle on the road toward a victorious socialist revolution and the realisation of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It objectively helps the bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeoisie, the social democrats, and the CPs to maintain the working class in the straitjacket of the bourgeois-democratic state.

It is an even more burning question in all the bureaucratised workers' states themselves, where the political revolution is on the agenda. In these countries, any attempt to present variants other than workers' democracy as goals for that revolution, would condemn those who make such attempts to extreme isolation from the rising masses. Indeed it would risk involving them in the same hatred with which the proletariat views the bureaucracy, “the new masters”.

The concrete experiences of the Hungarian revolution of October-November 1956 and of the Polish revolution of August 1980-December 1981, which went furthest on the

road to a full blown anti-bureaucratic political revolution, as well as of the “Prague Spring” of 1968-69 has already permitted the drawing of highly significant lessons on the dynamic of the political revolution. The “Prague Spring” and the political revolution in Poland also benefited from taking place in the social, economic and political conditions of countries where the working class represented the vast majority of the active population and could base itself on an old tradition of socialist, communist and trade union mass organisations, as well as, in Poland, on a rich experience of anti-bureaucratic workers’ revolts and struggles for workers’ self-management.

These three experiences of the beginning of political revolutions confirm that the contents of socialist democracy as set forth in our programme and further explained in these theses are but the conscious expression of what millions of workers and toilers fight for when they rise against the totalitarian rule of the bureaucracy.

The struggle against its secret police, for the liberation of political prisoners, against repression of political and trade union activities which undermines the power monopoly of the ruling bureaucracy, against press censorship, against juridical arbitrariness (i.e. for written law and the right of defendants to be judged and defended in line with the law), against the one-party system, against the bureaucracy’s control over the economic system, against the exorbitant material privileges of the bureaucracy and in favour of substantial progress in socio-economic equality – all these planks were the key motives which brought the Hungarian and the Czechoslovak masses onto the streets against the



bureaucracy. It will be the same tomorrow in the USSR and the People's Republic of China too.

They have nothing to do with the restoration of private property, or the restoration of capitalism, as the Stalinist slanders falsely alleged in order to justify the counter-revolutionary suppression of these anti-bureaucratic mass uprisings with the use of the Soviet army in Hungary or Czechoslovakia or the imposition of martial law in Poland. In that sense, they have nothing to do with the overthrow of the dictatorship of the proletariat either.

In Hungary in 1965, the workers' councils and the Central Workers Council of Budapest, after long debates, declared themselves in favour of a defence of nationalised property and of the freedom for all political parties except the fascists. In Czechoslovakia, during the Prague Spring, the demands for unrestricted freedom of political organisation, of political clubs, tendencies, and parties, first defended by the most radical protagonists of the movement, was taken up by large tendencies inside the Communist Party itself and supported by the great majority of the trade unions and workers' councils that sprang up in the final part of our movement. The working class was energetically in favour of a free press – while, significantly, the Stalinist spokesmen of the bureaucracy, those who prepared, facilitated and collaborated with the Soviet bureaucracy's counter-revolutionary military intervention, concentrated their fire on the so-called “irresponsible” “pro-bourgeois” writers whose freedom to express themselves they wanted to crush at all costs – with the working class, in its overwhelming majority, supporting the freedom of the writers.

In Poland in 1980-81, the working class drove forward the broadest experience of struggle for political democracy in a workers' state, for sixteen months. The internal democracy which the ten million organised Polish workers adopted within the Solidarnosc union demonstrated the attachment of the working class to the principles of proletarian democracy. The slogans of socialisation of the means of production and of planning", and of "construction of a self-managed republic", put forward by the mass movement, clearly expressed its aspiration to wrest the control of the economy as well as of the state from the bureaucracy, and to subject them to the collective democratic management of the workers, an aspiration which materialised in the struggle for workers' self-management and in the building of workers' councils and their co-ordination. The programme adopted by the national congress of Solidarnosc, stating that "ideological, social, political and cultural pluralism must constitute the basis of democracy in the self-managed republic", also added that:

"Public life in Poland requires a deep reform that should lead to the final institution of self-management, democracy and pluralism. That is why we struggle both for a change in the structures of the state and for the creation and development of independent self-managed institutions in all walks of social life."

In defence of the "the citizens' total freedom of association", the programme said:

"We believe that the principles of pluralism must apply to political life. Our union will aid and protect initiatives that aim to propose different social-political and economic programmes to society."

It is most likely that similar confrontations will occur during every future political revolution, especially in the USSR and the People's Republic of China. Revolutionary Marxists cannot hesitate or sit on the fence. Neither can they present them as purely tactical choices. They must align with the overwhelming majority of the toiling masses in defence of unrestricted democratic freedoms, against the censorship and repression of the bureaucracy.

In the beginning of the actual political revolution, the toiling masses make the distinction between those sectors of the bureaucracy which strenuously, including by the use of violence, try to oppose mass mobilisations and organisation, and those sectors which, for whatever motivation, yield to and seem to go along with the mass movement. The former they will pitilessly exclude from all renascent genuine organs of workers' and popular power. The latter they will tolerate and even conclude tactical alliances with, especially when they are under attack by the most hated representatives of the bureaucratic dictatorship.

In the final institutionalisation of workers-council power, the toiling masses will most probably, however, take all appropriate measures to ensure their numerical, social, and political preponderance inside the reborn soviets, in order to prevent them from falling under the sway of technocrats and "liberal" bureaucrats.

This is also possible by specific electoral rules, and does not require any banning of specific parties or ideological tendencies considered representative of sectors of the bureaucracy having temporarily allied themselves with the revolutionary masses.

Throughout the rise and the struggle for victory of the political anti-bureaucratic revolution, a tremendous handicap which revolutionary Marxists and proletarian revolutionists will have to overcome is the discredit which Stalin, Stalinism and its heirs have thrown upon Marxism, socialism, communism and Leninism, by identifying their hated oppressive rule with these great emancipatory ideas. The Fourth International can successfully overcome this handicap by basing itself on the record of the relentless and uncompromising struggle by its founders and militants against that oppressive rule for more than half a century. But to this record must be added an audacious programme of concrete demands which embody, in the eyes of the masses, the overthrow of the rule of the bureaucracy, its replacement by the rule of the workers themselves, and the necessary guarantees requested by them that we shall never see workers' political and economic power expropriated again by a privileged layer of society. Our programme of socialist democracy synthesizes all these demands which express the socialist goal as a worthy one in the eyes of hundreds of millions of proletarians in the bureaucratized workers' states.

## **XIII. The programme of socialist democracy – an integral part of the programme of world revolution**

The balance sheet of sixty years of bureaucratic power, since the rise of the Stalin regime in the Soviet Union and of 30 years of crisis of world Stalinism can be summarised as follows:

- a. In spite of all differences between the various European and Asian workers' states and in spite of all the changes that have occurred there, all remain characterised by the absence of institutionalised and constitutionally guaranteed direct workers' power (i.e., democratically elected workers' councils, or councils of workers and toiling peasants exercising direct state power). Everywhere de facto one-party systems exist as expressions of the complete monopoly of real power in all spheres of social life by the privileged bureaucracies. The absence of tendency rights within the single party, the negation of real democratic centralism in the Leninist sense of the word, reinforce that monopoly in the exercise of state power. The parasitic nature of the materially privileged bureaucracies furthermore implies that to various degrees momentous obstacles are placed on the road to advancing the world socialist revolution and building a socialist society; the transition from capitalism to socialism becomes bogged down, creativity is stifled, and tremendous amounts of social wealth are misused and wasted.
- b. In spite of many partial criticisms of the existing political and economic system in the USSR by various ideological currents that have developed since the crisis of Stalinism (Titoism,

Maoism, “Eurocommunism”, and left centrism of the Italian, Spanish and West German types, etc.) none of these currents has put forward a fundamental alternative to the Stalinist model in the USSR. Against that bureaucratic power structure none propose directly democratic working class power. No real understanding of the problem of Stalinism is possible without a Marxist analysis of the bureaucracy as a specific social phenomenon. No real alternative to rule by the bureaucracy (or in relation to the restoration of capitalism) is possible without institutionalising direct workers’ power through democratically elected workers’ councils (workers’ and toiling peasants’ councils) with a multi-party system and full democratic rights for all toilers, within a system of planned and democratically centralised self-management of the economy by the associated producers.

Most West European CPs, while accentuating their criticism of the dogmas and practices of the Soviet and East European bureaucracies, and while broadening polemics with the Kremlin, propose at the most a reform of the worst excesses of Stalinist rule rather than a revolutionary change. These parties have not cut their umbilical cords which link them to the Kremlin, and continue to provide justifications and make an “objectivist” apology for the past crimes of the bureaucracy and many aspects of the present forms of bureaucratic rule. Furthermore, in the imperialist countries, their general policy of class collaboration and upholding bourgeois order even during big explosions of mass struggle, of necessity limits their credibility regarding their respect for democracy inside the labour movement, particularly within the mass organisations that they control and within their own parties. In their critiques they have systematically obscured the differences between bourgeois and workers’ democracy and, under the guise of combating the one-party

system in the USSR, Eastern Europe and China. In reality, they defend the concept that the only alternative to the bureaucracy's rule through a single-party system is to accept bourgeois parliamentary institutions. In this way they reintroduce in the labour movement today the general theses of classical social democracy with regard to the "peaceful" and "gradual" transition to socialism.

In the light of all these failures, the programme of the Fourth International is in favour of the dictatorship of the proletariat, direct working class rule through democratically elected councils, and recognises the plurality of soviet parties as the only coherent and serious alternative to the twin revisions of Marxism advanced by social-democratic reformism and Stalinist codification of rule by a usurping bureaucratic caste.

This programme, which represents in its main lines the continuity of the writings of Marx and Engels on the Paris Commune, of Lenin's **State and Revolution**, of the documents of the first congresses of the Communist International on the dictatorship of the proletariat, has been further enriched in the light of the successive analyses of proletarian revolutions and bureaucratic degeneration or deformation of workers' states, first by Trotsky in **The Revolution Betrayed** and in the founding programmatic documents of the Fourth International, and later by documents of the Fourth International after World War II. This document summarizes the present thinking of the revolutionary Marxists on this key aspect of the programme for socialist revolution.