

Dialectics and Revolution

Why Mastering *Dialectical Materialism* Is Crucial for the Class Struggle

One of the basic laws of dialectics is that A is not equal to A, since A is always changing. This article deals with the most fundamental aspect of the application of that law: the need to analyze all things and phenomena in their continuous change. A more detailed and refined article would be needed to examine the laws of dialectical materialism in their full complexity. Yet the revolutionary movement must utilize these laws to build the movement that can fight capitalism successfully.

Dialectical change arises from the unity and struggle of opposites and their conversion into a new unity of opposites through the transformation of quantity into quality. These ideas are not mere abstractions. As this article shows, they manifest themselves in key political and theoretical problems which now confront the workers' movement and the so-called revolutionary movement (which presently consists mainly of petty bourgeois centrist forces).

The Falsification of Dialectics Today

All those who claim to adhere to revolutionary Marxism swear to the fundamental method behind Marxism: dialectical materialism. Yet when one examines the method of analysis of the so-called Marxist organizations, as well as their practice, the dismal reality is revealed: the method of thinking reflected in their program and practice is imbued with bourgeois formal logic; it is mechanical and crippled with routine bourgeois philistine thinking.

One of the things a Marxist dialectician must do is examine the following contradiction: Some "Marxists" can explain the laws of dialectics in the abstract, but in reality, they are the worst enemies of dialectical materialism. Take, for example, the dozens of Marxist academics, who can quote and even explain the basic teachings of Marx and Engels on dialectics. Yet when these gentlemen and ladies leave the classroom, they become petty bourgeois philistines to the core. They cannot use dialectics to explain the contradictions of the class struggle as it develops today, nor can they explain the most critical issue: how to use dialectics-as the brain of the Marxist scientific method-to resolve the contradictions of capitalism in favor of the proletariat.

For all the academic and petty bourgeois Marxists, the dialectic is a shell without content-and one which shatters at the first contact with serious living experience. Many petty bourgeois "Marxists" (academics and others) who can explain the abstract laws of dialectics at ease in their living rooms capitulate to bourgeois pressure in times of crisis or

big events in the class struggle. Faced with major historical events that shape the world, they support the bourgeois side, and they express-with the aid of "Marxism"-the ahistorical, distorted views of the bourgeoisie.

Dialectics Versus the Vulgar Logic of Mandel

Unfortunately, Marxist theory and dialectics are not trampled upon by "academic Marxism" alone, but also by the parties and organizations that claim to represent the revolutionary continuity of Marxism. Take for example Ernest Mandel, the leader of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec). In his books Mandel deals easily with the laws of dialectics. He can spell out the abstract laws nicely, and most of them even correctly. But in truth Mandel does not understand even the ABC of dialectics, since he cannot apply its laws to living material reality.

The petty bourgeois Marxist who can spell the ABC of dialectics in the abstract always gets lost in times of great struggles or vast historical change. Major events that shape the world always shatter such people's abstract intellectual Marxist shells, letting the real bourgeois logic of their thinking emerge. As in the case of many pedantic petty bourgeois intellectuals, Mandel (and USec with him) were driven straight into the trap of bourgeois logic and reasoning by the collapse of the former workers' states. (For simplicity, this article refers to the former deformed and degenerated workers' states as "workers' states.")

When the so-called "democratic" movements were on the rise in the workers' states, and Stalinism was on the eve of collapse, bourgeois propaganda spread the message that Stalinism's impending demise implied the final victory of the bourgeoisie, and that the prospect of socialist revolution was gone forever. Petty bourgeois cynics and USec partly capitulated to the propaganda of the bourgeoisie, but they added a "Marxist" twist to it.

Our "dialectical materialist," Mandel, agreed with the bourgeoisie that the establishment of bourgeois democratic institutions would undermine Stalinism. Caught in the web of bourgeois propaganda, Mandel was propelled into believing in the "progressive" role of democracy in the workers' states. Mandel-thinking-with petty bourgeois formal vulgar logic-believed that formal democracy would open the road for massive participation of the working class in "free" politics and that this would aid the preservation of the workers' states. The big bourgeoisie, on the other hand, understands the elements of dialectics better than Mandel and the rest of the petty bourgeoisie, because it needs to

use dialectics from time to time. Thus, the big bourgeoisie correctly understood that introducing bourgeois democracy in the workers' states would only accelerate capitalist restoration. Their talk about "democracy" was just propaganda for fools like Mandel and USec.

Now that capitalism has in fact been restored, the big imperialist bourgeoisie is proclaiming in its propaganda that "democracy" has won out over communism forever, or at least for a very prolonged historical period. The petty bourgeois fool, as represented by Mandel and company, cannot initiate independent thinking, not to speak of dialectic thinking. Thus, Mandel is still strictly following the tail of the big bourgeoisie. Capitulating even more than before to bourgeois propaganda, Mandel and USec are now lamenting that the class struggle is over to a large extent, and that the way to win social justice in the world is to struggle for democracy and human rights. They actually have begun to think that socialism can be achieved through increased democracy and other "reforms"! (See, for example, "No social democratic solution," *International Viewpoint* #251 (December 1993), at pp. 14-15 (characterizing "the changing of the economy based on a radical democratisation of society" as "a revolutionary path").)

The Dialectic of Today's Historical Events: The Marxist View

Trotsky explained the difference between Mandel's method and the dialectic method. Trotsky wrote that "Dialectical thinking is related to vulgar thinking in the same way that a motion picture is related to a still photograph." (*In Defense of Marxism* (hereafter *IOM*), pp. 50-51) Defeated and demoralized by the victory of counterrevolution in the workers' states, Mandel and USec have extended the still picture of today—that is, the temporary victory of counterrevolution—to an entire historical period. Without the theoretical tools to fight against capitalist propaganda and pressure, the petty bourgeois—demoralized by an earth-shaking event such as the triumph of capitalist restoration—concludes that that triumph is permanent, that the class struggle is largely over, and that the salvation of humanity lies in democratic reforms.

For the petty bourgeois see the world as a static entity—a still picture. They do not see the contradictory motion of world events scientifically, as expressed in the ups and downs of the class struggle. The petty bourgeois view the "downs" (restoration of capitalism) as a static permanent situation, and give them a bourgeois ideological explanation: the bourgeoisie has won, so all we can do is fight for democracy. Fundamentally, Mandel and company express the bottom line of vulgar bourgeois logic (which is also the typical logic of the social democrat): that the dominance of the bourgeoisie is more or less permanent, and therefore only slow evolution in the class struggle is possible. Under such logic—the core logic of reformism—a historical period is stationary, and unaffected by contradictory zigzag motion.

Trotsky's dialectic method, on the other hand, does not ignore the still picture, but views it in the context of continued contradictory motion. Thus, as Trotsky contin-

ued in explaining dialectic logic: "The motion picture does not outlaw the still photograph but combines a series of them according to the laws of motion. Dialectics does not deny the syllogism [deductive reasoning], but teaches us to combine syllogisms in such a way as to bring our understanding closer to the eternally changing reality." (*IOM*, p.51)

The destruction of the workers' states in Eastern Europe and the USSR, brought about by the 1989-91 counter-revolutions, was a historical defeat for the international working class. The resulting setback is still being reflected in a relatively low level of class struggle throughout the world. One does not need dialectics to understand that such a defeat causes a slowdown in the class struggle during the ensuing period. This type of deductive reasoning, which is part of formal logic, is correct as a partial analysis. This example shows that in many cases dialectic thinking can temporarily share a common ground with formal thinking.

But for genuine Marxists who think historically and dialectically, the recent defeat is only one frame in an evolving historical movie. It is not a frozen, static, permanent state of affairs, but rather a temporary episode in an "eternally changing reality." To a dialectician, the defeat caused by the collapse of Stalinism can be understood only as a temporary victory for the world bourgeoisie in the ongoing contradictory development of the class struggle.

Applying Dialectics to Capitalist Restoration and its Aftermath

As Trotsky went on to explain, dialectics gives us specific tools with which to analyze eternally changing reality: "Hegel in his *Logic* established a series of laws: change of quantity into quality; development through contradictions; conflict of content and form; interruption of continuity; change of possibility into inevitability, etc." (*IOM*, p. 51) Those who understand these laws of dialectics can use them to explain the changing world situation today.

Without question, the restoration of capitalism, which entailed the restoration of the old social system, was a change of *quantity* (market reforms) into *quality* (the destruction of the planned economy and the ability of the new state to restore capitalism as a different/old social system). But this qualitative change has only brought about a new stage of *development through contradictions*.

The "new order" of imperialism—without the USSR and Stalinism—entails terrific new contradictions. The conflict between the *form* of the bourgeois victory (the triumph of bourgeois "democracy"—or rather bourgeois propaganda about it—over the "totalitarian" Stalinist regimes) and its *content* (the harsh reality of restored capitalism) has already come to the surface with great speed. Capitalist restoration in the USSR and Eastern Europe has already engendered in the masses in these countries hatred for the emerging capitalist system and even nostalgia for the "old days." The main factor that is preventing an open revolution against capitalist restoration is the lack of any revolutionary alternative to the new social democratic parties (essentially consisting of ex-Stalinists) that are rising into power in many



Marx: One of the Fathers of Dialectical Materialism

Eastern European countries.

Dialectics can also show us how the temporary victory of counterrevolution has exacerbated the general contradictions of world capitalism. This major historical change interrupted the continuity with which the contradictions between the imperialist countries gradually developed in the past. The devastating pain of capitalist restoration, combined with the growing economic contradictions of world capitalism and the shrinking rate of profit, has resulted in increasing imperialist competition over profitable markets. (See "Theses on the Present Economic Crisis," p. 17 of this issue of *International Trotskyist*.) This situation is also generating a new global instability and growing social discontent. These new contradictions could prepare the ground to transform the victory of the world bourgeoisie into its opposite, i.e., the revival of class struggle on an international scale.

In the context of a longer historical perspective than that of the present defeats, the fall of the Stalinist bureaucracy could turn out to have a positive effect on the prospects of the emerging, sharper class struggle. Millions of Communist party members have now learned the hard way that the Communist parties do not really represent the gains of the October revolution. Many of these workers, as well as a new generation of young workers who can see that capitalism in the former workers' states is worse than "Communism," are now open to new ideas about how to build the class struggle.

In short, the victory of counterrevolution is only one phase of the long march of history. As the contradictions of the "new world order" evolve, new and explosive interrup-

tions of (gradual) continuity, that is, new waves of class struggle, are on the agenda. It remains to be seen whether the resulting possibility for social change will turn into inevitability, or in other words, full-scale class war. That depends on many complex factors, including the presence of a revolutionary alternative to reformism.

The Crisis of Theory Is Not the Crisis of Dialectics But of Those Who Have Abandoned It

Many believe that Marxist theory today is in deep crisis. This is not because it is less powerful and correct than in the past, but because revolutionary Marxist dialectic theory was abandoned by the Stalinists in the 1920's. At that time, Trotsky was the most important representative of the continuity of Leninism and the Bolshevik revolution. For a while, Trotsky and a handful of comrades continued the development of revolutionary dialectic thought. But after Trotsky's death, revolutionary theory and Marxism were misconstrued and misapplied by his pupils, that is, the forces that claim to represent to the continuity of Trotskyism. These include not only USec but also Lambertism, Healyism, Spartacism, the Cliffites, the Militant Tendency, and all their ilk.

Some of these petty bourgeois fragments claim to represent the continuity of the Fourth International. Others now call for its reconstruction (including those who call in the name of Trotskyism for the "new international"). But none of them have succeeded in preserving dialectic thinking or in developing Marxism. These forces have uniformly descended into centrism. That is, they have adopted a political method which zigzags between opportunistic/sectarian politics and correct programmatic statements.

The occasional correct programmatic statements of these centrists do not come from a well-considered development of the dialectical materialist method and a consistent application of it to today's class struggle. Rather, these groups have each chosen segments of orthodox programs and analyses from the past, and applied them mechanically to today's situation. This haphazard, pragmatic approach occasionally yields a correct result in a specific situation, but this should not lead us to confuse it with genuine Marxist dialectic thought. A program without the dialectic method is-to use Trotsky's words-a clock without a spring. (*IOOM*, p. 43) Such a clock will manage to tell the right time twice a day, but that does not mean it is working!

The Absence of Marxist Development Is Responsible for the Disorientation in the Class Struggle

The destruction of Marxism as a living revolutionary theory is what has made it impossible for the different modern centrist forces to establish roots in the working class. Lenin's statement that without a revolutionary theory there is no revolutionary practice has been proven correct in a negative way for the last fifty years. Without a revolutionary theory and method it is not possible to pose alternatives to the reformist leadership and traditions in a way that can attract mass working class support. And without

revolutionary practice it is not possible to develop the revolutionary theory further.

Since for the last fifty years no new steps have been taken to develop revolutionary theory and apply it in practice, the centrist fragments of Trotskyism orbit to a large degree around petty bourgeois circles and habits, and are completely infected by petty bourgeois thinking. Those few centrist forces which have been able to penetrate the workers' movement to some extent (the Morenoites in Latin America, for example), did so without Marxist theory to back them up. As a result, they accommodated to the backwardness of the workers' movement, and transformed their "revolutionary" (i.e., centrist) program into reformist practice.

There are many reasons why the international workers' movement has been so weak and so far removed from its historical tasks for the last several decades. During the last half-century, Social Democracy and Stalinism have continued to serve as the main agents of capitalism inside the working class, holding back the workers' movement. But *in the last analysis*, the most fundamental reason for the weakness of the working class is the destruction of Marxist theory, without which it is impossible to build a revolutionary alternative to the reformist leadership in practice.

The Roots of Centrist Decay

To understand better the decay of modern "Marxism" as a theory based on dialectical materialism, we can compare the relationship between dialectical materialism and revolutionary theory to the relationship between the law of value and the contradictions of capitalism. Dialectical materialism bears a relationship to the program, strategy and tactics of a revolutionary party in the same way that the law of value explains all the basic contradictions of the capitalist system. As Trotsky insisted to the dismay of the petty bourgeois opposition in the SWP—all the contradictions of capitalism can be traced *in the last analysis* to the law of value, that is, to the basic contradictions between capitalists' need to exploit labor to make a profit, and their need for increased mechanization in order to remain competitive. Thus, for example, we can always trace the origin of the various inter-capitalist wars to the law of value. Trotsky never ignored the many direct and concrete factors that bring about wars and other manifestations of capitalist decay, but as a dialectician he could always relate the concrete immediate causes of historical events to their roots in the fundamental social and economic contradictions of capitalism, even though the latter seem abstract and "theoretical."

In a similar fashion, the absence of mass revolutionary parties that could lead the workers to power can in all cases be traced *in the last analysis* to the absence of dialectical materialism in the theory and practice of the modern so-called Marxist organizations. This is because dialectics is the only tool capable of developing the theory and practice necessary to build a true mass revolutionary party and to take power. *It is the absence of this tool during the last fifty years which ultimately explains why a mass alternative to reformism and Stalinism has not been built.*

This fundamental dialectic explanation definitively refutes all the thousands of cynics and refugees from the so-called Trotskyist movement infesting this planet who disseminate the fabrication that the difficulty in building mass revolutionary parties is the fault of the working class for accepting reformist leadership. It also shows exactly how all the degenerated fragments of Trotskyism are to blame for their inexcusable failure to build an alternative to reformism for the last fifty years. Their inability to use dialectics in theory and practice has reduced what they call "Trotskyism" to an insignificant force in the working class. The abandonment and even destruction of revolutionary theory by the modern centrist forces is one of the main reasons why the socialist revolution is still far away, and why Marxism must be re-established as the first step toward carrying out the revolution.

Dialectics and Modern "Trotskyism"

One of the characteristics of the centrist-Trotskyist movement is its unserious attitude toward the study of dialectics. The subject is not studied seriously and political "positions" are not explained through the conscious use of dialectic reasoning. In some groups, the mere mention of dialectics is met with laughter. While other tendencies pay lip service to dialectics, neither the leaders nor the rank-and-file of these organizations learn how to use the dialectic method in approaching major questions of the class struggle *as well as in minor day-to-day tactics*. Pragmatism—that is, common sense, sometimes combined with a few elements of dialectic reasoning that "work"—and bourgeois impressionism usually replace dialectics in these people's reasoning.

The only modern tendency which has pretended to take the study of dialectics seriously was the International Committee (otherwise known as the IC or the Healyites). But Healy and his adherents separated the study of dialectics from the theory and practice of the IC. Members of the Workers League (the American section of the IC), for example, were taught to repeat quotations from volume 38 of Lenin's *Collected Works* without making any connection between Lenin's teaching and the theory and practice of the IC. This was no better than Mandel's "dialectics" or the "dialectics" of the petty bourgeois professors in the universities. The IC made a complete separation between the teaching of dialectic theory and the IC's Menshevik practice and program, which reflected the logic and the needs of the ruling class.

In the 1970's, at the height of the period when IC members were studying dialectics intensively, the IC's leaders made an alliance with the Libyan leader, Muammar Khadafy, under which the IC became Khadafy's spokesperson in the imperialist world. The IC also uncritically supported the PLO and other Arab leaders, including leaders of the Baath Party in Iraq when they were executing Communist Party members. This was done in the name of the "Arab Revolution," but in reality it was nothing more than capitulation to Arab nationalism and Arab capitalism. In capitulating to the bourgeois nationalist leadership in the semi-colonies, the Healyites rejected all the basic dialectic method of the theory of the permanent revolution.

The IC leaders also invoked "dialectics" to destroy any critical dialectic thinking and to convert the membership into petty bourgeois sheep. Anyone who did not quote Lenin in a satisfactory fashion was attacked and labeled a petty bourgeois revisionist and an idealist. The IC leaders used abstract quotations from Lenin on dialectics and idealism to silence the slightest opposition to their opportunistic program and practice. In sum, despite its lip service to dialectic theory, the program of the IC was not any better than the program of the rest of the Trotskyist fragments.

Mastering Dialectics Is Essential for Revolutionaries

The bourgeoisie does not need dialectics to remain in power, since it has enormous resources and controls most aspects of life in capitalist society. Formal logic is sufficient for the bourgeoisie most of time. But the bourgeoisie is capable if using elements of dialectics better than centrists and petty bourgeois dilettantes. This is because the bourgeoisie needs to understand the world that it masters and dominates, while the petty bourgeois centrists—who are not leading the workers in a fight against the bourgeoisie—can get by easily with vulgar / formal logic sugared with Marxism.

But for revolutionary Marxists, mastering dialectics is a question of life and death. Since bourgeois society dominates the world with its social thinking and pressures, it is impossible to understand dialectics without using it on a regular basis to counter the pressure of the bourgeoisie. To be a dialectician one must *break from the bourgeoisie in all the political and social spheres of life*. A revolutionary must connect to the fate of the proletariat and the class struggle and tie his or her life to the revolutionary struggle of the workers.

A true dialectician always draws the connection—which is sometimes indirect and concealed—between any social sphere of life and the *general* state of capitalism as well as its *particular* state of decay. Trotsky summarized as follows the reason why dialectics must be used in all spheres of life and not just in politics: "Dialectic training of the mind, as necessary to a revolutionary fighter as finger exercises to a pianist, demands approaching all problems as *processes* and not as *motionless categories*. Whereas vulgar evolutionists, who limit themselves generally to recognizing evolution in only certain spheres, content themselves in all other questions with the banalities of 'common sense.'" (*IOM*, p. 54, italics in original)

Dialectics and Everyday Life

For those who use dialectics as their basic method of thinking, there is no artificial separation between "political" time and "social" time. One cannot be a good revolutionary if one faithfully tries to use the dialectic method in political work on the weekends, but remains a typical individualist petty bourgeois at home, at work, and in all areas not directly involved with the class struggle. Those who persist in making such an artificial separation always end up by abandoning dialectics; their pragmatic individualist attitude in the other, "non-political" spheres of life eventu-

ally comes to dominate their political life, thus destroying them as proletarian revolutionaries. In fact, 99 percent of the time, those who believe in this artificial separation never really used dialectics in their political work in the first place.

All important social and personal conflicts, problems and antagonisms reflect—directly or indirectly—the social pressure of the bourgeoisie and the class struggle. Without class consciousness and deliberate use of the dialectic method, we end up dealing with such pressures, problems and antagonisms in a way that benefits the continued domination of the bourgeoisie. For example, since workers are not allowed to express their anger and hatred directly to their bosses, managers, and other exploiters, many times they personalize and internalize their growing stress and pressure and then abuse their co-workers, family members, and closest friends. As capitalist society continues to decay rapidly without its contradictions being resolved through the class struggle, this tendency to individualize bourgeois social pressure and to express it as subjective antagonism manifests itself with increasing sharpness in many "personal" spheres of life: the soaring rate of break-ups of families and relationships, for example.

By applying dialectics, we can see why many personal and social relationships, including those within the nuclear family, are extremely stressed today. On one hand, capitalism is dramatically increasing social stress, in that the current deep economic crisis forces millions of people to suffer abuse at work through speed-ups, overtime work and increasing poverty. On the other hand, the low level of class struggle and consciousness isolates working class people and makes them feel like helpless and alienated "individuals." This atomization helps the bourgeoisie by greatly reinforcing the individualist approach to life (I stab you in the back or manipulate you to get what I want). Over the last 20 years, the commercialization and individualization of all aspects of social and personal life has reached an extreme state, as capitalism decays rapidly as a social system and no alternative is readily apparent.

The tendency to resolve social antagonisms in an individualistic way reflects both the lack of social class consciousness and the low level of class struggle. This combination exacerbates the tendency to rely on the psychological and sociological baggage that we all accumulate from being raised bourgeois nuclear family environment. The bourgeois nuclear family trains us to think, feel and act as individuals separated from the social structure, which results in distorted and even disturbed thinking and behavior.

The deepening decay of capitalist society is now making it even harder to resolve social and personal problems through the old way of petty bourgeois individualized thinking and acting. The first step in resolving such conflicts in a progressive way is to *link* the struggle and solutions to all social and "subjective" contradictions in a *dialectic way* to the *struggle against capitalism*. Understanding these links entails struggling with others to achieve the revolutionary social consciousness that will enable us (the members of the working class) to direct our anger, in a collective way, against the ruling class that causes our social oppression.

In sum, a revolutionary cannot separate the big questions of politics from the small questions of day-to-day life. This point is a very important one which Marxists have not dealt with adequately in the past. *This* article does not purport to do more than simply identify the problem.

How to Transform Quantity Into a New Quality in the Class Struggle

As the preceding discussion illustrates, in peaceful or relatively peaceful times in the class struggle—which is the majority of the time—the working class is influenced deeply by bourgeois consciousness. *This* influence generally expresses itself through reformist consciousness. But such consciousness is in constant conflict with the objective reality of capitalism. This objective reality is what can drive the working class into taking revolutionary action. But without dialectics, it is impossible for a revolutionary party to create the necessary bridge between the consciousness of the working class and what is objectively needed to bring about the socialist revolution.

The contradiction between objective necessity and the subjective consciousness is governed by the fundamental law of dialectics which expresses the dynamic of all contradictions: the struggle of opposites. In peaceful times, the reformist/bourgeois side of the contradiction dominates the working class, and the potentially revolutionary class consciousness of the workers, which reflects objective necessity, is dormant. When the workers are engaged in sharp class struggles, however, an open conflict arises in the contradiction between reformist/bourgeois consciousness and the objective necessity to use bold revolutionary action to resolve the oppression and exploitation of the workers. In such times, growing numbers of workers are open to revolutionary solutions and methods of struggle.

These are critical times. Years and even decades of patient revolutionary work in the working class can be wasted if the revolutionary party is locked into the conservative mentality of yesterday and is incapable of winning over the militant sectors of the workers. The crucial problem is to detect the moment at which a *quantity* of hard work can be *transformed* into a new *quality*. At *this* moment, through the intense motion of the class struggle, the struggle of opposites between capital and labor, which had previously been waged with reformist means, can be transformed into a *new struggle of opposites in which the workers fight capital with a new class consciousness*. When revolutionary consciousness, expressed in revolutionary action, defeats and replaces the reformist/bourgeois consciousness in the course of the class struggle, the struggle of opposites does not simply increase in quantity; rather, it develops an entirely new quality.

Evolution, Revolution, and the Party Program

It is impossible to overemphasize how critical it is to detect the moment when a qualitative leap is possible. Trotsky summarized its importance as follows: "Whoever has come to understand that evolution proceeds through the struggle of antagonistic forces; that a slow accumulation of

changes at a certain moment explodes the old shell and brings and brings about a catastrophe, revolution; whoever has learned finally to apply the general laws of evolution to thinking itself, he is a dialectician, as distinguished from vulgar evolutionists." (*LOOM*, p. 54)

Unfortunately, throughout history only a few professed Marxists have been able to "apply the general laws of evolution to thinking itself." Lenin was one of them. We can say without fear of contradiction, and in full agreement with Trotsky, that without Lenin's mastery of dialectic materialist thinking, the October revolution would not have happened. (See Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*)

From the old days through modern times, vulgar "Marxist" evolutionist thinkers have always believed that a *program* is always the solution to the living class struggle. You wave the slogans in front of the workers and they follow you. But a program, no matter how correct it may have been when formulated, is nothing without a *method* which will enable the party to apply and adjust the program in the course of the living class struggle. Sometimes a program that was correct or perceived to be correct yesterday is incorrect and even opportunist for today. This is true, because even the method of dialectic analysis only yields successive approximations of the living objective situation. Dialectic thinking only reflects the objective reality, and even the best dialectic thinking often tails behind the objective reality and its new contradictions. While the general theory expressed in the laws of dialectics, and the general application of those laws to the class struggle, do not change, the specific conclusions to be drawn from those laws and expressed in a revolutionary program and slogans must change in response to the living reality of the class struggle.

Lenin, the Russian Revolution and Dialectics

The change in the Bolshevik Party's program during the course of the 1917 Russian Revolution is a classic example of *this* principle in operation. During the long years of slow development in Russia before 1917, Lenin had believed that while in the struggle for power the proletariat must smash the bourgeoisie and the Tzar, it would have to share power with the peasant parties. *This* conception was expressed in the famous "algebraic formula" that called for sharing power between the workers and the peasants. (See generally, e.g., "Letters on Tactics," in Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 24, at pp. 44-45)

Before the 1917 revolution, Lenin did not fully understand the dialectic law of uneven and combined development as it applies to revolutions in economically exploited colonies and backward countries. In brief, this law holds that in such countries, only the proletariat can carry out and complete the tasks of both the bourgeois democratic and the socialist revolutions, and therefore that both revolutions must be condensed into one, in which the proletariat takes power directly. In these situations, it is not possible for the working class to share power with other classes, i.e., the peasantry, because the leaders of the petty bourgeois peasant parties will line up behind the bourgeoisie in the critical movements of the revolution. The proletariat

thus must give leadership to the peasantry, and preside over the implementation of the democratic tasks of the revolution after it takes power.

Even before 1917, Lenin was not wedded to sharing power with the peasant parties. He left the concept of sharing power ambiguous in the algebraic formula, because he knew that only the concrete reality of the revolution could determine the final program of the Bolsheviks. In April 1917, by the time Lenin came back to Russia from exile abroad, he had learned through the living struggle that the petty bourgeois parties (Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries) were subordinating the masses to the interests of the bourgeoisie through their support of Russia's participation in the ongoing imperialist war (the First World War). The bourgeoisie

was also refusing to carry out completely the democratic tasks of the revolution (complete break with the vestiges of the Tzarist regime, land to the peasants, etc.).

To paraphrase Trotsky's analysis, the revolution, as a catastrophe, had exploded the "old shell" of the Bolshevik party's traditional program. The old algebraic formula was inadequate in light of the new reality of the revolution. Thus, upon his return to Russia, Lenin immediately began to fight for the slogan "all power to the soviets" (i.e., to the organs of working class power). For Lenin, this slogan was a popular way of calling for the dictatorship of the proletariat, since only the revolutionary proletarian parties in the soviets (the Bolsheviks and their left allies) were willing to carry to the end the struggle against the imperialist war and the bourgeoisie.

The Lesson of the Russian Revolution

By April 1917, as Lenin was able to see, the living revolution had elevated the contradictions inherent in the old algebraic formula of sharing power with the petty bourgeoisie into a fully antagonistic relationship, because the petty bourgeois parties lined up with the counterrevolution and the bourgeoisie. Only a struggle for a complete break from the old relationship with the petty bourgeoisie parties and for a new program that expressed the objective laws of the revolution was possible. *That is, the dialectical struggle of opposites had to be carried out through a decisive qualitative transformation of the program and consciousness of the Bolshevik party.*

In advocating this position, however, Lenin encountered stiff opposition from the majority of the leaders of the Bolshevik party, headed by Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin.



"All power to the soviets!" — Lenin (1917)

These Bolsheviks adhered to the algebraic program of yesterday, even though it had become sterile and opportunistic. Stalin was the most consistent representative of this type of crude evolutionist and formal thinking whenever it came to decisive times in the class struggle. In April 1917, he called for unity with the Mensheviks in one party, and for supporting the provisional (bourgeois) government and the war.

Lenin, who grasped the dialectic need for the decisive struggle of opposites between the new objective needs of the revolution and the old conservative consciousness and program, won the struggle for his program through the support of the rank-and-file workers of the Bolshevik party. Only through this victory was Lenin able to re-arm the Bolshevik party and prepare it for the next stage of the revolution. Those old Bolsheviks who were not able to grasp the living contradictions of the revolution swung to the right and were able to give only the most opportunist interpretations to the old algebraic formula.

Thus, one important lesson of the Russian revolution is that for those who do not master dialectic thinking as a reflection of the real objective material world, the dialectic nevertheless will recognize and master them, by coordinating their evolutionist vulgar thinking with right-wing petty bourgeois positions most of the time. The example of Lenin and the old Bolsheviks illustrates fundamental problems with the so-called revolutionary movement that have been repeated again and again. Since the deaths of Lenin and Trotsky, the movement has remained fundamentally without revolutionary Marxists who master the dialectics. The tendency to view a certain "program" as a panacea for the living situation, that is, the tendency to view it in an ahistorical abstract way "because Trotsky, Lenin, Marx or

Engels wrote something positive about it" dominates the method of thinking of the so-called Trotskyist movement. The program and writings of yesterday, which were good for the situation of yesterday, are imposed on the class struggle today.

Dialectics, Stalinism and Modern "Trotskyism"

The inflexibility of program is only one example of the way in which the modern so-called Trotskyist movement has failed to grasp the most fundamental laws of dialectics. In explaining how the vulgar petty bourgeois thinker cannot understand the basic law that "everything is always changing" and that "A is not equal to A," Trotsky writes that "Vulgar thought operates with such concepts as capitalism, morals, freedom, workers' state, etc. as fixed abstractions, presuming that capitalism is equal to capitalism, morals are equal to morals, etc. Dialectical thinking analyzes all things and phenomena in their continuous change, while determining in the material conditions of those changes that critical limit beyond which 'A' ceases to be 'A,' a workers' state ceases to be a workers' state." (*IDOM*, p. 50)

The most vulgar aspect of the Trotskyist movement's recent thinking has been in its approaches to the Stalinist bureaucracy and the workers' state. Since a group's attitude toward Stalinism has always been viewed as the prime test that settles whether the group is Trotskyist or not, debates on this question are carried with an intensity characteristic of the emotional outbursts of the petty bourgeois. In general, the so-called Trotskyist movement has viewed the workers' states and the bureaucracy as if these entities had been frozen at the moment when Trotsky finished writing *The Revolution Betrayed*. As a result, the earth-shaking events of 1989-91, which resulted in capitalist restoration in the USSR and Eastern Europe, caught the Trotskyist movement poorly prepared, since it lacked the basic dialectic tools for analysis.

In *The Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky wrote that if capitalism were to be restored in the workers' states, this would most likely occur through a civil war in which the fascists would lead the bourgeois counterrevolution. Trotsky wrote this at a time when the workers of the Soviet Union were willing to fight to the death to defend the gain of the October revolution, and when the revolution was fresh in many workers' minds. Since any attempt at capitalist restoration would have encountered violent mass resistance, it was only possible to smash the workers' state through a fascist movement.

Trotsky, who viewed the historical process dialectically, never had in mind that the same conditions and therefore the same analysis would remain valid 50 years later. In the 1930's, a militant workers' movement was alive and kicking, and many workers had illusions that the Stalinists represented the October revolution. In the 1930's, it was not clear how the contradictions of the Stalinist bureaucracy would be resolved, i.e., whether it would move in a bourgeois counterrevolutionary direction and restore capitalism, or end up in a split, with sections of it moving to the left and even completely breaking with Stalinism by joining the revolutionary Trotskyist movement.

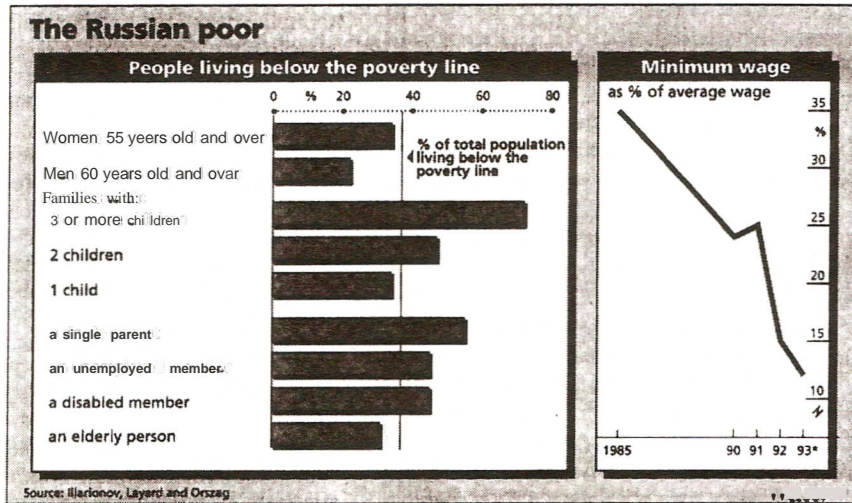
By the 1980's and 1990's, however, the international situation was completely different than it had been at the time that Trotsky wrote *The Revolution Betrayed*. Unlike in the 1930's, the working class in Europe and the US was demoralized and partially defeated after many decades of betrayals. Moreover, by the eve of the 1989-91 counterrevolutions, the Stalinist bureaucracy in Russia and Eastern Europe was clearly moving onto the restorationist road, and the workers' state were not the same workers' states. By then, also, most workers were not willing to defend the gains of October, and many had acquired illusions in capitalism and bourgeois democracy. Under the pressure of imperialism and the weight of its own pro-capitalist market reforms, which had greatly undermined the workers' state, the Stalinist bureaucracy practically as a whole chose to be the champion of bourgeois restoration, positioning itself to lead the emerging capitalist class.

By the time the events of 1989-91 began, the role of the revolutionary Trotskyist movement—the supposed "alternative" to Stalinism in Europe and the USSR—had been reduced to exactly zero. The workers did not take it seriously, and the great majority had never heard of it. Under these historical conditions, the possibility of serious left splits within the bureaucracy was almost nil, and the possibility of a mass workers' upsurge against the counterrevolution, which could result in a political revolution, was equally slim. There was no revolutionary alternative to restoration which had roots in the working class. Thus, the forces of capitalist counterrevolution, that is, imperialism and the Stalinist bureaucracy, concluded that it was safe and preferable to restore capitalism *without a fascist dictatorship*, that is, without a full scale civil war, and that state power could be taken instead through the relatively peaceful means afforded by bourgeois democracy, or through relatively mild Bonapartist measures.

Such were the *particular* historical conditions which produced the *particular* way in which capitalist restoration actually proceeded in the former workers' states. So what does this have to do with dialectics? Well, everything. Dialectic thinking cannot stick to the abstract, motionless analysis of yesterday. Rather, it must proceed with the real objective-historical developments, so as to see when the analysis of yesterday has been bankrupted by the new content of today, just as changes in quantity may be transformed into a new quality. If Trotsky were alive he would have insisted that his thesis of yesterday—that only fascism could destroy the workers' state—had been superseded by the events of today.

The Roots of Today's Errors in Vulgar Thought

In fact, Trotsky did explain exactly how the general relates dialectically to the particular historical development, and why the vulgar evolutionist cannot understand this principle. "The fundamental flaw of vulgar thought lies in the fact that it wishes to content itself with motionless imprints of a reality which consists of eternal motion. Dialectical thinking gives to concepts, by means of closer approximations, corrections, concretizations, a richness of content and flexibility; I would even say a succulence which to a certain extent brings them close to living phenomena.



And this is supposed to be a "workers' state"?!)

Not capitalism in general, but a given capitalism at a given stage of development. . . Not a workers' state in general, but a given workers' state in a backward country in an imperialist encirclement, etc." (IOOM, p. 50)

Exactly! The workers' state and the bureaucracy must be analyzed as their contradictions evolve historically. . . Instead, the vulgar Trotskyist movement of today, which uses Trotsky's writings as if they were cookbooks, found the quotation that the restoration of capitalism must be accomplished through fascism, and applied it in a lifeless and motionless way to today's situation. As a result of the movement's inability to use dialectics, it committed one or the other of two major errors.

On the one hand, the so-called Stalinophobic wing of Trotskyism-USec, the Lambertists, the LRCI, etc., concluded that since only the fascists could restore capitalism, the introduction of bourgeois democratic institutions into the workers' states was harmless and even progressive! These "Trotskyists," in the name of more (bourgeois!) democracy for the workers, stood behind the restorationists (the famous Yeltsin) right at the critical moment when they were taking state power! Their blind and unscientific hatred of the Stalinist bureaucracy, combined with their sterile understanding of Trotsky's writings, led them straight into the arms of counterrevolution. . . In the process, they disregarded one of the major "orthodox" conclusions of Trotsky's method: that the proletariat must defend the workers' state when it is under attack.

On the other hand, the so-called Stalinophilic wing of Trotskyism—namely the Spartacist League (SL) and its little cousins, the Bolshevik Tendency (BT) and its 1993 split, the Communist Workers Group (CWG)—committed an equally major error of a different sort. The root of the main methodological error of the SL's tradition is that it has never understood how contradictions evolve in the real material world. For the SL, it was as if the contradictions of the Stalinist bureaucracy had remained in the freezer for fifty years. According to this traditional view, therefore, the SL believed that the bureaucracy would defend the workers' states in 1989-91.

Trotsky, on the other hand, always viewed the contradictions of the bureaucracy with great flexibility. In the 1930's, for example, he did not exclude the possibility of left splits from its ranks. At that time, the bureaucracy's power and privileges were based on collectivized property relations, and it was therefore forced to defend them. But for Trotsky, the defense of the workers' states by the bureaucracy was historically conditional. . . Without a progressive solution to the terrific contradictions of the Soviet Union, that is, without a political revolution, Trotsky clearly saw that the bureaucracy would become restorationist, i.e., that the contradictions would be resolved in favor of bourgeois counterrevolution.

This process definitely occurred in the course of the 1980's. A growing sector of the bureaucracy was willing, even eager, to become a new capitalist ruling class. *The struggle of opposites inside the bureaucracy, between the fact that its privileges were based on nationalized industry on one hand, and its subordination to the overall interests of the world bourgeoisie on the other hand, was resolving in favor of the latter.* At the point of the 1989-91 counterrevolutions, the quantitative change in favor of restoration became qualitative, and the bureaucracy became the main force behind the bourgeois counterrevolution. . . But the SL tradition, which remained frozen in the 1930's, still expected to find a left wing in the bureaucracy which would "defend" the workers' states. (See, for example, "Death Agony of Stalinism," in 1917 (journal of the BT), No.8 (Summer 1990), at p. 16.)

For Trotsky, a united front with Stalinists was permissible only when the bureaucracy was actually defending the workers' state. For the SL and its ilk, however, the "Trotskyists" must be in a united front with the Stalinists no matter what the situation. In keeping with this tradition of lifeless thinking, when the Berlin Wall was falling, the SL called on the Soviet generals in East Germany to defend the workers' state, and the main activity of its branch in Germany was to try to court the Stalinist bureaucracy into forming a united front against unification! In reality, of course, the ex-Soviet generals were only too happy to order their troops to leave Germany, after toasting with champagne with the capitalists—including their German ex-comrades!

Similarly, the SL's small cousin, the BT, called for a military bloc with the leaders of the 1991 coup against Gorbachev, precisely at the time when the coup leaders came out with an openly pro-capitalist program. . . The SL/BT tradition, which wrote expectantly before the 1991 coup about a split in the bureaucracy, have received a major disappointment: the slow-roader sector of the bureaucracy, which supported the coup, is very active in capitalist restoration today. Behind the scenes, out of sight of the flashing cameras, the managers of the nationalized industries have privatized more industry in Russia than the Yeltsin government. . .

What the Stalinophiles and the Stalinophobes Have in Common

With all their differences, the Stalinophilic and Stalinophobic sectors of the Trotskyist movement share a very important common ground: a rejection of dialectic thinking. Thus, both sectors agreed with what they found in Trotsky's cookbook: that only a fascist dictatorship and a civil war could restore capitalism and change the nature of the workers' state. In so doing, they forced themselves to reject the fundamental Marxist theory of the state. For Marxists, once the restorationists take power and set up a state committed to private property relations, they have thereby transformed the class character of the state. Thus, when Yeltsin took power and smashed the basic planning apparatus of the USSR, a critical moment occurred, in which quantitative change was transformed into a decisive qualitative change. To use Trotsky's words, "'A' cease[d] to be 'A,' a workers' state cease[d] to be a workers' state." (*IOOM*, p. 50)

For Marxists, who are dialecticians, the question of state power is decisive. If the state, as a repressive apparatus, defends capitalist property relations and is firmly in the hands of an incipient bourgeoisie which has dismantled the basic economic planning mechanisms that glue the workers' state together, then the workers' state has ceased to be a workers' state, and has become an incipient bourgeois state. Concededly, it will take many years for the complete success of restoration, and during these years the workers could reverse the process. But it must be understood that the amount of privatization is not the crucial question in determining whether there has been a qualitative change in the nature of the state. It was the consolidation of the bourgeois state headed by Yeltsin which resolved that question.

For the crude evolutionists, on the other hand, nothing was resolved by the 1991 coup; Russia was still a workers' state. Not understanding the major changes since Trotsky's death, both the Stalinophobic and the Stalinophilic sectors were still waiting for the fascists and a civil war to resolve the issue.

A year after Yeltsin came to power, the SL's newspaper *Workers Vanguard* was still implying that without a fascist victory Russia was still a workers' state. ("One Year After Yeltsin Countercoup: Soviet Workers Bleed," *Workers Vanguard* No. 557 (Aug. 7, 1992)) Finally, in November 1992, without serious analysis and without any correction of the fundamental errors which had always led them to capitulate to Stalinism, *Workers Vanguard* announced that Russia had become a capitalist state. ("How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled," *Workers Vanguard* No. 564 (Nov. 27, 1992)) The restoration of capitalism in Russia had become so obvious by the end of 1992 that even the SL smelled the rot and could not take it, but this change of position came thanks to the American method of "common sense" rather than because of dialectic thinking. By changing its position without criticizing or even understanding the cause of its previous fundamental error, the SL continued to adhere to pragmatism even after it finally arrived at the correct analysis of the new Russian state.

The Stalinophobes, on the other hand, though they tended to capitulate to imperialism rather than the Stalinist bureaucracy, did agree with the Spartacists and their ilk that only a fascist dictatorship and a civil war could restore capitalism. Thus, according to the Stalinophobes, bourgeois democratic institutions (which were in fact imperialist counterrevolutionary tools to restore capitalism) were harmless and even progressive. For them, the victory of Yeltsin and company in the USSR and Eastern Europe did not produce any fundamental qualitative change; it simply gave the working class more "democracy" with which to fight the coming fascist dictatorship. As incredible as it sounds, some organizations in USec, and other groups such as the LRCI, were *still* calling Russia and the Eastern European states "workers' states" as of the fall of 1994!!!!. These pedantic boring lifeless thinkers will claim that A is equal to A until the new letter B-as transformed from the letter A-hits them in the face hard enough that the pain wakes them up.

According to the LRCI, for example, Russia is a "moribund degenerate workers' state." ("The world at a historic turning point," *Workers Power* No. 181 (Sept., 1994)) These crude evolutionists are waiting until the percentage of privatizations exceeds a certain number. For them, only the correct number of privatizations will determine when the workers' state ceases to be a workers' state. In Russia and some countries in Eastern Europe, the level of privatization-including some large privatizations in heavy industries-has already exceeded or is about to exceed 50



The misery caused by the restoration of capitalism

percent.. The question is what new theory will the middle-headed centrists come up with in the next period to justify stretching their vulgar evolutionist method to the point of absurdity? We do not know. But we do know that it will be inconsistent with the dialectic Marxist method and most likely with their previous positions.

Inconsistency is the hallmark of the petty bourgeois currents. The LRCI, for example, prior to the 1989-91 counter-revolutions, used to oppose the creation of bourgeois parliaments in the workers' states. (LRCI, *The Trotskyist Manifesto* (1989), pp. 97-98.) But the LRCI forgot its principles when faced with the big counterrevolutionary events of 1989-91. At that juncture, the LRCI supported bourgeois parliaments in the workers' states, and the LRCI's leadership hailed the creation of such counterrevolutionary organs as progressive instruments against Stalinism. (See "The LRCI and Stalinism," *International Trotskyist* No.5 (Spring 1992).)

This is how Trotsky described the method of such "Trotskyist" currents: "If political conclusions are made empirically, if inconsistency is proclaimed as a kind of advantage, then the Marxian system of politics is invariably replaced by impressionism—in so many ways characteristic of petty-bourgeois intellectuals. Every new turn of events catches the empiricist-impressionist unawares, compels him to forget what he himself wrote yesterday, and produces a consuming desire for new formulas before new ideas have appeared in his head." (*IDOM*, p. 56)

Dialectics, the Regime Question and General Considerations

Trotsky summarized the most important general law of dialectics as follows: "To determine at the right moment the critical point where quantity changes into quality is one of the most important and difficult tasks in all the spheres of knowledge including sociology." (*IDOM*, p. 50) To know how to use this law with sharpness but with great flexibility is one of the most difficult tasks, but it is critical for the great questions—for example, when we need to determine when the "downs" in the class struggle are transformed to the "ups" and when the "ups" are transformed into a revolutionary situation.

Understanding this law is also critical for the smaller questions. Take, for example, the party "regime" question. Every human social organ, including the best revolutionary parties, contains within it the contradictions of capitalist society. It is critical for a mature Marxist leadership which knows how to use dialectics to understand the correct timing for different struggles inside the party. This holds as true for small organizations as for mass parties. The leadership of a small propaganda group, for example, must know when it is time to turn to the struggles of the working class in a decisive way-taking into account the resources of the organization, the level of cadreization and experience of the organization, and most importantly, the objective situation of the class struggle. Making this turn too early, without cadres and with very little resources, can wreck a small organization. On the other hand, waiting too long can generate deep petty bourgeois pressure to transform the group into a petty bourgeois sect. By the same

token, a mass party that does not know when to fight for power at the critical moment can miss the revolution. Such a disaster generates deep opportunistic tendencies.

As a general rule, efforts to transform an organization and move it into the living struggles of the workers encounter petty bourgeois resistance (for example, Lenin and the old Bolsheviks in 1917). This is unavoidable, because not every member of a revolutionary party will have broken from bourgeois pressure, which becomes very intense when a major transformation is necessary. Thus, such a struggle to move the organization deeply into the struggles and life of the working class is normally a struggle of opposites, i.e., a struggle against the conservative influence inside a revolutionary organization.

In this respect, it is crucial for a Marxist leadership within a revolutionary group to know how to use the democratic centralist conception of a Leninist organization dialectically. This means knowing when to be extremely pedagogical and over-democratic in a discussion, even to the extent of ignoring formal by-laws and rules. This way, full political clarity and pedagogical persuasion can be achieved through discussion and the experiences of the organization. On the other hand, a revolutionary leadership must also know when to wage an uncompromising ideological struggle against a petty bourgeois opposition. Sometimes, in the absence of such a struggle, the organization or party will be transformed into its opposite and become a centrist petty bourgeois organization with a different method and principles.

Centrist organizations that are unable to use the dialectic method in addressing political questions, that is, in the development of program and tactics, generally also do not know how to use it in regard to organizational questions. They always end up with a bureaucratic regime that suppresses healthy discussion. The leaders of such a group-fearful of discussions that might expose the contradictions in their political positions and methods-usually resort to methods of intimidation, bureaucratic suppression and/or manipulation in order to maintain control. But political and ideological degeneration always comes before the degeneration of the regime. Adoption of a petty bourgeois method and wrong program come first, and can generate a bureaucratic regime. But the regime is just a reflection of the fundamental positions and method of an organization in the class struggle. It is not a separate question. Those who separate the two questions demonstrate that they do not understand the dialectical connection between politics and regime.

The Subjective and the Objective: Being Determines Consciousness

Mastering the complex dialectic relationship between the objective and the subjective, and understanding that the objective is primary (i.e., that being determines consciousness), are critical for revolutionary practice. Confusion on this question is a frequent source of opportunistic and sectarian practice.

Many so-called Marxists fall into the common error of starting with the subjective consciousness of the workers, which is seriously influenced by capitalist ideology in peace-



Trotsky reading the SWP's paper-with a critical eye!

ful times, instead of starting with the objective contradictions of capitalism. Trotsky often warned the leaders of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) that this error leads to opportunism: "We have repeated many times that the scientific character of our activity consists in the fact that we adapt our program not to political conjunctures or the thought or mood of the masses as this mood is today, but we adapt our program to the objective situation as it is represented by the economic class structure of society. The mentality can be backward; then the political task of the party is to bring the mentality into harmony with the objective facts, to make the workers understand the objective task. But we cannot adapt the program to the backward mentality of the workers, the mentality, the mood is a secondary factor—the prime factor is the objective situation. That is why we have heard these criticisms or these appreciations that some parts of the program do not conform to the situation.... Everywhere I ask what should we do? Make our program fit the objective situation or the mentality of the workers? And I believe that this question must be put before every comrade who says that this program is not fit for the American situation." (*Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1938-9), 1969 edition, p. 50)

Trotsky was aware that the leaders of the SWP had an opportunistic tendency to start from the subjective consciousness of the workers and not from objective necessity. When the SWP leaders complained that the workers, who supported Roosevelt, were not ready to fight for a labor party, Trotsky answered that when intervening in the workers' movement, we start from the objective conditions and not from the psychology or backward ideas of workers; and that the struggle for independent politics for the American workers (a labor party) is objectively needed to move the workers forward.

Unfortunately, the inability of the SWP's leaders to understand this method clearly and implement it led to their growing opportunism. In 1940, before he died, Trotsky had one last battle with the SWP leaders on the above method. The SWP refused to critically support the Stalinist candidate in the presidential election because the "progressives" in the unions supported Roosevelt. Some of the SWP leaders were afraid to alienate these "progressives."

Trotsky argued that the main task was to win over the *vanguard-those* workers who wanted to fight for communism-by giving critical support to the CP, and not by starting with the mentality of the rearguard of the working class—those workers who had illusions in the Democratic Party. (See *Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1939-40), 1969 edition, pp. 57-62)

The very interesting discussions between Trotsky and the leaders of the SWP on the possibility of giving critical support to the Stalinist candidate illustrate that the leaders of the SWP started from the subjective mentality of the workers, and not from what objectively had to be done to build a revolutionary party by utilizing the contradictions inside the CP. After Trotsky died, the incorrect, subjective method came to prevail in the SWP, and propelled it into degeneration, since there were no Marxists who had mastered the dialectic materialist method to battle against it. In the early 1950's, for example, the SWP did not take a clear anti-imperialist position on the Korean war. Instead, the SWP used a pacifist method in the struggle; it was against the war in general, but it did not take a clear anti-imperialist stand. The SWP did not call for the defeat of US imperialism by North Korea and China, because the SWP started once again with the backward anti-communist mentality of the workers and not from what a revolutionary party in the US had to do *objectively* in solidarity with the Korean masses to defeat imperialism. From that point on, the SWP degenerated fairly rapidly.

Objective Necessity and the Scientific Dialectic Method

Objective necessity, as determined through scientific analysis, always takes precedence over the subjective mentality of the workers. But the party must be flexible on the

method by which it uses to relate this objective necessity to the workers. The task is to create a programmatic bridge between what is objectively needed for the revolution and the changing mentality of the workers as they enter the struggle. The creation of such a bridge constitutes the application of Trotsky's transitional method.

This is how Trotsky defined the essence of the method behind the transitional program: "... the task is to adapt the mentality of the masses to those objective factors. To adapt the mentality is a pedagogical task. We must be patient, etc.. The crisis of society is given as the base of our activity. The mentality [of the workers] is the political arena of our activity. We must change it. We must give a scientific explanation of society, and clearly explain it to the masses. That is the difference between Marxism and reformism." (Trotsky, *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*, p. 180)

Trotsky added that "The program is only the first approximation"; it has to be concretized in the living struggle. (*Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1938-9), 1969 edition, p. 49) Indeed, the ability to take the abstract program and to turn it into a living program as a bridge to the struggling masses is one of the most crucial and difficult tasks of modern Marxism—a task that demands full mastery of the dialectic method on the part of the cadres of the party. While there are general guidelines as to how to use the program in the living struggle, and how to avoid opportunistic and sectarian mistakes, there are no ready-made formulas for living situations. One needs to master the complex relationship between changing consciousness of the workers when they enter into struggle, and the sharpening objective contradictions of capitalism that force the workers to take radical actions. One also must be aware of the reformist consciousness of the workers, without capitulating to it.

The Two Poles of Error: Sectarianism and Opportunism

Often, we need to advance only the key demands of our program, tailored to the general level of the class struggle in the country and the particular situation—demands that will make a bridge between the need for anti-capitalist revolutionary action and the present reformist consciousness. Bringing the full abstract program into a struggle that has just started up, and insisting that the workers embrace it immediately, will only alienate the workers from the revolutionary party. The workers must go through the living experience of the struggle in order to break with their reformist/bourgeois consciousness and to accept a revolutionary solution to the crisis. For example, they first have to form picket lines and engage in spreading strikes before they will accept the concepts of the general strike, the workers' militia, and workers' councils.

The inability to understand this principle expresses itself in sectarianism. As Trotsky said, the characteristic of the petty bourgeois sectarian "is to remain on general abstract lines and to repeat the general slogan without real connection with the trade unions in the local-

ity." (*Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1938-9), 1969 edition, p. 49) Trotsky added that "The sectarian looks upon the life of society as a great school, with himself as a teacher there. In his opinion the working class should put aside its less important matters, and assemble in solid rank around his rostrum," because according to Trotsky "A sectarian does not understand the dialectical action and reaction between a finished program and a living—that is to say, imperfect and unfinished-mass struggle." (*Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1935-36), 1977 edition, p. 153) The bottom line is that "[s]ectarianism is hostile to dialectics (not in words but in action) in the sense that it turns its back upon the actual development of the working class." (*Ibid.*)

These quotations perfectly describe the SL. The SL comments on the class struggle by putting forward its full abstract program in *Workers Vanguard*, but it rarely intervenes in real living struggles. When the SL does intervene, however, it usually swings in the opposite direction, and opportunistically adapts to reformist consciousness. For example, in 1993, after a BART public transit cop in the San Francisco Bay area killed an unarmed black youth by shooting him in the back, and arrested his companion, an SL member proposed to the local transit workers' union that it pass a resolution calling for the murderous cop to be "brought to a jury trial!" ("Motion for ATU Local 1555 Meeting 3/10/93" (unpublished))

As the practice of the SL shows, opportunism is the other side of the sectarian coin. There is a dialectic unity between abstract sectarian propaganda and opportunistic practice, because both of these errors stem from inability to apply the transitional method to bridge the contradictions between objective material necessity and the present consciousness and level of struggle of the workers.

Case Study: The San Francisco Newspaper Strike of 1994

Changing the workers' consciousness through living struggle is the most crucial task for revolutionaries to master. Consider, as a case study, the vital struggle of the newspaper unions in San Francisco in the summer and fall of 1994, in which our organization, then known as the Revolutionary Trotskyist League (RTL), was involved.

The eight unions involved in the struggle had not been on a strike since 1968. They faced a brick wall of union busters. Because of the concrete situation, the workers were forced to enter into decisive battles that stood in contradiction to their existing reformist/bourgeois consciousness. To win, the workers needed to defy the routine strike methods of the labor bureaucrats, which only lead to defeats. They had to be prepared to defy court injunctions limiting the number of workers per gate or per street; they needed to build massive militant picket lines that could be transformed in reality into a workers' militia; they needed to elect a militant strike committee; and so on. All these tasks were in complete opposition to the practices of the Conference of Newspaper Unions (CNU) for the previous 25 years—a whole generation!

During the months leading up to the strike, the RTL was deeply involved in the struggle, as we tried to forge links with the militant rank-and-file workers. We fought to build a mass solidarity committee to support the eight unions and the newspapers' non-unionized youth carriers, a committee which would have been open to other unions and the working class community. This was a way to prepare a committee outside the control of the union bureaucrats, in order to bring in mass pickets at the crucial time. We battled against the union bureaucrats and the reformists, whose main tactics for victory consisted of appealing for a boycott of the papers through churches and bourgeois "community leaders," and of pleading with advertisers to cancel ads in the papers in the event of a strike. As the strike deadline approached, more than a few workers who had started out with illusions in the bureaucrats' reformist tactics began to be slowly won over to our militant approach to the struggle.

On the other hand, if we had had the sectarian approach typical of the SL, for example, and insisted in the meetings on immediate mass picketing with an immediate mass occupation of the plants, the workers would not have taken us seriously. There was no militant strike committee or mass solidarity committee with support in the working class which would have been ready for these actions. Only *after* the workers had built these basic strike organizations and entered into a struggle with the police and the scabs would it have been correct to agitate for occupation of the plants; but once that point was reached, it would have crucial for the next stage of struggle to go forward. Thus, the *timing* with which different transitional demands are posed in the living struggle is critical to success in the political transformation of the workers.

Unfortunately, ours is a small organization, and none of our members belonged to the CNU. Therefore, it was not possible for us, in the time available, to catalyze the emergence of a rank-and-file leadership, through the building of a rank-and-file strike committee, and thereby to win the strike. In the end, the heroic strike efforts of the rank-and-file workers, one of whom gave his life in an officially unsanctioned effort to shut down production, were betrayed by the unions' bureaucracy. The strike was called off even before hasty, ill-informed ratification votes were completed on the new contracts. (For more details, see our article on the strike, forthcoming in the next issue of *Workers' Voice*.) But because we raised the issue of the best way to win the strike, some workers-after seeing that we were right-became willing to fight for the correct methods to win the next round of struggles, including the possible second strike which may be in the offing.

The Objective and the Subjective: A Final Word

Petty bourgeois elements-both those who openly reject dialectical materialism and those who only reject it in practice-always accuse Marxists of underestimating the subjective in favor of the objective; we are accused of being "dogmatic," and so on. Revolutionary Marxists, however, who use the dialectic method as a guide for action,

do not deny the importance of the subjective. On the contrary, the presence of the right subjective factors, when the objective conditions are ripe, is *critical* for the transformation of the objective conditions. For example, the presence of a mass revolutionary party when the conditions are ripe for revolution is critical in order for the revolutionary break to occur, making possible the destruction of the old and the emergence of a new society.

The objective social crisis and the breakdown of capitalist society are the prime preconditions for a revolutionary break. But the presence of a revolutionary party, guiding the masses into the battles that smash the old and create the new, is the *most* decisive factor for the revolutionary transformation. A revolutionary situation, caused by an objective crisis of society in which the capitalist class is paralyzed, does not occur often. Such a situation is a narrow window in history. In such times the struggle of opposites (between capital and labor) is the most intense—to a degree that workers' consciousness is ripe for the most revolutionary task: the struggle for power. But even in a revolutionary situation, the workers' consciousness is still contradictory—the shell of reformist consciousness cannot be broken completely without a strong party that can guide the workers toward the most decisive actions. Without such a party, the intense contradictions inherent in the critical moment will resolve themselves in the opposite direction: the resulting qualitative change will take a backward course, resulting, for example, in the defeat of the workers by fascism, as in Spain or Chile. If this occurs, it will take decades to regain the momentum and prepare for a new revolutionary situation once again.

The importance of the subjective factor is not confined only to revolutionary situations, but affects many situations in the class struggle and in life itself. In a major strike, for example, the presence of few conscious anti-capitalist leaders who can win the support of the workers can make the difference between victory and defeat.

It is a fundamental premise of Marxism that being determines consciousness, that is, that the objective conditions of capitalism and its contradictions are a primary determining factor in individual consciousness. That means that in peaceful times the workers' consciousness is predominantly bourgeois. When they enter into major struggles, the workers' bourgeois consciousness (which expresses itself in a tendency to limit their struggle to economic demands, etc.) is in conflict with its opposite: the objective necessity to fight capitalism politically and consciously in order to win. The intervention of conscious Marxists, conscious dialecticians-through the fight against the labor bureaucracy, by the correct usage of transitional demands-is crucial to defeat reformist/bourgeois consciousness and make the qualitative leap toward the struggle for power. At this point, when the consciousness of the workers is changing rapidly, *the subjective factor is decisive*. We may even say (horror of horrors) that at this point consciousness determines being, that is, that it is consciousness which can change the objective conditions of society.

Taken out of context, this last point may draw criticism from our opponents. But it does not mean that we

are agreeing with those petty bourgeois idealists, the enemies of Marxism and human progress, who claim that if enough good people sit together and radiate good feelings and "positive energy," the world will eventually change. No! What we are saying is that when workers' mass consciousness changes because of their struggle in the material world, *this subjective change becomes a new and potentially decisive factor in the objective reality*. It is in this sense, and in this sense *only*, that consciousness may potentially determine being. The combination of a new consciousness on the part of the working class coupled with revolutionary action in the material world is the key to the resolution of the capitalist contradictions in a progressive, revolutionary way. *In a potentially revolutionary situation, the workers' consciousness becomes a decisive factor in the change of the objective reality*: if the revolutionary actions of the masses are guided by a new consciousness, the objective reality can be qualitatively transformed. If the revolution succeeds, the new objective reality (the workers' state) will then develop a new consciousness through the dictatorship of the proletariat and later socialism.

Thus, viewed in the proper context, the statement that objective reality is the primary factor as between the objective and the subjective is *only relatively* true, because in many historical periods, the subjective factor, and even the presence of certain *individuals*, can be decisive in bringing about social transformation. This is particularly true in regard to the transformation of capitalism into socialism, where the subjective factor is a critical ingredient. Without the subjective factor, decisive changes in the objective reality are not possible. In the last analysis, the objective conditions-as-intolerable as they are-will not change, unless the workers' subjective consciousness changes through struggle. Otherwise, why would Marx have written that *only* the workers can liberate themselves? Such is the complex dialectical relationship between the objective and the subjective, and how they *interpenetrate and transform one another*.

Developing Dialectics as the Theory of Knowledge

Marx and Engels developed dialectic materialism into a consistent scientific method far superior to the idealist philosophical logic of their times. Dialectics, as developed by Marx and Engels, yielded the *only* consistent scientific analysis of society and of the relationship between the economic structure (the means of production), the class character of society, and the political superstructure as manifested in the relationships between the main classes. Marx and Engels also developed the tools of dialectics as the *only* objective scientific tools with which to understand the general laws of evolution of society and nature. While many serious scholars in biology and anthropology used *elements* of dialectics—consciously or not—to explain nature and evolution, it was Marx and Engels who—having freed themselves from the prejudices of bourgeois society—developed the clearest and most consistent explanation of society and nature.

But Marx and Engels' writing on dialectics is not sufficient for those turbulent modern times when capitalism is in crisis and sharp decline—for times when revolutionary upheaval is on the agenda, and revolutionaries need dia-

lectics to lead the working class to power. For this, further development of dialectics is necessary.

Such development has not really been completed. Lenin and Trotsky brilliantly mastered dialectics, both in their writings and in their actions. But they were too busy doing revolutionary work, including leading the October revolution, and then fighting the counterrevolution (in the case of Trotsky). They did not have the time to develop dialectics to the full extent to which they were capable and which was necessary.

Lenin wrote the masterful work *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* which was a battle for dialectic materialism against the reactionary idealist philosophy at the beginning of the century. Volume 38 of Lenin's *Collected Works* includes extraordinary observations on how to convert Hegel's idealist dialectics into a materialist dialectic. But Lenin never finished the material which makes up volume 38. He barely began it, and it remains essentially his late-night personal notes on dialectics. Lenin, as a great revolutionary leader, never had the time to organize these notes cohesively, and they were never meant to be published.

Trotsky also was too busy fighting Stalinism and centrism, and too preoccupied with the gigantic task of building a new international, to devote sufficient attention to theoretical work. While his writing and actions were extraordinarily vivid examples of what can be accomplished by a revolutionary Marxist who masters dialectics, he did not have the time to develop the general dialectic method into the laws of evolution for the turbulent twentieth century. He was rather forced to do it in a concise and abbreviated fashion in "The ABC of Materialist Dialectics," a section of the essay "A Petty-Bourgeois Opposition in the Socialist Workers Party." (*IDOM*, pp. 48-52) This essay was a brilliant summary of the laws of dialectics, tailored to the key questions of the day (Stalinism, fascism, etc.).

Unfortunately, after Trotsky's death the leaders of the SWP and the other so-called leaders of the Fourth International demonstrated that they had not understood his teachings on the dialectics. Since then, revolutionary Marxism and dialectical materialism have not been developed seriously; instead, they have been stabbed in the back by the modern epigones, the rotten centrist currents of today and the academic Marxists in their ivory towers.

Recently, the collapse of Stalinism has opened a window that had been closed for decades. As capitalism enters a period of deep decay, without Stalinism to hold the workers back, a new era is developing. We can take advantage of it, but we must develop dialectical materialism as the general theory of knowledge for the evolution of capitalism today. This article is *only* a modest beginning attempt at such development. It does not pretend to go beyond the explanation of how to apply the basic laws of dialectics to some fundamental problems in theory and to the class struggle itself.

Workers' Voice is committed to carrying on this struggle for the development of Marxism. We remind the reader once again of Lenin's words: "without a revolutionary theory, there is no revolutionary practice."