



Workers' Liberty

Reason in revolt

Vol 3 No 55 October 2016

Published with Solidarity 421



Stalinism and Afghanistan: socialists and the 1979-89 war

By Sean Matgamna

Introduction: A watershed for the left

Afghanistan's "Great Saur Revolution", in April 1978, and the Russian invasion of Afghanistan that flowed from it 20 months later, at Christmas 1979, were two of the most important events of the second half of the 20th century.

The invasion led to the so named Second Cold War. Their failure to subjugate Afghanistan in a nine-year colonial war was one of the things that shattered the self-confidence of the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy, and contributed to its downfall.

The April 1978 revolution was a freakish event — an army and air force officers' coup controlled by the Peoples Democratic Party, the Afghan Stalinist party. The PDP was itself a tiny town-based middle-class organisation of a few thousand people, perhaps as few as 2000, in a country then reckoned at about 18 million people.

The symbiosis between the PDP and the Air Force and Army officers had come into existence in the previous quarter century, during which Russia had equipped and trained the Afghan air force and army officers. Afghanistan's neighbour and rival, Pakistan, had the patronage of the USA. These army and air force officers took the USSR as their model for modernising Afghanistan.

It was a coup, not a revolution, that they made in April 1978. In China, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, Stalinist revolutions had been led by organisations at the head of mass movements. The PDP had no such base. It had only the officer corps. The army and air force soldiers in these organisations obeyed the officers in the traditional military discipline of command and obedience. The military hierarchies remained intact.

A gap of centuries of social and intellectual development divided the towns and their educated elites from rural Afghanistan. Having very small support in rural Afghanistan, the new regime had only force to rely on. It resorted to military and airborne terror to enforce revolutionary decrees for which there was little or no support in rural Afghanistan — land reform, for a surprising example. Within a couple of months of the coup, the regime was at war with much of rural Afghanistan, and soon with almost all of it. The Stalinists in power found themselves using the typical techniques of colonial war against the people they were trying to force-march into the 20th century. Villages were napalm-bombed, crops destroyed in the fields, large numbers of people killed or driven over the borders into Pakistan and Iran.

The PDP had been divided between two murderously hostile factions, Khalq and Parcham. They united under Russian pressure to make the coup. But not for long. Soon the Stalin-

ists in power started killing each other. Within a year of the coup so many officers had been killed or jailed that a large number of Russian air force pilots had to be brought in so that the air force could continue to function.

Russian pressure to take things more slowly had no effect on the ruling faction, Khalq. Their policy was to slug it out with the peoples of Afghanistan. By that time they probably had little choice other than to go down before the hostility of rural Afghanistan.

Russia invaded at Christmas 1979, shot the leaders in power, had the leaders they put in their place invite them to invade Afghanistan, and got bogged down in the last great colonial war of the 20th century — Russia's Vietnam war.

What attitude should socialists take to the Russian annexation of Afghanistan? This question immediately divided the international left. All the "Orthodox Trotskyist" organisations except what is now AWL either backed the invasion enthusiastically or took the line that, the Russians being there, they could not now condemn the invaders or call upon them to withdraw. One segment of the Mandel Fourth International announced jubilantly that Russia had gone "to the aid of a revolution".

Militant (today divided into the Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal) was then the biggest proclaimedly Trotskyist organisation in Britain. They soon came out in support of the Russian occupation. The invasion caught the Workers' Power group, who had been supporters of a state capitalist account of the USSR, in the middle of a reexamination of the "class nature" of the USSR. The new example of Russian imperialism made them decide to stick to the state capitalist point of view? No, they took a flying leap into the air and across the newly reinforced barrier to the idea that the USSR was any sort of workers' state. They chose to see the invasion as a new proof that the USSR was, after all, a degenerated workers' state.

After six months or a year many of the Orthodox Trotskyists sobered up and stopped supporting Russia's colonial war. Others backed Russia through a decade of savage colonial war in Afghanistan. The Socialist Party never sobered up. Nor did Workers' Power.

A lot of labour movement people, including some Labour MPs, backed Russia in Afghanistan. The introduction to the AWL book on the miners' strike contains an account of some of our experiences in connection with Afghanistan at that time.

An odd thing in the response of the ostensible left to the invasion was that, in contrast to the "Trotskyists", some Communist parties refused to back the Russians. For example, the Communist Party of Great Britain* condemned the invasion. Jack Woddis published factually honest accounts of what was happening in Afghanistan, and condemned it. These were Stalinists turning themselves into bourgeois liberals, but they had learned something from their experience, and in this case behaved as serious political people.

Before the invasion the AWL had been going through a prolonged "re-evaluation of values". There had been a short but

nasty fight in the group on our attitude to the Iranian Revolution, early in 1979. The argument for a more critical approach to this alien, reactionary revolution had received one vote on the National Committee. We learned from that mistake. In January 1980 we decided that we could not in political conscience join the other "Orthodox Trotskyists" as we had on Iran. We must oppose the Russians in Afghanistan. It was a major event in our ongoing "re-evaluation". But the material in this pamphlet was all written from within a residual "degenerated workers' state" position on the USSR.

When the Russians pulled out, we responded to the new situation by supporting the cities against the rural barbarians. An article reprinted in this collection outlines that position.

Some half-wise people have accused us of inconsistency in our attitude to Muslims. If there is inconsistency it is in the circumstances and situations in which different Muslim peoples exist.

Of course we opposed the attempt to conquer the Muslim peoples of Afghanistan. Of course we sided with the Muslim victims in Bosnia of the butchering Serb ethnic cleansers. Of course we campaigned politically against the international embargo on arms for the Bosnian Muslims. Of course we supported the Albanian Muslims in Kosovo, a Serbian colony, against the would-be genocidal Serbian state and its local supporters.

And of course we oppose political Islam. Of course we oppose their oppression of Muslims and non-Muslims who disagree with them. Of course we oppose them in their drives to set up Islamic theocracies. Of course we denounce their 9/11 atrocity in New York and the terror attacks in other places, including London.

Of course we oppose Islam, as we oppose Roman Catholicism, Greek Orthodox Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, etc, etc, etc.

Of course, we believe that the values and best standards of advanced bourgeois civilisation, one dialect of which is our own Marxist socialism, are better, superior, more advanced than backward Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and all the other obscurantist enemies of reason, democracy and rationality.

Our record on these questions shows the kitsch-left charge that our politics on political Islam now are rooted in a fixed hostility to Muslims as people is ignorant a-political and often hysterical abuse from people who have themselves lost the political plot.

Finally, it has become something of a truism on the left that by arming Russia's opponents in Afghanistan, the USA was the great villain there. No, the Russian invasion and the decade-long colonial war there was the great primal villainy, from which all the other bad things followed.

This pamphlet was published in 1985. The material appeared in weekly installments in the paper *Workers' Action* in 1980, and in a magazine issue of *Workers' Action* at the end of the same year. The Appendix was written in 1985.

Sean Matgamna, October 2016

* Footnote: This, of course, was the real CPGB, not the *Weekly Worker* group that uses that name now. These were then *The Leninist* and wild enthusiasts for the Afghan regime, lauding and relishing and, indeed, openly drooling and thrilling over, the strong hand of Stalinist rule and the Stalinist terror in Kabul and other urban centres. In print, they threatened to wreak eventual Stalinist vengeance of the same sort against opponents of "The Revolution" in Afghanistan, and on "Trotskyites" such as our selves. In plain words, the leaders of this groupuscule, then as now, were psychologically very strange people.

CONTENTS

A WATERSHED FOR THE LEFT (INTRODUCTION 2016) PAGE 2

INTRODUCTION 1985 PAGE 3

THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN IN THE BRITISH LABOUR MOVEMENT PAGE 3

PART I: AFGHANISTAN BEFORE AND AFTER 1978 PAGE 4

PART II: TED GRANT, ALAN WOODS AND AFGHANISTAN PAGE 8

PART III: CONCLUSIONS PAGE 11

**PART IV: AFGHANISTAN: DEFEND THE CITIES PAGE 15
CIVILISATION, BACKWARDNESS AND LIBERATION
PAGE 16**

APPENDIX: TED GRANT AND MARXISM PAGE 17

Introduction (1985)

Just after Christmas 1979, 100,000 soldiers of the Russian army occupied Afghanistan.

Five and a half years later the Afghans are still putting up an unquellable resistance. Russia holds only the towns; even its hold on the towns is insecure. Over large areas of the country the writ of Russia's puppet government does not run. The invaders are forced to move around in convoys which are frequently ambushed, reportedly with heavy losses.

Even the Russian "embassy" in Kabul is not safe from rocket attacks. Kabul, the capital city, with a population of one million, is reportedly surrounded by three defensive rings. Yet there are bomb and rocket attacks almost every night in Kabul. For example on October 25 last year [1984] there was a heavy rocket attack on government buildings in the centre of Kabul, and a rocket went off in the building holding the office of the prime minister. On October 26 the KGB building in Kabul was hit by a rocket. The Khad (Afghan secret police) building has been bombed.

In October-November 1984 the USSR lost control of Kandahar, one of the biggest towns, with a population of 100,000. The "Red" Army retook it by surrounding and bombing it. It burned the crops in the surrounding area.

Early last November the Muslim rebels captured 100 USSR soldiers and killed 30 more near Kandahar. The result was a wave of air attacks on the area between November 14 and 22. Some reports said that three Russian MIGs were brought down.

The Afghan army, 80,000-strong at the time of the invasion, has melted to half its size. It is a matter of the Russians being pitted directly against most of the people of Afghanistan.

The USSR has something like 120,000 soldiers in Afghanistan now. Various expert Western commentators have calculated that four or five times that number would be necessary to subjugate Afghanistan. Having occupied, Russia has so far not committed enough resources to "pacify" the country.

The result five and a half years after the occupation is that Russia has an occupier's presence and little more. The "Red" Army is an army of occupation in a hostile land. Its relationship with the hostile people is what the relationship of all

such armies is with those whose country they have invaded. They carry out reprisals and atrocities. When the Russians are attacked, nearby villages are shelled or napalmed in reprisal. Crops are burned from the air, in reprisal and as policy to deprive rebels and their supporters of food.

Refugees were estimated by the UN in 1982 to number 2.6 million in Pakistan and 1.3 million in Iran.

The economy has been wrecked. The area under crops is down. Rebel sources say it is down by two thirds.

OCCUPATION

But the signs are that the USSR has every intention of staying in Afghanistan. The economy of northern Afghanistan, where there are valuable minerals, is being systematically integrated with the economy of the USSR. At least 70% of Afghan trade is with Comecon.

There is little reason to doubt that the anti-Russian forces are almost entirely reactionary, conservative and backward-looking. They have allies and supporters ranging from the Chinese to the USA.

Whatever about Russia's intentions the Afghans are a long way from being defeated. They have never been conquered in modern times, and today they believe they are fighting a religious war.

For Russia to complete the conquest would very likely require the commitment of some hundreds of thousands of fighting soldiers and also that a large part of the civilian population be either massacred or rounded up and herded into what have variously been called "strategic hamlets", "resettlement areas" or "concentration camps". That is what the US did to hostile civilians in Vietnam, and what Britain did at the turn of the century to the women and children of the Boer guerrillas in South Africa.

Plainly what is happening in Afghanistan is a war of colonial conquest. Those who gloated in the capitalist press in January 1980 that this would be "Russia's Vietnam" have been proved right.

What attitude should socialists take to the war? It is a colonial war of conquest. But it is being fought by the USSR, which most of the left in Britain consider either socialist, or

The Russian invasion of Afghanistan in the British labour movement

Most of the Trotskyist organisations backed the Russians. Socialist Organiser was the only organisation in the entire "orthodox Trotskyist" political spectrum that condemned the Russian invasion and called for the troops to be withdrawn.

The confusion on the left about Stalinism created great difficulties for *Socialist Organiser* in the 1984-5 miner's strike. For us the first principle was the liberty and political independence of the working class everywhere. We had to combine necessary criticism of Scargill and his friends in their capacity of Stalinists with whole-hearted support for them in their capacity of heroic fighters in Britain. We encountered considerable hostility.

To give an example from my own experience at the time, one of the rowdiest labour movement meetings I've ever attended was a debate I had in Edinburgh soon after the Russian invasion with a pro-USSR Labour MP, Ron Brown. He was an honest but politically foolish man who thought that Leonid Brezhnev and Colonel Gaddafi — and probably Saddam Hussein — were socialists. Just back from Afghanistan, he was keen to report that the Russians were doing great work there, and were very popular.

It was a Saturday afternoon at the end of some miners' gala or conference, and a big proportion of the large meeting were miners, many of them bevvied-up. The meeting was overwhelmingly pro-Russian and very hostile to those who denounced Russia's invasion of Afghanistan. Most of them would have been Labour Party people. To the loud approval of much of the meeting Brown praised the Russian leaders

for sending tanks to Kabul. I attracted fierce abuse and much interruption when I argued that we should condemn the invasion and call on the Russians to get out of Afghanistan. "The Yanks are against the Russians, so is Margaret Thatcher, so is the CIA — and so are you".

I'd taken part in open-air mass meetings of dock workers in Manchester. Noisy, sometimes conflict-ridden affairs in which a more genteel outsider would have seen imminent violence where there was none. At a number of points I thought the Edinburgh meeting was about to break up in violent disorder. The supporters of the Russians in Afghanistan would certainly have won the vote had we had one.

This large Scottish labour movement meeting was not all that unrepresentative of opinion on the left then. Many people who called themselves socialists thought "defending nationalised property" more important than the right of the Polish workers' movement Solidarnosc to exist.

The most distressing thing about that Edinburgh meeting was who and what these angry supporters of Russian imperialism's colonial war in Afghanistan were, and the tragic gap between what in reality they were supporting and what they thought they were supporting by backing the Stalinist dictator Brezhnev.

These were some of the best people in our movement then. But they were hopelessly disoriented. Politically they had no future.

Sean Matgamna, July 2014.

From *Class Against Class: The miners' strike 1984-5*



Cover of the original 1985 pamphlet

at any rate a workers' state of some sort. (Most *Socialist Organiser* supporters would define it as a degenerated workers' state). [That was true in 1985. In 1988 we officially changed our view, towards seeing the USSR as an exploitative class system not superior to capitalism]. So should our attitude be different from the attitude we took to the Vietnam war?

Is the USSR's war "progressive"? Even if we do not like what the Russians are doing, and would not have supported the invasion, does it necessarily follow that socialists should demand that the Russians get out — thereby vacating the field for the Muslim forces?

TROTSKYISTS

These are important questions. Today the major supposedly Marxist tendency which supports the war is *Militant*. But at the beginning of 1980 most would-be Trotskyists in the world supported the Russians, or at least would not call for withdrawal.

Some of them were bowled over by the invasion. The American Socialist Workers' Party — once the party of James P Cannon, who died in 1974 — hailed the invasion as a wonderful new development. It was the USSR "going to the aid of a revolution". Cause indeed for wonderment!

In Britain, *Socialist Challenge*, forerunner of *Socialist Action*, first came out firmly against the Russians and then flipped over to support them.

Within six months or a year they had sobered up. It was one of the most bizarre episodes in recent "Trotskyist" history, which unfortunately is not short of bizarre episodes.

Today, only *Militant*, the posturing International Spartacist Tendency, and one or two no-hopers here and there maintain the pro-Russian position. Nevertheless the issues raised by the invasion remain extremely important. It is a duty of serious socialists in the British labour movement to agitate for the movement to oppose the Russian colonial war and to demand that Russian troops leave Afghanistan.

Militant is important for two reasons. It has a sizeable following in the British labour movement; and its ideas on Stalinism — from which its support for Russia's "Vietnam war" flows — go right to the heart of what it is as a political tendency. These ideas need to be discussed, especially by the youth.

The material in the first part of the pamphlet, on Afghanistan in 1973-9, is a slightly expanded version of two articles which appeared in the paper *Workers' Action* in January 1980. The section on *Militant* and Afghanistan is based on an article which appeared in *Workers' Action* magazine, December 1980. It has been expanded quite a bit.

The summary and conclusion is also based on that article. The rest is new.

Part I: Afghanistan before and after the 1978 coup

Afghanistan is one of the most backward countries on earth.

Its population about 16 million. National income per head is less than \$150 a year. Between one and two million people were nomads even before the Russian invasion created four million refugees.

The biggest town, the capital, Kabul, has a population of a million; the next biggest, Kandahar, a bit more than 100,000. More than 85% of the people live in the rural areas. Only 10% of males and 3% of females are literate.

The land is massively underutilised. Only about 20% of the country is arable but of that less than half is cropped. According to figures given out by the government after the 1978 coup 82% of the peasants owned 35% of the land, while the biggest landowners, 5% of the rural population, owned 45%.

Industry and handicrafts employ about 6% of the working population, but (according to estimates published by the US Department of Commerce in 1970) output in handicrafts was reckoned to be three to four times as large as factory-scale industry, though such industry had grown in the 1960s. In 1970 factory-scale industry still accounted for only between 2 and 3% of Gross Domestic Product.

The working class that could emerge in such conditions was bound to be both weak and socially unformed, even if we add in the 2% of the labour force in mining and construction. (The labour force is reckoned to be 25% of the population).

There is nothing remotely like the conditions that allowed the Russian working class — small relative to Russia, but proportionately and absolutely much bigger than Afghanistan's, and concentrated in large-scale industry — to lead a socialist revolution in 1917 against pre-bourgeois conditions. In Afghanistan, any attempts to organise trade unions seem to have met with harsh repression.

Capitalism in Afghanistan is mainly merchant capital and usurers' capital, enmeshing the rural poor in its net. There is some private ownership of the factory-scale industry (for example in cotton), but everywhere, in so far as there is industrial capitalism, the government, using foreign aid and acting through the ministries of mines and industry and of commerce, had to undertake the role of state capitalist.

There were no railways until the invading Russians started building one — which is still unfinished — to tie Afghanistan closer to the USSR.

One result of this underdevelopment is that nothing resembling a nation state has developed. The borders of the state were defined by the rival pressures of the Tsarist Empire in the north (which reached the present Russian-Afghan border, as it expanded in Central Asia, in 1875) and the British Empire and Persia. In the later 19th century Afghanistan emerged as a buffer between the Russian and British Empires.

The population consists of over 20 ethnic groups in all — of which the biggest accounts for only about half the population. Afghanistan not being knitted together by the development of a national economy, there are naturally many localisms and regionalisms and a deep tradition of resistance to any central government. The only "national" institutions have been the institutions of the state machine.

This society, which escaped both long-term imperialist occupation and disruption by capitalist penetration, has proved remarkably durable and resistant to change or development. In the 20s King Amanullah attempted to emulate Turkey's reforming leader Kemal Ataturk, and to transform and modernise Afghanistan from above. But fierce opposition and tribal revolts forced him to flee to Europe in 1929, and this despite the fact that politically the king and the royal clan held a complete monopoly of power (then and until well into the 60s. A form of constitution emerged in 1964).

Afghanistan was paralysed by a technological, cultural, political and social archaism which stood between most of the country and the 20th — or the 18th! — century.

THE ARMY

One of Afghanistan's central paradoxes lay in this, that apart from the people running the small islands of modern industrial technology transplanted to Afghanistan to extract natural gas and valuable minerals there, the armed forces — the only major national institution — were the part of Afghan society most in contact with and best integrated into the modern world.

The skills and training needed to run a modern army and air force took those who went abroad to acquire them very far from everyday Afghanistan with its nomads, priests, handicrafts, illiterate tribesmen and submerged female population.

In fact, Afghanistan's army and air force were both well-trained and well-equipped, and comparatively large. In April 1978 there were 100,000 men in the army, and 10,000 in the air force. (In addition there were 30,000 gendarmes).

This most modern part of Afghan society was the creation of the USSR. From the middle 50s the equipping of the army and air force, together with the training of their officers and technicians, was entirely in the hands of the Soviet Union, towards which Afghanistan gravitated in reaction to the close links of its rival, Pakistan, with the USA. Russia is credited with donating two-thirds of the \$1,480 million in foreign aid received by Afghanistan between 1958 and 1978. The relationship was similar to that of the USA with some of its South American satellites and client states.

The fact that the equipping, education and training of the entire officer corps of the armed forces on which the security of the corrupt and backward rulers of Afghanistan rested were, for quarter of a century, in the hands of the USSR, and that it did not create impossible contradictions, is surely a profound comment on the nature of the system in the USSR itself, and on the psychology, life-style and mores of the "Soviet" ruling caste and its military sub-section.

THE PDP AND THE ARMY

In a brief "liberal" experiment in 1951-2, a student and youth opposition emerged. Led by Nur Mohammed Taraki (who became president after the April 1978 coup) some of them went on to found the People's Democratic Party (PDP), a sort of "Communist Party" oriented to the Soviet Union. It appears to have been reorganised, or recreated, in the mid-'60s.

The PDP was as limited as the Afghan society which nurtured it. It does not appear even to have managed to put down roots in the countryside as many parties of its type in other backward countries have done. Most of its leaders were of petty bourgeois origin. Taraki himself came from a peasant/herdsman background, and had been a domestic servant before making his way to India, where he studied economics.

The PDP was an ambivalent party, not unlike Cheddi Jagan's People's Progressive Party in Guyana. It took part in international Stalinist junketings, but at home it rigorously denied that it was any kind of communist or Marxist party. It continued to deny it even after the 1978 coup.

In 1967 a split that was to last for 10 years broke the PDP into two organisations called after their journals Parcham (Flag) and Khalq (Masses). Parcham, led by Akbar Khyber, was more a direct agent and tool of the Soviet Union than Khalq and its leaders were willing to be.

Both PDP organisations recruited in the army and air force. They did well among army and especially air force officers trained in the USSR and alienated by their own ruling class.

In many underdeveloped countries, in Latin America for example, the armed forces have to substitute and compensate for a socially feeble ruling class. Being centrally responsible for controlling, dominating and repressing the masses, they are often the essential force binding the state together. Because of this social role they develop a distinct corporate identity. Groups develop within these armed forces powerfully aware of their own societies' backwardness and desiring development and modernisation. Military takeovers by such groups of officers are extremely common in the Third World.

Their model for the modern society they want to midwife is normally, though not always, that of Western capitalist society. It was to the USSR that the Afghan officers looked.

In Afghanistan the officer corps would naturally be friendly to the Soviet Union, and all the conditions of its experience and training would lead it to think of the USSR's society as a model to copy.

It is of course possible for such privileged and elite groups as the air force and army officers of Afghanistan to think of the USSR's model as suitable for their own societies without having to think of abandoning their own social privileges.

In these circumstances a sort of political symbiosis seems to have grown up between both factions of the PDP and sections of the officer corps. A majority of the highly skilled and educated air force officers became "communists". By its very nature, this alliance reproduced the essential characteristic of all such Third World modernisation drives originating from within the existing state apparatus: the conception of "revolution from above" and an essentially bureaucratic and elitist attitude to the masses, towards whom the leaders are capable of being murderously repressive.

The heavy focus of the PDP on the army — which was

uniquely fruitful because of the direct Russian influence — was in itself a "programmatic" declaration of its conception of the role of the masses, and of the nature of the revolution it wanted. The PDP had little other support apart from sections of the middle class in Kabul, and so the army was to be their chief instrument for carrying through a revolution in Afghanistan. But it was an utterly unsuitable instrument. In Afghanistan the cities and towns are islands in a prehistoric sea, and the officer caste is a highly elite group within the towns. They could not organise or mobilise the masses, nor compete with the priests for influence among them.

The character of the Afghanistan army and air force officer caste's relations with the masses — its organic inability to lead or mobilise them — made it an especially unsuitable and even counterproductive instrument for revolutionising Afghan society. It could make coups. It proved unable to make a bureaucratic revolution after it seized power in 1978.

Its savage brutality after the 1978 coup was essentially a function of its relationship to the masses of the people and its unsuitability as a revolutionary instrument.

COUP

The so-called "communist" coup of April 1978 was in fact the second stage of a movement that began five years earlier.

In July 1973 a coup led by Lt Col Abdul Khadir, a Russian-trained MIG pilot and then deputy commander of the air force, abolished the monarchy and the constitution, and put Mohammed Daud in power as president.

Daud, a past prime minister, was in fact a member of the royal family, cousin and brother in law of the deposed king, Zahir Shah.

Daud's was considered to be a "pro-Soviet" coup. But once in power Daud veered to balance between Moscow and the West. He systematically demoted those in the air force who had led the coup. Khadir was first made head of the air force and then demoted to being head of the military abattoir. Rehabilitated in 1977, he had returned as deputy commander of the air force by April 1978.

Daud did little to change the condition of the country, though he started a land reform programme. He was tied by family and interest and sentiment to the ruling class and to much of the existing system. For example, he protected the vast properties of the exiled king, his cousin.

Parcham joined Daud's government, reportedly on the instructions of the Soviet Union. Khalq and its leaders refused to do Moscow's bidding, apparently insisting that the Daud regime could not transform Afghanistan because of its organic ties to the old ruling class and its system. As a result, Parcham participated directly in the government's persecution of Khalq from 1973 to 1975 (when Parcham was pushed out of power). Khalq would repay them with interest after the summer of 1978.

When Daud kicked Parcham away from him in 1975, moves began that led to the reunification of the PDP in 1977. The PDP linked up with those in the army who had made the July 1973 coup but were bitterly disappointed by Daud or had been treated badly by him.

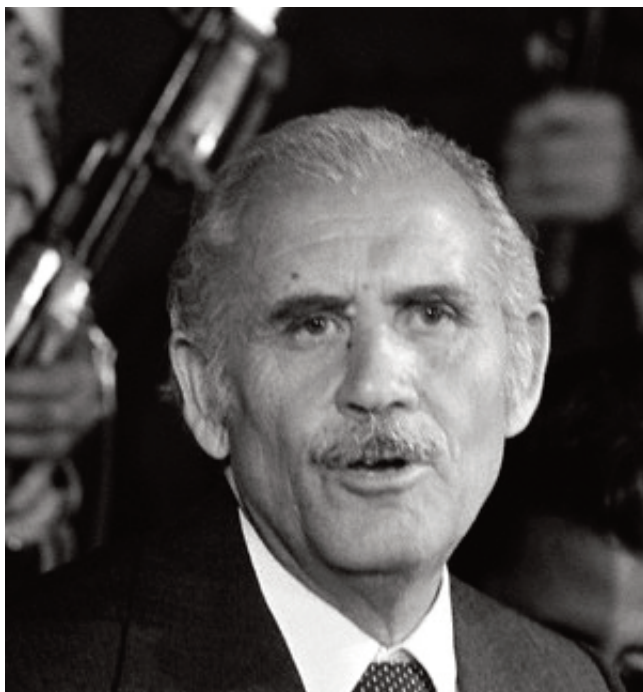
Repression — assisted, according to some reports, by SAVAK, the secret police of the Shah of Iran — was severe. Many of the PDP leaders were jailed. Daud seemed to be launching a major attempt to eliminate the PDP and its supporters. The PDP struck first.

When the leader of Parcham, Akhbar Khyber, was assassinated in Kabul, probably by extreme right-wing Muslims, there were large-scale demonstrations by students and others on the day of his funeral. They presaged and set the scene for the April coup. On the day of the coup, tanks commanded by Col Aslam Watanjar, head of the tank regiment in Kabul, attacked the presidential palace. After a bloody battle, the insurgents took control, killing Daud and his family.

The coup against Daud was made essentially by those who made the coup that put him in power. Like the 1973 coup, the 1978 coup was headed by Lt Col Abdul Khadir.

One of the first acts of the new military rulers was to release the leaders of the PDP — including Babrak Karmal, Hafizullah Amin, and Nur Mohammed Taraki — from jail, and to appoint Taraki, the PDP's secretary general, as president.

This was an approach to a party, not just to individuals. The PDP leaders were later to point to the way the high command of the air force held together, and to claim that both the air force and the tank regiment had been under PDP leadership and control, which is probably true. The high ranks of some of



Nur Mohammad Taraki, one of the founders of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. He was strangled in jail in 1979.

the PDP-inclined officers, stopping short only of marshals and generals, is notable and symptomatic.

A revolutionary council mainly consisting of civilians was set up to replace the military council which had organised the coup, and it appointed a largely civilian government. The government contained only two military men, one of them Khadir, who was defence minister. The top leaders were from the Khalq though Babrak Karmal, now leader of Parcham, was one of three deputy prime ministers. A purge of army officers and top civil servants began immediately.

In its public accounts of itself the new government denied that it was communist or Marxist. It solicited aid from sources other than Russia. Their Russian ties, the new leaders said, would be no greater than Daud's. Their country was "free and neutral".

They insisted they were Afghan nationalists, concerned to modernise and develop the country. They denounced Daud's backsliding after the 1973 coup — indicating a different approach but also no doubt the views of Khalq, which had never been with Daud, and of the disillusioned army and air force officers who had made both coups.

The government declared itself devoutly Muslim. One article of the credo of State — a continuation of an article in the Daud constitution — said: "Internal policy is based on the foundations of the sacred Islamic religion".

"We are free and move ahead according to the circumstances prevailing in our society", a press conference was told in Kabul in June 1978. Guarantees were offered to private property, bank deposits were declared inviolable by the government. But from the beginning the government committed itself to land reform. Taraki said the "present stage" was one of national democratic revolution.

1978: COUP OR REVOLUTION?

But whatever about the PDP's dogmatic Stalinist talk of "national democratic revolution" as the "first stage" of their revolution, what was new and decisive after April 1978 was that the Stalinist party, together with the decisive section of the old state apparatus — which was closely affiliated with it and linked also by many ties to the neighbouring USSR — had taken power in Afghanistan.

To the extent that they could stabilise that power and "purify" it by purging alien and hostile elements from the state apparatus, replacing them with their own people, they and they alone would decide from day to day what "stage" the revolution was at. Or at least, if the state actually controlled Afghanistan they would decide.

They would decide how long or how short a rope to give to private capital and to the various other segments of the archaic ruling classes of Afghanistan — or, for that matter to the peasants, who might be "given" the land in the "first stage" and forcibly collectivised at the second, as in other Stalinist revolutions.

But while the PDP and the pro-PDP officers firmly controlled the state, they did not, as events would show very soon, control Afghanistan. The PDP and the officers had only made a coup, not a revolution. Conditions in Afghanistan were such that they would soon learn to know the difference between a coup and a revolution.

Central to the tragic events that followed the April coup and, step by step, led to the Russian occupation, was the conception of what they themselves were held by the PDP and its officers after they seized power. Taraki talked of Afghanistan pursuing a "new road" to revolution. They didn't know the difference between a coup and a revolution. They had power only in the cities. Afghanistan was a traditional society where suspicions of the central state power ran deep, and where men bore arms and lived in a vast expanse of mountains and hills from which in the past both central government and foreign invaders — the British as late as 1919 — had been resisted.

Almost like a tribal medicine man who dresses in green because he thinks that is the way to bring back the spring, the PDP in power mimicked the Russian bureaucratic elite. They seem to have thought that within certain limitations — like making a few would be bamboozling noises about their respect for Islam — they could behave as an all-powerful bureaucracy like the Chinese and Russian bureaucracies. They acted as if the government could command the forces and tides by its decrees, as if the "Revolution" were already made and harnessed as in Russia.

The PDP leaders might ape the Russian bureaucrats and aspire to replicate them. But the PDP stood on one side of a revolutionary social transformation yet to be achieved, while their Russian bureaucratic model stands on the other side of a deep and thorough revolution made by the worker and peasant masses. The USSR bureaucrats erect their caste power on that revolution's political grave but also on its socio-economic achievements and accomplishments. That difference was qualitative. Partly because of things peculiar to Afghanistan, as outlined above, the Kabul government was in a radically different position from the Kremlin regime, and yet they acted as if they didn't know it. They acted as if they thought that they, like the rulers of the USSR, China, North Korea, etc, could do anything they liked with an atomised and defenceless population. But the population was not defenceless.

Essentially because of their elitist notion of the "revolution", the PDP leaders seem to have gone through the months between April 1978 and December 1979 as inept and increasingly desperate people, suffering from a hopelessly confused perspective on history, misunderstanding both their own and the Russian bureaucracy's place in it.

The story is worth telling in outline before describing it in detail.

Because the army was not fully the PDP's, purging it was a feature of the regime from the beginning. PDP commissars were appointed. Yet this army was the central, indeed the only strong, instrument of the government.

The regime lacked popular support. The PDP leaders claimed sometimes after the coup that their organisation had 50,000 members, but this is doubtful. Their problem of building support in the population was never overcome. A youth movement was initiated and there was a drive to build "trade unions" (controlled by a policeman and forbidden to strike). Both were to be overseen by PDP units.

The regime also lacked a material and technological base for transforming the backwardness from above; and it never had and never managed to call forth a sufficient basis of active or even passive support in the population to compensate even in part. For example, when it decreed the peasants' debts to usurers — a major yoke on their necks — abolished, the first reported result was an immediate drying-up of credit for the peasants. The government was not in a position to organise an alternative.

Despite its public proclamations and readings from the Koran, the government immediately fell foul of the Muslim religious leaders. Its first offence seems to have been insufficient consultation with them. But in fact the unavoidable conflict was rooted in the fact that many of the religious leaders were landholders likely to be affected by land reform. Centrally, also, the government's attempts to degree equality for women struck at the most deep-rooted beliefs and prejudices of the Muslim population.

99% of Afghanistan's people are Muslims, 85% Sunni and the rest Shiite. By contrast with Iran, where the Shiite hierarchy formed a powerful cadre, of a virtual mass party, the clergy in Afghanistan are not organised hierarchically and therefore are less of a coherent national force.

Nevertheless they are a very powerful force, and from very early on the regime was opposed by a clergy commanding huge influence and wielding it in alliance with the landlord class and the royalists.

When the government decreed drastic land reforms without having mobilised rural support, the clergy was able to rally mass opposition and the government had only the army to back it up.

The purging, soon to be accompanied by large-scale blood-letting, was not confined to the army and air force. Within three months of the April coup, all the Parcham leaders were

pushed aside and exiled to diplomatic posts in Eastern Europe. Soon they were recalled on charges of high treason. But they didn't come, nor did their hosts send them back.

The purging of the army now became intertwined with the successive purgings of the PDP. To the army's other inadequacies as an instrument for changing society was soon added an inevitable collapse of morale.

As the Muslim revolt became serious, and right through to the Russian intervention, purge followed bloody purge, like an amalgam of Robespierre's reign of terror during the French Revolution and Stalin's destruction of the officer corps of the Russian Army in 1937.

In the next part we will examine these events in more detail as they unfolded between April 1978 and December 1979.

RUSSIAN INVASION

Within six weeks of the April 1978 coup, armed Muslim tribal bands were reported to be in rebellion against the new regime.

But at first the rebellion was small-scale. Opposition to central government, normally a stable part of the outlook of the Sardars (chiefs), now became opposition to the "pagan" and "infidel" regime.

What fuelled and spread the revolt, and ultimately put the skids under the government, was its reform decrees — decrees that should have benefited many millions of Afghans. That is the tragic paradox of the PDP regime.

The Taraki government decreed drastic changes in three areas: abolition of peasant debt to the village usurers; drastic land reform; abolition of the practice of charging a bridal price for women, and educational reforms involving women.

In response most of the upper layers, the "lords temporal and spiritual", of Afghanistan's semi-feudal and rigidly hierarchical society moved into opposition to the central government; and the revolt slowly spread until it threatened to overthrow the PDP regime.

Had the ruling classes been able to overcome their endemic tribal and other divisions, and unite in opposition to the government, then the weight of the potentially overwhelming forces opposed to the PDP and prepared to take up arms against it would probably have brought the PDP regime down by mid 1979.

In the event the old ruling class groups have not managed to achieve unity even today, seven years later.

Despite their divisions, the upper layers seem to have carried with them most of the lower orders of the social and regional hierarchies of which they were at the head.

It would be a mistake in judging such a society from outside (or from "above", which is probably the point here) to assume a seething rebelliousness (as distinct from grievances) at the base of society. Far from it. Living as they do in rural isolation and medieval backwardness, the Afghan rural masses would have to make an immense mental leap to reach the possibility of even conceiving of a different arrangement of society, let alone of committing themselves to a struggle to attain it by breaking up the existing social structures. That would be true even for the most oppressed of them and even for those who felt themselves to be oppressed. And of course the fabric of such a society is woven from many ties of mutual responsibility and personal and family loyalties between the members of the different hierarchical layers, ties that seem largely to have remained intact after April 1978.

To revolutionise such a society, to wean the lower layers from the existing structures, more than decrees were needed. The tragedy was that — apart from brute force — only decrees were available. The revolutionary regime had not been installed by a revolutionary uprising of the masses. Not even the example and the prodding of substantial bourgeois areas in Afghan society, of areas that had developed beyond the semi-feudal level, was available.

No part of Afghan society had achieved sufficient bourgeois/capitalist development to give the government an adequate base-area from which to begin to revolutionise rural society, to suggest or provide alternatives to the semi-feudal relations (including even usurious capitalist relations) around which the lives of the rural masses were organised.

The central government, as we have seen, did not even have the resources to organise an adequate alternative credit system when it decreed peasants' debts abolished — an act which should have benefited, and thus affected the attitudes of, 11 million peasants.

Thus the decrees of the "infidel" central government and its disorganising "interference" appeared mainly as a threat to the rural masses. Because the government failed to ignite the rural masses against the upper social layers, it had no alternative but to continue to rest, fundamentally, on the army.

Even the land reform, designed to benefit the 700,000 landless peasants and millions of others, does not seem to have polarised rural Afghanistan or to have rallied a strong layer of

the rural masses to the government which made the revolutionary decrees. It did not even generate passive support or tolerance.

Land holdings were declared limited to a maximum of about seven hectares — an extremely drastic levelling which alienated all the leaders of rural society. With the help of the priests those leaders were able to mobilise most of those due to gain from the land reform against the government, using slogans about the defence of Islam against the infidel government.

With such battle-cries, the Sunni Muslim priests, and the landlords and royalists, rallied the masses against the government before the government's decrees could even begin to achieve a class polarisation in the rural areas. The government's lack of a serious base in the population must have been decisive here.

To try to compensate, the Stalinist government attempted to compete with the priests for the Islamic banner. On important occasions Taraki publicly prayed for the revolution in Kabul mosques. The 1,410th anniversary of the Koran was celebrated officially throughout the country.

The regime felt sufficiently sure of its standing to denounce the Muslim Brotherhood for "un-Islamic activities". They declared a Jihad (holy war) against it in September 1978, pretending to regard it as the only enemy. Soon, after the revolutionary decrees on land and women in the autumn of 1978, the forces against the government had gained sufficient strength to be able to declare their own "Jihad" — on the government, in March 1979.

The striking way in which the material interests of the ruling class were mixed together with the prejudices of the Muslim faith and with the enormous ignorance of the rural masses (over 90% of the people of Afghanistan are illiterate) was captured by an anonymous writer in the *Economist*.

"In fact no restrictions had been imposed on religious practice: the mosques were always open, and were particularly thronged with worshippers during the Eid festival last weekend. The Shora courts continued functioning.

"The acts that were interpreted as anti-Islamic measures included the fact that the new regime ignored the religious leaders, the introduction of the red flag (removing the green of Islam), the enforced education of women (a first step, the mullahs claimed, towards their being sent to Russia to live lives of shame), the land reforms (many of the mullahs are landowners), and the use of the words 'comrade' and 'hurrah' (this cheer word, the mullahs said, was really the name of Lenin's mother)" (1 September 1979).

(But maybe they'd heard about the "Lenin" mausoleum and the obscene quasi-religious cult centred around the remains of the great revolutionary...)

The priests were encouraged by events in Iran. A Muslim priest told a *Daily Telegraph* reporter that they would fight with the Koran in one hand and a gun in the other. For they were "fighting a pagan regime which has no place in Afghanistan... This Jihad will surely mean the end of the Communists, and the triumph of Islam, just as it has triumphed in Iran and Pakistan".

Beginning as a series of limited local revolts in summer 1978, the rebellion spread until by the end of 1979 the Muslim insurgents could plausibly claim to dominate 22 out of Afghanistan's 28 provinces. A big factor in this process and in the speed with which the Muslim masses were polarised against the reforming government must have been the brutality with which the government reacted.

From the summer of 1978, that is from the first and extremely limited revolts, the government bombed and strafed tribal villages. Eventually, by mid-1979, it was using napalm on the rebels and engaging in military sweeps which pushed many thousands across the border.

It is not clear how much of the land reform was carried out before the government called it off in mid 1979. But when the government did finally abandon land reform, with the obviously untrue claim that it had been completed already (six months ahead of schedule!), it was left with no possible means of appealing to the lower orders of traditional Afghan society against the landlords and the priests. Now it could rely only on the arguments of the MIGs, on helicopter gunships, and on napalm against the vast majority of the Afghan population.

Long before the Russian invasion the government of Afghanistan behaved as if it were a hostile government of occupation, using the methods that the US used in Vietnam. In a sense that expressed the vast gulf between urban and rural Afghanistan.

The initial policy of reforming decrees plus repression soon became just a policy of more and more unrestrained repression, simply to enable the government to survive. The very early resort to savage repression flowed from the lack of an adequate base of support for the government. But it inevitably increased and deepened the government's isolation.

The Muslim revolt spread and grew.

In late March 1979 there was a mass uprising in the town of Herat, during the suppression of which perhaps 5,000 people were killed; it seems likely that some at least of the insurgents were Afghan workers who had recently been expelled from Iran. Army mutinies occurred and sometimes whole army groups deserted to the rebels.

In June there was fierce fighting around the strategically very important town of Jalalabad. In August a four-hour battle with mutineers took place in Kabul itself: they were routed by tanks and helicopter gunships.

In July the Muslim groups, of which the biggest was the "National Front for the Rescue of Afghanistan", claimed to have set up an alternative government (though in fact they remained incapable of co-ordinating their combined forces).

More and more of the countryside was controlled by the rebels, and the government securely controlled only towns, garrisons, and wherever its army had asserted physical control at a given time.

The war of attrition between the government and a large part of the population became more vicious. The number of refugees who crossed the border into Pakistan tells its own story. In December 1978 there were 10,000. In March 1979, there were, according to Pakistani government figures, 35,000 refugees in Pakistan. In June it was 100,000. By July there were 150,000; and some of them had napalm burns.

By the end of 1979 the Pakistani government was citing a figure of more than 400,000. (Unofficial figures were usually higher than those of the Pakistani government).

OUTSIDE INVOLVEMENT

Other than the Russian involvement, and long before the full-scale Russian invasion and the reactions to it, the Afghan civil war had already developed international ramifications.

The anti-government forces were allowed to base themselves in Pakistani territory, across the border from Afghanistan, and to train and arm there. Money from the Gulf states helped finance the Muslim Brotherhood. Emissaries toured Muslim capitals to get supplies and money for their holy "anti-communist" war. Places they went to included Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

By February 1979 the leaders of Hizb-i-Islami claimed they had so far raised and spent £400,000 on weapons. The Muslim insurgents had Chinese rifles, and the Chinese government sent soldiers to Pakistan to train them.

"... When (Pakistani) drug enforcement agents spotted some Chinese in the tribal border areas, an urgent message was sent to the Pakistani government demanding immediate action. The official reply was that the Chinese had nothing to do with drugs and were to be left alone.

'Members of Pakistan's narcotics control board later learned that the mysterious visitors had been sent by Peking to train Afghan guerrillas' (*Economist*, 23 April 1979).

The same issue of the *Economist* gave details of just how accommodating to the needs of the Afghan reactionaries the Pakistani government was being.

"... The war inside Afghanistan does seem to be financed increasingly with the proceeds of the illegal opium trade. Feudal Afghan landlords, whose holdings are threatened by the Taraki government, are bringing their poppy crops into Pakistan and using the proceeds to buy arms in the town of Darra, where rifles, machine guns, explosives, even cannons, are available to anyone with cash in his pocket.

"The arms merchants of Darra report that business is booming" (*Economist* 21 April 1979).

Guns also came from Iran: "... a burgeoning opium-for-guns trade with dissident groups and Baluchi tribesmen in Iran has built up... Narcotics experts believe that an increasing amount of the 300 tons of opium produced annually along Afghanistan's southern fringes is being funnelled into meeting the growing demand from Iranian addicts, and for refining in Iran to supply Western markets for heroin.

In return many of the guns seized from Iranian armouries during that country's revolution are finding their way into Afghanistan, probably with the knowledge of some Shi'a Muslim clergymen who want to help the overthrow of the 'kaffir' or infidel regime in Kabul" (*Economist* 19 May 1979).

What about the CIA? No doubt they were involved. But the available evidence is that CIA involvement was small-scale until the Russian occupation.

THE PDP AT BAY

The PDP had accepted office from the officers with whom it had collaborated to overthrow Daud.

It had enough support and members among them to give it so secure a grip on the armed forces that it could purge these forces and make its continued control certain. However, as we have seen, it found that it did not have the strength or the influence to carry through serious reforms, and reaction mo-

bilised a big proportion of the Afghan masses against the PDP government. No armed force coup could remove the government, yet neither could the "infidel" government move Afghan society. It became a bloody war of attrition in which the PDP regime, with its too narrow social base, found itself progressively pitted against everything else in Afghanistan. It began to tear itself apart.

Parcham and Khalq had a history of bitter conflict. The fragile unity broke down three months after the April 1978 coup. Parcham was ousted and persecuted, as were its supporters in the army. Lt Col Abdul Khadir, leader of the April coup and minister of defence immediately after it, was arrested and accused of plotting a coup against Taraki, who himself now took over the ministry of defence.

Khadir "confessed" to anti-revolutionary activity and treason after one month in custody, and his confession was published by the ministry of defence, now headed by the other hero of the April coup, Abdul Watanjar. By July 24 1978 Taraki could announce that now all army commanders were supporters of Khalq. The others had been purged.

The previous history of the two tendencies and subsequent events lend weight to reports published in 1978 that they differed on the extent of the Soviet Union's role in Afghanistan.

They may also have differed in that Parcham, reflecting the Russians, advocated a slower and more cautious approach to reform. Soon this division would re-emerge within Khalq itself and lead to more bloodletting.

CONCESSIONS TO NO AVAIL

Faced with growing and spreading revolt, the one-year-old regime made new attempts to conciliate Islam and to annex for itself the trappings and symbols of the religion, undoing its "offences" where possible.

Offending words like "comrade" and "hurrah" disappeared. The regime now saturated itself even more thoroughly in the Muslim faith, and tried to legitimise itself according to it: prayers and Koran reading accompanied everything; every public announcement opened by invoking the name and, hopefully, the approval of Allah and the sympathy of some of his Afghan devotees in the here and now.

In August, an Assembly of some 100 leading ulema (mullahs) was convened to declare that the government's revolutionary deeds were in accordance with the teaching of the Koran. Obliging they made a ruling — quoting the Koran — that all believers had a duty to fight those opposing a regime that has done good to the common man. But most Afghans continued to prefer the call for a holy war and a different interpretation of the Koran — that made by a vast majority of priests.

The government also back-pedalled on its reform policies. In July the land reform was abandoned. It tried a general attempt at conciliation. In June Taraki appealed for a return of the refugees and declared an amnesty until July. 1,300 political prisoners were released. The government made much-publicised approaches to mullahs, tribal elders, and traders. In August the pay of officers and NCOs was doubled.

This turn was Russia's policy for Afghanistan. In July and August, according to the Western press, the Russians were eagerly signalling to the west that their policy was for concessions and attempts to broaden the base of the government (and the PDP), even to the extent of including royalists in it.

In fact the reactionary revolt continued to spread and to become more threatening, and the PDP began to rip even more deeply into its own vitals.

KHALQ DIVIDES

Publicly Khalq was united on the policy of concessions. But as the civil war continued to worsen, divisions on similar lines to those between Khalq and Parcham re-emerged within Khalq, under pressure of events and of the USSR. They centred on president Nur Mohammed Taraki on one side, and Hafizullah Amin, who was becoming increasingly prominent, on the other.

Amin took over as prime minister in March 1979, retaining the position of field marshal and becoming vice-president of the supreme defence council. Taraki remained president and supreme commander of the armed forces, though now he reportedly devoted a lot of his time to a luxurious style of life in the royal palace, which had been renamed the People's Palace.

Publicly Amin, who had organised the Khalq cells in the armed forces, was most identified with the mailed fist approach. He was the "strong man" of the regime.

Before the turn to conciliation, he had advocated a "no concessions" policy. He was considered to have been the prime mover in pushing through the divisive reforms — against Russian advice for caution — and also as the man responsible for the purges in which thousands had died and the morale of the armed forces had been shattered.

In July Amin took over the ministry of defence from Watan-

jar, in what was then thought to be a move to forestall the threat of a new Russian-inspired coup.

Sure enough, on September 14 the Russians attempted their coup against Amin.

On September 11 Taraki passed through Moscow on his way back from the so-called “non-aligned” states meeting in Havana, and was publicly bear-hugged by Brezhnev. Three days later he was dead, killed after a gun battle with Amin and some of his supporters in the Peoples’ Palace.

The evidence suggests that it was Amin who was to have been removed, and scapegoated in the well-known Stalinist style, because he was the most hated representative of the brutal and politically bankrupt regime. Probably he really was partly or wholly against the Russian policy of concessions to broaden the regime, and did really believe in a policy of slugging it out with the entire population of Afghanistan if necessary.

Summoned by Taraki to give an account of his purge of three ministers including Lt Col Watanjar and Major Masdooryar, who had been the leaders of the assault on Daud’s palace, prime minister Amin went, apparently under a safe-conduct from the Russian ambassador.

He was fired on as he approached, but he and his supporters came out on top in a ten-hour gun battle that followed. It was Taraki and not Amin who drew the role of scapegoat. Amin now denounced Taraki publicly, blaming everything bad on him. He did not do what the Russians seem to have wanted — broaden the base of Khalq. Amin released a few hundred non-political prisoners and a list of 12,000 people who had “disappeared” — and with the rebels operating safely a few miles from Kabul, continued to purge and to shoot armed forces officers and members of the PDP on a large scale.

Amin’s victory did lead to a new primary reliance on the firepower of an army increasingly demoralised and fragmented. The army was beginning to melt away. Its ranks were unreliable conscripts on a wage of £1.20 a month, who would naturally be affected by the Muslim revolt. After Amin’s coup, despite the elimination by shooting of many officers, including the chief of staff, most remaining officers were considered hostile to Amin. The rebels were 15 miles from Kabul.

In late October, Amin made a military sweep against the insurgents, victoriously driving 40,000 people — mostly non-combatants — across the border into Pakistan. At the end of 1979 there were 400,000 refugees, mostly in Pakistan. But the regime was still not stable.

RUSSIA IS DRAWN IN DEEPER

Russia had had many hundreds of civilian and military advisers in Afghanistan even before the April 1978 coup, and their numbers were increased in the months after the coup, during which more than 30 trade and aid agreements were signed.

On 3 December 1978 a new Soviet-Afghan friendship treaty was signed, by which time an estimated 5,000 Soviet advisers, half of them military, were in Afghanistan.

To the degree that the post-April regime was weak against the Afghan population, the Russians became directly involved to shore it up. As the Taraki/Amin regime decimated, disrupted and destroyed its own base in the army and the PDP, the Russians progressively substituted themselves and their resources for the native regime. In the first place they progressively assumed responsibility for its military forces as the purges decimated the officer corps. For example, there were 2,000 air force pilots in April 1978. By July 1979 there were only 500 of them left. Russian pilots made up the difference.

By late 1979, western observers put the number of Russians in Afghanistan at anything up to 20,000, including combat troops. The main air force base was protected by Russian troops; the air force, now with many Russian pilots, was effectively under Russian control. There are powerful parallels with the process whereby the USA was drawn deeper and deeper into Vietnam, beginning with “advisers” and ending with half a million troops committed.

Towards the end of the Amin regime, there were virtually two state machines in Afghanistan: what was left of the original one, and a parallel structure directly controlled by the Russians. The full-scale Russian occupation was the logical finale.

RUSSIA OCCUPIES

Over Christmas 1979, the Russians flooded in troops, and on 27 December took complete control. The leaders of Parcham were flown in and put in charge as Russia’s puppets, with their first chore to “invite” into Afghanistan, respectively, the Russian troops on whose tanks they ride to power.

Babrak Karmal became general secretary of the PDP, and in return for his “invitation” to the Russian troops, Leonid Brezhnev publicly congratulated him on his “election”. “I warmly congratulate you on your election to the post of general secre-

tary of the central committee of the PDP and to the highest state posts in the People’s Democratic Republic of Afghanistan!”

Amin and his associates were naturally denounced as agents of American imperialism, as tyrants and as adventurers and demagogues who had run a “fascist regime”. They were “tried” and shot. The Russians explained that their soldiers had been sent to “defend the revolution against outside interference”.

It is important to be clear about one central thing at this point. Despite the prominence of Parcham leaders like Babrak Karmal, Dr Anahita Rabtezzad, etc., and the semi-miraculous reappearance of Lt Col Abdul Khadir out of Taraki’s and Amin’s dungeons, the regime in Afghanistan after December 1979 was not a continuation of that established by the April 1978 coup. The Russian takeover marked the end of that chapter. The invasion registered the failure of the PDP/ army experiment by moving in Russian troops to bury it before the Muslim insurgents did.

CLASS CHARACTER

What class ruled in Afghanistan from April 1978 up to December 1979 when the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy became Afghanistan’s ruler? “Communists” certainly held state power after April 1978. But their political opinions cannot be taken as the determinant of the class character of the state.

For a certainty the intention of the PDP regime was — at their own pace — to replicate the USSR’s system, installing themselves and their middle-class and army-elite supporters in the position of a privileged Stalinist-type bureaucratic caste. But the class character of the state is not determined by such intentions. They did not manage to fulfil their intentions, or even come near to. This failure to replicate in Afghanistan the system which has existed in the USSR since the Stalinist political counter-revolution in the 1920s was central to the whole experience.

The level of nationalisations and state involvement in the very backward economy after 1978 tells us nothing one way or another about the class character of the state, since — quite apart from the important question of whether nationalisations alone can ever be the main criterion — the same level of nationalisations existed under the previous regime.

What then was the class character of the state? It was a bourgeois state, heavily relying like its predecessor on state-capitalist measures.

Summarise the experience of the PDP in power and you get an unmistakable outline picture.

The regime was based essentially on the army, where the ruling party installed in 1978, the PDP, had a large base. The PDP had won political hegemony over the decisive sections of the officer corps.

The officers’ view of their own future was as an elite, like the USSR bureaucracy, on the basis of a serious social transformation.

Because of the absence of a mass base for the PDP outside the armed forces, the “revolution” unfolded as an attempt at reform from above, stamped throughout and limited in every respect by its military-bureaucratic origins and the limitations of the PDP. The PDP attempted to use the armed forces as the instrument of a social transformation which proved obnoxious, for varying reasons, to the big majority of the population.

Despite its unusually close links with the bureaucracy of the degenerated workers’ state, the regime never got beyond the stage of being a military-bureaucratic state-capitalist regime attempting to carry through the bourgeois programme of land reform, education reform, and some easing of the enslavement of women. They failed more or less completely to realise any of these reforms.

Their methods in relation to the Afghan masses were never other than military-bureaucratic: the bombing and strafing of villages, including the use of napalm, from the first weeks of the regime, and the figure of 400,000 refugees by the end of 1979, graphically sum up the military bureaucratic regime’s relationship with the Afghan masses.

It is difficult to get accurate information about the degree of support the PDP-army regime did have. Some fairly big demonstrations were staged in Kabul after the coup. Nevertheless the known course of the Muslim revolt, the difficulty of the PDP-army regime in standing up to it, and the incapacity of the regime to rally even significant, let alone decisive, masses of the population in support of reforming decrees that should have benefited millions, provide us with a clear proof of the feebleness of whatever support the PDP had outside the army.

It does not even seem to have been able to muster a fraction of the support from urban petty-bourgeois and plebeian forces achieved by Jacobin formations in 18th century Europe, al-

though the conflicts in Afghanistan have many points of comparison with those between such Jacobin regimes and peasant opposition.

Socialists in Afghanistan would have had to give critical support to specific measures of the state-capitalist regime, but in no sense could they have supported the regime as such. It would have been necessary to maintain class independence; to aim at dismantling and destroying the state apparatus; to criticise and expose the brutal military-bureaucratic methods of the regime as both counter-productive in relation to the reforms and expressive of the class character of the regime. Socialists would have faced the repression of the one-party PDP-army regime.

They would have directed their fire against the reaction, and in that sense only would have “supported” the PDP-army regime — while maintaining political and if possible military independence from it, and striving to overthrow it.

WHY DID RUSSIA INVADE?

Russia invaded:

- Because it lacked confidence in the “leftist” and intransigent Amin regime to stabilise Afghanistan.

- * Because the defeat of the PDP-army regime would have placed in power a hostile regime on the USSR’s borders (though the importance of this should not be exaggerated, the invasion has made Pakistan hostile and alarmed, and has led to its being rearmed and reinforced by imperialism).

- * Because for the USSR to allow the defeat of its client could undermine its relations with other client states like Ethiopia.

- * Because — and this is probably the fundamental thing — the disarray and weakness of imperialism following its defeat in Indochina and the [then recent] collapse of Iran as a military power seemed to allow the possibility of the Russian bureaucracy expanding its area of control with military (though not political) impunity, in a strategically very important area.

RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM?

Further expansion through Baluchistan (in Pakistan) to the sea may well be in the minds of the Russian bureaucracy. In the 40s it seized and plundered territory in Eastern Europe and Manchuria, with the reluctant consent of imperialism.

Does this mean that Russia itself is imperialist?

The USSR is not imperialist in the sense of being based on monopoly capitalism, with its inherent drive to expand and divide up the world — but the bureaucracy does seek to gain and plunder new territories, and seizes what it can. As Trotsky indicated nearly half a century ago: “The driving force behind the Moscow bureaucracy is indubitably the tendency to expand its power, its prestige, its revenues. This is the element of ‘imperialism’ in the widest sense of the word which was a property in the past of all monarchies, oligarchies, ruling castes, medieval estates and classes”.

The foreign policy of the USSR today is that of a relatively stable bureaucratic degenerated workers’ state. Since World War Two it has increasingly been the co-equal of imperialism in terms of military power, in a world where the H-Bomb has led the rulers of imperialism and the bureaucracy so far to rule out full-scale war as a means of trying each other’s strength. In that period the bureaucracy has been the twin pillar of world counter-revolution, the other being American imperialism.

In a large part of the world the USSR bureaucracy is the first-line or second-line direct enemy of working-class socialism.

It has taken opportunities to expand its area of control as it did after World War Two. Competition with imperialism has led it to support a number of autonomous, mainly Stalinist-led, Third World anti-imperialist movements of a relatively progressive character.

In underdeveloped countries, the USSR’s non-capitalist social system, created by the October Revolution, has given the Kremlin bureaucracy the possibility of relating to revolutionary movements in a seemingly positive way. Its own social structure has allowed it to seem in line with the anti-imperialist and even anti-capitalist objectives of the revolutionaries.

It has “evoked” revolutionary movements in areas such as Eastern Europe — and almost immediately or simultaneously, strangled them, imposing a repressive totalitarian regime as the social instrument which serves the maintenance of the rule of a parasitic bureaucratic caste, on top of the revolutionary transformation it has carried through or helped through.

It has repeatedly shown itself to be capable of being revolutionary, against imperialism and capitalism, but always it has been simultaneously counter-revolutionary against the working class, striving to set up its own type of bureaucratic regime. Where it has aided revolutions, as in Cuba, it has at the same time shaped and moulded the resulting regime to its own totalitarian pattern.

Part II: Ted Grant and Alan Woods on Afghanistan

What characterises Bolshevism on the national question is that in its attitude towards oppressed nations, even the most backward, it considers them not only the object but also the subject of politics. Bolshevism does not confine itself to recognising their "rights" and parliamentary protests against the trampling upon of those rights, Bolshevism penetrates into the midst of the oppressed nations; it raises them up against their oppressors; it ties up their struggle with the struggle of the proletariat in advanced countries; it instructs the oppressed Chinese, Hindus or Arabs in the art of insurrection, and it assumes full responsibility for their work in the face of "civilised" executioners. Here only does Bolshevism begin, that is, revolutionary Marxism in action. Everything that does not stop over that boundary remains centrism.

Leon Trotsky, 'What Next?'

These tribesmen [are] "dark masses", stuck in the gloom of barbarism... The task of dragging the Afghan countryside out of the slough of primeval backwardness and into the 20th century would be formidable, even with correct leadership and Marxist politics... The Russian bureaucracy and their Afghan supporters are, in effect, carrying through the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution in that country.

Alan Woods, *Militant*, July 1980

It so happened that Ted Grant published a major statement of his position on "the colonial revolution" just a few months after the April 1978 Afghan coup, in *Militant International Review*, No.14, Summer 1978.

At the end of a very long article proclaiming that the Stalinist "proletarian Bonapartist" state is the wave of the future for large areas of the world Grant hails the latest proof of the correctness of his views — Afghanistan. He devotes two pages to it, asserting that: "...The fresh example of Afghanistan underlines the analysis we have made of the colonial revolution". Like the Ba'ath party in Syria, the PDP has "had no difficulty in swallowing the doctrine of 'Islam' as well as 'Communism'. This is because religious superstition has deep roots in the backward and illiterate peasant majority.

Afghanistan has had many coups, but this coup was not like other coups. "This coup opens up the possibility (Grant's emphasis) of striking in a new direction. 'Communists' have become prime minister and president and also have a dominating role in the government. This indicates in which direction the officers wish to go".

What about the problem of the deeply conservative Muslim clergy? Grant was not worried. "As in Poland, where the Polish Stalinist bureaucracy came to an agreement with the Catholic Church so in Afghanistan the Communist Party leadership, together with the officers, can arrive at an agreement with the Mullahs of Islam". In this field, Grant thinks, "Taraki... pursues the same policy as that of the Syrian leaders of the Ba'ath".

Grant believes Stalinism has a progressive role to play in Afghanistan, as he explains here. "In the case of Afghanistan, only two roads are possible at this stage. The working class is minuscule. Sections of the intelligentsia, and apparently the majority of the officers and a great part of the professionals want to construct a modern civilised state. The peasants want the land". There is no way forward "on the road of capitalism and landlordism". The officers want to develop Afghanistan, "to take the road traversed by Outer Mongolia". These "peculiar changes" are only possible because of "the international context: "crisis of imperialism and capitalism, the impasse of the backward countries of the Third World and the existence of the proletarian Bonapartist states, especially of Russia and China in Asia together with the delay of the proletarian revolution in the West".

The officers are "attracted when they see the consequences of the Stalinist regime in the modernisation of Russia. Its effect on the tribesmen of similar peoples and even the same tribes, in bordering areas of Russia has a big effect, with formerly as low a standard of living, and just as great illiteracy and ignorance.

"The industrialisation, complete literacy and high standards in comparison to Afghanistan, are bound to impress these strata. In contrast the backwardness and barbarism on which the nobility thrived in Afghanistan cannot but appal all the best elements — the intelligentsia, the professionals and even the officer caste. They wish to break out from poverty, ignorance and dirt from which their country suffers. The capitalists of the West, with unemployment and industrial stagnation, offer them nothing as far as they are con-



Ted Grant, *Militant* theorist

cerned. They wish to break away from the vicious circle of tribal rulers and different military regimes which change nothing in fundamentals".

So they turn to — and in the case of much of the old upper classes and professionals, wish to turn into — the ruling caste of a degenerated workers' state, what Ted Grant calls "proletarian Bonapartism". Everything is 100 per cent as it has to be because of the circumstances. Everybody is attracted to the Soviet Union and repelled by everything else. As we saw, in Grant's soothing vision the problems with the Muslim clergy will soften and ease under the magic-working strokes of the wave of the future, as it benignly washes over Afghanistan.

"Under these circumstances, if the new regime leans on the support of the peasants and transforms society then the way will be cleared for the development of a regime in Afghanistan like that of Cuba, Syria or Russia". This new Afghan regime will be nothing less than epochal, "For the first time for centuries", Grant explains (his emphasis), this regime "will bring Afghanistan forward to the modern world".

Continuing, Ted Grant becomes positively visionary. The reader must excuse a longish quotation.

"It could become a new blow at capitalism and landlordism in the rest of capitalist- landlord Asia... It will have incalculable effects on the Pathans and Baluchis of Pakistan. It will have an effect on the like peoples on the borders of Iran. The rotting regime of Pakistan in coming years will face complete disintegration... The tribesmen will be influenced by the processes taking place among their brothers across the borders... The effect will be in widening circles... felt in Iran... also in India.

"This is the road which the 'Communist Party', which holds power together with the radical officers, will take."

Taraki, Amin, Babrak Karmal — history is at your feet... if the people of Afghanistan are!

But if they hesitate, perhaps under restraining Russian influence, then, Grant warns, they will prepare the way for a ferocious counter-revolution led by landlords and mullahs. If successful it could slaughter hundreds of thousands of peasants, massacre radical officers, and perhaps exterminate the educated elite.

Grant concludes with a firm commitment to support the new regime in Afghanistan: "... the most progressive development in Afghanistan seems at the present time to be the installation of proletarian Bonapartism.

"While not closing our eyes to the new contradictions this will involve, Marxists in sober fashion will support the emergence of such a state and the further weakening of imperialism and capitalism and the regimes basing themselves on the remnants of feudalism in the backward countries".

On the whole Ted Grant is very optimistic for the future of Afghanistan. He warns of the dangers of counter-revolution, but expects them to become serious only if the government

temporises. Rivers of blood and napalm later, 18 months in the future, when he comes to assessing the Russian invasion, Ted Grant will still manage to spin optimistic "perspectives" for Afghanistan.

GRANT ON THE INVASION

***Militant* took some time to hammer out its response to the invasion.**

It took a very long article by Ted Grant and then, a month later, another long article by Lynn Walsh supplementing it, before their line was clear. A third article by Alan Woods, published in July 1980, drew out the logic brutally expressing the satisfaction with which this "Trotskyist" tendency greeted the prospect of a Stalinist transformation in Afghanistan.

Militant's first response to the invasion was a three-page-long article by Ted Grant (*Militant*, 18 January 1980). The last third of the article fell apart into an unintegrated series of musings and reflections, not too far above the stream-of-consciousness level. We shall see the consequences. Despite that it was a knowledgeable analysis of the events that preceded the Russian occupation. Though the analytical framework was different, the essential features of Grant's description paralleled that presented above (which first appeared in *Workers' Action*, 16 January 1980 and 23 January 1980).

In contrast to the fantasies then being peddled by others who call themselves Trotskyists, especially the SWP-USA and the large part of the USFI which consists of its international satellites, Grant knew quite well who it was that had made the original so-called revolution, that is, the military coup of April 1978. "The April 1978 coup was based on a movement of the elite of the Army and the intellectuals and the top layers of professional middle-class people in the cities". But Grant still did not know what it was that they had made. He writes as if the revolt against the PDP regime had not happened (though his article contains a passable account of it), or as if what had happened had no possible bearing on his 1978 analysis or the validity of his "proletarian Bonapartist" tag for Afghanistan.

"Conditions of mass misery and the corruption of the Daud regime resulted in a proletarian Bonapartist coup. Proletarian Bonapartism is a system in which landlordism and capitalism have been abolished, but where power has not passed into the hands of the people, but is held by a one party military-political dictatorship".

He goes on: "After the seizure of power, they abolished the mortgages and other debts of the peasants, who were completely dominated by the usurers, and carried through a land reform".

Now if this is what happened, it becomes impossible to explain why the regime had so little popular support, why its initial support declined, and why it needed the Russian army

to keep it in power. But Grant is not dealing with Afghanistan but with the model of “proletarian Bonapartism” in his head.

The PDP regime did decree an end to usury and a cancellation of debts, it decreed steps towards equality for women; and it legislated a land reform — but it could not carry them out.

The central point is that the PDP did not carry through a revolution, and that it proved unable to do so. What Grant chooses to call “proletarian Bonapartism” was a middle-class regime, symbiotic with the Russian Stalinist regime, but still resting on the old state. It never succeeded in making itself, still less the society, into a replica of the USSR’s social institutions, and the invasion snuffed out its independent development.

Why in Grant’s view did the Russians invade?

Because “the Russian bureaucracy could not tolerate the overthrow, for the first time in the post-war period, of a regime based on the elimination of landlordism and capitalism [thus he describes the PDP regime, though even their formal programme for the ‘first stage’ did not break with capitalism] and the victory of a feudal-capitalist counter-revolution, especially in a state bordering on the Soviet Union”.

Fear of the ferment spilling over to the Muslim population of the USSR was also a motive. (Remember that in 1978 Grant thought it was the USSR that exerted the compelling influence: “The industrialisation, complete literacy and high standards... are bound to impress...”). The Russian bureaucracy thus intervened “not only because of Afghanistan’s strategic position, but for reasons of their own power and prestige”.

Grant denounces the hypocrisy of the imperialist outcry and chronicles recent imperialist “interventions” — South Africa in Angola and Zimbabwe, Belgium in Zaire and France in Chad and Zaire. All true, as far as it goes, but it obliterates in a cloud of minor propaganda/agitational points what is “new” in Afghanistan — the fact that the USSR, acting from strength, was overstepping the agreed boundaries that had prevailed since World War 2, or at least since the end of the Korean war.

The US, says Grant, is using the pretext of Afghanistan and “attempting to hit at Russia because of the class character of the Soviet Union, where landlordism and capitalism have been eliminated”. This is typical Grant-thought. Basic, general historic truths about capitalist class antagonism to the anti-capitalist regime are used to “explain” specific developments. The method is one of living off the mental stock rather than thinking about live issues.

GRANT AND STALINISM

What response should socialists make to the invasion? How do we advise the labour movement to see it? Should we support or oppose the invasion? What should we say to the Communist Party in Britain, which denounced the invasion? Grant is far from clear.

He attacks the Communist Parties for opposing the invasion because, he says, they proceed from “abstract ‘principles’” of opposition to “aggression between peoples”, support for the UN, etc — “instead of viewing the process from the point of view of the class struggle internationally and the class relations between the nations”. Which means? Grant doesn’t tell us. Others — his pupils — subsequently will. In fact, it is a way for Grant to evade the by no means abstract question of what the Afghan masses would choose, and what their choice tells us about what our attitude should be.

Everything is skewed by Grant’s basic attitude to Stalinism. 40 and more years after Trotsky and the Bolshevik rearguard publicly declared, with irrefutable truth, that a river of blood separated Stalinism and Bolshevism, Grant is still — in his mind — engaged in a political and ideological dialogue with the Stalinist bureaucracy.

The bureaucracy in the 1920s accused Trotsky of wanting to use the Red Army to “export revolution”. (Grant mistakenly asserts that Trotsky did advocate this). Lo and behold, says Ted Grant in 1980, we now have a grossly bureaucratic use of the Red Army (the same Red Army?) without the support of the workers, etc.

The point, of course, is that the Russian bureaucracy is necessarily against the workers and the common people of Afghanistan.

In this vein, as a critic of the techniques and crudities of the bureaucracy, Grant comes to his central objection to the invasion. It will repel the international working class.

The Russian state conducted itself differently in Lenin’s and Trotsky’s time. “They based themselves on proposals and actions which would raise the level of consciousness of the working class internationally”. “Anything which acted to raise the consciousness of the working class was justified; anything which had the opposite effect was to be condemned”, etc. etc. Yes (though in fact the Bolsheviks were

sometimes forced to do things irrespective of the effect on international working class consciousness.)

But what have Lenin and Trotsky got to do with the present Moscow regime — with its character, its selection, its education, its motivation, its lifestyle, or with its relationship to the Russian and other USSR peoples and to the workers in the USSR or outside it?

The answer, for Ted Grant, seems to be that they carry on the same business in a “distorted” way. The train of thought runs on tracks laid down by Isaac Deutscher — Stalinism is a part of the continuation of Bolshevism or at least the custodian of its social-economic achievements and the transplanter of them to other countries, carrying them on the point of bayonets to people who are crushed by tanks if they resist.

This is very strange stuff. But it is of interest as illustrating the confused thought processes of the main political leader of one of the biggest groups in Britain calling itself Trotskyist. He is confused to the point of seemingly not knowing who he is supposed to be, who and what the Stalinist rulers of the USSR are, and what their relationship is to the working class. He is seemingly confused about what time of the political clock it is.

Like the legendary professor of history who asked a colleague “What century is this?”, Ted Grant must have occasion to ask his associates “What decade is this?” (But they won’t be able to tell him).

Having explained at great length the different methods and techniques of the Stalinist bureaucracy on the one hand and of Marxist working-class revolutionaries on the other, Grant then comes close to the truth that it is a matter of different people, as a different social formation, and of different aims. But he puts his own gloss even on this.

The policies of the “proletarian Bonapartist” regime in the USSR are determined by the “income, power, prestige and privilege” of the bureaucracy. But that’s not the whole story, nor — for backward countries — the relevant part of it. The USSR bureaucrats support revolution in backward countries “when it takes place in the distorted form of proletarian Bonapartism”. But strictly only in backward countries, with their “distorted revolutions”. “They are opposed to a socialist revolution in advanced countries [because] ... the establishment of a democratic socialist regime in any country in the world would immediately threaten the foundations of the bureaucratic misrule in Russia, China and the other Stalinist states”.

This seems to mean that despite what they are, and in the course of serving their own interests, the Russian bureaucracy can nevertheless do good work in backward countries. Grant manages simultaneously to conflate, collapse into each other, and link as parallel phenomena the workers’ revolution and the mutations he calls proletarian Bonapartism: the idea is clearly one of distinct stages reflecting different levels of development. Stalinist bureaucratic revolution is appropriate for backward countries and even inevitable. For Grant “proletarian Bonapartism” is to socialism what the bourgeois-democratic revolution was for the Russian Mensheviks: an inevitable stage in a two-stage process.

At the same time Grant’s scheme of workers’ socialist revolution for advanced countries, “distorted (Stalinist) revolution” for backward countries, ignores the fact that the Stalinist bureaucracy has made its own “revolution” in advanced countries too — in Czechoslovakia (he has a selective memory. He forgets the Czechoslovakian Stalinist coup of 1948, and he forgets that his own organisation, the RCP, was then alone among Trotskyist organisations in supporting the coup), in East Germany (a backward part of Germany, but that is relative), on condition of having military-bureaucratic rule over them.

But what has this to do with the Russian occupation of Afghanistan? Now Grant gets to the crux.

SUPPORT OR OPPOSE?

The ending of feudalism and capitalism in Afghanistan, says Grant, opens the way to bring that country into the 20th century. “If we just considered the Russian intervention in isolation, we should have to give this move critical support”.

So we support the occupation? No: “because of the reactionary effect it has on the consciousness of the working class... Marxists must oppose the Russian intervention”.

“The Russian intervention in Afghanistan must be condemned despite its progressive aspects, because it is spitting at the opinions of the world working class”.

It is clear from the article that when he talks about the bad effects on working class consciousness of the invasion, he has something specific in mind. “The overriding danger under contemporary conditions is the alienation of the workers of Japan, Western Europe, the USA and other advanced countries from the idea of socialism and socialist revolution [i.e. Russia?]. This is shown by the attitudes taken by the Tri-

bunites. Like the CP, they unfortunately base themselves not on the real movement of the class struggle and on the actual relations between the great powers [sic] but, on the contrary, rely on abstract moral condemnations... But [world antagonisms] are a reflection of the dialectical contradictions between the capitalist states, and above all of the major contradiction of our time, that between the Stalinist states, on the one hand, and the countries of capitalism on the other”.

It is clear that Grant is being tossed between the implications and necessary conclusions from his theory on one side, and the pressure of the Tribunes on the other. The Russian occupation may “in isolation” be progressive in Afghanistan, but it makes life difficult in the Labour Party! The complete prostration into bloc politics, and the consequent abandonment of independent working-class politics, should be noted.

So Grant deplors the invasion. Should the Russians then withdraw? Grant seems to think so, though it is not quite clear. His way of expressing it is to dismiss “the demand by the imperialist powers supported by the CP and the Tribune group” as “utopian”. Why? Grant adds immediately after this: “Russia, of course, has vetoed this demand in the UN Security Council”. And you can’t beat that, can you? Grant’s comment on the “utopianism” of the CP seems to suggest that you shouldn’t try. The CPs should be criticised for no longer automatically backing what Moscow does!

Nothing here is abstract, or “idealistic”, or contrary to “the real movement of the class struggle” and the taking of sides with one bloc in “the major contradiction of our time”. The advancing tanks inexorably roll forward, backed by history, and not all your programmes or your tears will ever roll them back again one inch!

REVOLUTIONARY PROSPECTS

Even after deploring the invasion, Grant is as optimistic as he was in mid-1978. The Kremlin bureaucracy will save the day.

“Balancing between the different nationalities of Afghanistan, and leaning on the poor and middle peasants, the Afghan regime, based on Russian bayonets, will undoubtedly be able to crush the rebels and establish a firm proletarian Bonapartist state as a Soviet satellite”. But things won’t be so bad. “Once the counter-revolution has been defeated, most of the Russian troops will be withdrawn... The Bonapartist regime and the Russians will find a way to compromise with the mullahs”.

The international contradictions will soften too, though not immediately. First Russia may, in response to the American trade reprisals, back the Baluchis and Pathans in breaking up Pakistan, and thus maybe “fulfil the old dream of Tsarist diplomacy, a warm water port”. But “Before things go that far, however, it is likely, in the not too distant future, that there will be a compromise between the US and the bureaucracy”.

This soporific message perhaps lulled the many readers of *Militant* who did not have the political duty in 1965 and after to read *Militant*’s assurances, month after month and year after year, that compromise was just ahead in Vietnam. It had the effect of minimising the degree of blame the readers of *Militant* would attach to the bureaucracy for the invasion and the boost thereby given to the re-armers and warmongers in the USA.

Grant’s article, though it left many things in the air, seemed on balance to come out against the Russian invasion. But in fact Grant’s position was utterly contradictory.

His basic assessment of the “progressive” side of Russia’s effective annexation of Afghanistan strongly implied support for it, while his seeming opposition to the invasion was shallowly grounded in the need to bow to working-class public opinion. Grant declined to take a stand on the basis of his own political assessment, instead allowing the public opinion of the labour movement to override for him the necessary conclusions that flowed logically from his fundamental assessments.

The occupation would bring the advantages of the 20th century to 16 million Afghans, in the only way possible, and create a society which would be an inspiration for hundreds of millions across Asia. But, unfortunately, the British labour movement does not understand about these things and was displeased. So there was nothing else for it: Ted Grant would have to tell the Russians that they should not have invaded! The Afghans would just have to grit their teeth and endure “ferocious counter-revolution”.

No wonder this position soon crumbled. In effect Grant had confined himself to describing a process and scoffing at the “utopians” of the CP and Tribune.

Within a short time, some of Grant’s pupils insisted on drawing the logical political conclusions from Grant’s analysis.

One month after Grant’s article there appeared part 1 of a two-part reply to a letter from “Roy Bentley”, who had “just

read" Ted Grant's article. He wanted to inquire what Grant's line really had been!

He was bold enough to offer an interpretation, based on Grant's comment that the call for withdrawal was "utopian". "Does that mean that *Militant* is against the withdrawal of the troops, having quite rightly condemned the invasion?" He "could see" that if the Russian troops were withdrawn, "the Afghan regime of Karmal would soon collapse and there would be an almost inevitable bloodbath and a return to feudal landowning and backwardness... This would justify support for the troops being there now they have invaded. Is this the position *Militant* is putting forward?"

Roy Bentley, if he is a real person, obviously has a great future before him as a political interpreter.

"Roy has indeed drawn the right conclusion from Ted's article", began the reply. Thus, ludicrously, *Militant* began to correct itself.

The reply by Lynn Walsh did not mention that meanwhile the "world Trotskyist movement" — for which *Militant* spuriously affects contempt — was agog over the invasion. Many groups, like the SWP-USA, had hailed the progressive work of the Russian army in "going to the aid of the revolution". In Britain, the IMG (the USFI section) came out fiercely against any call for Russian troops out, after a brief and sharp faction fight against the editor of its paper, Tariq Ali, who left the organisation soon after. Ted Grant's deference to working-class public opinion had put *Militant* dangerously close to what most would-be Trotskyists saw as lining up with the world counter-revolution — and with *Workers' Action* (one of the publishers of *Socialist Organiser* then)! Hastily they changed their line.

Walsh made the following new points.

To call for withdrawal would open up the risk of "Afghanistan's proletarian Bonapartist regime" being overthrown. Supporting withdrawal would therefore mean siding with the forces of counter-revolution. The whole question of any rights for the Afghan people against the invading Russian army was thus wiped out by equating the Russians with the left, and by equating what the Russians would do if they assimilated Afghanistan with the proletarian revolution. The pretence that the regime had an existence independent of the Russian army also helped Walsh to evade the issue.

Militant, wrote Walsh, could not support the invasion "because of the reactionary consequences internationally. Once Russian forces had occupied the country, however, it would have been wrong for Marxists to call for the withdrawal of Russian troops".

In other words — don't take responsibility, but be glad the bureaucracy is not so fastidious. This attitude of saying "no" while meaning "yes" combined the joys of abstention from direct responsibility with those of vicarious realpolitik, via hypocrisy.

For if it is necessary for the troops to stay, on pain of undesirable consequences, then it was right to send them in in the first place. Responsible people would have called for the invasion and should acknowledge now that the initiative of the bureaucracy (what ever their motives) was the correct one. That is what the American SWP did for the first six months of 1980, and at least they were consistent and, after a fashion, politically serious.

Walsh continued: "The Russian intervention in Afghanistan was a progressive move" — Grant is quoted as saying this, though in fact he said it would be progressive if it could be taken in isolation, and that in fact it could not be.

PROGRESSIVE?

If the invasion was a "progressive move", then surely you should support it. If not, why not? Walsh admits that "The reactionary international repercussions of invasion completely outweigh any immediate gains in Afghanistan". Still, preventing the downfall of a "proletarian Bonapartist" military regime was "in itself" another blow to world imperialism. And the invasion "established the development of historically progressive social relations in this small country".

"In Afghanistan, though it has moved to prop up a Bonapartist regime that rules through dictatorial methods, the Russian bureaucracy is defending new, fundamentally progressive, social relations". A mass base of support for the regime (that is, for Stalinism) will be created by land reform, planning, etc. Like Grant, Walsh retains his optimism. "When the proletarian Bonapartist regime is consolidated in Afghanistan, which will be within a measurable period, the Russian leadership will probably withdraw its forces". And if it doesn't it will have *Militant* to reckon with! Walsh adds defiantly: "in any case if there were no danger of counter-revolutionary forces threatening the regime and the social changes that have been carried through, we would then call for the withdrawal of Soviet troops..."!

Nobody should mistake Walsh's enthusiasm for the great

prospects that Stalinist bureaucratic rule opens for Afghanistan for unawareness of what is happening there. What exists in Afghanistan, he adds, is "a grotesque totalitarian caricature of a socialist state".

He has a strange idea of why this regime exists. He thinks it is "because of the isolation of the social change in an economically and culturally backward country, and the fact that the Bonapartist leadership has inevitably taken Russia's Stalinist regime as its model". Apart from the fact that it is nonsense now to pretend that the Afghan regime has an existence independent of the USSR, it is certainly not isolated. The character of the regime is determined now not only by the conditions of its own society, but by the bureaucratism of the much more developed Russian society which dominates Afghanistan. Even if they industrialised Afghanistan and modernised it, the bureaucracy would still — unless overthrown — maintain a totalitarian state to defend its privileges, which would grow with the growth of the social wealth as they have increased in the USSR over the decades. Russian domination determined the shape of the regime even in immensely more developed Czechoslovakia.

Isolation? Ted Grant is not the only one who does not know what time of the historical clock it is — for Stalinism, or for anti-Stalinist revolutionary socialists.

POLITICAL REVOLUTION

Walsh does not forget the political revolution. He insists that *Militant* "stands for a further supplementary political revolution".

For when? This is an epochal perspective, unless the Russian workers soon overthrow Stalinism. For Afghanistan it could come only after a whole long historical period — after a strong working class has developed, after present-day Afghanistan no longer exists. Walsh tacitly admits this. In his account the first stage is the consolidation of a progressive Stalinist system by the growth of support for the regime. The Russian tanks and the napalm-spraying helicopter gunships — whose presence *Militant* supports because of the progressive work Russia is doing in Afghanistan — will subdue the population. Thus cowed, the Afghan masses will be made to support or tolerate the regime by economic measures. And after that, perhaps political revolution.

Walsh underlines the point: in Russia and Eastern Europe the bureaucracy has "outlived any progressive role it played in the past through developing the planned economy". (When was it progressive in Czechoslovakia, for example?) But not in Afghanistan. There — as in many other backward countries, indeed apparently in most of the world — it has prospects of an organic growth and the consolidation of mass support. The bureaucracy is the natural leading force, for society at that stage — the bearer of a higher civilisation. And for that reason revolutionary socialists must support the proletarian Bonapartist bureaucracy even against most of the people of Afghanistan. And why only Afghanistan?

THE "DARK MASSES"

***Militant's* third major article on Afghanistan, published in July 1980, brutally tied it all together.**

Its author was Alan Woods, editor of *Militant's* theoretical journal. Like Walsh, Woods is one of those who gathered around the dead stump of the old ISFI (Pablo-Mandel) group in Britain in the early 60s and helped develop the mutant strain that is the present *Militant* tendency.

By July 1980 Russia had been fighting a brutal colonial war in Afghanistan for seven months, using mass terror bombings and reprisals against the recalcitrant Afghan peoples — in fact, using the same techniques that the US used in Vietnam, the French in Algeria, and the Nazis in some parts of occupied Europe and of Russia. You did not have to know that this war would still be going on in 1985 to realise that it was, as the gloating capitalist press insisted, Russia's "Vietnam war".

There was still quite a lot of noise in the capitalist press, and perhaps some *Militant* supporters asked awkward questions. Alan Woods' article was designed to answer them.

Grant had established some account of the April 1978 "revolution"; and Walsh (perhaps after an internal dispute, but it scarcely matters) got *Militant* into line with the Mandelites and the SWP-USA by establishing a (hypocritically dressed-up) pro-invasion line from Grant's unresolved contradictions. Woods emerges as the arrogant champion of the civilising mission of the army of the Russian bureaucracy.

As we will see below he boldly picked up the arguments used by the old Fabian imperialists (and other "socialist" imperialists) to justify the colonisation of Africa and Asia by Britain and other colonising European countries and used them to defend and justify Russia's colonial war in Afghanistan.

Entitled "Afghanistan: what is really happening? — the

truth behind the press fantasies", Woods' article is a polemic against the press reports of mass resistance to the invaders and of the horrors of Russia's war in Afghanistan. It was *Militant's* contribution to a campaign then being waged by the SWP-USA and others to pretend that Afghanistan, before and after the Russian occupation, was the victim of a sustained press conspiracy to misrepresent what was happening there.

Given that they supported the PDP regime and then the Russian war of colonial conquest while continuing to proclaim themselves Trotskyists, they had little choice but to deny the serious press reports of what was actually happening in Afghanistan. Of course, the SWP-USA and the Mandelites usually glorify and fantasise about the Third World regimes they support. Their six-months period as vulgar propagandists for Kabul was only a little more than business as usual for them. (Today it's Cuba and Nicaragua). *Militant* does not usually go in for this sort of thing. Why was *Militant* forced in this case to deny the basic facts of what was going on? Was it because even *Militant's* leaders were not given sufficient philosophical fortitude by their vision of the long-term progressive effects of the Russian occupation? Did they balk at supporting the brutal Russian war of conquest without the consolation of fantasies and delusions of a more immediate sort? Or was it that they thought that some people in *Militant* or on its periphery would need to be lied to for fear that they would refuse to follow *Militant* into support for Russia's Vietnam?

As they say, in war truth is the first casualty.

A PRESS CONSPIRACY?

Woods' denunciation of the bourgeois press for what it says about Afghanistan was simply ridiculous. For his case was that the Western press is grossly unreliable, concerned only with making anti-Russian propaganda in Afghanistan — and he establishes it entirely by quotations from the self-corrections of the Western press.

The piece is studded by quotations from the (pre-Murdoch) *Times*.

What emerges from Woods' own polemics is that a serious effort was being made in the *Times* and the *Financial Times* to establish the facts, and this involved printing not entirely checkable accounts and then correcting them or repudiating them. What Woods himself does is seize on the reports printed by the *Times* about press inaccuracies and on their corrections of reports from Afghanistan which proved false, and belabour them in order to disguise his own partisan and one-sided propaganda for the civilising mission of the Russians. He denounces the press to forestall the effect on *Militant* readers of press reports — in general probably true — of Russian war atrocities in Afghanistan. *Militant's* support for Russia's bloody war of conquest had pitched it into the role of making dirty war propaganda for the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Woods doesn't notice how ludicrous it is to end one point with "And the *Times* reporter commented laconically: 'Not to put too fine a point on it, the Voice of America was talking rubbish'" — and then immediately go on: "But the *Times* itself has not been averse to talking rubbish in recent months, as when it screamed in banner headlines 'Hundreds dead in Kabul revolt against Russians' (28 February), a typically exaggerated report of the strike of reactionary shopkeepers in the Kabul Bazaar in February..."

Woods is clearly the coming master of the major tool of Grantite reasoning, the non sequitur. Or perhaps he means — it is certainly his underlying train of thought — that dead shopkeepers are not worth the tallying.

Here a digression is necessary on sources of information in politics. It is almost a reflex in large parts of the left to dismiss information like the accounts of Russia's war in Afghanistan as "capitalist propaganda". In fact the picture that Woods and others present of an invariably lying bourgeois press systematically orchestrated to mislead and hide the facts about the "socialist revolution" in Afghanistan (and everywhere else) is a grotesque distortion of reality. Yet — significantly — this picture is often a fundamental part of their politics. For if *Militant*, the SWP-USA, etc are to present the "analysis" and "facts" decreed by the "party line" — in this case on Afghanistan, but there are many other instances — then it is frequently necessary for them to explain why their picture of reality is so widely contradicted.

Now every socialist worker knows that the bourgeois press is unreliable, biased, hostile to revolution and to most workers' struggles. But this varies from issue to issue and from newspaper to newspaper.

On certain issues of "security" the entire press can be orchestrated and silenced. This can also be done on trivial things: gossip about the Royal Family, for example. There is also sometimes self-suppression by newspapers, encouraged by the government. Reporting on Northern Ireland is the worst current example in Britain.

Apart from that, in the bourgeois democracies there is no

orchestration, no censorship. And between a newspaper like the *Sun* or Maxwell's *Mirror* and papers like the *Guardian*, *Financial Times* and *Times*, there is an enormous gulf.

The serious bourgeois press does, in most cases, subscribe to the ideal of honest factual reporting and to the rights and duties of a free press to provide an honest public record. The bourgeois revolution was good for something, after all! Papers like the *Financial Times* and the *Economist* are written for and directed at the ruling class itself, and they see their role as opinion formers and aids to guiding that class in steering the capitalist system. Class bias, bourgeois ideology, and wishful thinking obviously colour these papers, but for them crude lies and propagandising would be counter-productive. And such papers probably don't feel tempted to suppress news of revolutions for fear of arousing the sympathy of their readers!

The British miners' strike of 1984-5 — on which any British bourgeois paper would have much more motive for distortion than on events in Afghanistan — provides a test. Papers like the *Sun* were foul. The *Financial Times* gave dispassionate and accurate reporting.

In most Stalinist states there are special shops for the bureaucratic elite, but there are no special shops for the bourgeoisie. Papers like the *Economist* and the *Financial Times* are on public sale, private reports produced by banks for their big business customers are available in libraries.

Lenin once said of the *Guardian* that it told the truth usually in order the better to be able to tell lies at crucial points. That is a million miles from saying that such a paper lies on everything serious, all the time. On the contrary. The *Guardian* is a serious paper with extremely high standards of accuracy. So are the *Times* (even today under Murdoch); *New York Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Washington Post*, *Le Monde*, *Die Zeit*, etc.

Their view of the world is not our view. But read critically the facts and reports they produce do allow you to gain a roughly accurate picture of the world. Obviously no Marxist could use the accounts of the bourgeois press of events like those in Afghanistan without selection, judgement, and so on. But if the whole press coverage were a conspiracy to pervert the truth, then it would scarcely be possible to know anything about the world unless you were part of an independent newsgathering international network. And more: most of the Marxist commentaries on past events by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky, etc would be by definition suspect or invalid, for they too depended heavily on the serious bourgeois press, filtered of course through their own judgement and understanding.

The serious bourgeois press is the only source of information on Afghanistan available to us. But Woods doesn't need to read it. He knows what is going on, from Grantite theory. This is the core of the article and what makes it worth bothering with — his assumptions and interpretations.

The point is not assessments like the following (basically the same as the assessment made in *Workers' Action* in early 1980): "Moscow's strategy is first to dig in in the towns, secure control of the administration and the main highways, and then gradually consolidate their influence over the villages and the backward mountain tribes". Nor is it his support (despite the reiterated hypocrisy about how the Russians should not have gone in) for the Russians. It is his interpretation of what is happening and why.

The old-style Fabians argued that colonialism, despite everything, brought civilisation to backward peoples. Basing himself on the same approach, Woods makes it plain that for him the Afghan masses are necessarily the object of someone else's boot and bayonet in history. They are "dark masses", hopelessly benighted, and the Russians are doing them a great historical favour.

For Woods, because "these tribesmen [are] 'dark masses', sunk in the gloom of barbarism, whose conditions of life and psychology have not changed fundamentally in 2000 years", it follows that "the task of dragging [sic] the Afghan countryside out of the slough of primeval backwardness and into the 20th century would be formidable, even with correct leadership and Marxist politics". In the absence of "correct" leadership and politics, the Russian bureaucracy has fortunately undertaken to do the job. "The Russian bureaucracy and their Afghan supporters are, in effect, carrying through the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution [eh?] in that country".

In a "distorted, bureaucratic, Bonapartist fashion", Woods of course adds. Still, that is what they are doing in Afghanistan. It is the totalitarian bureaucracy that is doing it. And we should be glad that they are doing it. We should support them in doing it.

Thus, 40 years after Trotsky's death, one of the leaders of *Militant*, a tendency which claims to be the sole representative of Trotskyism in the whole world, speaks up for the USSR bureaucracy and its "civilising mission". His tone and voice would be appropriate to a brutal Fabian imperialist of the



Russian troops returning to Russia following their withdrawal

year 1900, championing the civilising mission of the British ruling class which had picked up "the white man's burden" in Africa and elsewhere. Such people explained that the wars of colonial conquest against "lesser breeds without the law" were really in the victims' interest. Conquest would civilise them and make them fit to hear the socialist message by dragging them — or those of them who survived — into the year 1900. There were many such Fabian imperialists — some of them no doubt honest and sincere blockheads — and they argued their case rather like Woods argues his, looking to the British army where he looks to the Russians in Afghanistan.

In fact *Militant's* politics on Afghanistan are identical to the politics of those whose attitude to the people of backward countries was condemned by Trotsky in the quotation at the beginning of this pamphlet. True, the old Fabian imperialists thought of countries like Britain as the hub of contemporary progress, and *Militant* looks to the USSR instead. But the "Red" Army ceased to be a Red Army over five decades ago. The different orientation changes nothing politically essential, though *Militant* thinks it does.

That is also the significance of the insensitive reference to the "dark masses" which — even if you exclude any racist implications, as I do — is also a choice expression of "socialist" imperialism. Undoubtedly Afghanistan is very backward. *Militant's* conclusion from this is not Trotsky's but Taraki's and Amin's and Karmal's. The politics of Trotsky conjure up no big battalions these days, and therefore support for the conquering armies of Stalin's heirs is the lesser evil in Afghanistan. (And Pakistan? If not, why not?)

All this is not confined to Afghanistan. It is rooted in *Militant's* whole political outlook on the Third World.

MILITANT ON THE THIRD WORLD

The picture of the Third World presented in such articles as Grant's 1978 piece on "the colonial revolution" is as follows.

Capitalism means nothing but stagnation. The inevitable way forward, once the local middle class has "tired" of capitalist stagnation (Grant's term), is for that middle class to create "proletarian Bonapartism". This "proletarian Bonapartism" is totalitarian and brutal, but progressive: it develops industry and society.

Such are the prospects for the great majority of the world's population — all except those who live in the most developed countries. Even countries such as Portugal are candidates for a "proletarian Bonapartist" stage. Working-class socialist revolution is for the few.

This picture — segmenting the world into economically

progressive "proletarian Bonapartism" and stagnant capitalism — blots out a large part of reality. *Militant* (implicitly at least) denies even the theoretical possibility of state capitalism: so what about Egypt, or Algeria, or many other countries where social structures have been substantially changed, and industry expanded on the basis of a very high level of nationalisations? Have all the struggles in those countries been much ado about nothing?

And in fact in many Third World countries — from South Korea through the Ivory Coast to Brazil — capitalism has developed industry and society very fast. The record is one of hideous human suffering but certainly not of stagnation. Even India or Pakistan, for example, have seen industrial growth since independence far outstripping Britain's in the 19th century.

Within this development there are substantial struggles, on many issues. Sizeable working classes now exist in many Third World countries; in terms of objective social weight they are better placed to make socialist revolutions than were the Russian workers in 1917.

But worse. Aside from its factual inaccuracy, *Militant's* vision is so Eurocentric as to be almost racist.

They endorse "proletarian Bonapartism" as the best available next stage for most of humanity. Yet they do not engage themselves actively in the struggle to install this "proletarian Bonapartism", as the Russian Mensheviks before 1917 actively fought to get the bourgeois democratic revolution which they saw as the best development possible for backward Russia. No: at most *Militant* expresses satisfaction after the event at the good results to be expected from "proletarian Bonapartism". At the same time they dissociate from it, describing its viciously repressive methods, and venomously denouncing those Trotskyist "sects" who actively support the movements for "proletarian Bonapartism".

The basic idea is that nothing very much at all can be expected from the great mass of humanity; that most of the world's people (not just the Afghan peasants and nomads) are fated to be mere objects for boots and bayonets; and that it doesn't matter very much, for in due course the socialist revolution will come through the legislation of Enabling Acts and nationalisation decrees in countries such as Britain (or the political revolution in the USSR), and will "usher in an epoch of unprecedented abundance".

Despite the routine expressions of indignation in *Militant's* articles about the terrible social conditions in the Third World, their attitude to the mass of workers and peasants suffering those conditions is that of the philosopher on a watchtower.

Part III: Conclusions

“The Russian bureaucracy and their Afghan supporters are in effect carrying through the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution in that country”, says Woods — though they are doing it in a “distorted”, Bonapartist fashion. The same idea is expressed by Grant in his 1978 article: the “proletarian Bonapartist” regimes “carry out in backward countries the historic job which was carried out by the bourgeoisie in the capitalist countries in the past”.

They are alluding and making comparisons — Grant explicitly — to Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution, according to which the tasks of a bourgeois democratic revolution in a backward country (land reform, civil liberties, a democratic republican state, national independence) can be carried out by the working class and peasantry in a combined movement, led by the working class, which does not stop at bourgeois-democratic tasks but goes on to install working-class power and overthrow capitalism.

Woods’ allusion is intended to put the events in Afghanistan and the Russian invasion in the historical framework of the theory of permanent revolution, as a sort of special variant of it. But this is a very strange variant indeed.

Two issues are involved here: first Woods’ substantive view that Stalinism is the necessary next stage for most of the world; and second his presentation of this scenario as a working-out (albeit “distorted”) of Trotsky’s perspective of permanent revolution.

THE HISTORICAL PROTAGONIST

In the Russian Revolution of 1917, where Trotsky’s theory was strikingly born out by events, the proletariat took the lead of the peasant masses in the struggle against reaction and backwardness, carried out the tasks of the bourgeois revolution, and in the same movement took power, eliminated the bourgeoisie, and established a workers’ democracy.

Woods’ formula might be called the theory of “international proletarian Bonapartist permanent revolution”. The historical protagonist in Trotsky’s permanent revolution is the working class. But in Woods’ “international proletarian Bonapartist permanent revolution” the protagonist is first the Afghan “communist” middle class and the top army and air force officers. When they fail, the hero’s role falls to... the totalitarian Stalinist bureaucracy.

Where the working-class instrument in making permanent revolution for Trotsky was a revolutionary working-class party based in democratic soviets, for Woods the instrument is a savagely undemocratic, hierarchical foreign army which makes the revolution by subjugating — if it can — the rural masses. It appears among them as a bitterly resented and hated foreign invader.

(And not only among the rural masses. Woods asserts falsely that the towns are solidly with the invaders; but that was not true even in 1980. One of the results of the invasion was the alienation of the masses in the towns and even of sections of the PDP — the Khalq faction).

But if the invaders win the war — though five years later they are further from winning than they were when Woods was stabilising *Militant’s* line on the Russian occupation if they win, what happens then?

The scenario is as follows. A foreign military machine conquers the country. It organises, beginning from an initially tiny basis of support, a replica of the totalitarian Russian political regime. It carries out reforms from above, manipulating the population (for example, land redistribution under such a regime is no more than a transitional stage to collectivisation with or without consent). At the same time, unless miraculously the regime proves to be different in Afghanistan from what it is in Russia, it will — even after the initial conquest is completed — oppress, massacre, jail and deport as many of the Afghans as necessary. The norm for this regime is that the population has no civil rights. Every attempt by workers to organise — in backward Afghanistan or advanced Poland — is stamped on.

What has this got to do with permanent revolution? Nothing whatever! Here permanent revolution is only an — unintendedly — ironic phrase to point up the contrast between Trotsky’s programme and what is likely to happen in Afghanistan. It brings out the contrast between permanent revolution and socialism on one side, and what exists in the USSR on the other.

PERMANENT REVOLUTION

Woods’ attempt by allusion to link what *Militant* is supporting in Afghanistan with the Trotskyist theory of per-

manent revolution in underdeveloped countries points up something else too: that *Militant* possesses all the key ideas of Marxism and Trotskyism — workers’ state, permanent revolution, democracy, socialism — in a decayed and corrupted form.

The terminology is used as rags and tatters to dress up a set of politics which owe little to Marxism and Trotskyism and far more to Stalinism and Fabianism.

Woods rightly locates the pre-invasion dynamic in the backwardness of the country and the self-defined mission of the officer caste to modernise in face of the feebleness of Afghan capitalism and its bourgeoisie. He accepts that the PDP/officer caste symbiosis was only possible on a programme of transforming that caste and associated sections of the middle class into a ruling elite of the Russian bureaucratic type.

Yet he argues that their “revolution” was nevertheless “a step forward in comparison to the previous situation”. In fact it proved impossible for the PDP and the army to make that “step”; and even if they had succeeded, it would be a programmatic betrayal for Trotskyists to support such a formation, rooted in the existing state and pitted against the masses.

The PDP/officer regime was radically distinct from the sort of movement that existed in Vietnam and China, where Stalinist forces led masses against reaction and imperialism. In Afghanistan first there was an attempt to impose a Stalinist police state from above and now there is an attempt at foreign subjugation of the entire people.

It was right for Trotskyists to support the Vietnamese and Chinese Stalinists against reaction and imperialism. But even in such cases it is a to-be-or-not-to-be question for working-class politics that we do not accept that the establishment of a totalitarian Stalinist state is inevitable, even if we think it probable. We fight in the last ditch against the establishment of Stalinist totalitarianism, exerting whatever influence we have to warn — and organise — the masses against it and to tell them what it will mean for them and for any hopes they may have for freedom or socialism. If a Stalinist system triumphs nevertheless — and of course we knew that all the circumstances were such in China and Vietnam that the victory of Mao or the Vietnamese CP would certainly mean the establishment of a Stalinist dictatorship — then we do not hail that triumph, or the regime that embodies it, as a victory.

We recognise it as a defeat for the working class, even if it is also a defeat for imperialism and capitalism. We prepare to continue the struggle in the new circumstances.

There is no parallel in Afghanistan with the support we would give to Stalinist-led movements as in China and Vietnam. Socialists in Afghanistan would oppose the reaction, but not as partisans of the PDP/officer regime. Since the invasion the struggle has become one between the occupying forces and almost the entire people of Afghanistan.

WOODS’ PROGRAMME

Nowhere and not in any circumstances — whether we were critically supporting the Vietnamese Stalinists against the USA or precariously trying to maintain a guerrilla base in Afghanistan against the hostile reactionaries and the PDP regime or the “Red” Army — would we accept the establishment of a necessarily totalitarian state of the Stalinist bureaucracy as part of our programme. For to do so would be to write our own self-obliteration into the programme.

Yet that is exactly what *Militant* does, and that is why Woods coyly alludes to Trotsky’s permanent revolution. He doesn’t openly call it a variant of permanent revolution, because that would be too glaringly to emphasise that the carrying through of the “tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution” is merged not with socialism but with what *Militant* calls a “proletarian Bonapartist” state. But his position depends on the notion that somehow, and in some way, the war of the Russian Stalinist totalitarian state to subjugate the peoples of Afghanistan is a “distorted” working-class struggle.

He tells us that our attitude to the invasion must not be determined by “sentimental considerations” but “first and foremost by class considerations”. Which class forces, he asks, stand behind the present Kabul regime, and which behind the Mujaheddin rebels? Putting his shoulder and full weight to an open door, he proves that the rich stand behind the rebels — and considers the matter settled, as if you can derive a class characterisation of the Kabul regime and of Russian Stalinism by negative deduction from the nature of their opponents.

The rebels have next to nothing in the towns, says Woods triumphantly (though falsely). “The new regime can count on the support of the small working class that exists, plus the

great majority of the students, intellectuals and functionaries”. Woods does not present his evidence for thinking that this is actually how it is. He knows that it is so for it is ordained in the schemes that it is so. He probably still knows it five years later, when even the Russian “embassy” comes under rocket fire and the Russians do not even have secure control of the towns, nor of parts of Kabul.

“The struggle in Afghanistan”, writes Woods, “is essentially a struggle of the towns against the countryside, of civilisation against barbarism, of the new society against the old”. Stalinism is the progressive next stage, the bearer of civilisation.

Citing facts about the rebels burning schools, Woods declares that the victory of these “reactionary gangsters” “would lead to a terrible bloodbath and an orgy of violence and destruction which would plunge Afghanistan back into the dark ages”. He lists the traditional cruelties and mutilations used by the rebels; he is completely silent about the napalm and the Russian tanks and bombers. The “historical mission” of the rebels is “about as ‘progressive’ as that of Genghis Khan” — unlike the mission of the army of the Russian totalitarian bureaucracy whose barbarism with napalm and bombs against the Muslim villagers he excuses and forgives.

And no starry-eyed enthusiast for the conquering armies of capitalism was ever so “optimistic” as Alan Woods. After the brutal disregard comes the consoling cant. The future — after the invading army has completed the subjugation, buried the dead, and re-built the bombed villages — is bright and hopeful.

“As the social benefits of the revolution [i.e. the conquest] begin to become understood by the poor peasants,... the mass base for reaction will evaporate...” Moscow will eventually withdraw “the bulk” of its troops (and of course *Militant* will approve their judgement and wait for it). “Despite all the totalitarian deformations [!] the new regime will mark a big step forward for Afghan society. Industry will be built up rapidly... The growth of an industrial proletariat in Afghanistan will ultimately serve to undermine the base of bureaucratic rule and prepare the way for a new political revolution, and the establishment of a healthy workers’ democracy in Afghanistan”.

Oh what dreams *Militant* could dream five years ago.

CONCLUSIONS

***Militant* has transformed the Trotskyist idea that the Stalinist states are deformed and degenerated workers’ states into a programmatic norm for most of the world.**

It has incorporated the so-called proletarian Bonapartist stage, which it says is now inevitable, into its programme, in the place held by the bourgeois revolution in the pre-1917 social democracy. It also explicitly says that Stalinism has not yet outlived its progressive role in the USSR.

Of course it talks about political revolution at a future stage, but its message to the workers in most of the world — including countries such as Portugal, it seems — is that “proletarian Bonapartism” is a progressive stage in history which should be supported. “Proletarian Bonapartism” is as distasteful to them as the notion of the inevitability of a capitalist stage was to Marxists in countries like Russia, but they consider it just as inescapable.

Even if *Militant* were right about the probable course of historical development in the Third World there are fundamental class reasons why Marxists could not endorse “proletarian Bonapartism” in the way that pre-1917 revolutionaries endorsed bourgeois development in underdeveloped countries.

In 19th century Europe capitalism developed industry, cleared away feudal restrictions, and also developed the working class. Marx and Engels argued for a recognition of the progressive role of capitalism, and an alliance between the working class and the middle-class revolutionaries.

Stalinism today in underdeveloped countries — so *Militant’s* argument runs — develops industry, develops the working class, clears away feudal remnants. So why not “critically” support the Stalinists’ efforts to drag Afghanistan into the 20th century.

Why not? In the first place, Marx and Engels also argued for independent anti-capitalist activity by the working class at every stage. Lenin developed this emphasis with great sharpness in relation to capitalist development in Russia, denouncing the Mensheviks’ passive self-limiting policy of accepting that the bourgeoisie was preordained to lead all and any general revolutionary movement for the foreseeable future.

Yet nothing the Mensheviks did comes near to equalling the fatalistic prostration of *Militant* before the Afghan Stalinists and the Russian Stalinists in Afghanistan.

Even the worst of the Mensheviks tried to organise workers



Afghan Mujahideen who fought against the Russian invasion

independently for their immediate interests. *Militant* accepts that such workers' organisation is impossible under Stalinist rule. It deplores the fact, but accepts it as an inevitable feature of a whole stage of development in which the active agent, deserving of support for its progressive work, is the Stalinist bureaucracy.

At the end of that stage *Militant* sees the political revolution. But no practical conclusions follow for now.

Although *Militant* gives an accurate description of who dominates now in Afghanistan, of what the motives for the Russian invasion were, and although they describe the bureaucracy as totalitarian, at no point do they draw conclusions about actively opposing the oppressive, anti-working-class character of the regime that the Russians will create. They know that there will be "totalitarian deformations", but that is not important, it is a secondary aspect of a fundamentally progressive phenomenon.

Trotskyists say that the bureaucracy can be (and has been) in certain circumstances revolutionary against the bourgeoisie, treating it (as Trotsky expressed it) as a competitor for the surplus product. It is in all circumstances counter-revolutionary against the working class. *Militant* might accept this formula. But it adds: even so it is progressive in backward countries.

Militant portrays the fact that the Russians will probably be able to create a stable regime in Afghanistan as reason for hope in the circumstances. It assumes, takes for granted, that the workers will support the transformation, and blandly sets aside the fact that this means co-option of individuals into the new bureaucracy and repression for the masses.

The monstrous logic of this argument is softened for *Militant* by a gross Eurocentrism. The Mensheviks, while organising workers independently, also fought actively to bring about the bourgeois "stage" that they foresaw. *Militant* remains aloof, contenting itself with the thought that proletarian Bonapartism will be created by "the magnificent movement of history". It was notoriously inactive even in solidarity movements like the campaign to help the Vietnamese against US imperialism.

Again and again, *Militant* contents itself with a purely metropolitan-centred perspective. "Once the decisive battle is joined in the metropolitan centres, the world situation will change completely... A Socialist Europe, Japan and America, would then lead Asia, Africa and Latin America direct to Communism in a world Federation". (1964 document).

FALSE ANALOGY

The presentation of Stalinism as a progressive historical force analogous to early capitalism is fundamentally false — and moreover undermines, as we shall see, the ritually-proclaimed perspective of political revolution.

Under the regime of Stalinist totalitarianism the working class is bound hand and foot, deprived of all rights by a highly conscious and *militantly* anti-working-class state apparatus which concentrates the means of production in its own hands, together with immense powers of oppression and terror.

It was possible, within developing capitalism, for Marxists to look to a capitalist evolution and still to relate to the working class, support its struggles, and try to organise it independently. The prospect was not that if the bourgeoisie established their regime, then the working class would be held in a totalitarian vice. On the contrary, even in the worst and most repressive capitalist hell-holes, the working class retained individual rights and could take advantage of loopholes to organise itself.

Bourgeois society offered the possibility of the workers organising themselves and developing politically and culturally. This did not happen without struggle, repression and setbacks — but it was not ruled out. It could happen and it did happen. And otherwise the Marxist policy would have been a nonsense.

A specific repressive and terribly reactionary regime is inseparable from Stalinism. Economic development was separable from the often repressive early capitalism regimes because the exploitation of the working class did not rest on its loyal status but on economic (market) transactions and the bourgeois ownership of the means of production. Stalinist economic development is inseparable from totalitarian oppression of the working class: the economics are not separable from the regime, and to opt for one is necessarily to opt for both. The surplus product is not seized primarily through market transactions, both via the wine-press grip of the bureaucracy. For this reason, the analogy with the capitalist development of the means of production is a piece of monstrous Stalinist nonsense.

THE SWEEP OF HISTORY

But in the broad sweep of history is it not true that the development of industry lays the basis for progress? In the broad sweep, yes — on condition that the working class liberates itself and seizes the control of the means of pro-

duction from the hands of the bureaucracy.

But politics is necessarily concerned with a more immediate, sharper focus. In that focus the idea that the suppression (and slaughter, deportation, etc, which has been the stock-in-trade of the Stalinist bureaucracy ruling the USSR), is a detail in the broad sweep of history, is a monstrous anti-Trotskyist nonsense.

It loses the viewpoint of the *militant* who stands with the working class and with oppressed peoples, trying to organise them to make themselves the subjects of history, not its passive objects, in favour of the viewpoint of the historian/"prophet", the man in the ivory tower.

An entirely different set of values, priorities, concerns and considerations belong to the *militants* compared with the philosophers in the watch-towers. Of course Marxist *militants* inform their work with the general historical considerations. They do not allow them to override their goal of mobilising, organising, and rousing up the oppressed. They do not allow the goal of industrial development on the back of the masses to supplant the goal Trotsky outlines in the quotation at the beginning of this pamphlet.

In the Granite view of Afghanistan everything is eventually — and quickly — to be made right by the workers taking political power from the bureaucracy in Russia and elsewhere. Such a view is rational only on an analysis of Stalinism such as Trotsky's, which identifies the bureaucracy as being in fundamental contradiction with the basic socialised relations of production. (In the final analysis, that is because it is in fundamental contradiction with the working class).

Yet Grant presents a different picture: the bureaucracy (the Russian one or its would-be Afghan duplicate) is the bearer of a higher civilisation and will do for Afghanistan what capitalism did not Europe. The bureaucracy is at one, at least for a whole historical period, with the collectivised means of production, which for that epoch of history are "its" means of production.

The implication is inescapable that Stalinism, which has a progressive role in the backward countries, has had a progressive role in Russia too. We have been through, and are still in, an epoch of progressive Stalinism.

And it follows necessarily that — whatever tags we call them by — the Stalinist states are stable class societies, whose ruling group is not a usurping bureaucracy in contradiction to the property relations but a historically legitimate ruling class, whose role in history is to develop the forces of production. Grant, in fact, like Isaac Deutscher, is a Shachtmanite (bu-



After the Russians withdrew, Afghan cities were still under attack from the mujahedin-controlled rural areas

reaucratic collectivist) disguised within the verbiage of Trotsky's theory, and placing a plus sign of appreciation against the new class society between capitalism and socialism, while Shachtman placed a minus sign, calling it barbarism,

In that perspective, it is not clear why the working-class political revolution against Stalinism in Russia should be on the order of the day now, or even on the agenda of the next epoch at all.

DEFENCE OF THE USSR

But doesn't the Trotskyist commitment to defence of the USSR against imperialism necessarily imply support for the armies of the USSR in Afghanistan? No.

Defencism is fundamentally a position against imperialism, against according it any progressive role, or allowing it to strengthen itself, against looking to anyone but the working class to deal with the bureaucracy, against allowing imperialism once again to feed off the areas taken out of its control in the USSR and later the other Stalinist states.

The remnants of the conquests of October are defended against imperialism despite the monstrous totalitarianism that is grafted onto them.

Already in 1939-40 Trotsky and his comrades declared: "We were and remain against the seizure of new territories by the Kremlin". The experience since then has vindicated and reinforced this position one hundredfold: in an advanced capitalist country like Czechoslovakia with a mass labour movement and a mass Communist Party (a real party, not a ruling apparatus created by the Russians), Russian control meant the annihilation of the labour movement.

Trotsky's view, in fact, was that the property relations were potentially progressive. Imperialism should not be allowed to destroy that progressive potential, but working class revolution was necessary to realise the potential. "In order that nationalised property in the occupied areas as well as in the USSR become a basis for genuinely progressive, that is to say socialist development, it is necessary to overthrow the Moscow bureaucracy" (Trotsky). The USSR "as a whole" — property relations plus bureaucratic tyranny — was a reactionary force.

Trotsky and his comrades categorically repudiated and denounced the "pro-Soviet" propaganda of the professional

friends of the Soviet Union — among them long-time Fabian enemies of Marxism in Britain like the Webbs and Shaw. The Trotskyists did not indulge in propaganda about the wonders worked by the nationalised economy, because they knew that would imply a shamefaced endorsement of "socialism in one country".

Of course, we supported the Vietnamese, for example, against imperialism, despite the Stalinist leadership. In the case of Afghanistan there is nothing to support but a very isolated Stalinist middle-class leadership, and the brutal extension of Kremlin power.

To say that the overthrow of already established nationalised property by imperialist intervention is reactionary and should be resisted is one thing. It is another to support the Russian bureaucracy against the people of an invaded country. We say to imperialism: hands off Afghanistan. We can't, or we should not, say that to the people of Afghanistan.

The view that Stalinist collectivism contains progressive or potentially progressive elements compared to imperialism or imperialist-backed alternatives is one thing. To slip from that into the view that the Stalinist regime is progressive even while it atomises and oppresses the working class and the plebeian population, is another. That is to accept the bureaucracy as the protagonist of history — for the "next stage". It is a reactionary and elitist position. No wonder Woods finds himself talking about the "dark masses" of Afghanistan.

TROTSKY ON FINLAND AND POLAND

Many would-be Trotskyists think that Trotsky supported Stalin's expansion into Poland and Finland in 1939-40, and sometimes they cite this as authority for supporting the USSR in Afghanistan.

Nothing of the sort is true. Trotsky denounced Stalin's expansion, but also argued that the whole issue had to be seen in the context of the world war then in progress, in which attempts by imperialism to crush the USSR were certain in the very short term. He regarded Finland as an outpost of Anglo-French imperialism.

In addition, Trotsky argued that revolutionaries must recognise that the Russian Army was likely to stimulate revolutionary struggle which the Stalinists would use against the Polish and Finnish ruling class — and then strangle. Revolu-

tionaries should support any such independent working-class and poor-peasant-mobilisation, and align themselves with it. They should at the same time try to warn the workers and peasants against the Stalinist Russian state and all its instruments, as deadly enemies. They should immediately fight for political independence from the Stalinists — and prepare to fight them with guns.

It was a policy for the orientation of revolutionaries in a situation where (Trotsky assumed) the "Red" Army still had a revolutionary prestige and authority with Polish workers and peasants, and with the oppressed Ukrainians in Poland — where its call to seize land, etc could be expected to evoke responses of a revolutionary sort. Nothing like that can be even imagined in Afghanistan. The Russians alienated even former supporters of the PDP.

And, as far as I know, Trotsky's assumptions about Eastern Poland and Finland were seriously mistaken. (He was starved of information). Even in 1939 the "Red" Army's power to rouse revolutionary action was minimal. Its power to kill off Poles was much greater. Between one million and 1.5 million Poles were deported to make Poland safe for Stalin. (The Poles numbered five million out of 13 million in Eastern Poland, the rest being Ukrainians and White Russians: unknown numbers of these went the way of the million and more Poles).

Trotsky partly acknowledged his mistake (see *In Defence of Marxism*). And in any case he did not hesitate to describe the fate of the people of East Poland, in so far as they were subjugated by the "Red" Army, as that of becoming "the semi-slaves of Stalin".

Where is the analogy in Afghanistan? World War 3 is not in progress. And *Militant* is supporting no mass movement, but the implied "promise" of nationalisations and agrarian reform which are to be carried out by a totalitarian state once it has imposed itself by force against the resistance of the people of Afghanistan.

Where *Militant* parts company with Marxism is clear at this point: they do not relate to the working class and its struggles and interests.

The Stalinist "revolution" will impose a savagely oppressive regime, which will destroy and continually uproot any elements of a labour movement. To go from the clear and simple idea of "defencism" — that the conquest of the Stalinist states

by imperialism and their return to capitalism would be reactionary and should be opposed by socialists — to go from that to support for the conquest and hoped-for transformation of Afghanistan is to travel light-years away from revolutionary socialism.

It is to take up residence on the grounds of Stalinism. It is to accommodate to the existing Stalinist bureaucracy with the “perspective” (i.e. passive confidence) that after the totalitarian “stage” will come a better stage.

BLOODBATH

Finally the supporters of Russia's conquest of Afghanistan have the fall-back argument: if the Russians go, there will be a bloodbath.

This argument was used intensely by the Mandelites and the SWP-USA in 1980; then they changed their minds and forgot about it.

In 1980 the short answer was: If the Russians stay there will be a bloodbath. There has been a bloodbath, and the bloody colonial war continues.

The argument always was and is now thoroughly dishonest. It is also incompletely stated. The complete version would say, and not just imply — a bloodbath of PDP people and collaborators with the Russians.

This is not a humanitarian objection, but taking sides with the Russians and their supporters. It is a variant of the idea that it is better if the Russians do what the PDP/army aspirant bureaucrats could not do — subjugate the population and make a Stalinist “revolution”.

That has to be argued for and justified politically. For how many of the Afghans will the Russians shoot? Or napalm, or bury in the ruins of villages bombed for reprisal? And why is such a brutal transformation by conquest necessary?

Why should it not be what the majority of the peoples of Afghanistan want that occurs? Even if assimilation by the USSR is ultimately desirable, as *Militant* says, why can't this area wait until the majority of its own population decides to fight for social change, or until a socialist revolution in other countries makes it possible to attract its people to the work of transforming their own country? From the point of view of the

international socialist revolution, there is no reason why not.

LESSER EVIL?

Something basic is involved in the bloodbath argument. It is impossible to work out a serious independent working-class political assessment on the basis of such gun-to-head questions as: do you want the right-wing Muslim reactionaries to triumph? Yes or no?

In any acute situation where a large revolutionary working-class movement does not exist, the gun-to-head appeal to responsibility, humanitarianism, and the lesser evil can almost always be counterposed to an independent working-class political assessment. For example, in 1969 when the British army was deployed to stop sectarian fighting in Derry and Belfast, enormous pressure was generated to support the use of the troops, or refrain from opposing their use, on the ground that they had probably saved Catholic lives and that Catholics had welcomed them. No doubt they did save Catholic lives, and certainly Catholics welcomed them, including the Republicans.

A lot of socialists succumbed to the pressure. The SWP (then IS) did. The small minority at the September 1969 IS conference who resisted and called for opposition to the British imperialist troops were met with hysterical denunciations and slandered as “fascists” who “wanted a bloodbath”. Yet it was those Marxists who refused to be panicked or to abandon their understanding of Britain's role in Ireland who had the better grasp of reality.

But then, Ted Grant might say, it was plainly a matter of a reactionary imperialist army. And in Afghanistan... it is a matter of the thoroughly reactionary anti-working-class army of the Russian bureaucracy.

If the Russians withdraw it might well prove to be the case that the final result of the strange episode of the seizure of power by the putschist PDP/army “bureaucratic revolutionaries” would be a massacre of PDP supporters (though presumably most of them would leave with the withdrawing army). That would be a tragedy.

But it cannot follow that because of this, Marxist socialists should abandon their programmatic opposition to the expansion of the area under Kremlin control, or should abandon the

idea that the consolidation of a Stalinist regime in Afghanistan would be a defeat for the working class.

We cannot abandon independent working-class politics for the lesser evil — for the PDP and the supporters of the Russians — in a situation which the putsch, the policy of the PDP/army, and the Russian invasion has created for them. They are not, to quote Trotsky, the inspectors general of history.

POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE

The political independence of the working class, and in the pioneering place the political independence of the Marxists, is the to-be-or-not-to-be question for socialism — independence from the bourgeoisie, from the labour bureaucracy, and from the totalitarian state bureaucracies of the Stalinist states. This is the immediate political question for people who may take *Militant's* pro-Stalinist line on Afghanistan for Marxism.

While *Militant* is unlikely to influence events in Afghanistan, it does influence people in Britain (and perhaps elsewhere). It influences them away from independent working class politics and towards the role of cheerleaders for the “progressive” Stalinists in Afghanistan.

For more than five years now *Militant* has supported the USSR's attempt to subjugate the Afghan peoples by way of a murderous colonial war. In Afghanistan and in relation to Afghanistan *Militant* has abandoned the basic commitment to working-class political independence, as well as the Trotskyist programme.

Militant insists that the proper role for socialist militants is to line up firmly with one of the international counter-revolutionary blocs. It deplores the lack of class consciousness and failure to relate properly to the “major” contradiction of our time on the part of the British CP because it does not support the Russian invasion. *Militant* even criticised the Tribunites, as we say, for not basing themselves on the actual relations between the great powers!

Even the most wretched of the left reformist currents is too independent for “Labour's Marxist Voice”.

Part IV: Afghanistan: Defend the cities!

For nine years, the army and air force of the bureaucratic ruling class of the Soviet Union waged a brutal war of conquest against the peoples of Afghanistan.

They napalmed villages and burned the crops in the fields. They devastated the countryside, wrecked the primitive economy, and drove as many as five million refugees — one quarter of the entire population — over the borders into Pakistan and Iran. Yet they never even came near conquering the people.

Western military experts calculated that a full conquest would have taken at least three times as many as the 100,000 soldiers and flyers whom the Brezhnev regime committed to Afghanistan. They would have had to slaughter a large part of the population and terrorise the rest. Unprepared for an imperialist operation on that scale, the Kremlin made murderous but inconclusive war for a decade. Now [1989] it withdraws its army and air force. Why?

Essentially because Gorbachev wants to concentrate resources for the drive to modernise the economy. The new ruler, the reforming Tsar, wants to liquidate the costly blunder made by his predecessor, and he can even admit that it was a “mistake”. Pulling out the USSR's army is also a useful gesture in USSR-US diplomacy. But the withdrawal of the Russian army leaves the native Afghan forces of progress and modernisation in dire straits.

Those fighting the Russian occupation were always backward-looking and reactionary. But the fact that the big majority of the people of Afghanistan are medieval in their thinking does not cancel out their right to self-determination. It could not justify the Russian invasion, nor make progressive the bureaucratic state-monopoly system they fought to establish.

When the overwhelming majority of the people of Afghanistan fought to drive out the Russians, they were entitled to the support of all socialists. Now that the Russians have gone, the question is posed differently. The question now is what attitude we take to a civil war in Afghanistan — a civil war which is likely to be in large part a war between the cities and the countryside, between the men and women of the towns, with their relatively modern outlook, and the viciously reactionary and medieval forces which have been the

main organisers of Afghan resistance to Russian imperialism.

The question has to be posed like that, because no working class exists in Afghanistan strong enough to transform the situation. A similar civil war predated the Russian invasion. It was subsumed into the conflict between the USSR and the people of Afghanistan. In April 1978, the Afghan Stalinist party, the PDP, took power by way of a military coup. The Afghan air force and army officers who formed the core of the PDP believed that it was their mission to drag Afghanistan into the twentieth century.

Army officers in many underdeveloped countries have undertaken the same mission. The difference in Afghanistan was that the air force and army officers had, from the mid 50s, been trained and educated in the USSR. They took the USSR as their model of development.

The PDP was essentially an urban middle-class movement — and a movement of a middle class trying to turn itself into a state-monopoly bureaucracy. It could make a coup; lacking mass support, it could not make a revolution. When the government passed progressive laws against usurers and landlords and in favour of women, the landlords and the Muslim priests roused a large part of the countryside against them.

Similar things had happened in Europe at the time of the French Revolution, with the Catholic countryside roused against the Jacobin towns in Belgium and France — except, that in Europe the forces of progress were strong, and in Afghanistan the Stalinist middle class was feeble. The PDP regime responded with savage violence against the people of the countryside. The air force was dropping napalm on rebel villages within weeks of the coup.

In the subsequent 20 months the reactionary opposition to the regime grew and spread. At the same time the PDP tore itself apart in faction-fighting. By December 1979 the Russians became convinced that their client regime would be overthrown unless they intervened.

The Russians invaded, purged the PDP, and set out to conquer the country. They failed. Muslim reaction became much stronger. At the end the Russians had a grip only on the towns, and that an insecure one. They leave a native government in power which, though well-armed, is far weaker than its predecessor which the Russians replaced in December 1979.

The Muslim reactionaries have been subjected for over a decade to the napalming war of the Russians and their Afghan allies. They have good reason to be vindictive. Large-scale massacres of the townspeople are certain if the Mujahedeen conquer the cities.

One issue alone is sufficient to indicate that socialists should take sides in this horror, and tell us which side we should take: the position of women. In the towns some — middle-class — women have escaped the inhuman bondage decreed for women by Islamic fundamentalism. They will be slaughtered, and all women in Afghanistan thrown back to the Dark Ages, if the Mujahedeen win.

Before the Russian invasion — as we wrote in 1980 — socialists in Afghanistan would have had to give critical support to specific measures of the regime, though in no sense could they have supported the regime as such. It would have been necessary to fight for the class independence of the tiny working class; to fight to dismantle and destroy the state apparatus; to criticise and expose the brutal military-bureaucratic methods of the regime as both counter-productive in relation to the reforms and expressive of the class character of the regime.

Socialists would have faced the repression of the one-party PDP-Army regime. But they would have directed their fire against the reaction; and in that sense only would have “supported” the PDP-Army regime, while maintaining political and if possible military independence from it and striving to overthrow it.

Now that the Russians have gone, the same basic arguments hold. The main enemy is the Muslim-landlord reaction. Tragically, it looks very much as if the result of the decade of Russian occupation is to make certain the victory of the Islamic medievalists.

The years of the Russian-conducted bloodbath are likely to be crowned by the slaughter of most of the people who form the elements of a modern society in Afghanistan.

There is little or nothing that socialists in the West can do about it — except understand the unfolding tragedy, and tell ourselves the truth about the why and how of it.

22 February 1989



Civilisation, backwardness and liberation

What is the attitude of Marxists to “backward” and “underdeveloped” countries and peoples who are being assaulted, occupied, or colonised by a more advanced but predatory civilisation?

No-one expressed it so clearly and so forcefully as Leon Trotsky:

“What characterises Bolshevism on the national question is that in its attitude to oppressed nations, even the most backward, it considers them not only the object but also the subject of politics. Bolshevism does not confine itself to recognising their ‘rights’ and parliamentary protests against the trampling upon of those rights.

“Bolshevism penetrates into the midst of the oppressed nations; it raises them up against their oppressors; it ties up their struggle with the struggle of the proletariat in advanced countries; it instructs the oppressed Chinese, Hindus or Arabs in the art of insurrection, and it assumes full responsibility for their work in the face of “civilised” executioners.

“Here only does Bolshevism begin, that is, revolutionary Marxism in action. Everything that does not step over that boundary remains centrism”. (What Next, 1932).

The opposite idea, that socialists should adopt a disdainful, elitist attitude to those peoples and stand aside in neutrality when they fight to free themselves from the grip of “civilised” robbers, has been typical of the right wing of the socialist and labour movement — of such right-wingers in the Second International (1889-1914) as the British Fabians, for example.

When the Communist International was founded, in 1919, one of its conditions of membership was that communists in imperialist countries actively help insurgents in countries occupied by “their own” government. At the new International’s Third Congress in 1921 about the Irish war of independence — in which the Catholics of the least-developed and proverbially “priest-ridden” parts of Ireland fought British occupying forces — Karl Radek spoke for the entire Comintern leadership when he told British Communists they should be judged not by the good resolutions they passed, but by the number of them arrested for giving practical help to the Irish fighters against Britain.

In France, in 1923-4, the Communist Party organised a tremendous campaign against the French war in Morocco to suppress Muslim tribesmen who had rebelled against French rule, the Riffs.

The International had no time for ifs, buts or hesitations on this question. The manifesto of the Second Congress, in 1920, written by Leon Trotsky, put it like this:

“The British Socialist who fails to support by all possible means the uprisings in Ireland, Egypt and India against the London plutocracy — such a socialist deserves to be branded with infamy, if not with a bullet”.

The Russian invasion of Afghanistan at Christmas 1979 posed this question anew — and in a complicated form for those who regarded the USSR as still, despite the rule of the Stalinist autocracy there, some variant of (degenerated) working-class state, or at least historically progressive.

The Russians and the quisling puppet regime they maintained in Kabul fought a typical colonial war with typical imperialist methods. The Afghans fighting the invaders were, in outlook and social attitudes, a thousand years behind those

who were throwing napalm, bombs, rockets and bullets at them. They were thoroughly reactionary. The Russians — like the British in Africa and India and Catholic Ireland — were far more advanced than those who fought them.

And for those who bought into the fiction that Russia represented some variant of socialism, or transition to socialism, “civilisation” here was also “socialism”. Whose side were we on?

For all the organisations of “orthodox” post-Trotsky Trotskyism, with the exception of the forerunner of AWL, the answer was at first clear-cut: they backed the Russians, some very reluctantly, others with pixillated, ideology-drunk, enthusiasm.

For example, a minority segment of the Mandelbrite “Fourth International” hailed the Russians for “going to the aid of a revolution” in Afghanistan. With the exception of a big minority in their French organisation, the LCR, the rest of the “Fourth International” backed the Russians too, more shamefacedly, until 1982.

Militant (now the Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal) and the Thornett group (now zig-zagged into Socialist Resistance) continued to back the Russians all through their nine-year war.

In that war, one and a half million Afghans were killed — one in twelve of a population of about 18 million — and six million driven out into refugee camps on Afghanistan’s borders (from which the Taliban later emerged). In a magazine article in 1980, dealing with those who are now in the Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal, I pointed out that the pro-Russians, though they thought they were being very revolutionary and anti-imperialist (against Western imperialism), were in the same political and moral position as the right wing of the Second International — “arrogant champion[s] of the civilising mission of the army of the Russian bureaucracy” with “the arguments of Fabian imperialism — all the way to the explicit paternalist description of the Afghan masses as necessarily the mere objects of someone else’s boot and bayonet in history”.

I am reminded of all this by the antics of the *Weekly Worker*, the hybrid right-left paper published by a couple of dozen people who modestly call themselves “the Communist Party of Great Britain”. During Russia’s “Vietnam war” the group were Stalinists who thought that Afghanistan had become a socialist state in 1978, when the tiny Afghan Stalinist party (perhaps 2000 strong) used pro-Russian officers to organise a military coup. They fervently backed the Russians as the representatives of “socialist” civilisation against backward tribespeople.

The Weekly Worker’s current account of the issue omits all reference to their old all-defining view about “socialism” in Afghanistan, but holds on to their old conclusions. They invoke the Second Comintern Congress to justify it!

While the Comintern backed all anti-imperialist movements, it instructed the communists in countries fighting for national liberation to maintain strict political independence from petty-bourgeois or bourgeois forces on their own side. And especially, the Congress theses stressed, “the need to combat pan-Islamism and similar trends which strive to combine the liberation movement against European and American imperialism with an attempt to strengthen the positions of the

khans, landlords, mullahs, etc.”

The *Weekly Worker* understands from this that in a conflict between imperialist invaders and backward Muslims the Communist International advocated neutrality, or siding with “civilising” imperialists — as they themselves did in Afghanistan. In other words, they attribute to the Communist International the attitudes of the right wing of the Second International.

They confuse the political and social attitudes of communists to political Islamists within oppressed countries with our attitude as between such forces and imperialist invaders! The example of French Communist opposition to France’s Riff war shows how wrong this is.

The Weekly Worker loves such iconography as the hammer and sickle emblem. They cling to fetish-words like “Communist”. Here they have the politics of the right wing of the Second International.

They are even more ridiculous, however, in British politics now.

AWL and the SWP are in dispute about the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB, British wing of the biggest Islamist party of the Arab world, the Muslim Brotherhood). AWL argues that socialists should keep a severe distance from MAB: the SWP made it co-sponsor of the recent one million strong anti-war demonstration. Still justifying their support for Russian imperialism in Afghanistan because the majority of Afghans were backward Muslims, over MAB the *Weekly Worker* is firmly on the SWP’s side.

Like the proverbial man who put on a heavy coat when the sun was shining and took it off when it started to rain, the citizens of the CPGB think it good to back a savage imperialism when it burns Muslim children, women and men with napalm — because the victims were “backward” Muslims — and also good to hold hands politically with Islamist reactionaries in Britain, entering a political popular front with them.

Where their political and social attitudes should for us have no weight at all — when a people, Muslim, Catholic or whatever, is fighting against foreign enslavement — there, they side with the enslavers because the Islamists are too backward for freedom. Where, as in Britain now, it is a matter of choosing political affinities and alliances — then they insist that Islamist politics don’t matter at all. Accommodation to the SWP rules, OK!

For our part we are uncompromisingly against political Islam as a world outlook. We combat it by reason and argument. We back the secularists of Islamic origin in combatting it within the Islamic communities. But we will defend the people of Islamist outlook against persecutors, racists and bigots, in East London or in Afghanistan.

The weird combination of reiterated support for imperialist invaders in Afghanistan, because the people were Islamist, with political indifference to the Muslim Brotherhood in Britain now, is a prize example of the incoherence of this peculiar political formation and of the very peculiar people who control it.

Appendix: Ted Grant and Marxism

By Sean Matgamna and Martin Thomas

When the Russians invaded Afghanistan In December 1979, almost every “orthodox Trotskyist” group in the world supported them, or at any rate refused to call for their withdrawal.

Some were wildly enthusiastic for a while. A big part of the so-called “United Secretariat of the fourth International”, grouped around the Socialist Workers’ Party of the USA, hailed the Russians as “going to the aid of the Afghan revolution”. Even those who had a more balanced view refused to call for the Russians to get out. Over the years most of the Trotskyism changed their minds and started to call for withdrawal. *Militant* was an exception. *Socialist Organiser* was very much in the minority when he insisted at the beginning that socialists should call for immediate Russian withdrawal. The tragedy, as yet unfinished, that engulfed Afghanistan, shows who was right; and it would have been a worse tragedy, in its human consequences, if the Russians had decided to commit themselves to full-scale conquest. Those, like *Militant*, who supported the Russians need to give an honest account of themselves on this question. They looked to the Russian bureaucracy to “make a revolution” — against the entire population of Afghanistan. Logically they should now denounce the Russians for betraying that revolution. So far they have tried to square their circle by claiming that the Russians are withdrawing from Afghanistan victorious — but how long can that delusion last?

Militant won’t give an account of themselves. The reason why they repeat the self-same errors over and over again is that they don’t want to learn. Delusions are more comfortable than the bitter truth.

RULES

Nevertheless, Trotsky was right when he wrote: “To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; to be true in little things as in big ones... these are the rules” of Marxist revolutionaries.

As far as I know there are two central documents putting forward Grant’s position. The first, the 15,000-word-long “The Colonial Revolution and the Sino-Soviet Dispute” was written in 1964. In fact it has little to do with Sino-Soviet dispute of the early 60s, and is a general statement of Grant’s view of the colonial revolution — that is, of Grant’s variant of the views common to himself and others in the early-60s Pablo-Mandel “International Secretariat of the Fourth International”.

This document is the major single item in a big collection put out for supporters of *Militant* in 1974 under the title “The Colonial Revolution”.

The second central document was written 14 years later. It is the article “The Colonial Revolution and the Deformed Workers States” already referred to, in *Militant International Review*, summer 1978.

I will analyse the main ideas in both articles. The second offers an opportunity for Grant to check what he wrote on the same subject 14 years earlier against the facts. We’ll see what he makes of it.

In the early 60s Algeria, Cyprus, most the French and British colonies in Africa, and Malaya all won independence — some of them after long and bloody struggles. The Cuban revolution had triumphed in 1959. In Algeria and in other Third World countries — notably in Iraq, in Egypt and in Syria — there had been substantial nationalisations and land reforms carried through by radical-nationalist military-based regimes.

Generally the working class in the advanced capitalist countries was quiet, though there had been a general strike in Belgium in 1960-1.

The dominant notion in the Pablo-Mandel mainstream of the Trotskyist movement was that the “world revolution” was “on the rise”, but its “epicentre” was in the underdeveloped countries. Many would-be Trotskyists developed all sorts of illusions in this “revolutionary process”. Pablo hailed the Ben Bella leadership of the National Liberation Front in Algeria as genuine revolutionary socialists; Juan Posadas, who took a large number of its Latin American members out of the ISFI in 1962, was wildly enthusiastic about the Maoist current generated by the Chinese-USSR dispute of the early 60s, arguing that Mao’s verbal leftism really reflected his (Posadas’) ideas.



What were the realities of Mao's China?

The whole ISFI did not yet call for a political revolution in China. In 1963 it united with the SWP-USA (which did call for a political revolution in China) on the basis of an evasive formula about the changes needed in China.

What did Grant make of it all? He accepted the notion that a process of world revolution was going on; accepted that systems like China’s were its lawful products, greeted them; yet dourly portrayed them as totally repressing the working class.

After World War Two, says Grant, Stalinism was strengthened “temporarily for a whole historical period”. Yet the world revolution was still going on. What did this strengthened Stalinism mean for it?

“In... history... there have been many methods of class rule... In a period where the revolution (apart from Czechoslovakia) has taken place in backward or undeveloped countries, distortions, even monstrous distortions in the nature of the state created by the revolution are inevitable” so long as the metropolitan countries remain capitalist.

“The malignant power of the state and the uncontrolled rule of the privileged layers in the Soviet Union has served as a model for ‘Socialism’ in these countries”.

Bourgeois Bonapartism is a form of rule where the state rises above society “only in the last analysis directly reflecting the propertied classes because of the defence of private property on which it is based”. Not only the bourgeoisie can have aberrant forms of rule. “The proletariat is not a ‘sacred cow’ to which analogous processes cannot take place”, says Grant elegantly.

Thus “proletarian Bonapartism”: “The State raises itself above society and becomes a tool of the bureaucracy in its various forms, Military, Police, Party, ‘Trade Union’ and Managerial” which is the “privileged” and “sole commanding” stratum. “In the transition from capitalist society to Socialism the form of the economy can only be State Ownership of the means of production, with the organisation of production on the basis of a plan.”

And this state ownership, and a plan of some sort, are for Grant necessarily a workers’ state, whatever the political dynamics — though “Only the democratic control of the workers and peasants can guarantee such a transition [to socialism]. That is why Political Revolution in these countries is inevitable before workers’ democracy is instituted as an indispensable necessity if the state is to ‘wither away’, but such ‘transition regimes’ can only be deformed workers’ states — because the economy of these states is based on nationalisation of the means of production — the operation of the economy on the basis of a plan.”

So “monstrous distortions” are inevitable in “the state created by the revolution”, because of backwardness and the strength of Stalinism. But what is the motive force of this revolution?

“The explanation for the way in which the revolution is developing in the colonial countries lies in the delay and even over-ripeness of the revolution in the West, on the one side,

and the deformation of the revolution in Russia and China on the other side. At the same time it is impossible to continue on the old lines and the old pattern of social relations. If, from a historical point of view, the bourgeoisie has exhausted its social role in the metropolitan capitalist countries... it is even more incapable of rising to the tasks posed by history in the colonial areas of the world.

“The rotten bourgeoisie of the East and the nascent bourgeoisie of Africa are quite incapable of rising to the tasks solved long ago by the bourgeoisie in the West. Meanwhile, the bourgeois-democratic and national revolution in the colonial areas cannot be stayed. The rise in national consciousness in all these areas imperatively demands a solution to the tasks posed by the pressure of the more developed countries of the West.

“Thus we see the same process at one pace or another, in all the colonial countries. At the moment, the process is becoming marked in the Arab countries, which have been in a state of ferment for the last decade... The monotony with which such tendencies appear in all these countries is striking...”

“The bourgeoisie is so weak and impotent that they are incapable of resistance. The officer caste which carried out the revolution [in Egypt], with the sympathy and support of the masses undeniably, did so because there was no perspective of modern development for the nation under the old system. There are no forces capable of resisting such change. Imperialism is too weak... The bourgeois system in these areas is so effete and prematurely decayed that it can offer no perspective of development...”

“Under conditions of slump, there will be a veritable landslide in Asia, Africa and Latin America in the direction of social revolution, in this peculiar form... There are no forces of resistance in the old system in these countries. Thus the magnificent movement of history takes place on the peripheral weak links of the capitalist system. All mankind in a sense benefits from these changes. But it would be a horrible betrayal to see in these regimes, the authentic visage of Socialism”.

Thus the motive force of revolution is defined more negatively than positively. Negatively, it is the decay and impasse of the old order. Positively, it is nothing more precise than the needs of “development”, the tasks posed by history, “the magnificent movement of history”.

“In the process of the permanent revolution”, writes Grant, “the failure of the bourgeoisie to solve the problems of the capitalist democratic revolution under the conditions of the capitalist society of modern times is pushing towards revolutionary victory”. Pushing whom? Towards a revolution made by whom?

The theory of distorted permanent revolution here is peculiar. Trotsky talked of the bourgeoisie in underdeveloped countries being tied to the landlord class and to imperialism, and being afraid of the mobilisation of the working class, and therefore not fighting seriously for bourgeois democracy. The

working class in those countries could therefore take the lead in the fight for bourgeois-democratic measures like land reform, civil liberties, national independence. In that sense one class — the working class — would carry out the historic tasks of another, the bourgeoisie.

Grant also talks of one class carrying out the tasks of another. What he describes, however, is some force of no precise class identity coming forward to substitute for a historic class. Sometimes — as in the passage above — this “proletarian Bonapartist” force is described as substituting for the bourgeoisie. In nationalising industry, however, it is deemed to be substituting for the working class.

CHINA

The Chinese Revolution was “next to the Russian Revolution, the greatest event in human history” — “as the document of the RCP [the British Trotskyist group in the 1940s, in which Grant played a leading role] proclaimed in advance”, adds Grant proudly.

“The Chinese Revolution unfolded as a peasant war... led by ex-Marxists. Thus as in Eastern Europe the revolution from the beginning assumed a Bonapartist character, with the classical instrument of Bonapartism, the peasant army”.

Why didn’t the Maoists fuse with the bourgeoisie, as Trotsky had expected? “Because on the road of capitalist development there was no way forward for China”.

So the Maoists constructed “a strong Stalinist state in the image of Moscow”. “Just as bourgeois Bonapartism... in the last analysis defends the basis of the capitalist society, so in the same way, proletarian Bonapartism rests in the last analysis on the base created by the revolution, the nationalised economy”.

There is a curious logical trick here. The nationalised economy is “proletarian” because it is “created by the revolution”. But why is the revolution “proletarian”? Because it creates nationalised economy.

The assumption is either that nationalised economy is ipso facto proletarian, however created; or — by a mechanical interpretation of Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution — that no revolution in the modern world can be other than proletarian.

“The Stalinist leadership... where elements of proletarian action emerged spontaneously, met these with the execution of the leading participants”. But Grant is very optimistic about China. “The Chinese revolution solved all those problems which bourgeois society was incapable of solving.”

Grant presents the Chinese Communist Party and its army as no more than a negative imprint of the impotence of the Chinese bourgeoisie. Yet consider the history.

After the bulk of the old Communist Party was broken up and slaughtered by Chiang Kai Shek in the 1920s, a faction took to the countryside. Basing themselves on the peasants, they took power in Kaangsi province in 1931. Harassed there by Chiang Kai Shek, they went on a Long March to the remote north-west and set up a regional state power there.

The Maoists built an army, fought the Japanese invaders after 1937, and manoeuvred with the Chiang Kai Shek government, with which they entered into an alliance without ever surrendering to its control and putting themselves at Chiang’s mercy as the CP had done in the run-up to 1927. All the time they built up and conserved their strength. After 1946 they then fought a three-year civil war.

The Mao leadership was not a mere shadow of the pressures and forces around it. Its ideas and models were Stalinist, but nevertheless it was a conscious, active force whose deliberate and calculated efforts transformed its environment.

Grant fades all this out of the picture. At the same time he vastly exaggerates the impasse of Chinese society.

Of course China was backward. The bourgeoisie and the landlords were corrupt. The Chiang Kai Shek regime was rotten and incompetent. But societies do not just come to a line marked: “Dead end — wait here for a deliverer”. If the Maoists had not mobilised, manoeuvred, and fought, then Chinese society would have continued in a different way. If what has happened in the non-Stalinist colonial world since the 1940s is any guide, and it must be, it would have developed substantially on a different, capitalist, basis.

The conscious factor was central in China and Cuba in securing one result, and equally central in Egypt or Syria in securing another. But Grant reduces it to naught by way of crude distortions of reality and the method of vulgar materialism. He sees politics as a mere impress of economic trends. Where Marx wrote “Men make history, but under circumstances not determined by themselves”, he might write “Circumstances make history, but with men not chosen by themselves”. This vulgar materialism diminishes both the conscious role of political formations in history, and the importance of any other criterion than nationalisations for a workers’ state.

“PROLETARIAN BONAPARTISM”?

Grant uses a very mechanical, indeed mystical, determinism, according to which “needs of economic development” make history almost regardless of human activity.

“All history”, he writes, “has demonstrated that the peasantry by its very nature... can never play the dominant role... It can support either the proletariat or the bourgeoisie. Under modern conditions it can support the proletarian Bonapartist leaders or ex-leaders of the proletariat. However, in so doing, a distortion of the revolution is inevitable... on the lines of a military-police state”.

But what are these proletarian Bonapartist leaders themselves, positively? Grant’s answer: they are what the nationalised property they create makes them.

He underlines his point: “The most striking thing to demonstrate the correctness of this thesis is the events in Iraq. The Communist Party, through its cowardly opportunism and the policy of Khrushchev not to disturb the imperialists in this area, failed to take advantage of the revolutionary situation provoked by the fall of the old regime [in 1955]... Nevertheless the Kassem regime... was preparing measures of nationalisation. The recent [1963] coup of the army took place to prevent these measures. But now... this very caste... has itself now announced measures of nationalisation, which embrace all important industry and the banks”.

The Aref regime formed after 1963 did indeed nationalise most industry in Iraq. But for Grant the political events he describes do not show the state-capitalist nature of those nationalisations. On the contrary: they show that “the process” is so strong that even if the Stalinists are defeated, even if the radical nationalists are in turn defeated, still the makers of “the counter-revolutionary coup” will willy-nilly become instruments of Proletarian Bonapartism.

From one side the impasse of capitalism pushed society willy-nilly towards proletarian Bonapartism. From the other side — for Grant — the backwardness of the Third World, coupled with the existence of the USSR and the survival of capitalism in the metropolises, makes proletarian Bonapartism inevitable.

Other Trotskyists in the same international tendency (Pablo-Mandel) that Grant was then in had great, exaggerated, somewhat fantastic hopes that the Algerian revolution would deepen and follow Cuba. They saw Cuba as a relatively healthy workers’ state; and indeed then and until late 1960s Cuba was far from being a hardened Stalinist state as it is today.

No such hopes or aspirations for Grant. He expresses hard, fatalistic conviction that the wave of the future can only be decades of deformed, totalitarian workers’ states.

“Beginning as a national revolutionary war against colonial oppression, Algeria finds itself in an impasse. On the lines of capitalist society, there can be no solution of its problems. With the result, step by step, that Ben Bella and the FLN are being pushed in the direction of a ‘Socialist solution’...”

This will be “a Stalinist dictatorship of the familiar model”. There is no other possibility whatsoever.

“Even the victory of a Marxist Party, with the knowledge and understanding of the process of deformation and degeneration of Russia, China and other countries, would not be sufficient to prevent the deformation of the revolution on Stalinist lines, given the present relationship of world forces.

“Revolutionary victory in backward countries, such as Algeria, under present conditions, whilst constituting a tremendous victory for the world revolution and the world proletariat... cannot but be on the lines of a totalitarian Stalinist state”.

The only Third World countries for which any other possibility is even hinted at are India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) — and, in another passage, South Africa.

“In India and Ceylon... with a developed proletariat, it is possible that the bourgeois democratic revolution could be transformed into the Socialist revolution... The installation of a Workers’ Democracy would be its crowning achievement.. However, in these countries... the firm establishment of a workers’ democracy could only be an episode to be followed by deformation, or counter-revolution, in the Stalinist form, if it was not followed in a relatively short historical period by the victory of the revolution in the advanced capitalist countries”.

Then it hardly matters very much if Third World revolutions are immediately Stalinist; it saves time and energy for all concerned. The situation in Algeria — where the possibility of a workers’ democracy emerging was indeed slight in 1964 — is made to stand for the whole Third World. The proletariat has been dropped from the whole calculation, the protagonist is the “proletarian Bonapartist” social formation gathered around the army, or the CP, or the Ba’ath party, or whatever, and the working class is fated to suffer “a totalitarian Stalinist state”.

Grant regrets the totalitarian suppression of the working class. He censures those Trotskyists who gloss up the Stalinist regimes. He looks forward to a political revolution at the next stage. But he is not impatient. For the spread of proletarian Bonapartism is part of the “magnificent movement of history” which is sure eventually to produce world socialism. On a world scale, “From the point of view of Marxism, no more favourable situation could be envisaged”.

But in this rosy perspective, Grant dismisses the working class entirely for the whole next stage of history in most of the world!

The working class has no role to play except to “support” the semi-automatic ascent of the alien social formations that Grant calls proletarian Bonapartism. The system that they must support is one in which the working class is to be mercilessly suppressed and denied all civil or political rights. No wonder Grant needs to tell himself again and again that this is nevertheless “a tremendous victory for the world revolution”.

What should the working class, or the socialists, in the countries where proletarian Bonapartism is the inevitable “next stage”, do? Bow down low before the imperious decree of history, as revealed by Ted Grant?

Before 1917 the great majority of the Russian Marxists were convinced that bourgeois society was the inevitable next stage for Russia. The Bolsheviks advocated that the working class should not tail the bourgeoisie, but should strive to do the job themselves, even to the point of forming a coalition government which would inevitably be short-lived. The Mensheviks thought that the revolution could be made only by coaxing and prodding the bourgeoisie to do it; but they said to workers — organise, defend yourselves, fight for liberty in the bourgeois republic.

And Grant? By definition workers’ self-defence is not allowed under proletarian Bonapartism. Any civil liberties would hinder the proletarian Bonapartists in their progressive work. So what can the workers do?

In fact, any worker or socialist who took Grant’s “perspectives” seriously would — if they did not despair and die — ... join the bureaucracy. There would be no shortage of ideological, political and historical rationalisations, after all, would there?

In his 1978 article — to anticipate — Grant is even clearer: “For a transition to a Bonapartist workers’ state such organs of workers’ democracy, indispensable for a healthy workers’ state, would be an enormous hindrance...”

Does Grant want the workers to be suppressed by the proletarian Bonapartists? Speaking of someone with 50 years as a would-be Trotskyist it is tempting to say: of course not. He has just not thought it through.

I’m not sure. Passages like this — which state a central truth about the Stalinist system — go ill with Grant’s fervent advocacy of the glories of proletarian Bonapartism. The contradictions are blurred by Grant’s stance of vast philosophical detachment, his sweeping perspectives in which the activity of the majority of the world’s working class is lost as a tiny detail in the “magnificent movement of history” — but they are there. Comrade Grant, you advocate and justify the system that you describe as “a one-party totalitarian state machine where the proletariat is helpless and atomised”. You recognise it as necessary, you greet it as progressive.

SOUTH VIETNAM & SOUTH KOREA

The second article was written 14 years after the first. A lot had happened in that period.

In 1964 Grant had written. “In Asia, the remorseless peasant war of liberation in Vietnam... is nearing success...” Be predicted confidently — as he would continue to do year after year — that the US would soon negotiate a compromise resulting in “a nationalist-Stalinist regime in Vietnam... independent of China, like Yugoslavia is independent of Russia”.

In 1965 the US started bombing North Vietnam, and built up its forces, previously small, to 125,000 men in Vietnam. By the end of 1966 it had 400,000 troops there. At the end of 1972, in eleven days it dropped a greater tonnage of bombs on Vietnam than the Allies dropped everywhere in the world in the whole of World War Two.

Finally, in 1975, the Vietnamese CP emerged victorious. The war had seriously shaken the whole economic and political structure of metropolitan capitalism.

In 1978 all Grant has to offer on Vietnam is a harangue on how events have confirmed his perspective, and how “The latest events in Indochina have served again to show the ridiculous contortions of the policies of all the sects...”

In 1964 Grant had compared South Korea to South Vietnam. “The American position in South Vietnam tomorrow in South Korea, is becoming untenable... The military police states in South Vietnam and South Korea and other areas of South-East Asia can only be compared to the rotting regime of Chiang Kai Shek in the period before the Second World War”.



Egyptian President Gamel Abdel Nasser

By 1978 South Korea had gone through probably the most rapid process of capitalist industrialisation ever seen anywhere. Industrial output there grew 17% per year in 1960-70, 13.6% per year in 1970-82. South Korea is now the second biggest shipbuilding nation in the capitalist world, and threatening to outstrip Japan.

Grant in 1978 comments: "There is no possibility of a consistent, uninterrupted and continuous increase in productive forces in the countries of the so-called Third World on a capitalist basis. Production stagnates or falls..."

True, any development of productive forces under capitalism will not be quite "uninterrupted and continuous". It will be spasmodic and uneven. But that is not the same as stagnation.

South Korea — where growth was much accelerated by the US's vast Vietnam war spending — is exceptional. But generally Third World capitalism has shown an elasticity which proves Grant's mechanical picture of society at a dead halt not only methodologically unsound but empirically ridiculous.

From the early 1960s manufacturing industry began to grow quite fast in the Third World. In 1960 the Third World made only 5% of the capitalist world's steel. By 1980 it produced 15%. Overall since 1950 manufacturing output in the Third World has grown around 6% per year, and output per head at around 3 to 4% per year. That average is twice as fast as the growth of British manufacturing industry in the 19th century.

In Mexico manufacturing output rose at an average of 8.5% per year in 1960-82. In Brazil, at 8% in 1970-82. In Kenya, a country specifically named by Grant as doomed to stagnation, at 8% per year in 1970-82. In Pakistan, again supposed to be absolutely static, at 6.5% per year in 1960-82. Great misery often goes with this growth; but it is not stagnation!

EGYPT AND SYRIA

In 1964 Grant had confidently seen Egypt as on the road to proletarian Bonapartism. In 1978 he has no comment. He hailed Syria as a workers' state in 1965 (in a document which is published in the collection *The Colonial Revolution*). In 1978 he repeats that assessment.

What is the reality?

The Economist Intelligence Unit reports as follows on Egypt:

"Under President Nasser, Egypt built up a dominant public sector of the economy. In the 50s banks, insurance, transport, major trading, mining and even agriculture were all brought under the overall control of the state. Regulated pricing, purchasing and profit margins were the order of the day.

"Over the next 20 years some valuable national assets were built up, particularly the iron, steel and other heavy industries. (Even today some 75% of industrial production comes

from the public sector). But growth tended to be sluggish. Wars with Israel depleted currency reserves; there was little domestic demand to stimulate the economy.

"In 1974 the new president, Sadat, decided to reverse the centralising economic policy of his predecessor. His law 43 of that year instigated *infatih*, the open door policy, and gave the green light to increase foreign and domestic private investment.

"The latter half of the 1970s saw some spectacular improvements in economic performance. Real GDP rose on an average of around 9% a year from 1974 to 1981. However it soon became apparent that much of the growth was being fuelled by four significant sources of revenue: oil sales, Suez Canal tolls, tourism receipts, and workers' remittances. The actual effect of the open door policy was fairly limited.

"Law 43 companies provided much needed stimulus to their Egyptian counterparts, particularly in banking".

And on Syria:

"Although President Rafez al Assad rules in the name of the Ba'ath party, Syria's economic system and political structure do not rigidly conform to Ba'athist ideals: indeed, the Assad regime's will to survive rather than the party doctrine is often the most important determinant of events. The private sector still plays an important part in most areas of the economy and a whole stratum of *nouveaux riches* has been allowed to develop. Its members tend to have strong links with the regime, often coming from the Alawite minority to which Assad himself belongs. Corruption and nepotism are rampant ...

"The foundations of a socialist economy were laid in the period of the first union with Egypt (1958-61), largely on the lines of President Nasser's own policies in Egypt, and have been consolidated by the Ba'ath party from 1963 onwards. The main measures implemented to change the structure of the economy were land reform and nationalisation of the major industries and financial institutions.

"In addition the government controls utilities, transport, communications and internal and external trade, and operates a wide-ranging system of price controls. Public investment predominates, but is largely funded by outside transfers.

"In Syria there is considerable but far from total central control over resource allocation and current operations in the productive sector of the economy. Much private enterprise remains, however, and has been actively encouraged in recent years.

"Of the total sum of £101.5 billion to be invested in the Fifth Plan (1981-5), £23.3 billion or 23% was to come from the private sector.

"Private sector operations in industry tend to become more efficient than their public sector counterparts. The black economy has grown increasingly important in recent years, and

the government has made no determined effort to stamp it out. The military is heavily involved in the black economy and in smuggling from Lebanon..."

Egypt and Syria show that Third World bourgeoisies — or sections of them — can opt for state capitalism as a measure of expediency. The same lesson can be drawn from a number of Third World regimes with no pretence whatever at socialism which have nevertheless developed industry on the basis of extensive state ownership and control.

THE IVORY COAST

The Ivory Coast has possibly the most vocally pro-capitalist government in the Third World.

"The state seeks to promote a stratum of entrepreneurs... The creation of a rural bourgeoisie... is also the explicit target in agriculture. The effort on the part of the state to persuade Ivorians to invest their savings in industry, and thereby diminish state intervention, is another example..." (this quotation, and all following quotations in this section, from H S Marcussen and J E Torp, *Internationalisation of Capital*).

Moreover, the Ivory Coast state has clearly been governed by the bourgeoisie. Under French rule, the country was mostly exploited in the form of French-owned plantations worked by forced labour. When the forced labour system was abolished in 1946, a native planter class began to develop.

"The struggle for independence was carried out by a layer of larger plantation owners... this group of larger plantation owners ... took over the colonial administrative apparatus and... gradually developed the state apparatus to what it is today".

Yet the state totally dominates the economy. It controls marketing of agricultural produce. It owns the biggest plantations and the ancillary factories. "The Ivorian state... share of total (industrial) capital has grown from 10% in 1976 to... 53% in 1980". Almost all the rest of industry is foreign capital operating under detailed conditions imposed by the state. Marcussen and Torp could find only *five* people in the country who could be described as private industrial capitalists, and even the big private planter class has declined relative to the state.

On this basis industry grew at about 8% per year in 1965-83. "In 1950, the total industrial sector consisted of two small canneries, some soap factories, two factories producing beer and mineral water, a spinning mill and some saw mills. Today a varied industrial sector exists consisting of... 705 enterprises in 1980."

Samir Amin, a well-known academic Marxist economist of Maoist leanings, wrote a detailed study on the Ivory Coast in the mid-1960s: in which he concluded that substantial autonomous development there was possibly only through socialism. Marcussen and Torp point out that the vocally pro-capitalist regime has actually done through capitalism

what Amin said could be done only through socialism!

And the Ivory Coast should pose a problem for Grant, too. If Syria is a workers' state, then why isn't the Ivory Coast? If (as we saw) any petty bourgeois formation in Iraq — either the CP, or the left nationalists, or the army officers who carried out a right-wing coup against the left nationalists — could become the vehicle for "proletarian Bonapartism", then why can't the bourgeoisie in the Ivory Coast be "proletarian Bonapartism" too?

By the logic of Grant's theory, we would be driven to the conclusion that when the bourgeoisie — in the interests of making profits better — nationalises enough of industry, then the bourgeoisie becomes proletarian!

In fact a high level of nationalisations in industry is common throughout the Third World, under regimes of the most varying colour.

But the bulk of Grant's 1978 article is simply repetition of his theses from 1964.

"At a time when Mao and the Chinese CP had the programme of capitalism and 'national democracy'", boasts Grant, "we could predict the inevitability of proletarian Bonapartism as the next stage in China".

"Here was a perfect example of one class — the peasants in the form of the Red Army — carrying out the tasks of another". (I.e. here, of the working class. Elsewhere Grant identifies the proletarian Bonapartists as carrying through the tasks of the bourgeoisie). "It is amusing now to see the sects swallowing the idea that a 'workers' state' was established in China by the peasant army without turning a hair only because at the head of the army was the so-called 'Communist' Party. In classical Marxist theory this idea would be precisely considered hair-raising and fantastic. The peasants, as a class, are least capable of assuming a socialist consciousness. It is an aberration of Marxism to think that such a process is 'normal'. It can only be explained by the impasse of capitalism in China, the paralysis of imperialism, the existence of... Stalinist Russia; and most important of all, the delay in the victory of the revolution in the industrially advanced countries of the world".

But for Grant, in fact, the process is much more uniformly and mechanically a "norm" than it is for the "sects" he is lambasting! Grant reconciles it all in his own mind, first by a stance of philosophical detachment (the battles of most of the world for half a century are only a marginal distortion in the grand sweep of History), and second by the notion that it doesn't matter who creates "Proletarian Bonapartism". Any force to hand can be pressed into service.

INTELLECTUALS

Continuing his account of China, Grant makes it clear that his concept of "proletarian Bonapartism", under the labels, is in reality a concept of a new class, a new historical epoch, midway between capitalism and workers' revolution.

"On a capitalist basis there is no longer a way forward particularly for backward countries. That is why army officers, intellectuals and others affected by the decay of their societies under certain conditions can switch their allegiance.

"A change to proletarian Bonapartism actually enlarges their power, prestige, privileges and income. They become the

sole commanding and directing stratum of the society raising themselves even higher over the masses than in the past. Instead of being subservient to the weak, craven and ineffective bourgeoisie they become the masters of society".

So "proletarian Bonapartism" is a process whereby the middle class carry through their revolution with the conscious and central intention to become the ruling class (Grant calls it caste) on the basis of collectivised property, using the state as their instrument.

Long ago Mikhail Bakunin, the anarchist opponent of Karl Marx in the First International in the 1860s, described "state socialism" as no more than a proposal by middle-class intellectuals to enslave the workers. Grant's "proletarian Bonapartism" is more like that than any "distorted" version of Marxian socialism.

But why is it proletarian Bonapartist? Why are they workers' states? Remember that Grant emphasises again and again that these states have nothing in common with the revolutionary USSR of Lenin and Trotsky except nationalised property, and that they cannot enable a transition to socialism without a further workers' revolution. Before that further workers' revolution all they can do is carry out certain tasks of the bourgeois revolution and develop industry. Why is that proletarian?

Grant's implicit answer is that the one workers' state — the USSR — defines the many similar to it. In fact the vast expansion of the deformed workers' state theory to include Syria, Burma etc. — and the relegation of the conscious factor, the revolutions, the social overturns, to the status of inessentials — inescapably implies that the many do define the USSR — as a new form of class society.

That is the last thing Grant wants. In the 1940s he attempted to refute Tony Cliff's theory of state capitalism in the USSR by arguing that state capitalism was a logical impossibility. Unlike Trotsky he rules out even the theoretical possibility that nationalised property could be other than proletarian. But ideas have their own logic.

Grant's notion that we are in a whole epoch of progressive Stalinism — that this distinct form of society is the only and inevitable way to develop the productive forces in most of the world — implies that the bureaucracy in Russia was no aberration but something rooted in the fundamental needs of Russian society. The bureaucracy were not the usurpers that Trotsky says they were, but a legitimate historical ruling class.

"In Eastern Europe, China, Cuba, Syria, Ethiopia — the petty bourgeois intellectuals, army officers, leaders of guerrilla bands, use the workers and peasants as cannon fodder, merely as points of support, as a gun rest, so to speak. Their aim, conscious or unconscious, is not power for the workers and peasants, but power for their elite". All distinctions between a genuine mass mobilisation and revolution, and palace coups, are suppressed by Grant.

WHOSE EXPENSE?

The workers and peasants, in Grant's "perspective", are fated to be "cannon fodder". But "proletarian Bonapartism", is still a tremendous step forward. "These regimes... can... develop the productive forces with seven league boots. They carry out in backward countries the historic job which was carried out by the bourgeoisie in

the capitalist countries in the past".

Why should carrying out the jots of the bourgeoisie define army officers in Syria or anywhere else as "proletarian"? Grant's argument depends on his repeated assertions about the absolute stagnation of capitalism (therefore, any system that sees development cannot be capitalist) and dogmatic manipulation of phrases from Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution (only on a proletarian basis can the bourgeois tasks be carried out).

But, labels aside, why do the Stalinist regimes develop the productive forces fast? Grant knows well enough, even though he would say that the progress is primarily a product of the nationalised economy and planning. The workers are under semi-slave conditions. The state has totalitarian control over them. All means of working-class self-defence are destroyed and systematically rooted out.

Such methods are inseparable from the results desired and advocated by Grant. (Notably, the least repressive of the Stalinist-type states, Cuba, has had a rate of economic growth not particularly impressive by comparison with capitalist countries).

Implicitly — with such conclusions as his attitude on Afghanistan — Grant is saying that "the development of the productive forces" is more important than the working class and its struggles. And he is utterly fatalistic and dogmatic about the inevitability and progressiveness of "proletarian Bonapartism".

In fact there is a substantial proletariat in many Third World countries. Working-class revolution is not ruled out; and even if it were, socialists could not abandon the cause of the working class for the sake of "the productive forces". Far from adopting Grant's "proletarian Bonapartism" as part of its programme (until socialism comes in the metropolitan countries), the working class in the Third World should fight, with guns and any other weapons at their disposal, and to the last ebb of their strength against the imposition of a Stalinist totalitarian state.

Of course no individual in *Militant* holds this attitude of welcoming Stalinism consciously, lucidly, and coherently. Yet the logic is there, for certain.

PORTUGAL

The major new experience — apart from Afghanistan — dealt with in Grant's 1978 article is Portugal. His fantastic account of the Portuguese revolution and implicitly of what our programme in it should have been shows that it is not only for the Third World, but even for the less-developed countries of Europe, that proletarian Bonapartism is on the agenda.

In April 1974 Portugal's crumbling semi-fascist dictatorship was brought down by an army revolt. As Portuguese politics radicalised, the top army ranks round General Spínola attempted a coup to clamp down on the revolution in March 1975. Their defeat by a workers' mobilisation opened a period of intense struggle.

Workers' commissions were set up in the factories, neighbourhood commissions in working-class districts. Factories and banks were brought under workers' control and nationalised. One shaky provisional government succeeded another, dominated by the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, and/or radicalised officers.

Many army officers started talking about revolution and socialism; and the first act in the coup, in November 1975, which halted the development of the revolution, was the removal of the left-wing general Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho and his unit, Copcon, from posts round Lisbon.

What account does Grant give? "Under conditions of the crisis of capitalism in Portugal, a semi-colonial country, a majority of the officer caste... moved in the direction of revolution and 'socialism'. Only our tendency explained this process.

"This gave an impetus to the movement of the working class, which then reacted in its turn on the army. This affected... even some admirals and generals who were sincerely desirous of solving the problems of Portuguese society and the Portuguese people... True enough, because of the reformist and Stalinist betrayal of the Portuguese revolution — by preventing it from being carried through to completion [by the "admirals and generals"?] — there has been a reaction. The army has been purged and purged again to become once more a reliable instrument of the bourgeoisie.

"But how far this has succeeded remains to be tested in the events of the revolution [sic] in the coming months and years".

Rather than stressing the need for working-class independence, Grant looks to the officers. And not only in 1975! Three years later he was still looking hopefully for "proletarian Bonapartists" to come forward.

The two Trotskyisms confront Stalinism

Buy a copy online!

www.workersliberty.org/node/25483

£19.99, or £23 including UK postage.

Reading groups are happening across the country. Check thetwotrotskyisms.org for details

