INTRODUCTION

The events of 1989 were revenge of the politically expropriated working class of Eastern Europe. The crisis was a crisis of capitalist restoration, a crisis of the betrayal of communism, a crisis of the retreat from revolutionary transformation.

Marxist-Leninists bear no responsibility for such a crisis. It was not marxist-leninists who were the apologists for what happened in Eastern Europe. Responsibility lies with those revisionist forces who are quickly distancings themselves from past "socialist" practices.

Marxist-leninists warned of the revisionist course diluting ideological commitment and competence, that adoption of capitalist theory and practice corrodes the communist orientation. Few Marxist-Leninists in Britain took at face value the ritual use of ideologically derived language by the ruling parties of Eastern Europe.

The events since the collapse of the ancien regime have shown that there is no hybrid social and economic formation that transcends capitalism and socialism. Any hybrid that is suggested, like social democracy, is not halfway between socialism and capitalism but is capitalism under another name.

The accelerated pace of change that saw the regimes of Eastern Europe crumble and collapse occurred against the background of changes in the Soviet Union. When Gorbachev was forced to embark upon "democratisation" his hope was that this would lead to the rejuvenation of a stagnating economy. Gorbachev initial shocked by talking about things that were well known to everbody but seldom acknowledged.

To use Havel's much quoted phrase, Gorbachev sought "to live within the truth". New thinking, generated by the crisis within the Soviet Union, encouraged the political transformations of 1989. The invasion of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 signalled the reality of a Kremlin veto on change within it's East European satellites.

When challenged by popular demonstrations on the streets, Gorbachev made it clear that the Soviet Union would not back internal military action by the leaderships of those East European countries. Just as the Berlin Wall was breached and shattered, the regimes whose legitimacy was questioned in mass popular demonstrations shrivelled-up once force was removed from their arsenal. Not only could they no longer rule in the old ways; they could not rule.

The ruling parties split in what was an appropriate response: internal manoeuvring of those who wanted to manage change and solve the antagonisms by political methods, moved against the 'hardliners'. The old ruling parties have been reduced to small minorities, have split, transformed themselves into social democratic parties and put forward programmes which envisage private ownership, price and currency reform and greater reliance on market mechanism and philosophy. No wonder anti-communists in the capitalist world point to Eastern Europe and say that the socialist road proved to be a cul-de-sac.
In the aftermath of WW2, the Soviet Red Army acted as a barrier to the re-establishment of the repressive state apparatus of the old semi-feudal and capitalist regimes. By opening up the possibilities for realising the people's hopes of a new social order, the communist forces relied excessively on the external forces from the Soviet Union to establish state power. The opportunity was taken, but these founding circumstances loomed as a shadow over the coming years.

Some comrades would argue that the main problem was that, except in Czechoslovakia, at first, the working class did not want them. In most cases, the Communist Parties were tiny. Their political dominance was imposed by the Soviet Union, and never had a popular mandate; and they knew it. There may have been those who were sincere, but most had let colleagues be purged in the Thirties and during the war, without protest, and were just Soviet stooges. The way they took power was itself corrupting, based as it was on a lie of mass support. Such an argument questions whether the "People's Democracies" established in most of Eastern Europe after the Second World War were ever really socialist.

In reply it should be noted that communists in Eastern Europe were caught up in the deformations of Comintern politics that were manipulated in the interest of Soviet foreign policy; as the Comintern pattern its policy after that of the USSR it lost its ideological independence. [The Comintern was not synonymous with the whole of the international communist movement, and aspects of the errors of the age are discussed in 'Eurocentrism and the Communist Movement'].

The defense of the Soviet Union was regard as the internationalist duty of all communists, many communists thought that involved holding back from public criticism of any aspect of the Soviet Union.

Did East European communists, who had often operated illegally in the repressive autocratic states from which they had been forced to flee, weekly resign themselves to the persecution and annihilation of fellow communists in their adopted Soviet homeland during the purges? Research by Soviet academics disclose that the Bulgarian communist, Dimitrov, Pieck and others tried to defend the arrested:

"Each time Dimitrov intervened, he proved that the arrested was a communist and demanded his release. Notably, in gathering evidence to prove these people to be loyal Communists, Dimitrov had the cooperation of the rank-and-file Comintern members who helped him under pain of death. Sometimes Dimitrov's letters brought results. But far from always, unfortunately..." [Firsov, Stalin and the Comintern. New Times #18 1989:41].

Faced with the opportunity, and perhaps wary of the alternative, of embarking upon a road of socialist orientation were these surviving communists to relinquish the possibilities made possible by the presence of the Red Army?

These lines of thought deserve greater discussion than possible here but what is possibly an agreed positions is that in Eastern Europe Communists failed to rectify the political errors of the early years.

The establishment of correct internal relationships, broadening and deepening the involvement of the working class in determining and pursuing independence and socialism, was hindered by the incorrect external relationship to the Soviet Union. The onset of the US-inspired Cold War saw the consolidation by the Soviet Union of the security zone that Eastern Europe represented to the Soviet Union.
Soviet interference and domination devalued the legitimacy of the ruling parties in the eyes of the masses. The social improvements in the wake of the economic and political dislocation arising from the WW2 and its aftermath were not sufficient benefits in exchange for a complete monopoly over society.

The internal contradictions engendered by social polarisation accelerated with the adoption of revisionist politics that came to dominate Soviet-orientated parties. The system stagnated. Communists faced a renewed ideological offensive that sought to identify marxism with bureaucracy, commodity shortages, economic stagnation, declining living standards.

Solidarnosc in Poland was illustrative of the dialectic of the mass movements that have risen in opposition to the old order in Eastern Europe. As the League pointed out at the beginning of the 1980s, the politics of Eastern Europe have been characterised by two main features:

"A national contradiction which is the servitude imposed upon Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe by the USSR and the people's struggle against this; and a class contradiction between the broad mass of working people and the ruling elite."

(Class Struggle Supplement/
Poland: Military Rule exposes sham 'socialism' 1981)

This analysis was borne out by subsequent events when the "whole society had risen against the injustices of Polish reality" (Class Struggle, July/August 1989).

As we embark upon a new decade, there are few illusions about both the dangers and possibilities offered by events in Eastern Europe. There is an extensive anti-communist offensive: the communist insignia torn out of the national flag was a visible expression of not only the revolution at the regimes but symbolic of sentiments of national liberation. These sentiments may give rise to more virulent reactionary trends.
With the collapse of the East European regimes, coupled with the changes underway in the Soviet Union, the ostensible rationale for the Cold War in the West - rooted in the idea of a powerful and expansionist enemy - has evaporated: the Cold War warriors are claiming victory.

Industrialists and financiers sense opportunities in the conversion to a rapacious free market system. The reintegration of the eastern economies into a wider European economic community, re-oriented to the needs of Western Capital, is a future that could sustain the expansionist and adaptive capabilities of western imperialism.

The restructuring of East European economies brought about by the reforming regimes elected to power will, in the name of economic reform, privatise industry, remove state subsidies in housing and food production, and unemployment will increase. The new governments cannot afford the inherited social commitments of the previous regimes but they can offer cheap, skilled labour forces and a potential market.

Capitalism is quick to proclaim that marxism is incapable of providing a positive alternative to solve the problems of the modern world. What marxist-leninists have long argued is borne out by the events in Eastern Europe. Would be wrong to say that the changes in Eastern Europe are a great victory for capitalism when the great victory for capitalism came in the 1950s, when revisionism became dominant within those ruling parties of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union? The victory for Western imperialism that the events of 1989 represent is a victory over a rival power bloc, it crowns the initial inroads laid by the revisionist course that took such a strong hold on the ruling parties of Eastern Europe as they followed the Soviet baton. The crisis in those countries was the consequences of re-introducing capitalist values and practices.

As Class Struggle pointed out in the summer of 1989 in regard to Poland: "Past manifestations of opportunism and revisionism have led to the political degeneration of the PUPP (Polish United Workers Party) and of the Polish state. The unhealthy parody of socialism in Polish post-war developments allowed conditions to exist in the country for open anti-communist propaganda and for it to penetrate and flourish amidst the development of an ineffective, bureaucratic rule by the PUPP."

There is on the Left some confusion about the events of 1989. The anti-communist offensive of the bourgeoisie has had the effect of creating an intellectual climate in which the marxist project is open to ridicule. The revisionist forces of the CPGB, having long abandoned revolutionary politics, proclaim the end of Leninism. The myriad of Trotskyites see the end of the historic foe, Stalinism. In proclaiming this they are joined by strange bedfellows:

"Profound changes are taking place in Eastern Europe. When people say that this is the collapse of socialism, we ask them, 'what kind of socialism?' The kind that was essentially a version of the Stalinist authoritarian and bureaucratic system." And Mikhail Gorbachev adds, "which we have ourselves rejected." (Daily Telegraph July 3 1990)
What trotskyist and Gorbachev-type positions share is a language derived from marxism, but in which marxist analysis plays no part in the process of providing an explanation of the social democraticising of the regimes of Eastern Europe.

It has been claimed that the implosion of the East European regimes vindicates the trotskyite analysis. The Labour Party's largest trotskyist group states "Gorbachev's coming to power signified the beginning of the political revolution" (Militant 19.1.1990).

While it is only the likes of the Redgrave-dominated "Marxist Party" (formed by the pro-Healy remnants of the WRP) that treat Gorbachev as a closet trotskyite, fellow trotskyists in Britain welcome what is "an historic opportunity for the victory of the political revolution" (Socialist Organiser #21 Feb.1990:11).

In the euphoria around the disintergration of the "stalinist regimes", modern day trotskyists argue that the validity of their political tradition has been confirmed by history. Ernest Mandel, a leading theoretician of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, told a London rally in December 1989 in a speech filled with characteristic delusion, that:

"The hour of the Fourth International is beginning to strike. We are now at the start of a worldwide rise of new mass workers' movements, in which for the first time in history our movement is like a fish in water. We can speak freely, and raise our programme without fear of slander or repression."

What was the trotskyist analysis now bearded as prescience? There is not a single trotskyist analysis of the regimes of Eastern Europe. The petty-bourgeois class nature of trotskyism has engendered faction-fighting that has given rise to a process in which sections of the trotskyists split, fused and expelled each other with monotonous regularity.

Thus there are a variety of different perspectives within the trotskyist tradition, often identifiable with a 'personality', but what they share is that they are rooted in Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet Union undertaken in the 1930s. The shared belief is that the workers' state was established, and then following the isolation of the workers' state, it degenerated as the bureaucracy inside the state seized political power from the working class. The degeneration was incomplete. There was no complete return to capitalism. So within their terms of reference, the Soviet regime might be reactionary, but it had to be defended against attacks from capitalist sources, in the name of defending the gains of the working class.

Trotsky died leaving a political analysis that said that the social gains of October 1917 remained despite political power belonging to the "stalinist bureaucracy". Any degeneration was seen as superstructural in character.

Echoing his mentor, Ted Grant of Militant describes the bureaucracy as "a cancerous appendage" on the workers' state:

"The bureaucracy is not a social class; it has no independent relationship to production, it is not based on private property, it performs no historically progressive function, and it is impossible to determine where it begins and where it ends. It has all the vices of a ruling class, without having any historic mission."

(Silverman & Grant, Bureaucracy or Workers' Power
Militant 1975 (3rd Ed): 33)
In regard to the Soviet Union, the majority of Trotskyists have held fast to the notion that it is a temporary deformation of a worker's state, a mere deviation from the path of socialism. Trotskyism, trapped in a conception of unilinear progression, argued that, (apart from pre-capitalist modes of production) in the modern world there is only one mode of production other than capitalism, and this is socialism.

The formula of degenerate workers' state as applied to the Soviet Union was essentially a political definition concerned with the institutional system of power. "The bureaucrats have been nothing but parasites on the backs of the working people, interested in little more than preserving their unjustified privileged existence." (Militant Oct.20 1989)

Thus orthodox Trotskyites argue that the Soviet Union is some kind of workers' state NOT because of the nature of political power BUT because the state preserves at its base, gains made by the working class. Trotskyism defends what the Yugoslav Edvard Kardelj termed, the "socialism of the apparatus".

Trotskyists argue: the state is a workers' state because the economy is centrally planned rather than being a market economy and because the principal means of production are nationalised rather than privately owned. As Workers Power put it: "Dominance by the market stands in total contradiction to the whole economic basis of the stalinist states, just as it would in a healthy workers' state." (Workers Power/Irish Workers Group, Stalinism in Crisis 1990:31)

What the more sophisticated Trotskyists might argue is not that such states are literally workers' states but that certain economic relations, over which the Soviet state presides, are of a socialist or proto-socialist nature. This modification in the argument maintains the economistic vision that associates the abolition of private ownership and its replacement by a nationalised economy as the key process in establishing socialism.

However if the nationalised economy controlled by the state and the planning implemented by the state are not devised or controlled by the working class, then how is it in the "interests" of the working class? Surely these mechanisms are used against the working class by those who control the state - we certainly have seen the effects of state ownership on the steel, shipbuilding and coal industries in this country!

Extensive state intervention and planning have been features of states which no-one outside the nutty right would call 'socialist', including Germany under Bismarck and Hitler and fascist Italy.

The Trotskyist argument that the dominant mode of production is socialist depends upon the assumption that solely identifies the mode of production with nationalised property relations, and not wider social relations of production and political power. The emphasis on the existence of nationalised property and state planning detracts from an understanding that the control of the political and economic apparatus effectively performs an 'ownership function', that determines the production and allocation of the social surplus.

Thus Trotskyists cannot but draw the absurd conclusion that what is required is that the workers' state apparatus needs to be smashed by a political revolution in order to clear the way for socialism.
Despite the "reactionary nature" of these states, trotskyists believe there exists within them the forms of property ownership which are regarded as the crucial, objective material preconditions for developing a socialist mode of production. Therefore in any conflict with western imperialism, trotskyists defended the deformed or degenerate workers' states in order to protect the (social) gains which remain from the overthrow of capitalism there.

For orthodox trotskyists, the class character of a state is decided by which form of property dominates the economy. It was starkly put: the capitalist private property of the bourgeoisie, or the nationalised and planned property expropriated from the bourgeoisie, defended by the Stalinists, which could only realise its potential in socialism. Thus Militant states, "All that are needed are political changes, on the lines of Lenin's four points safeguarding workers' management against bureaucracy." (Silverman & Grant : 51)

**THE INDEPENDENT 24.12.98**

RECENTLY a hunk of bronze about a foot high and weighing 200lb was dumped outside the porter's lodge at the Museum of the Hungarian Workers' Movement in Budapest. It is the right hand of the gigantic Stalin statue which stood in Procession Square before it was hacked to pieces by a crowd during the 1956 uprising. The statue was almost destroyed, but the spirit of Stalin lived on for years after.

The surviving fragment of the Stalin statue will play a central role in East Europe's first critical exhibition on Stalinism, to be staged next year by the Museum of the Hungarian Workers' Movement. Laszlo Nagy, the museum's deputy director, said such an undertaking would have been unthinkable a few years ago. It would have been impossible to collect the necessary objects and documents, because people would have been too afraid to come forward with any relics.

The exhibition will take the form of a Potemkin village. Outwardly, the cardboard houses will radiate happiness and prosperity. Smiling posters of the age, with pictures of Stalin and his Hungarian alter ego, Matyas Rakosi, will proclaim the triumph of communism, and capitalism's impending doom. But when visitors go behind the walls, they will discover the realities of the age: a peasant's larder emptied by the state, evidence of the cultural poverty imposed by leaders in the name of progress, and barbed wire, signifying the gulags.

Rakosi and his comrades celebrate May Day under Stalin's statue.
Another of the Labour Party's internal Trotskyite support groups, Socialist Organiser, rejected Trotsky's analysis in November 1988. They then characterised Eastern Europe's states as "bureaucratic state monopoly" societies.

Their analysis echoes Max Shachtman's "Bureaucratic collectivist" analysis of the Soviet Union. This emerged in a bitter factional fight within the American SWP in the early 1940s when Shachtman, a leading Trotskyite, advanced the view that it represented a new type of class society. Schachtman, in a moralistic critique of Stalinism published as "The Bureaucratic Revolution", labelled the Soviet Union as representative of "bureaucratic collectivism". He emphasised the 'Stalinist counter-revolution' as a necessary component of the establishment of a new mode of production.

According to this view, Soviet-type societies cannot be capitalist because there is no exchange of commodities, no competition of capital and no category of surplus value: the economy is dominated by the production of use value. However to postulate a managerial, bureaucratic stratum controlling the means of production, rather than an 'owning class', strays from a marxist critique of class society. If the system is characterised by administration and organization, how is this elite endeavour linked to an understanding of the structure of society?

In 1937, an associate of Shachtman, the American trotskyist, James Burnham (Professor of Philosophy at New York University) has questioned Trotsky's analysis, arguing that the Soviet Union's ruling bureaucracy constituted a definite social class, and dominated a 'bureaucratic collectivist state.' (Burnham was to develop this line of thinking in the 1941 publication, The Managerial Revolution, as he argued that the Soviet Union was one example of an entirely new form of society: "managerial society").

Trotsky responded to the incipient polemic with "Not a Workers' and Not a Bourgeois State?" (Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1937-38, p.60). Throughout the 1930s a whole series of splits occurred over the constantly recurring differences relating to the class nature of the Soviet Union. A few months prior to Burnham's dissent, there was similar criticism from an ex-Trotskyist, Bruno Rizzi, author of La Bureaucratization du Monde, and at the founding conference of the 4th International, a 'new class' thesis was advanced by the French delegate Craipeau.

A correct position on the Soviet Union, Trotsky lectured, was based on asking the right questions. They were:

1. What is the historical origin of the USSR? 2. What change has this state suffered during its existence? 3. Did these changes pass from the quantitative stage to the qualitative? That is, did they create a historically necessary domination by a new exploiting class?

[In Defense of Marxism, Pathfinder 1970:52]

These criteria were applied to the states of newly-liberated Eastern Europe by Trotskyists in the post-war years trying to come to terms with the expansion of Stalinism in contradiction to Trotsky's prognosis.
In the early 1950s, Michel Pablo, a leading Trotskyite, classed the regimes of Eastern Europe as \textit{deformed workers' states} rather than "degenerated workers' states" on the original Soviet model. Such a classification involved more than a subtle semantic argument. The new label continued to maintain an analytical separation between base and superstructure, abstracting property relations from social relations as a whole.

It was hard for trotskyists to characterise the new regimes established in Eastern Europe and Asia as \textit{degenerated workers' states} as according to the Trotskyist analysis, they were not the product of the usurpation of power in pre-existing socialist societies by a bureaucracy, but of the take-over of countries by Stalinist parties, which carried out some measures of socialist transformation from above, without allowing the working class to take political power. In these states too, there would need to be a 'political revolution', not a social one. They created that economic structure and could hardly be classed as 'parasites'. They were said to be \textit{deformed regimes} because of their origins. As Ted Grant asserts they had "no October tradition of Soviet power". The regimes of Eastern Europe were:

"Deformed workers' states in the image of Moscow, bureaucratically disfigured from their very inception, were created on the backs, either of the Red Army or of independent peasant armies".

(Silverman & Grant,\textit{ Bureaucratism or Workers' Power} 1975:33)

Workers Power argues that "Capitalism in these local areas was replaced by the bureaucratised post-capitalist system as a by-product of a reactionary strategy of collusion with fascist imperialism." (\textit{Stalinism in Crisis} 1990:30)

These East European regimes performed the historically necessary task of developing the productive forces. The primitive accumulation of capital benefitted the workers with the provision of a social welfare system, but there was no fundamental mechanism for innovation and revolutionising productive techniques. The position of the unified post-war Fourth International was that:

"Totally deformed workers' states came into existence, ones which had extremely progressive property relationships but were hampered by the Kremlin-imposed political apparatus."

The necessity of the economy to accumulate and to achieve the levels of advanced capitalism, it is argued, builds in tendencies to operate like capitalist societies in terms of wage differentials, discipline of labour and work processes.

Trotsky's analysis goes some way to acknowledging the need to overcome the backwardness of the technical productive forces, but in attempting to give theoretical status to his empirical investigations on the subject, trotskyites treated the Soviet Union as a transitional social formation between capitalism and socialism which had been temporarily stalled by bureaucratic deformation.

What was to be faced in the light of the establishment of the regimes in Eastern Europe was the idea that a transitional — albeit degenerated — society could reproduce itself.
The notion that 'counter revolutionary Stalinists' had overthrown capitalism in Eastern Europe following the end of the WW2 should have shaken the doctrinaire certainties of the Trotskyite movement.

The spread of "stalinism" went against every prediction. Far from collapsing under the German invasion (as Trotsky predicted), the Soviet Union survived and helped establish similar regimes wherever the victorious Red Army stood. This strategic situation held a number of problems for the Soviet Union as Stalin remarked at a dinner party in the Kremlin in July 1944:

"This war is not as in the past; whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise." (History Today October 1983:30)

Post-war Trotskyism faced the task of attempting to analyse a "Stalinism" which was plainly not what it had seemed to Trotsky. In Albania, Yugoslavia, China and north Vietnam, 'Stalinist' parties won power under their own steam. What had been characterised as Stalinism proved to be not just an apparatus of power as Trotsky had asserted, but also a movement that inspired and generated revolutionary class forces in a variety of societies.

World Trotskyism split around 1954 when Pablo developed the notion of deformed workers' state to support a political line that upheld the revolutionary nature of Tito's leadership in Yugoslavia. This viewpoint was a minority position and fundamentally questioned the Trotskyite pretence to revolutionary leadership. What emerged as more influential was the position associated with the present day Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) in Britain.

"If the Soviet bloc are workers' states" SWP theoretician Duncan Hallas argued," then the Fourth International and the Transitional Programme were wrong to say Stalinism cannot overthrow capitalism." (I.S. Journal 40)

If these regimes were workers' states, argued SWP's Chris Bambery, then the post-war imposition of these regimes endorses the idea of socialism from above and that "capitalism could be removed without the working class."
(Socialist Worker Review Feb.1990:15)

The theoretical debate on the nature of the 'Eastern bloc' involved looking again at Trotsky's analysis, questioning whether they were workers' states, aberrant societies or new exploiting systems.

Tony Cliff was expelled from the post-war Revolutionary Communist Party in 1947 for advocating the view that Russia was not any sort of workers' state. His work "The Nature of Stalinist Russia" argued that the existing system in the USSR was a form of capitalism, namely bureaucratic state capitalism. That view marks the SWP as heretics within the trotskyite tradition.

The implosion of those societies is explained in terms of their inability to compete with the rest of world capitalism. The rule of the bureaucrats is seen as an impediment to the development of the productive forces. Cliff explains: "Instead of a real plan, strict methods of government dictation are involved in filling the gaps in the economy made by the decisions and activities of this very government. Therefore instead of speaking about a Soviet planned economy,
it would be much more exact to speak of a bureaucratically directed economy."
(Socialist Worker Review Dec.1989:14)

What Cliff's analysis has in common with a Marxist analysis is the rejection of the notion that state property equals the negation of capitalism, and a focus on the real relations of production underlying the economic system.

Where Cliff breaks from orthodox trotskyism is in the understanding that the basis of class divisions and exploitation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe does not lie in the political superstructure and thus cannot be removed by political change alone. However, Cliff's understanding of the nature of these societies, drawn from his analysis of the Soviet Union, has major flaws in explaining the generation and consolidation of these class societies.

In Cliff's view, the Soviet economy is characterised by the operation of the law of value within it. This is in response to pressures from outside that stem mainly from the arms race!

However, many pre-capitalist societies have been subjugated by imperialism, or integrated into the world market which have nevertheless not been capitalist societies. The state capitalist nature of the Soviet Union could hardly be derived from external influence on the operation of the internal mode of production. Cliff's reasoning displays a fatalistic view of revolutions in non-capitalist developed societies common to fellow trotskyists: it locates the source of degeneration as the economic backwardness and isolation from the goods and skills available in the more "advanced countries".

The rump WRP, clinging to the notion of the transitory nature of the regimes, argued: "The deformed workers' states of Eastern Europe have for years becoming increasingly indebted to the imperialist banks, to which they have turned to try and fund their national economies... pressure of the world crisis means that the Stalinist rulers are driven to try and impose capitalist solutions to the problems they face: even if it should mean effectively handing over the power to the capitalists themselves."
(Marxist Review Vol.5.1 Jan.1990:27)

As the state apparatchiks transform themselves into the formal owners-through management buy-out of enterprises is there any re-think by the trotskyists of their past analysis? Will they change their definitions as the dwindling percentage of industry in state hands comes to the market place? Will they support attempts to restore the previous system by restorationist forces dedicated to restore the social gains of the "bureaucratised workers' state"?

While the orthodox believers expressed fear at the restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe, the SWP have long argued that Soviet-type societies have not transcended the capitalist mode, but are merely a special type of capitalist society. A problem with the state capitalist thesis is its continuing reliance on the notion of the administrative bureaucracy as the location of the ruling class in these societies. Where it is unsatisfactory in its explanation is in terms of competing bureaucracies within Soviet-type societies.

The nature of the state apparatus varies according to the historically determined social formations in which it functions. The state is functional to the needs of the ruling class, it is an instrument for the perpetuation of a
specific set of social relations, for the domination and repression sanctioned by the ruling class. It is the politics and policies that change, and the vast number of functionaries who comprise the bureaucratic machine in those societies will process the alterations in public policy.

Even a parasitic bureaucracy is not involved in a monolithic structure. There is an assumption that the politics of institutional continuity, gradualism, accommodation and reassurance prevails. The Brezhnev era may have been one of unparalleled bureaucratic stability but the "Stalinist system" that pre-dated it was established through a series of deep revolutionary convulsions and transformations that affected the bureaucracies themselves.

Today Gorbachev, far from accepting the settled shape of bureaucratic relations, has responded to the pressures of changing material conditions in society, and of changing political circumstances within the Soviet elite. He has acted to circumvent the power of the party bureaucracy in favour of the state bureaucracy. These moves, and the implosion of the old regimes of Eastern Europe indicate the theoretical poverty of the Trotskyist movement.

One regime after another has collapsed, and the survivors look quite ill. Those that have fallen have been replaced by forces committed to some form of Western parliamentary democracy, dismantlement of much or all of the state sector, and opening up of the economy to western investment. This has happened with little opposition from workers, and, to a large extent, even with their support. It makes nonsense of the pretense that there were working classes who had made great gains and only needed to carry through a political revolution to establish socialism.

The political revolution came, and gave rise to unashamedly bourgeois regimes. Clearly, the majority of the Trotskyist movement was shown to be wrong in its characterisation of the systems existing in Eastern Europe. It failed to grasp that there could not be a bureaucracy ruling as an independent force detached from a specific system of production. The system had to be socialist, capitalist or some other definite system, with its own class relations (such as the 'Statist model' suggested by Samir Amin), and giving rise to the state power of a specific ruling class, not a non-class.

In Lenin's words: The key question of every revolution is the question of state power. Which class holds power decides everything... The question of power cannot be evaded or brushed aside, because it is the key question determining everything in a revolution's development.

It is on this question that the Trotskyist analysis is vulnerable: it cannot locate the focus of power, it fudges the issue of the consequences of an abortive social-historical process. Whatever defects might be detected in the historic M-L critique of the East European regimes, it was at least coherent and identified the central power question correctly.