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Stalinism – How to Understand It and How to Fight It

- Works -

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The undeniable increase in strength of the Stalinist movement throughout the world has provoked two different and equally disastrous reactions in the periphery of our International. The first of these tries to find some "bridge" to the Stalinist movements, with the worthy aim of "detaching" the masses from their leaders. It leads logically to an adaptation of day-to-day policy to Stalinist policy and ends by muddling the fundamental differences separating us from the Kremlin agents.

In practice such "adaptation" not only renders our movement more vulnerable to the Stalinist danger, but in the eyes of the masses robs it of all reason for existence. If the task of the revolutionary vanguard consists merely in friendly criticism of the Stalinist leaders, the masses will see no reason for the existence of the Fourth International as a separate movement on the political arena.

The other reaction, like the first, starts from a superficial exaggeration of the strength and stability of the Stalinist parties. Whereas the opportunists, in their efforts to adapt themselves to the obstacle of Stalinism, forget the fundamental orientation of our movement, the sectarians on this question sacrifice our fundamental orientation to the struggle *against* the obstacle. The practical actions which follow from this policy are as fatal as those flowing from the opportunist policy. They consist in sacrificing the interests of the proletariat to the "tactical" necessities of the struggle against Stalinism. The opportunist methods, both of the sectarians and of the conciliators to Stalinism, derive from a common error : an untenable theoretical position on the nature of the Stalinist parties and their apparent strength. That is why only through a correct analysis of the nature of these parties can a *principled* tactic be worked out on this question.

It is obvious to any attentive observer that the Stalinist parties contain *contradictory* elements. Where such elements reach their polar opposites in certain of the Stalinist parties, they show up these contradictions all the more clearly. The French Communist Party has a million members, in their majority industrial and agricultural workers and unquestionably including the most militant sections of the French proletariat. On the other hand the Stalinist party of Catalonia (PSUC), which played the role of gravedigger of the Spanish revolution, combined sparse layers of backward workers with a hodgepodge of bureaucrats, adventurers and petty-bourgeois elements. Obviously no common denominator can be found for these two poles, even though they came together in general within a single party.

Furthermore, the present grows out of the past, even if with the help of surgical operations. In most cases the present-day Stalinist parties (the Polish PPR and the PSUC are exceptions) have arisen out of the Communist parties of yesterday, by way of a long line of mutilations and poisonings. This is not a figure of speech but a tangible reality, visible in the thousands of members in the Stalinist organizations who joined the party in the period before its degeneration, and visible in the mass of illusions in the consciousness of the masses on the "Communist" character of Stalinist policy.

Finally, even the degeneration of the Stalinist parties is not a uniform process. It appears rather as a growth in the *differentiation* of the numerous layers in the party. This degeneration has transformed *certain* layers into depraved assistant-hangmen and assassins ; other layers have been led to adapt themselves to bourgeois society. The degeneration has opened wide the doors to careerist elements looking for a comfortable spot and adventurers out to

achieve socialism for themselves. It has superimposed layers of intellectuals and functionaries on the initial layers of advanced workers, and peasant layers on the layers admittedly made up of uneducated workers. Some of these are corrupted to the core ; others demoralized to the point of tolerating every sort of perfidy. But with the large majority of Stalinist workers the degeneration reveals itself simply in the passivity of their thinking, their temporary abandoning of a critical spirit, their docile submission to discipline and to orders from above. But these workers are neither corrupted nor disposed to accept corruption passively – otherwise the Stalinist leaders would not make such feverish efforts to hide their crimes from their own membership !

We can thus conclude that insofar as the Stalinist parties are made up in their majority of the better layers of the proletariat, insofar as their members believe them to be working-class parties and as they appear as such to the masses and to the bourgeoisie, they remain *working-class* parties. But they are profoundly degenerated working-class parties, which do not reflect in their structure, their program, their leadership or their political practice, the class consciousness of the proletariat carried to its highest expression.

When Stalinism as a whole is considered formally, it is difficult to separate what remains working-class and socialist from what is no longer such ; hence the chronic headache of all sectarians in their search for the magic formula ! But in practice the distinction is easier. We recognize that there is no longer anything socialist in a speech by Togliatti, for even the phraseology has lost its class stamp ; but the workers in the Turin Federation who almost rebelled after the vote of the Stalinist deputies for Article 9 of the Constitution represent a fundamentally socialist reaction. **L'Humanité** is a laboratory for a score of Stakhanovists in collective poisoning ; but if fascist gangsters should attack the **L'Humanité** offices tomorrow, even the Shachtmanites would defend these offices, arms in hand, alongside the Stalinist workers. How could such an attitude be explained if there were no longer anything working-class about the Stalinist parties ? It is not customary in the working class movement, we believe, to meddle in the settling of accounts between rival "totalitarian" gangs ...

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Reformist Bureaucracy and Stalinist Bureaucracy

The European reformist parties underwent a highly significant social transformation during the last two decades. Today they are composed in large part of layers of middle and upper functionaries, superintendents and professionals. Thus, with the exception of the Austrian SP and to some extent the Italian SP, they appear more and more as the legitimate heirs of the petty-bourgeois radical parties. A comparison of the *present-day* reformist and Stalinist parties is thus a more complex task than the simple comparison between the bureaucracies of the two parties. On the other hand, a comparison between the big reformist parties of the years between the two wars and the *present-day* Stalinist parties, which appear as their successors, will make it possible to throw further light on the question of the social and political nature of the bureaucracy of the Stalinist parties.

Historically, both these bureaucracies are privileged layers which attain socially advantageous positions on the backs of the proletariat. With privileges to defend – "a full and happy life" – the bureaucrats lose contact with the proletariat, abandon the defense of its historical interests and substitute for this the consolidation of their own privileges. This is expressed politically by their abandoning of revolutionary Marxism for an *unprincipled opportunism* which, be it said in passing, not only hastens the working class to defeat but also in the long run results in destruction of the privileges of the bureaucrats.

Up to this point the analogy is exact. The *difference* between the two bureaucracies appears when we examine the *source* of their privileges. Historically, the reformist bureaucracy issued out of the period of imperialist expansion, with its corruption of a large layer of the workers' aristocracy, who were filled with reformist illusions about the peaceful

accumulation of "crumbs" until finally they would have the entire socialist "cake." It established itself in the entire machinery of the bourgeois "democracy," but primarily it constituted the top leadership of the powerful mass organizations that experienced a remarkable growth in this period : parties, trade unions, cooperatives, fraternal organizations, etc.

The Stalinist bureaucracy, on the other hand, is historically tied to the phenomenon of the Soviet bureaucracy, in the epoch of capitalist decay. It obtains its privileges through subsidies from the Kremlin and through the power of the Kremlin-controlled Stalinist parties in the bourgeois state. The degeneration of the Stalinist parties showed itself first in the formation of ruling cliques, with pliant spines, faithfully accepting orders and appointments from Moscow, and establishing themselves in the thousands of lavishly-paid posts in the parties, the publishing houses, "cultural" societies, etc. If therefore the historical function of the reformist bureaucracy consisted in *forcing* the proletariat into submission to the bourgeois "democratic" regime, the historical function of the bureaucracy of the Stalinist parties consists essentially in *utilizing* the proletariat within the framework of the Kremlin's foreign policy.

All this, however, only *poses* the problem, but far from exhausts it. The bureaucracy of the Stalinist parties cannot, indeed, utilize the proletariat except within the framework of existing class relationships. The subordination of the interests of the proletariat to the special interests of the Kremlin does not at all mean that these class relationships are replaced by a "three-cornered fight" of some special nature. When the Stalinist bureaucracy, for whatever diplomatic reasons, imposes on its parties a political line that leads the proletariat to defeat, it acts *in the interests of the bourgeoisie*, whether it wishes to or not. The counter-revolutionary intervention of Stalinism in Spain was inspired by complex diplomatic considerations of the Kremlin ; it nonetheless led to the triumph of the *bourgeois* counter-revolution. The same is true of Stalinist intervention in China, Germany and elsewhere. Insofar as every defeat of the proletariat results in a strengthening of the bourgeoisie in its social relationships, the Stalinist bureaucracy has objectively worked in the interests of the imperialist bourgeoisie, just as did the reformist bureaucracy also, whatever the particular motivations may have been.

Moreover, the problem becomes more complicated as the Stalinist parties grow and their bureaucracies acquire a more differentiated character. The functionary of the CGT owes his post to his "loyalty" to his party, that is, to the Kremlin. But the CGT maintains its position thanks to the tolerance of the bourgeois state. In case of a real conflict between the bourgeois state and the Kremlin, a large number of Stalinist state functionaries and trade union bureaucrats will choose to keep their posts and desert their party. This phenomenon has only occurred in individual cases since the "great turn" of 1939 ; but at that time the penetration of the Stalinist bureaucracy into the apparatus of the bourgeois states was itself still a matter only of individuals. Today, the individuals of yesterday have become thousands of functionaries. It is certain that as the Stalinist penetration into the trade union and state bureaucracy increases, so also the pressure of bourgeois ideology on Stalinist policy increases – and with it the danger of a serious split of the "right" wing at the time of a possible major "left turn." The evolution of Stalinism, *from centrism to neo-reformism*, is a sociologically and ideologically apparent phenomenon in every country and deserves separate study (being outside the framework of this article).

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Stalinist Stability and Reformist Flexibility ?

But doesn't the Stalinist bureaucracy put up a much more savage defense of its privileges than the reformist bureaucracy ? Shachtman, who states his position in a recent article (**New International**, March 1947), goes further. He declares that the Stalinist parties "do not 'give away' what they manage to gain control of ; what they control is absolutely controlled [!] and only 'rented out' for specific price paid them, in return, by the bourgeoisie." Politics is here reduced to mere trading, outside the laws of the market, that is to say, outside the class relationship of forces which in the last analysis determines the strength of each bargainer in the negotiations.

Can this statement be applied to the past ? Against Shachtman are arraigned not only twenty years of Trotskyist polemic but also twenty years of historical experience not to be denied. Did the Stalinist bureaucracy "keep firm control" of Shanghai and Canton ? What "price" did it receive from Chiang Kai-shek for its shameless capitulation other than a kick in the rear ? Can Shachtman make clear to us what was the nature of the "control" which the Stalinist bureaucracy maintained, after 1933, over its very powerful positions in Germany ? Or can he specify exactly what "price" Hitler paid Stalin for his capitulation of 1933, other than the feverish building of a war machine to make a colony out of Russia ?

And more recently : Has the French CP "kept" control over the powerful armed forces it possessed immediately after the "liberation ?" What exactly did it receive in exchange for their dissolution ? Did the Greek CP keep "control" over the tens of thousands of soldiers when it accepted the disarming of the EAM ? What did it receive in exchange from the Greek bourgeoisie ? This assertion of Shachtman's is completely ridiculous in the face of the entire results of twenty years of Stalinist policy, which are nothing but a long series of defeats, not only for the world proletariat but also for the Stalinist parties !

Furthermore, *within its own framework* the reformist bureaucracy also puts up a savage defense of its positions. Every revolutionary worker who has dared defy the trade union bureaucracy in Europe knows something of this. The reformist moguls refrain from no "totalitarian" measure to eliminate revolutionary currents, to rig elections, to suppress the voice of minorities, to throw out those who won't stay in line and to use physical violence against anyone who becomes too "troublesome." Along this line the Stalinists have not had to invent anything ; they were able to copy the reformist bureaucrats' method of fighting, only raising it, of course, to the n-th degree.

But the resources of the reformist bureaucrats come, in very limited amounts, from the power of the workers' organizations and, again in limited amounts, from subsidies by the bourgeois state. The subsidies of the Stalinist bureaucrats are supplied out of the Soviet budget, second largest in the world. Their more ample resources mean also a more fully stocked arsenal and greater confidence in their own strength ; this is without doubt one aspect of the much greater success of the Stalinist bureaucrats in defending their privileges.

A second aspect arises from social psychology and also deserves to be clarified. The reformist bureaucracy has actually never emerged from the "peaceful" atmosphere of the period of imperialist growth ; it still carries the heavy burden of parliamentary illusions, so utterly absurd in our era, and feels completely out of its element in the epoch of wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions. A reformist bureaucrat is a narrow petty-bourgeois, paralyzed by legal cretinism and intimidated by physical violence. The Noskes are rare among the Social-Democratic leaders, whose usual level of treachery does not go beyond anonymous denunciations to the bourgeois police. Exceptional historical circumstances may turn the reformist leaders into accomplices of the bourgeois assassins ; but they never become a *police force* themselves – if for no other reason than their lack of physical courage.

Stalinist leaders, on the other hand, are trained in the completely corrupted clique of Kremlin emissaries, a bunch of unscrupulous adventurers for whom human life has no value. The only thing they inherited from Bolshevism is their skill in forging false passports. Although reformist policy appears as an intolerable anachronism in the era of human incinerators and atomic bombs, Stalinist policy unites all those elements of decay in our civilization which are characteristic of the epoch of the putrefaction of capitalism. The *individual* psychology of the Stalinist leaders is much nearer that of the fascist leaders than that of the reformist bureaucrats. And it goes without saying that the Stalinist bureaucrats employ their brutality and their complete lack of scruples solely in defense of their own privileges ...

When we examine the contradictory nature of the privileges themselves, we can see the dialectical solution of the contradiction between the savage defense of their privileges which the bureaucrats put up and the completely liquidationist results of their policy. The privileges of the reformist bureaucracy depend upon the existence of a powerful workers' movement and on the peaceful integration of its apparatus into the bourgeois "democracy." But the

degeneration of capitalism increasingly undermines the possibility, in our epoch, of cohabitation between capitalism and the workers' organizations, no matter how emasculated the latter may be. The burning question confronts the workers' movement : overthrow the bourgeois state or be crushed by a bourgeois dictatorship. The reformist bureaucracy tries to defend both its own organizations and the bourgeois state – which is to say, it paralyzes the proletariat and leads it straight toward the destruction of its mass organizations, which also means destruction of the bureaucracy's privileges.

The Social Conservatism of the Stalinist Bureaucracy

Basically the situation is no different with the Stalinist bureaucracy. The leaders of the Communist parties in Germany, France, Spain, Greece and increasingly in every country in the world, find themselves and will continue to find themselves faced with the historical alternative : forward to the proletarian revolution or be crushed in the near future by the bourgeois dictatorship. Invariably the Stalinist leaders have chosen the second road, though of course trying to gain as much time as possible – but the reformist bureaucrats do this as much as the Stalinists.

The fundamental reason for this suicidal policy of Stalinism lies, as in the case of the reformist bureaucracy, in the contradictory nature of the privileges of the Stalinist bureaucracy. The Soviet bureaucracy, which developed because of the monstrous degeneration of the Russian workers' state and planned economy, fears the world revolution as much as the imperialist bourgeoisie does. For both, victory of the international proletariat means the final end of their social privileges, however totally different their nature. That is why the Soviet bureaucracy prefers to abandon its weapons abroad – the national Stalinist parties – rather than risk the launching of revolutionary mass struggles in defense of these parties.

The objection will be made : Didn't Trotsky, toward the end of his life, write that the bureaucracies of the Stalinist parties view "with envy" the Soviet bureaucracy's special privileges arising out of the system of nationalized property, and that they try to attain similar positions ? And then the example of the "buffer countries" is rushed in as evidence.

In pointing out a *tendency*, Trotsky was entirely correct ; but he added that the possibility of this tendency being *realized* was very slight if not entirely excluded. Moreover, it seems to us that the example of the buffer countries is completely irrelevant.

The first question to ask is this : If the Soviet bureaucracy is really a "class" tending to reproduce itself outside the borders of the Soviet Union, and if the *fundamental* tendency of the bureaucracy of the Stalinist parties is really to attempt to overthrow the bourgeois regimes and set up a "new totalitarian slave society" – then how explain the policy of capitulation to the bourgeoisie on the part of the French, Italian, Greek, Belgian, Dutch and other Stalinist parties after the "liberation ?" No one who studies closely the relationship of forces in those countries at that time can doubt for a moment that the Stalinist parties had only to *gather up* the power in the streets if they wanted to.

No effective force existed capable of opposing them ; they were actively followed by the largest part of the workers and peasants of these countries ; and many of the rest were passively sympathetic to them. Why then did the Stalinist parties, instead of seizing power in each of these cases, repeat on a European and world scale the capitulatory policy of the Noskes, help reestablish the bourgeois state apparatus and put the power back in the hands of the bourgeoisie ? Through fear of imperialism ? But the establishment of their own Stalinist regime would have been the best defense against every imperialist threat at Russia ! Out of loyalty to the Yalta agreements ? That is too absurd to need answer. Because the relationship of forces was "unfavorable ?" That is what Stalinist propaganda

claims.

Actually, never in history have parties claiming to be working-class parties been in as favorable a situation for their coming to power as the Stalinist parties in 1944, and it may be assumed that the genuine revolutionary parties will have to fight for power in far more difficult circumstances. Only one conclusion remains : that the bureaucracy was even more afraid of its own "seizure of power" than of consolidation of the bourgeois power ; that the bureaucracy was well aware that under conditions of revolutionary upsurge such "seizure of power" would be a first step toward the proletarian revolution and not toward the establishment of some sort of "bureaucratic regime" ; and that the bureaucracy was more conscious than Shachtman of the fact that the final crushing of the bourgeoisie would be impossible except through the revolutionary mobilization of the masses, which it wanted to avoid at any price. And it is paying this price now in the *loss*, one after another and with no compensating factors, of all the positions it had won or was about to win at that time in these countries.

In the buffer countries an entirely similar process unfolded.

No serious obstacle stood in the way of complete overthrow of the capitalist regime in Rumania, Hungary, Finland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, etc. But there also the bureaucracy chose to compromise, to make alliances with various bourgeois elements and to restrict its own opportunities, rather than allow the unloosing of vast revolutionary mass actions. This constant in Stalinist policy appeared in all the buffer countries, as throughout the world. The machinations of the bureaucracy in the buffer countries occupy an entirely harmonious place within the framework of the panicky policy of a gang of bankrupt criminals attempting to prolong their power by indiscriminate looting ; within the supposed framework of a search for "social stabilization" or "historical interests" on the part of a "new ruling class," they are absolutely incomprehensible. They confirm the analysis we have endeavored to outline : The *fundamental* tendency of the Stalinist parties, flowing out of their fundamental role of doing service to the Kremlin, is their *counter-revolutionary* and objectively bourgeois tendency ; the tendency toward adding to the revenues of the Soviet bureaucracy by looting, etc., is a by-product of this fundamental tendency, a by-product arising only out of very exceptional conditions.

We know the extent of this exceptional conjuncture of circumstances in the buffer countries : physical elimination of a large part of the old bourgeoisie in several countries during the war ; temporary non-intervention of imperialism, won at Yalta ; presence of the Soviet army of occupation and a powerful repressive apparatus, and so on. As a result the Stalinist parties in Poland, Yugoslavia, and partially in the other buffer countries, were able to grab most of the key posts in the state apparatus – on a basis of relations of production which remained fundamentally bourgeois – while restricting the action of the masses within the narrow limits determined by Stalinism. What they wanted primarily were economic advantages of basic importance for speeding up the reconstruction of Russian economy. But a "new bureaucratic society" no more emerged from these events than did these events "destroy" capitalism in the buffer countries ...

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"Totalitarian" Parties ?

The emotional power of the word "totalitarian" is curiously linked to the fact that no one can define it exactly ; it works primarily by suggestion. It evokes the image of a society where the "state" attempts to impose its law in every sphere of social and individual human life. Hence it is as applicable to the realm of the Incas as to the Jesuit state in Paraguay, as applicable to the semi-feudal empire of the Mikado during the war as to the Nazi dictatorship in Germany. All these regimes do actually have something in common, just as the arrow and machine-gun are both weapons of death. But there the likeness ends, and Marxism provides us with a number of invaluable criteria for determining the difference between political regimes on a basis other than their outward forms.

The political regime in Russia is certainly quite as "totalitarian" as Hitler's. No serious Trotskyist has ever questioned this ; the only thing which Trotsky questioned, entirely justifiably, was whether the totalitarian nature of the political regime *sufficed* to define either the social nature of the Russian state or the attitude the Fourth International should take toward it. The bureaucracy of the Stalinist parties obeys the "totalitarian" orders of the Kremlin and even dreams, in its spare time, of setting up similar regimes in various countries – as a eunuch dreams of a woman. But it seems to us that though these facts are quite true, they are not sufficient for determining the nature of the Stalinist parties or for characterizing the role they play on the political arena.

We can go a step further and say that the Stalinist parties are "*police*" parties. But confronted by the *revolutionary* menace to their privileges, the Social-Democratic leaders also become objective instruments of the bourgeois police. Where is the difference ?

The Stalinist bureaucracy, like the reformist bureaucracy, carries out its counter-revolutionary policy within the framework of bourgeois society. But although the reformist ministers are simply outrunners of the bourgeois police in the workers' movement, the Stalinist leaders are an integral part of the GPU, serving objectively as auxiliaries of the bourgeois police. Circumstances transform the outrunners and the accomplices into actual assistant-hangmen : Browder and Stachel collaborated actively in the assassination of Trotsky, just as Noske participated actively in the assassination of thousands of Spartacists. The police role of the Stalinist bureaucracy is more marked insofar as its tie with the GPU is a permanent one or that its professional training ordains it to this kind of occupation, whereas the training of the reformist leaders ordains them at best to the profession of quack lawyers for the imperialist assassins. This difference gives the Stalinist leaders a tremendous superiority in police methods and counter-revolutionary activity as compared with the reformist leaders, and explains the predominant role they were able to play in the declining phase of the Spanish revolution.

But the individual psychology of the leaders does not function in a void, nor is it a spring to set robots in motion. The mass of Stalinist workers, at least in those countries where the Stalinist parties have a large mass base, judge their party from its past, its tradition, its language today, its relations with other parties and with the bourgeoisie, etc. But this mass of Stalinist workers is as little "totalitarian" as the simple average worker and in general they are by no means always ready to accept the "totalitarianism" of their leaders. It was not lack of experience but the objective impossibility of getting the masses to accept the terrorism of open physical violence against the Opposition which prevented Stalin from assassinating the Trotskyist leaders in 1927. He had to move step by step along this road, and only in the measure that the reactions of the masses subsided. It was neither a question of "orders" nor of "occupational proficiency" but the dynamics of the class struggle which determined the fact that the open gangsterism of the GPU was able to go into action in Spain only after many months of more or less complete "workers' democracy." And even after two years of retreat of the revolution and a year of unlimited Stalinist terror, the GPU was unable to impose its will at the time of the trial of the POUM.

The victory of Stalinism in Russia itself and the monstrous growth of the police – yes, "totalitarian" – terror which followed, are explained historically by the whole mechanism of the world-scale *retreat* of the proletariat. The exhaustion of the Russian working class, which did not receive sufficient help from the workers of other countries, was expressed in their passivity and growing political skepticism. As the number of advanced workers belonging to the Russian Communist Party decreased, the weight of the newly-born bureaucracy became greater in the party and in the state. The brutality toward the rank-and-file, the cynical careerism, the irresponsibility and the covetousness for material advantages – all these products of functionary-ism under conditions of economic misery could be held in check by the working masses so long as they combined an enthusiastic confidence in their ideals with critical activity in the workers' organizations. The degeneration could not have developed to the point it did if the proletariat had not become politically *passive*. In the interrelation between the passivity of the working class and the growth of the police terror, it is the former which is by far the more decisive. That is why we say that Stalin, far from being an evil genius who succeeded in fashioning history with the help of his diabolical secret police, is himself only an abortion of the historical process, driven by social forces of which he was unaware to a policy whose appalling internal logic he could

never suspect.

Similarly, Trotsky always emphasized the fact that the passivity of the German working class under Hitler was fundamentally not a result of the all-powerfulness of the Gestapo apparatus, but that, on the contrary, the "totalitarianism" of the dictatorship was possible only because other factors had brought about an unprecedented prostration of the proletariat. Trotsky analyzed these other factors so thoroughly that we can here confine ourselves to listing them : the weight of fifteen years of defeats ; the terrible demoralization caused by the capitulation of the reformists and Stalinists in 1933 ; complete disillusionment in the traditional workers' organizations ; lack of confidence in their own class strength ; lack of any concrete perspective of struggle – and so forth. The demoralization naturally became greater as the terror continued, and the terror became more effective as the passivity of the working class made it possible to isolate and rapidly crush the last islands of resistance. But recent history has provided plenty of examples to prove that a transformation in the attitude of the proletariat can in its turn quickly break up the most "totalitarian" state apparatus, and that in such a situation the pressure of the masses is enough to shatter it in pieces.

Did the recent growth of the Stalinist parties occur following an *ebb-tide* of the proletariat ? Did the workers leave the Communist parties in great masses and fall again into complete passivity ? Clearly, with the exception of Poland and perhaps Yugoslavia, a fundamentally *different* phenomenon occurred. Beginning in 1944 the workers everywhere flocked in mass to the Communist parties. Far from being demoralized, they were filled with hopes they had not known since the October Revolution. The world-wide upsurge of Stalinism after World War II was the crest of the great revolutionary tide. Under such conditions, was it possible to "utilize" the proletariat in order to establish a "new exploitive society ?" To suppose even for a moment that a working class *in full upsurge* could be brought by the simple method of police terror to accept immediately the establishment of a new regime of exploitation, means actually to give up all hope in the revolutionary potentialities of the proletariat.

Furthermore, does what actually occurred have anything in common with this abstract and lifeless schema of the "fundamental drive of the Stalinist parties toward seizure of power in order to establish a new regime of exploitation ?" Wherever the workers drove the Stalinist leaders ahead, the latter put on the brakes or retreated. Everywhere the hopes of 1944 were cruelly shattered. After this disillusionment, the bourgeoisie was able to make a relative recovery, the Stalinist parties were thrust back on the defensive, and the masses temporarily thrown into passivity. The phenomena of Stalinist "seizure of power" in some of the buffer countries are directly related – wherever it was really a question of *anti-working-class* terror – to this new relative passivity of the masses under exceptional historical circumstances, which rendered the bourgeoisie itself incapable of taking advantage of the temporary retreat of the proletariat. But even in these countries, after the demoralization of the workers was still further increased by their terrible disillusionment with the policies of Stalinism "in power," the bourgeoisie regrouped its forces and made ready to proceed again to the offensive. That is why in these countries also the growth of Stalinism appears to us as a *transitory* phenomenon, the fate of which will be determined either by a new offensive of the working class or by a victorious regroupment of the bourgeoisie assisted by world imperialism. The decisive factor in every country remains the class struggle. The dreams which the Stalinist leaders have of "totalitarian dictatorship" are being inexorably ground to dust between the powerful millstones of modern society ...

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A New Edition of the "Third Period"

When Zoergiebel, chief of the Social-Democratic police, had scores of Communist workers killed at the time of the 1929 May Day demonstration, he was unquestionably a bourgeois assassin. But the mass of Social-Democratic workers continued to follow Zoergiebel after this massacre. It required, however, the ignorant blindness of the "Third Period" Stalinists for the conclusion to be drawn that the Social-Democratic workers were "little Zoergiebels." Actually

these workers, in continuing to follow their leaders, did not by any means accept their criminal police measures [1]. The "crime" of these workers consisted rather in this, that the massacre for which Zoergiebel bore full responsibility was not enough to convince them of the superiority of the hysterical putschism of the Stalinist leaders as against the criminal lethargy of their own reformist leaders.

Similarly, Maurice Thorez and Palmiro Togliatti are without question direct accomplices of the GPU. But despite all that has been revealed about the crimes of the GPU, the large mass of Stalinist workers will continue to follow their Stalinist leaders – or will fall back into complete passivity – until the day when the Trotskyist parties can prove to them *in practice* the superiority of their policy over the policy of Stalinism. To call the Stalinist parties "parties of assassins" is therefore as monstrous an error as the "Third Period" Stalinist error of calling the reformist parties parties of "little Zoergiebels."

When Trotsky opposed the line of the "Third Period," he never for a single moment, however, undertook to defend Zoergiebel himself. To find a bridge to the Social-Democratic *workers* did not mean, for Trotsky, to pass over in silence the crimes of the reformist *leaders*. This task he left to the Brandlerites. Those who, in seeking to find a bridge to the Stalinist workers, are consistently silent about the crimes of the Stalinist leaders, occupy a position in relation to our movement similar to that of the Brandlerites during the years of the "Third Period."

The reformist workers will not be convinced of the counterrevolutionary character of their own leadership unless they can be brought to learn through their own experience that these leaders are not ready to solve a single one of the problems confronting the working class. At a certain stage this experience will inevitably pass through the slogan, "All power to the parties claiming allegiance to the working class !" The ultra-Leftists, who, as always, take their own experience for that of the masses, have been objecting to the application of this slogan to the reformist parties : "Such a government will govern objectively *against* the proletariat." No revolutionist denies this – but it certainly is no objection against the use of this slogan. The slogan corresponds precisely to a situation in which the reformist leaders *do not want* to break with the bourgeoisie and, under the driving pressure of the masses, take power in their hands. If the masses nevertheless succeed in forcing such a break on their leaders, then there begins a revolutionary period in which the proletariat can at every moment confront the indecision and cowardliness of its "leaders" with its own boldness ; the "government of parties claiming allegiance to the working class" would be a brief interlude before the seizure of power by the proletariat.

This slogan cannot of course be advanced except in clearly defined situations characterized by :

- the discontent and thorough radicalization of the working class, in the period of pre-revolutionary crisis in society, when the workers understand the necessity of throwing out the existing governments (whether bourgeois or coalition) which are incapable of bringing the country out of the impasse ;
- the fact that the proletariat continues to place its confidence in its traditional working-class leaders ; and
- the fact that the proletariat does not in its majority understand the necessity of going over to direct struggle for the setting up of Soviets and the passage of power into their hands – an idea still advanced only by a revolutionary minority.

Is then the importance of this slogan minimized by the fact that there is a considerable number of situations in which the slogan does *not* apply ? By the fact, for example, that it would be absurd to advance the slogan at a time when the masses are *sinking back* into passivity and no longer have confidence in their traditional leaders ? By the fact that it would be even more absurd to advance the slogan for parties which have never had the confidence of the working class ? All the "examples" given by Shachtman have to do with such cases ; they do not prove in the slightest that the slogan of a "CP-SP-CGT Government" does not apply to all situations in which the above-outlined conditions exist. As is so often the case, his crushing argument is nothing more than a tremendous wallop at thin air.

On the other hand, the arguments advanced against using this slogan, under any circumstances whatsoever, in

relation to the Stalinist parties, is as similar as two drops of water to the ultra-Leftist argument against use of the slogan in relation to the reformist parties. It is needless to convince us of the counter-revolutionary character of the Stalinist leadership, or of its connections with the GPU, and so on. The problem still remains this : Given a suitable situation, *does anyone know any way of detaching the masses from the leaders in whom, despite everything, they continue to place confidence, other than that of the traditional slogan of "Government of the parties claiming allegiance to the working class ?"* So long as no one can show us another way – and not one of those who oppose the use of our transitional slogan has even tried to propose something in its place ! – we will continue to consider it the only slogan which corresponds to the situation.

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The Problem of the United Front

What we have just said on the subject of the "SP-CP-etc." slogan applies all the more to the problem of the united front. The tactic of the united front, once again, is not a *fetish* except for centrists – such as the SAP in Germany before Hitler – who really think that "united action" solves everything. For us, the united front tactic corresponds to a given stage of development of the revolutionary parties, as well as to a given state of the consciousness of the masses. Under certain *precise* conditions, which were precisely formulated at the Third Congress of the Comintern, the united front tactic is the most powerful instrument for detaching the masses from a traditional party and for making possible the most rapid passage of the masses into the ranks of the revolutionary party.

Once, given this set of conditions, the united front tactic applies as much to the Stalinist as to the reformist parties. Those who now say, "We can't make a united front with the assassins of the Old Man," are repeating word for word the argument of the "leftists" of the German CP at the Third Congress of the CI who said, "We can't make a united front with the assassins of Karl and Rosa." These comrades have not understood that the united front, far from "re-gilding the banner" of the treacherous leaders, is an especially effective weapon for *fighting* them and destroying their influence among the masses.

Obviously the Leninist tactic never was to "offer" united fronts to the treacherous leaders on every occasion and under all circumstances. But it is clear evidence of bad faith when we are asked with feigned indignation whether we propose a "united front" to the Polish Stalinist leaders when they shoot down the striking workers in Danzig and hunt out the militants of the PPS (Polish Socialist Party) or burn down the villages whose inhabitants would not comply with the orders of the secret police. One could with similar malice ask : "Do you offer Bevin and Deakin a united front when they are engaged in a fight to expel revolutionists from the trade unions or when they are trying to break the dockers' strike ?" It is obvious that when strikes break out in Poland or anywhere else, including Russia, because the workers see no other way of defending their right to a decent standard of living, we will be unconditionally on the side of the workers. If the police shoot down the striking workers – thus demonstrating that they have nothing in common with the working class ! – we will fight beside the workers and we will try to organize armed resistance, if conditions allow. We will follow this line of conduct in Great Britain as well as in Palestine, in Russia as well as in Poland, whether the government be conservative, Laborite, or Stalinist. But that does not at all mean that in these countries, *under other circumstances*, the possibility of a united front is excluded in advance. If a fascist *coup d'état* were ever attempted in Great Britain against the Labor Government, we would most certainly propose a united front to Bevin ! We were for a united front with the Stalinist bureaucracy against Hitler – and reports from Russia indicate clearly that after the first moments of confusion this was the *practical* attitude of the great majority of the revolutionists, whatever their theoretical explanations for the attitude. We were likewise for a united front with the leaders of the EAM in Greece in December 1944. Under similar circumstances we would also be for a united front with the Polish PPR – provided that by a conjuncture of circumstances the PPR were with the majority of the Polish workers struggling for a just cause. This is not "eclecticism," it is a Marxist principle readily to be found in the *Communist Manifesto* : Every victory of the working class strengthens the revolutionary party, just as every defeat of the *working class as such* makes the building of the revolutionary party a thousand times more difficult.

But in thus demarcating ourselves from those who faithfully apply the myopia of the "Third Period" to the problem of Stalinism, we must emphasize even more the fact that the *Leninist* conception of the united front has nothing in common with any of the theories about "pleasant atmosphere," or "friendly language," or "limiting our criticism," and the rest of the opportunist drivel which blunts this weapon and ends by turning it into nothing more than a wooden sword, brandished impotently by a little party impatient to become a "mass party." The united front is simply a supplementary and more effective method, in certain suitable circumstances, for denouncing the reformist and Stalinist leaders. It is a means of making the workers conscious of the fact that the revolutionary party offers a better defense of their *immediate* class interests than opportunism of whatever color. Those who introduce into the tactic of the united front the least hint – whether feigned or sincere – of fraternization with the lackeys of capitalism or of the Kremlin, remove themselves from Leninism and take their position with the purest centrism.

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The Causes of the Recent Growth of Stalinism

Whoever approaches the problem of Stalinism in the light of a false analysis of the Soviet Union, finds himself completely paralyzed in trying to explain the extraordinary growth of Stalinism in the last three years. The greatest phantasies – on such subjects as "Machiavelism" and "regression of the mass consciousness" – have been used for explanation. Certain people have even, like real magicians, pulled out of their sleeves "new classes in power" in order to explain the very rapid enlargement of the Stalinist organizations. The absurdity of all these theories is best indicated by the astonishing results one gets when the theories are pushed to the end.

The tremendous growth of the Stalinist movement for a period at the end of World War II can be understood only if one starts from the classical conception of our movement regarding Stalinism : whatever the degree of degeneration of the bureaucratic leadership of these parties, they remain, in most cases, working-class parties, and are considered as such by the bourgeoisie and by the proletariat. Their growth, like their decline, is to be explained as a function of the class relationship of forces and the development of the working-class movement as a whole.

By virtue of the special nature of the Social Democracy, the historical period of its growth falls in the epoch of imperialist expansion – the three decades prior to the First World War. In this sense, the First Congress of the Comintern was entirely correct in characterizing the *historical* period which mankind entered in 1919 as the period of the *liquidation* of the Social Democracy. Nevertheless it was precisely the first worldwide revolutionary wave, after 1917, which expanded the Social-Democratic parties more than all the reformist activities during thirty years of relative peace. And the European Social Democracy won its leading positions in the apparatus of the bourgeois states long after the moment when historically its death-knell had begun to toll.

Unlike the Social Democracy, which was historically connected with a period of "peaceful" growth of the workers' movement, Stalinism expresses objectively a period of retreats and bloody defeats. The historical growth of Stalinism coincides with the historical retreat of the workers' movement. Again in this sense, the Fourth International was entirely correct in characterizing the period of revolutionary upsurge of the proletariat following World War II as the period of the *historical liquidation* of Stalinism. The fact that precisely at the beginning of this period Stalinism seemed to reach its peak in numerical forces and in the "winning" of posts in the bourgeois state apparatus, no more contradicts this fundamentally correct analysis of the period than the existence of ten reformist Prime Ministers in the world in 1919 contradicted the analysis of the First Congress of the Comintern.

The movement of history does not proceed along the trajectory of a straight line, but follows an irregular curve which most frequently takes the form of periodical cycles. But to ignore the cyclical movement and see only the general direction is no less serious an error than to ignore the general orientation while seeing only the cycles ! At the

moment when the first important layers of the working class detached themselves from reformism and understood the need of forming a new revolutionary party – only then did the great mass of the *class*, which had been politically passive during the comparatively "quiet" years, reach the threshold of *working-class* politics – and there they were promptly absorbed by reformism. The fact that the high point of the European Social Democracy came in 1919, and of world Stalinism in 1944, is to be explained fundamentally by the same process of uneven development of the various working-class layers – though it was made possible by the revolutionary upsurge which, moreover, undermines the entire foundation of these parties. The masses who flocked to Stalinism in 1944 came there not because of its policy *today* but because of its *past* which made the Stalinist parties appear to the masses as the most radical on the political scene.

A second factor common to the peak of the Social Democracy in 1919 and of Stalinism in 1944 is the *organizational conservatism* of the highly skilled and best educated layers of the working class. These layers hang on to their traditional organizations, and especially the organizations which in the past gave them their local and regional leaders. The extraordinary attachment of the French proletariat to the Communist Party is to be explained not so much by their attachment to the October Revolution or their illusion that the Communist Party continues to incarnate the tradition of that revolution, as by the fact that present in the factories, the mines and workshops are the lower cadres of the party who, because of their struggles in the past, are looked upon as the best fighters for the workers' interests. Insofar as the contradiction between the *present-day* policy of the CP and the *present-day* needs of the masses sharpens both the opposition of these lower cadres toward the party and the mistrust of the masses toward these cadres, the break with the CP is being objectively prepared ; but what is involved here *is* an extremely slow process, which requires a whole series of experiences and which runs the danger of finally turning into *demoralization* unless the revolutionary party is able at the right moment to counterpose, within the living mass organizations, its own representatives against the representatives of Stalinist neo-reformism.

Along with these causes which are common to the development of both the Social Democracy and Stalinism in the two periods of revolutionary upsurge we have just described, there is a special cause for the growth of Stalinism at the end of World War II. This cause lies in something peculiar to Stalinism. Acting in the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy, and not so much with the aim of *defending* bourgeois "democracy" – as the Social Democracy did – as of preventing the outbreak of the socialist revolution. Stalinism has a field of operation much vaster than that of the reformist bureaucrats. Moreover, the sharpening of the contradictions between imperialism and the Soviet bureaucracy results in a much more stubborn opposition of the bourgeoisie to penetration by the Stalinists into its state apparatus than its opposition to a similar penetration by the reformist bureaucrats. This opposition, in turn, gives the Stalinists a new anti-capitalist halo. Finally, and a still more important factor, the Stalinist parties have accomplished a veritable *renovation of reformism* by proposing, within the framework of the capitalist system, the carrying out of a number of measures which are characteristic of Soviet planned economy. However fraudulent this renovation may be on a purely theoretical level, it gives their propaganda and their political activity a character a thousand times bolder and more dynamic than that of the old reformist parties. It is this illusory "effectiveness" of the Stalinist parties and of the solutions they propose which has been an undeniable force of attraction not only for the working masses but for numerous petty-bourgeois layers who were convinced that the coming to power of Stalinism would sweep out "everything" from top to bottom. These illusions have been strengthened even more by the confused impression the masses have that capitalism has "somehow" just been destroyed in the buffer countries – an illusion skillfully fostered by Stalinist propaganda and also shared, alas, by Shachtman.

The combination of all these factors contributed to raise Stalinism to its pinnacle at the beginning of the revolutionary upsurge ; but it is no less true that the upsurge itself undermines the foundations of Stalinist power. Whatever illusions the masses may have about the "anti-capitalist" character of Stalinist policy, the experience of one or two years of participation by the Stalinists in the ministries is preparing the ground for dissipation of these illusions. The scope of these illusions bars the road, for a certain period, to a new advance of the proletariat. This new advance, which is being prepared by a great number of objective factors, will be realized according as the masses have the capacity to overcome the obstacle of Stalinism. This capacity, in turn, depends in large measure on the actions of the Fourth International.

The Struggle Against Stalinism

The struggle against Stalinism is not a literary exercise ; it is a fight to break the influence of Stalinism *among the masses*. For this reason the struggle is ranged on three different planes, each of which corresponds to one of the roots which Stalinism has among the workers.

The most burning task of the struggle against Stalinism, the task which can never be interrupted, is the intransigent ideological struggle against the poison that Stalinism has introduced into the workers' movement. A patient and intelligent re-affirmation, in the light of today's events, of the fundamental principles of Leninism and workers' democracy will make it possible to gradually cleanse the working masses of all the foul vapors of chauvinism, reformism and social collaborationism which the Stalinist parties have spread among them. Above all we must consistently set forth the tradition and practice of Bolshevism in opposition to the degraded prostitution of socialist ideals which the Stalinists organize wherever they can, not only in the buffer countries but also in those trade unions and mass organizations of the "West" in which they have seized the levers of command. We must denounce, without surcease and without reservation, all the crimes of Stalinism against the people in the buffer countries, we must systematically break down all the illusions of the masses about the "destruction of capitalism" in these countries and about the "socialism" that exists in Russia. This task is as fundamental as the fight against parliamentary illusions in the struggle against the Social Democracy – for no worker who really thinks that Russia is "socialist" and that the Stalinists have abolished capitalism in Yugoslavia will leave the Stalinist organizations.

It is all the more necessary to repeat these elementary truths because in the periphery of our movement there is a tendency to consistently evade any "sharp" characterization of the Stalinist leaders and to pass over in silence most of the crimes of Stalinism in the buffer countries, with the excuse of "not playing the game of the anti-Soviet campaign." This must be said clearly : such a tendency corresponds objectively to the *pressure* of Stalinism and must be fought implacably by the International if it wishes to preserve its own character.

The second task in the struggle against Stalinism, a task which will become broader and more urgent as our movement grows and begins to attract the sympathy of large layers of Stalinist workers, is to apply correctly the *tactic of the united front* in relation to Stalinism. Even if we can win a part of the vanguard on the basis of our *principled propaganda*, the masses will not come over to us unless they can be convinced in practice of the *superiority* of our *day-to-day* policy over the day-to-day policy of Stalinism. The united front tactic – our agitation for its realization, and its eventual application – is the best way of getting the masses to understand that we are better fighters for their class interests than the Stalinist opportunists. This point has to be emphasized because in the periphery of our movement there are tendencies which reject the possibility of united fronts with the Stalinist mass organizations. Such tendencies correspond objectively either to the *pressure* of imperialism or to traditional sectarianism. The effectiveness of our struggle against Stalinism depends in large measure on our ability to avoid in relation to Stalinism the errors of the "Third Period" in relation to reformism.

The third task in the struggle against Stalinism is the patient penetration of our movement among the *rank-and-file* of the workers' movement. Only when the masses recognize our militants in the factories, in the working-class quarters, in the community, in the trade unions, in the cultural organizations, in every field of their activity, as *better* leaders than the Stalinists ; only when they feel that our movement is more effective, more closely tied to the masses, better organized to lead them to victory ; in a word, only when they recognize in our parties *their* parties and in our International *their* International, not in words but in fact – only then will we have the premises for thorough destruction of Stalinist influence. That is why the struggle against Stalinism is not some kind of special task, an appendix to our program. The most effective struggle against Stalinism is the building of our party, the strengthening of our

International ! This will require a whole historical period, for a whole historical period will be necessary in order to finally win the confidence of the masses ; but we are profoundly convinced that this period has already begun.

In this sense, a race is now going on between two processes which will decide the future of humanity : the regroupment of the world bourgeoisie and the regroupment of the proletariat. In spite of the successive capitulations of the "working-class" leaders and the liquidation of the first stage of the revolutionary upsurge, the bourgeoisie is still far from a solution of its immediate problems : to get rid, even just a little, of the cracks in its system and the ruins left piled up along its road after the war. But even a temporary solution of these problems requires of the bourgeoisie not only a furious attack on the living standard of the workers, but also the elimination of Stalinism as a factor of power in the workers' movement.

The proletariat, for its part, if it is to return to the offensive against capitalism – and without this none of its immediate problems can be solved – must above all overcome the inertia and pressure of the Stalinist machines which have been erected on top of its organizations. Liquidation of Stalinism *by imperialism* would carry with it the danger of the entire workers' movement being buried in the debris ; failure of the *proletariat* to overcome the burden of Stalinism which weighs it down would make its defeat inevitable. The historical task confronting the Fourth International is to take leadership in the overthrow of Stalinism by the *working-class*, and thus to prevent the crushing of the workers' movement by imperialism. Whoever understands the dialectical relationship between these two tasks will understand why, in the daily struggle, we must defend the *distinctive character of our own party* with the most fierce and unrelenting defense. And this character of our party cannot include any trait of adaptation to Stalinism, just as it must be completely free of any trait of vulgar anti-Stalinism.

Ernest Germain

April 10, 1947 [didim escort](#), [marmaris escort](#), [didim escort bayan](#), [marmaris escort bayan](#), [didim escort bayanlar](#), [marmaris escort bayanlar](#)

[1] **Footnote by MIA** : The originally published version thisw sentence was formulated in error as follows : "Actually these workers, in accepting the criminal police measures of their leaders, did not by any means follow these leaders." [See [Two Corrections](#), **Fourth International**, Vol.8 No.6, June 1947, p.169.]