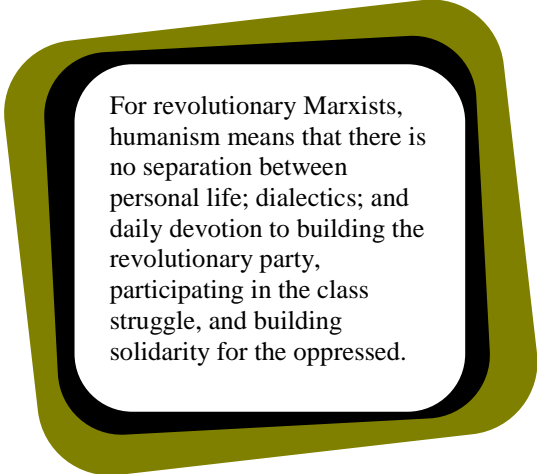


DIALECTICS, ALIENATION & REVOLUTION



For revolutionary Marxists, humanism means that there is no separation between personal life; dialectics; and daily devotion to building the revolutionary party, participating in the class struggle, and building solidarity for the oppressed.

Published January 2010 by:
**Humanist Workers for
Revolutionary Socialism**

FIGHTING CAPITALISM AND ALIENATION

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Foreword

I wrote the two articles about dialectics in two different decades. The first article, *Dialectics and Revolution*, was written in the 1990s. These were particularly difficult times for the workers' and revolutionary movements because of the fall of most of the degenerated/deformed workers' states and the low level of class struggle. Besides illustrating the basic elements of the dialectics, I used the dialectics extensively to show how the workers' movement, in particular the so-called Trotskyist movement, reacted to the restoration of capitalism. There were two major camps in the Trotskyist movement: the camp that supported the Stalinist bureaucracy which stood for the restoration of capitalism slowly (i.e., the Stalinists in China) and the camp that supported the openly bourgeois restorationists (Yeltsin's Russia). I illustrated dialectically the roots, errors and twists of each camp and how they are ultimately connected to each other through the rejection of the dialectic method. So while both were different varieties of opportunism, they were also the same; dialectically speaking, they were opposite sides of the same coin.

Ironically, history has shown that the slow road for restoration, capitalist restoration in China via the creation of state capitalism and its slow dismantlement, was the most successful type of capitalist restoration. This defies "common sense" and pragmatic thinking, but it is understood perfectly by the dialectics that recognizes the inter-penetrations of opposites (slow road of restoration versus the fast road of restoration). In other words, the slow road for capitalism (led by the Stalinists) beats the fast road (led by direct supporters of imperialism). China via the slow road of restoration has become a powerful imperialist country that is challenging the US.

The second article *Dialectics and Alienation* was written in 2009 when the greatest crisis of capitalism since the great depression hit the streets. If anything, the first decade of the 21st century has shown to be gloomier than the 1990s. Barbarism is spreading throughout the world, and the knowledge that ecological disasters and wars will severely bite or ruin capitalist society (the co-called civilization) is trickling down to the common person. Using the complex rules of dialectics, I illustrated how the politics of the ruling class, that is, reformism, is tied to alienation; and how alienation keeps the advanced workers paralyzed, even though what could be at stake here is the survival of the human race. Using the dialectics to explore alienation within the socialist and the so-called revolutionary movement, I illustrated why alienation must be fought against and overcome within the revolutionary socialist movement. I showed that alienation keeps the anti-capitalist and the revolutionary movement emotionally tied to capitalist forms of thinking and acting. Thus, such subjectivity prevents socialists from thinking objectively, which is a pre-requisite for using dialectics. It is necessary at least to some extent for revolutionaries to overcome alienation to grasp the dialectics and prepare the leadership for the socialist revolution. In other words, the seeds of the new society must grow within the old one for the next step of evolution to occur—for the revolutionary party to be capable of leading the socialist revolution as the basis for the new classless society.

Dave Winter

Dialectics and Alienation

Behind the Wall that Separates Abstract Understanding of the Dialectics From Its Living Implementation

By Dave Winter

Many socialists, and in particular those who believe that the working class must take power via the socialist revolution, believe that the main obstacle to achieving socialism is the corrupt and pro-capitalist leadership of the workers' movement. This is, of course, a formidable obstacle, but it is not the *only* significant obstacle. There are a number of obstacles, all of which are connected through a web of dialectic contradictions in capitalist society. One of these is the *complete* failure of the socialist movement to grasp the dialectic as a *living* theory of knowledge. The understanding of dialectics has not developed at all since Lenin's attempts to explain it in Volume 38, followed by Trotsky's ABC's of dialectics as explained in *In Defense of Marxism* (Dec. 1939). The failure of revolutionaries to understand and apply the dialectic is a main reason, if not *the* primary reason, for the degeneration of the revolutionary movement.

In the paragraphs that follow, I will continue to develop and explain dialectics. This is a continuation of the article "Dialectics and Revolution," which I wrote in *International Trotskyist* No. 10, Winter-Spring 1995.(Reprinted in this pamphlet) In this text, I do not focus primarily on the political aspects of dialectics, but on its aspects as a general *living* theory of knowledge. I will also explain how and why an alienated person cannot grasp the dialectic.

Why do we, as Marxists, say that dialectical materialism is the *only* correct method to understand social and economic contradictions and their constant evolution? We say that Hegel developed the laws of dialectics as abstractions, as pure thoughts in our heads. Marx took Hegel's method and developed it as it relates to the real material world, and in particular, as it applies to the contradictions between the classes under capitalism. Marx never claimed that the laws of dialectics apply primarily in the realms of economics and politics. He recognized its manifestation in other aspects of the lives of

alienated people in *Capital* (Volume 3), and, primarily, in his early writings on alienation.

Most socialists think that one *should* use dialectics to understand economic and political contradictions, but that it is not necessary to use the dialectical method in *all* other aspects of life. I will attempt to prove that this kind of thinking is disastrous and a mockery of Marx's method. In daily life, of course, a person does not need to use dialectics consciously all of the time.

For example, if I want to go to the store and buy bread, formal logic is sufficient to accomplish this task. Yet every single move, from thinking about going to the store to buy bread to arriving home with a loaf of bread, is accomplished only through complex dialectical interactions. To begin with, the thoughts themselves are not pure thoughts (using Hegelian terminology). The thought process consists of complex and often contradictory processes in the real world; it begins with the activity millions of neurons in the brain, starting at the cortex where consciousness operates. It also involves other parts of the brain, which monitor the processes of constant change in our brain. It is likely that after thinking about buying a loaf of bread, I will develop feelings that stand in contradiction to the “simple” action of buying bread (for example, the feeling and the thought that “I’d rather be on the beach or taking a walk in nature”) which stand in contradiction to what I need to do in order to eat.

This is likely to cause anxiety, because it reminds me of how stressed out my life is under capitalism, and that my daily life consists of constant errands and chores but not enough leisure time. If I do not have consciousness about alienation (which the majority¹ doesn't) then my anxiety will come from the unconscious part of the brain. I will not be aware of why I feel anxious. If I am a poor worker, I am likely to feel anxious because I am going to part with some of the little money that I have. So just the two seconds of thinking that “I need bread” brings about a very complex and contradictory process between an area in the cortex (the “rational” part of the brain) and many emotional areas of the brain, including areas that consist of unconscious feelings, *which makes our body and brain go through constant changes*. These include, of course,

walking to the store, which also involves many complex interactions between the nervous system in the brain, our body, and our muscles.

All of the above can be fully understood if we consciously use dialectics. (The contradictory complexity of our brain and body is, by the way, one of the main reasons why science and doctors have such little understanding of how the nervous system works.) Then, of course, as we walk, our body remains on the ground only because we are heavy enough not to rise above the ground because of the laws of gravity. If we happen to take a walk in the middle of a Category 5 hurricane, we will end up rising up from the ground anyway. This will happen at a certain point when the wind reaches a certain speed against the weight of our body, which is kept on the ground by gravity. When the wind reaches a certain speed, we will be lifted off of the ground. This is the point at which quantity is transformed and leaps into quality.

While in daily life we do not need the dialectic for everything that we do, we need to be better equipped to use dialectics even *in an embryonic form* if we must walk during a hurricane. Without it, we could even lose our lives.

Dialectical materialism is not a philosophy that Marx and Engels made up. *It is not a philosophy at all.* It comes from the basic composition of matter and from its evolution everywhere at any time and in any place in the universe. Dialectics are the only laws that that can completely explain everything that is going on in the universe every single second. We need dialectics to fully explain the tiniest part of the universe (the atom) and the grand phenomena in the universe (the laws of relativity and gravity). The atom is the simplest and most important example, since it is the basic building block for everything. The atom contains within it the most basic laws of the dialectics: the unity and conflict of opposites and their constant interpenetration.

Lenin summarized elements of dialectics as follows: (*See Appendix Reference Links: Lenin*)

- “1. the *objectivity* of consideration (not examples, not divergencies, but the Thing-in-itself).
2. the entire totality of the manifold *relations* of this thing to others.

3. the *development* of this thing, (phenomenon, respectively), its own movement, its own life.
4. the internally contradictory *tendencies* (*and sides*) in this thing.
5. the thing (phenomenon, etc.) as the sum *and unity of opposites*.
6. the *struggle*, respectively unfolding, of these opposites, contradictory strivings, etc.
7. the union of analysis and synthesis—the break-down of the separate parts and the totality, the summation of these parts.
8. the relations of each thing (phenomenon, etc.) are not only manifold, but general, universal. Each thing (phenomenon, process, etc.) is connected with *every other*.
9. not only the unity of opposites, but the *transitions* of every determination, quality, feature, side, property into *every other* [into its opposite?].
10. the endless process of the discovery of *new sides*, relations, etc.
11. the endless process of the deepening of man's knowledge of the thing, of phenomena, processes, etc., from appearance to essence and from less profound to more profound essence.
12. from co-existence to causality and from one form of connection and reciprocal dependence to another, deeper, more general form.
13. the repetition at a higher stage of certain features, properties, etc., of the lower and
14. the apparent return to the old (negation of the negation).
15. the struggle of content with form and conversely. The throwing off of the form, the transformation of the content.
16. the transition of quantity into quality and *vice versa* (15 and 16 are *examples* of 9)

In brief, dialectics can be defined as the doctrine of the unity of opposites. This embodies the essence of dialectics, but it requires explanations and development.”

I will refer to some of the above laws in my comments to follow. They explain the atom very well. The electrons and nucleus of the atom (protons, neutrons), are a unity of opposites; the “negative” (electrons) cannot exist without the “positive” (protons, neutrons). This is similar to the basic structure of class society. The capitalists cannot exist without the working class, and vice-versa. The relationships between electrons and protons are what Lenin refers to as “*the struggle, respectively unfolding, of these opposites,*

contradictory strivings, etc... not only the unity of opposites, but the transitions of every determination, quality, feature, side, property into every other [into its opposite?].” All of this has been proven by quantum physics. For example, an electron can be in two places simultaneously at the same time that it circles the atom’s core. It is on one side of the atom's nucleus while it is on the other side at the same time. This fascinating contradiction is the basis for the design of many high technology machines.

The real point here is that everything is in constant change, transition, and interpenetration with everything else. One atom relates in this way to the atom next to it. In this fundamental way, the planets relate to the sun. It is not an accident that the relative distance between the electrons and the core of the atom is the same as the relative distance between the planets and the sun. Our sun is rotating and is related in a similar (of course, not exactly the same) dialectic way to the core of our galaxy (the monstrous big black hole in the galaxy's center that can host millions of suns). Our galaxy and its local sisters’ galaxies are orbiting in a similar dialectical way around distant, more powerful galaxies millions of light years away from earth. Thus, there is inter-connection, interpenetration and constant change happening every second in the universe, which is made of the same basic particles that are found on earth, atoms.

If for some mysterious reason one of our local sister galaxies (which are millions of light years away) disappears one day (an extremely unlikely event), it will affect our Milky Way and the relationship among the stars within it, with unknown consequences for the earth’s climate and life on earth. Petty bourgeois scientists may not agree with the dialectics, but the best of them have to concede that dialectics explains well the *way matter works*. Every good scientist, whether consciously or unconsciously, needs to use some of the laws of dialectics.

What Does This Have To Do With Defeating Our Class Enemies?

Everything. Without the vanguard of the working class understanding and implementing dialectics in practice, we cannot defeat the bourgeoisie. My addition to this is that in order to

overthrow capitalism, the members of a revolutionary party must transcend alienation—at least to some degree. I will provide further explanation of this later; for now, we need to deal with much more basic questions. If matter in the universe *can only behave dialectically*, then this must also include all of the dynamics between the major classes as well as all social interactions among humans, including intimate emotional connections (or, unfortunately, in capitalist society, the lack of such relationships). These can only be explained by dialectics.

Yet practically every person on our planet, including the great majority of leftists, either rejects dialectics or refers to it only as an abstraction, while miserably failing to implement it consciously in real life. “What is the big deal?” one may ask. “As long as the dialectic recognizes us and governs our social relationships, who cares?” There is some validity to this line of inquiry. Many species of animals do not use the dialectic consciously and do just fine.

For example, the lioness has dialectics built into her genes, and the rest of her survival skills come with her training as a cub. Yet when she hunts, every single move that she makes toward her prey can only fully be explained dialectically. Her brain must constantly “think,” evaluate and correctly resolve the “problems” and the material contradictions that separate her from her prey. She must have tall enough grass, and the wind must be blowing in the right direction. Every instruction that her brain gives her paws must be absolutely, correctly balanced, and for each small move she makes, many parts of her brain are “considering” all the immediate environmental factors: If her paws make too much noise, the prey will hear her and run away; if the lioness approaches too slowly, the prey has the chance to smell her, etc. As she gets close to the prey, she must observe its every, subtle move, every movement of the prey’s ears and nose. Without consideration of these factors, she can misjudge the critical timing of her pounce. This is the gradual development and then the final leap of the lioness. Here we see how gradual and complex moves are rife with contradictions every second. Finally, the quantity of considerations and observations is transformed into the final qualitative leap (after which quality is transformed into the quantity of food).

Basic dialectical laws apply to the hunting of the lioness as much as they apply to the necessary resolution of class society toward a classless society. First, there is the slow evolution of the contradictions of capitalism until they reach the point at which they become unbearable. Then, the revolution, the final leap of the lioness: quantity transforms quickly into a new quality. The lioness does not need to understand dialectics consciously in order to eat well. But the international working class will only eat well when its revolutionary leadership understands how to use dialectics. In fact, the leadership not only needs to understand the dialectic to overthrow capitalism; it also needs to *master* it in many areas of practice that will lead to the final revolutionary leap.

Humans think that they are much more advanced than animals. However, this comparison is very relative, and under the conditions of present-day decadent capitalism, the advances of the human race are being reversed very quickly. No species of animal would ever destroy the entire planet because of the greed of a few of its members. Yet this is exactly what capitalism and its social conditioning are threatening to do to the human race and the entire planet today.

Unlike other animals, humans have a choice. Primitive class societies, including those at their highest level, capitalism, repress and distort our human potential from the day we are born. Advances in technology are certainly enough to give us short working hours and flexibility, as well as a significant reduction in stress to the point at which we can learn the art of loving as well as develop our individual potential and talents. Yet throughout life, the small minority which controls everything that makes us social human beings is making sure that we remain stupid; that the awful contradictions in capitalism that drive our destiny are integrated into our cognitive and emotional neurons in our brain; and that we become helpless, hopeless, cynical and negative, and/or “positive,” but clueless to the point of conforming to all the garbage of capitalist conditioning. Thus, we have no idea of how we think or feel; it all comes from the contradictions of capitalist pressure. Our only choices are either to conform and become part of the herd of our social milieu that dictates who we are, or to feel isolated, cast out and depressed. The latter response can lead to a variety of

psychological and emotional disorders, and, in extreme cases, drive some people to commit suicide, since humans are very social animals.

Our conditioning begins at home within the backward structure of the nuclear family. It continues with our mis-education in schools and colleges. By the time we become “adults,” we are completely ready for a daily engagement with compulsive internet activities and the bombardment of TV’s portrayals of “life.” We absorb the messages of the media through which the ruling class conditions us with its ideas and feelings—all of which have to be safe for capitalism. Ultimately, the great majority of personal relationships are a reflection of capitalistic conditioning. What emerges is what Marcuse called “one-sided man,” or what Marx called the alienated person. The alienated person does not reflect in his or her thinking the *real contradictions in the material world*, but the values and conditioning of capitalist society: the distortion of the real contradictions that the person experiences and their bourgeois flatness (to use Marcuse again). The reason why people have such deep-seated apathy is because an alienated person must suppress most of what he or she really feels about the decadent society around them, and because he or she must rationalize his or her existence in this society. *This is why it is so difficult to understand dialectics in the living world.* The so-called Marxists who remain as alienated as the average person cannot use the dialectic in Marxist theory and practice, which shows that they only understand it as an abstraction.

Humanism of the Proletariat versus the "Humanism" of the Petty Bourgeois and the Liberal

The humanism of the proletariat and that of the liberal stands in stark opposition. For the revolutionary proletarian, humanism means first of all deep solidarity in the common class struggle to overthrow capitalism. Solidarity entails standing together in the picket lines and the battles against the class enemy. A revolutionary socialist never crosses the class line or gives any harmful information to the bourgeoisie or its petty bourgeois agents. It goes without saying that revolutionary proletarian (and even an honest reformist proletarian), never betrays a comrade in struggle. The humanism of revolutionary proletarians involves helping the comrades to enhance their strength

and overcome their weakness while building deeper emotional solidarity in the battles with unwavering commitment to overthrow capitalism and liberate humanity.

The other side of such solidarity entails ruthlessness against the class enemy and its reformist collaborators, and not being afraid to use deceit and even lies to confuse and defeat the class enemy. This revolutionary moral standard, and this form of humanism, are precisely what the liberal capitalists and their petty bourgeois tail reject, because their "humanism" exists only as long as it does not harm the bourgeoisie.

The liberal and the petty bourgeois may speak of humanism until he/she is blue in the face, but its only purpose is to promote the illusion that people can flourish personally with humanistic values while they sell their soul to the Satan (capitalism). For the liberal and the petty bourgeois humanism is abstract, a topic for a dinner conversation, while the rest of the day the liberal/petty bourgeois promotes illusions in capitalism as he/she engaged in gossip and the enhancement of their alienated ego and the illusionary humanism of liberal capitalism. The liberal and its petty bourgeois tail live a life of duality. They talk about their humanistic "beliefs" as they hypocritically live and endorse the alienated and brutal life under capitalism as something eternal that cannot be fundamentally changed by the class struggle and the revolutionary overthrowing of capitalism. But for a revolutionary Marxist with his/her humanism, there is no separation between his/her personal life, the dialectics and the daily devotion to build the revolutionary party, participate in the class struggle and build solidarity for the oppressed. For the liberal/petty bourgeois it is the opposite. There is a total separation between their abstract humanism and his/her rejection of the class struggle: As Trotsky wrote:

"To a revolutionary Marxist there can be no contradiction between personal morality and the interests of the party, since the party embodies in his consciousness the very highest tasks and aims of mankind" (Leon Trotsky: *Their Morals and Ours*)

The petty bourgeois humanists may be humanistic toward their pets, but they ignore their neighbors, treat people around them as things, and when under intense pressure from the system they support wars

and the rest of the capitalist horrors (I have seen a number of these petty bourgeois humanists put the American flag, the symbol of imperialism, at their front porch after 9/11). The liberals and the petty bourgeois stole Marx's humanism and convert it to its opposite. Marx explained very well the behavior of the alienated person of today 150 years ago, and he always linked it to capitalism and the struggle for communism as the only solution for the alienated person. For Marx the alienated person loses his/her humanity because the alienated worker/person's world in capitalism is alien:

“ . . . Thus alienated labor turns the species life of man [By the species life of man, Marx means what makes humans as a species different than other (animal) species, that is, our potential to develop our humanity through love, reasoning and compassion for others], and also nature as his mental species-property, into an *alien* being and into a *means* for his *individual existence*. It alienates from man his own body, external nature, his mental life and his *human* life.

“ . . . In general, the statement that man is alienated from his species life means that each man is alienated from others, and that each of the others is likewise alienated from human life.” (*From Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, quoted in Marx's Concept of Man by Erich Fromm, pages 101, 103, emphasis in original*).

Thus for Marx the non-alienated human life means **the person's humanity that is stolen from him/her by brutal capitalism**. The humanism of the proletariat and its liberation could be fully achieved for Marx only with the Communist society when the healthy balance between humanity and nature will return and people could develop their real humanity, that is, their potential. Under title *Communism Equals Humanism* Marx writes that:

"Communism as the positive transcendence of private property as human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e., human) being – a return accomplished consciously and embracing the entire wealth of previous development. This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism."

This is not the "humanism" of the liberal who believe that people can develop their humanism and potential under capitalism. Marx and Engels had our contempt for the abstract dead humanist spiritualism and idealism of the liberals and the petty bourgeois that is not based on the dialectic of the material world. Marx and Engels express this when they wrote the forward to *The Holy Family*:

*"Real **humanism** has no more dangerous enemy in Germany than spiritualism or speculative idealism which substitutes "self-consciousness" or the "spirit" for the real individual man."* (Emphasis added)

Capitalism poison the mind of the great majority with its alien values and morals, as Marx pointed out: these alien values and morals are alien to the human species. Imperialism the highest and most brutal stage of capitalism has a duality that keeps the system going. Imperialism has used the duality of old carrot and the stick for a long time. The carrot consists of the façade of "democracy": the promise that its democratic fronts, its popular fronts, its Bolivarian regimes (Chavez and company) will "eventually" bring the promised honey for the masses. Thus, we internalized all the capitalistic "humanistic" values and democratic illusions without which capitalism cannot control us. When this does not work capitalism and imperialism use the stick: Fascism, or other straight -forward brutal regimes. But brutal force alone cannot work for capitalism, hence the liberal "humanism" and the capitalist morals associated with it: "It (the ruling class) pursues the idea of the "greatest possible happiness" not for the majority but for a small and ever diminishing minority. Such a regime could not have endured for even a week through force alone. It needs the cement of morality. The mixing of this cement constitutes the profession of the petty bourgeois theoretician, and moralists. They dabble in all colors of the rainbow but in the final instance remain apostles of slavery and submission." (Leon Trotsky *Their Morals and Ours*)

It is very difficult and literally impossible to understand the dialectics not to speak about mastering it, if one does not accomplish the elementary steps for it, that is, breaking with capitalist system, and devoting one life by joining the forces that build a genuine revolutionary proletarian international to overthrow this barbaric system that is taking humanity and the entire planet into ruins.

As I wrote earlier, there is still a battle to fight alienation within the revolutionary movement, a necessary battle to create a cadre within the revolutionary party that masters the dialectics and knows when to use its sharp edges in the class struggle and when to use its vast flexibility for the development of the next generation of cadre. Time is running out for the next generation of cadre. Our international, *the International Leninist Trotskyist Fraction* (ILTF) is going to be forged in battles against all variants petty bourgeois elements, whether they are liberals or fake Trotskyists (of reformist or centrist variety) that capitulates to imperialism and the bourgeoisie and who spread around the morals and "humanism" of capitalism disguised as "Socialism". In the last century millions of workers and well intended petty bourgeois people were ruined by Stalinism, centrism and their petty bourgeois fellow travelers. The Vanguard of the working class was defeated because of these currents. We have no choice but to re-build the revolutionary party and the revolutionary international once again in a life or death battles between the revolutionaries and those who stand between them and the liberation of the working class and humanity. Only in these battles can we master the dialectics, transcend alienation, and introduce a better proletarian humanity and working class morals into our own ranks.

Trotsky explained it vividly: "Among the liberals and radicals there are not a few individuals who have assimilated the methods of the materialist interpretation of events and who consider themselves Marxists. This does not hinder them, however, from remaining bourgeois journalists, professors or politicians. A Bolshevik is inconceivable, of course, without the materialist method, in the sphere of morality too. But this method serves him not solely for the interpretation of events but rather for the creation of a revolutionary party of the proletariat. It is impossible to accomplish this task without complete independence from the bourgeoisie and their morality." (Leon Trotsky: *Their Morals and Ours*)

The Marxist Left, Alienation and Dialectics

Many Marxists, including very well-known names such as Plekhanov and Bukharin, and practically everyone who has written good books about dialectics, such as modern "Marxists" like George Novak and Earnest Mandel, fail miserably when it comes to shifting

from the abstract explanation of dialectics to its implementation in practice. This does not mean, of course, that young Marxists should not study these books, some of which are excellent. But the question remains: Why does one need to transcend alienation in order to understand dialectics? My whole life experience has shown me that it is impossible to really comprehend the dialectic unless one consciously attempts to transcend alienation. By this I mean transcending deep emotional conditioning, to become at least partially successful at the task of becoming a humanistic person not only in words. Such transcending is essential for one to develop the capacity to be an objective person toward oneself and the external world. This must be accomplished with the development of the capacity to love. (I don't mean here illusionary romantic bourgeois love.) For more information on this topic, see the main chapters of *Alienation in the Post Cold War Era*. (See Reference Index) See also Eric Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, a book that many have read but which very few people fully understand.

Because of the intense pressure under current decadent capitalism to conform to the system intellectually and emotionally, transcending alienation is the most difficult task a human being can undertake. There are no formulas for it. It is essentially struggling throughout life to develop emotional strength with “softness” for love and compassion, combined with the ability to reflect in your mind as closely as possible the real contradictory external world as it evolves independently of your fears, hopes and anxieties—your subjectivity. The emotional part means relating to others with love and objectivity. “Others” means the people and comrades closest to you, including and perhaps most importantly, yourself. Thus in order to understand dialectics, you need to have it in your flesh and bones; it must be deep in your emotional and cognitive comprehension of the world, freed as much as possible from alienation.

You must fully develop your understanding of how the world crisis of capitalism influences people objectively outside of your subjective needs and fears; your ability to read people's essence and contradictions far deeper than their superficial expressions and the facades through which they express themselves; and your ability to test your analysis of the capitalist crisis and how it affects workers through subjective practice in the class struggle. Ultimately, you

need to give your subjective experience in the class struggle an objective meaning without expurgating or minimizing your subjective experience. Understanding and applying dialectics is about getting as close as possible to the eternally changing, objective world and life.

A chapter in my book *Alienation in the Post Cold War Era* is devoted to the reasons why the left fails so miserably to do the above:

“What do we mean by a bourgeois psychological make-up that dominates the life of the organization? Most people who are attracted to a progressive or a socialist organization do not change their psychological alienated character after they adopt socialist ideas or become ‘Marxists.’ In their emotional world and their way of thinking they do not really break with the functioning and general ideology of this society. This is true in particular in times when there are no signs of revolutions or social change. For many individuals emotional considerations are mixed up extensively with the ideology of the organization or the party. Underneath the exterior of ‘revolutionary’ or ‘socialist’ ideology lies the real social/psychological structure of the group and the people involved with the group. The social/psychological structure in these groups is not very different than the social/psychological structure in the rest of society. Most of the top leaders in the parties, who never dealt with their own alienation and humanity, act like bourgeois politicians. They are driven by the passion for power triggered by the impotency of their ego (like Clinton, for example), and their failure to be a compassionate loving person. They enjoy the domination and manipulation of other people, and they use the theory of socialism and Marxism in a demagogic and manipulative fashion, that is, to make the members of the group dependent on them. In the hands of such leaders, socialism and Marxism have little to do with scientific objective thinking and practice. Such socialism and Marxism are rather manipulated and used in a demagogic way by the leaders to defeat their opponents and to wrest control of the movement.

Under these psychological features of the leaders genuine objective dialogue that leads to the narrowing of differences and to unity against capitalism is impossible. What happens is that the demagogic and manipulative leaders take advantage of the members' emotional insecurities, that is, the need to be loyal to the herd and not lose touch with it. Such members are encouraged to view other socialists and progressive people who do not share the precise ideology of their group with deep hostility; thus, the emotional security of the members is shackled to the security of their specific herd. With such infantile mentality, political meetings and mobilizations against the common capitalist enemy often become bickering sessions where the egos of the parties involved is more important than a genuine dialogue to achieve clarity and unity in action. This may be the case even when the parties and groups agree on the basic ideas.

Under such conditions, the members of such parties and organizations always mix the justified anger against the system *with the security of the herd*, which is provided by such parties or organizations. Most members of these groups do not create a clear boundary between the political line of the group and their emotional needs that accompany a dependency on the group. Thus their emotional needs determine their adherence to the line even when it becomes irrational. The group uses such emotional dependency and channel the anger against the system toward a specific ideology and actions; they become beliefs and actions which the members have not arrived necessarily through independent and objective reasoning. Thus, the people in such organizations and parties are internally weak, insecure, and unable to relate to each other in a loving humanistic way. *The bottom line is that the internal psychological life in such groups is not different than the life in other groups in bourgeois society.* The social relationships within the socialist and the progressive movement is based most of the time on the establishment of cliques, friction, suspicion, bickering, subjective liking and disliking, and alienated hostility between people — all which booster the ability of the main enemy to penetrate and manipulate the movement."

All left and socialist groups are indeed not any different from pro-capitalist groups in their functioning and internal relationships. The rank-and-file follows the leadership for emotional security, for the security of belonging to the herd. When significant differences arise, all rich and serious dialogue is blocked. The leaders with inflated egos will trash or crush the opposition, and the majority will follow them because emotionally they are infantile and need the security of the pack. *The relationships within the dysfunctional nuclear family persist in most spheres of life, including the political.* This will not change until at least a minority struggles to transcend their deep alienation. Only when this minority becomes established in the leadership of the revolutionary socialist movement will the socialist revolution become possible. Only then will we have enough people who are not only capable of citing the dialectics, but also capable of using it in practice, in particular at the most critical moments, when the danger of making critical mistakes is high. At present, I am afraid that I can count the number of people who understand and are capable of *fully* implementing dialectics in life and politics with the fingers of my hands.

I will give here two examples from history that may shake up some “orthodox” Leninists and Trotskyists. Was Lenin correct to suggest Stalin for the central committee in 1913? And why didn’t Lenin take up the struggle against Stalin until he was too ill to defeat Stalin? I have no doubt that Lenin’s decision to incorporate Stalin into the Bolshevik leadership had nothing to do with Stalin’s talents as a political leader, a theoretician or a great dialectician. It had much more to do with Stalin’s excellent organizational talents which the Bolshevik Party needed (see Trotsky’s book *Stalin*). Lenin knew of Stalin’s weaknesses: his personal ruthlessness and cunning, maneuvering behind people’s backs, etc. It was not necessary to be brilliant to see that Stalin was driven by power-gains, and that he lacked any capacity for objectivity (see *Stalin*). It was a pragmatic decision on Lenin’s part; he hoped that Stalin could learn and change. It is not fair to blame Lenin, since in those days political agreement with the program was much more important than how rotten and alienated was the comrade in question. We know now that political agreement by itself does not mean much. Mussolini was a socialist and it did not take much for him to become a fascist.

The left has not really learned much from Lenin's mistake. Many "Trotskyist" organizations had or have at the top little Stalin-type personalities, for example, Gerry Healy and Jim Robinson. One may argue that ignoring Stalin's personality and maneuverings for ten years while he was establishing his power brought about the degeneration of the 1917 Revolution. This is not so. However, I believe that there is still a huge lesson to be learned here. When building a revolutionary party with a humanistic and anti-alienating approach in the selection of leadership, we must recognize and expel the Stalins, the Healys and the Robertsons the minute that we recognize their characters and before they move into leadership positions. If the leadership is humanistic and the comrades can see sooner than later what makes an individual tick, it should not be too difficult to recognize such rotten elements. If the comrades are not quite certain, then they should prevent these types from assuming power and show who they really are: cunning, manipulative individuals with ambitions for power.

I am not saying that if Stalin had not been allowed to take a leadership position, the bureaucratic caste would not have come to power and caused the degeneration of the 1917 Revolution. In his book *The Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky outlines brilliantly the objective conditions that caused the rise of Stalinism. Stalin only personalized a whole layer of privileged bureaucrats that reflected the contradictions and isolation of the revolution.

Objectivity, Dialectics and the Left

Let's cite here the most simple but widely misunderstood "law" of the dialectics, Marx's most famous quote, "Being determines consciousness," which means that the external world and its constant changes determine our subjective consciousness. The idealist thinks, on the other hand, that it is the other way around, that the external world is a reflection of one's subjective consciousness. Trotsky clearly outlines the simple and supposedly obvious rule of dialectics by writing, "We call our dialectic, materialist, since its roots are neither in heaven nor in the depth of our 'free will' but in objective reality, in nature," (*In Defense of Marxism*, p. 51) One can never become fully objective because we are only human beings who live

in a world that is constantly changing. It is the practice of getting as close as possible to (understanding) the objective changing world that make us objective dialecticians.

Yet it is grasping objective reality, the supposedly simplest task for a dialectician to figure out, that *all* socialist left fails to understand, due to the subjective alienation. The subjective person freezes the world, and his or her consciousness always lags far behind the movement of objective contradictions. In order to be objective, one should understand dialectical relationships and the continuously evolving contradictions between the general and the particular, which is the essence of being objective. So, for example, we cannot talk about capitalism in general but about capitalism and its evolving contradictions in a *specific* historical period. The subjective alienated person always mixes his or her subjective reaction with complex, constantly evolving, objective contradictions.

In a factional fight within the SWP in 1939-40, the petty bourgeois opposition mixed their appalling reaction to Stalin's pact with the devil (Hitler) with the objective character of the Soviet Union, which remained a workers' state. Because of the similar brutality of Stalin and Hitler, they also mixed up form and content, another fundamental rule of the dialectic. For the dialectician never confuses appearance and emotional reactions with the living contradictory reality underneath. One needs to see the flexible (the grey areas, not the emotional black-and-white areas) and constantly changing contradictions underneath the form (in this case, Stalin's pact with Hitler). The brutality of Stalin did not change the basic social and economic reality that the Stalinist bureaucracy was still defending a workers' state, and that its privileges rested upon the workers' state's existence at the time. Nor did the bureaucracy (which ultimately had a greedy bourgeois character) care with whom it made a pact, as long as its privileges and the borders of the planned economy (upon which its privileges rested) were under its control. Thus the form changed (Stalin's brutality, which looked similar to fascist brutality) and the *particular stage* of the Stalinists' relationship with imperialism changed, but not the *essence* of the Soviet Union.

Trotsky explained the relationship between the dialectician and objective reality:

“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, concretization, a richness of content and flexibility; I would even say “a succulence” which to a certain extent brings them closer to living phenomena. 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.” (Leon Trotsky: The ABC of Materialist Dialectics)

The great majority of left organizations, including the fake Trotskyist organizations, are structured as petty bourgeois organizations (many times with the same characteristics of a cult or a sect. This is the case particularly in the US and England) with a bourgeois emotional consciousness that is linked to non-dialectical petty bourgeois ideology or political positions. The terms I am using here are not insults or political attacks, but precise scientific definitions of the politics of these groups, and how their politics are connected to the group’s structure. By “petty bourgeois,” I mean groups in which what glues the individuals together is the herd mentality, the feelings of “I belong” that prohibit independent thinking. Such groups cast out any individual who expresses doubts about the group’s politics. These groups do not use the dialectic, but many times they are controlled by the political whims of the leaders. Even though such groups do not use the dialectic, dialectics controls every moment of their flat existence.

Let me explain what I mean. I have chosen the Healyites as a target. Yes, they are an easy target with some extreme features in comparison to other left groups. But they are an excellent group to illustrate the dialectics because they were the only fake Trotskyist international that made their version of the “dialectics” the center of everything. In the 1970s, Healy and company (ICFI) functioned like the Stalinists. The adhesion to the herd within its English (SLL) and American groups (WL) was based on feelings of terror and fear. Any member who raised minor criticisms immediately became a “renegade” of Marxism and an enemy of Dialectics. The Healyites

correctly quoted a thousand times a day the laws of dialectics; that is, they were “teaching” the members about the dialectics by using the “dialectics” to terrorize the members and create fear within the organization. Their method showed the extent to which bourgeois society masked as “Trotskyists” controlled and ultimately destroyed thousands of subjective revolutionaries, all in the name of dialectics.

I was in the WL, and in 1974 I started a struggle within the WL. I was young, only 24 years old, and not very experienced. One day, I told Mike Banda (Healy's second in command) that their positions on the Middle East were very wrong because instead of criticizing the Palestinian leaders (Arafat) and the Arab bourgeoisie (Sadat), the WL praised them. (I later wrote a document about this.) So what should one expect from the so-called masters of the dialectics (Banda and Cliff Slaughter)? The ABCs of dialectics demand, first of all, objectivity. They had to check whether my claims that their press wrote articles uncritically praising Arafat and Sadat were correct. In addition, if my criticism was factually correct, then the obligation of the “dialecticians” was to explain to me, using the dialectical method, why I was supposedly wrong.

Instead, their US group (WL) reverted to methods from The Stone and Middle ages. They never discussed the contradictions of their positions (on the Middle East) with dialectical Marxism. My criticisms were never discussed. Instead, I became the enemy. Everybody was supposed to be cold toward me; I was an outcast. Finally, they prepared a Congress (1976), which most of the International Healyite leadership attended. Part of it was devoted to terrorize me. If there is no human dialogue to evaluate the contradictions of a group's politics, then the contradictions (dialectics) dominates every move of the group. In a very negatively charged atmosphere, I had to present my criticism. Then, every member had to denounce me as a renegade and (sometimes) as a spy of the SWP (one of the main opponents of WL at the time). In this herd-like controlled group, the topics on the table were not even mentioned. People stood there denouncing me with their hands shaking from fear. Why? Because if they used one or two “wrong” sentences in their denunciations, Banda, Slaughter or North would have come to the podium and denounced these comrades as renegades who failed to understand, yes, the dialectic.

This era was the beginning of the end for Healyism. With an internal life of such abuse, even centrist and fake-Trotskyist groups cannot be maintained. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the Healyites were a typical centrist group. But with the evolution of extremely oppressive internal regime and more opportunistic politics (Healy became a Monarch, Kaddafi, a great revolutionary), the evolution of Healyism in a backward direction started to accelerate. I can say with confidence that at some point this quantitative backward direction took a leap and Healyism made a qualitative leap backward, becoming a monstrous illustration of fake-Trotskyism. This kind of evolution leads only to the “last” law of the dialectics, *the negation of the negation*.

If someone figures out one day how to take all of the atoms on earth, separate the electrons from the protons and keep a huge charge between them, that person will create a huge explosion like a super-nova. That is what happened to Healyism. In 1985, the Healyite movement exploded spectacularly, like a sun that is condensed to the size of the earth, with all of the pressure that had built up. The ashes, thousands of disillusioned subjective Trotskyists, were lost and could not rise again as militant Trotskyists, for the same reason that a star, after the process of a super-nova is finished, can never shine again.

I can cite dozens of daily examples and illustrate how profoundly the absence of basic elements of the dialectics in the left’s arguments is connected to the deep alienation of the individuals and to their bourgeois emotional world. Here I will use a very basic example, very routine and typical, just to illustrate how one can see this with everything that the left does and writes. A few months ago (In the spring of 2009), the HRS was exchanging informal e-mails with a British group called *Socialist Fight*; specifically, with an individual named G.

He was moving leftward from his previous right-wing Trotskyist history, but he had one extremely reactionary bone in his system: Zionism. As a Marxist, he failed the elementary test of supporting the oppressed against the oppressor, by supporting the right of the Jews in Palestine (the oppressors) to self-determination at a time when the Zionists were in the middle of a genocidal campaign against the Palestinians. This position is the method of the petty

bourgeois which cannot stand up against the pressure of imperialism; thus, G had adopted a social chauvinist/social imperialist position. This is not the place to discuss what is wrong politically with this position, which is common among leftists in the imperialist countries. (See the publications of the ILTF and historical material from our group on the topic). Here, I simply want to state that this position (supporting the right of an oppressor nation to self-determination) is directly connected to alienation, because the petty bourgeois is capitulating to the propaganda of Zionism and imperialism; hence, the emotional herd mentality (conformism) of the petty bourgeois who does not have the courage to stand up to imperialist pressure and say loudly and clearly, “I stand without wavering for the destruction of the imperialist enclave (Zionism) in the Middle East, which can be carried out only by the oppressed (the Palestinians, and the Jewish workers who support them by totally breaking from Zionism)!”

In the case of G, as in all cases like this, the pro-Zionist position (the political source of his alienation) demonstrated the lack of the dialectic method, which could be seen in everything he wrote. Losing all ability to be objective, he did what all petty bourgeois “Trotskyists” do: If you cannot answer your opponents, accuse them of the worst things that come to mind. G used the worst insults in the Trotskyist movement; he wrote that the FLT is Pabloite. In the heat of the debate, I wrote back to G, saying:

“. . . before you rush to accuse the FLT of being Pabloite on Palestine, read the Transitional Program. Here is a section on the workers’ and peasants’ (farmers’) government.

‘The practical participation of the exploited farmers in the control of different fields of economy will allow them to decide for themselves whether or not it would be profitable for them to go over to collective working of the land – at what date and on what scale. Industrial workers should consider themselves duty-bound to show farmers every cooperation in traveling this road: through the trade unions, factory committees, and, above all, *through a workers’ and farmers’ government.*’ (Trotsky, *The Transitional Program*, my emphasis)

So I think that the FLT statement ‘for a non racist, democratic and secular Palestine State from the river to the

sea, which can only be guaranteed by a workers' and peasants' government of the Palestinian masses organized and armed,' is a good application of Trotsky's method. There is nothing Pabloite about it."

His reply was:

"He (Trotsky) does not say, though, that it should lead a 'democratic and secular Palestinian State,' did he? Perm Rev Vs two stages?"

At the time, I did not write back because I thought that G was a lost cause and a waste of my time. But I am going to do it now using the laws of dialectics. Law number one: Being determines consciousness, or, the objective reality and your role in it determine your method of politics. In other words, this was a subjective emotional reply that distorted the position of the FLT. The FLT does not simply call for a "democratic and secular Palestinian State," which is saying that the FLT has the program of Arafat and the PLO. Our "dialectician" "forgot" to mention the rest of the sentence which says "which can only be guaranteed by a workers' and peasants' government of the Palestinian masses organized and armed." In other words, this is the method of Trotsky's Transitional Program that I quoted above. For Trotsky, the need to pose the slogan of "a workers' and farmers' (or peasants', in most colonies and semi-colonies) government" is a critical transitional demand. It is a popular way of calling for workers' and peasants' power based on the mass organizations of the "masses organized and armed," which is understood by the masses. Such a demand can only be carried out with the leadership of the proletariat, and, if carried out successfully with a real revolutionary leadership, this can only lead to the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is what Trotsky had in mind when he raised it in the transitional program, and that is the way this demand is connected to the permanent revolution. If we go to the Palestinian masses today and call for the "dictatorship of the proletariat," nobody in Palestine will understand this, and we will be prey to the assaults of the reactionary leaders of the Palestinians (even though all the democratic tasks in Palestine can really be implemented by the "dictatorship of the proletariat," the culmination of the permanent revolution). Yet the slogans of the IFLT are powerful transitional demands addressed to the present consciousness of the Palestinian masses which, if carried out, is

likely to complete the revolution via the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

So G lost all objectivity in his argument by totally distorting what the FLT actually wrote. When dialectics masters you instead of you mastering dialectics, it will not leave you alone. When G could not break fully with Zionism and the social chauvinism of the imperialists, he embraced their method of thinking, which is reflected in the social democratic, “gradual two stages” road to socialism. When he attacks the FLT in “Perm Rev Vs two stages,” he is really arguing against himself. Once again, we see how dialectics controls the person who develops a “position” with social chauvinist emotions. Any solution with the “Jews’ right to self-determination and a state” is not any different from the two-state solution advocated by all the liberals, the “progressives” and the imperialist themselves. Thus, G’s road to socialism needs to go through the social democratic two stages as two capitalist countries (Jewish and Palestinian states) attempt to “resolve” the democratic and national tasks in Palestine. However, as long as the Jewish workers do not support the Palestinians in their tasks to smash the Zionist state and liberate their lands and homes which were brutally taken from them, Jews can have only a Zionist reactionary state, and their consciousness can only remain nationalist and reactionary. Furthermore, if the Jews support the Palestinians, there will be no need for their separate state. Their Zionist “state” has proven to be only an instrument of imperialism in the last sixty years.

So in the case of G, the lesson is: When you capitulate to social imperialist pressure, you can only end up with the pedantic Western thinking of “gradual changes” without the leaps of the permanent revolution.

Alienation, Dialectics, and the Crisis of Climate Change

The current ecological crisis is unrelenting. It has evolved to the point that mainstream scientists and politicians cannot avoid it any longer. The doom and gloom over climate change is beginning to affect their nerves. Physicist John Holdren, director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy in the Obama administration, said, “There is nothing we can do to stop climate

change in its tracks because emissions already in the atmosphere will eventually raise ocean temperatures.”¹ This view of the Obama administration is becoming common among scientists. I will not repeat here how urgent the situation is. (See my appeal in *A Dire Emergency Regarding Climate Change*)

At this point, most scientists agree that we are passing the point of no return, which means that *at least certain levels of devastation* will strike capitalist civilization because of climate change. These include millions or even billions of people suffering or dying from lack of water and food, as well as increasing devastating and unpredictable storms. Even a relatively mild change of temperature of 2 to 3 degrees Celsius will bring scarcity which the human race has not faced for thousands of years. If capitalism continues to function as expected (profit comes first) for the next ten to thirty years, and no *drastic* curtailment of green gases takes place, the changes could be so drastic that the human race could be wiped out along with the great majority of other living beings on the planet. As a matter of fact, even mainstream scientists are soberly telling us that we are in the middle of mass extinction of all species from every category (mammals, birds, fish)—a mass extinction that planet earth has not experienced for millions of years. Furthermore, what is also terrifying is that previous mass extinctions took thousands of years to develop, whereas now it is developing over a few decades. This is a great warning to the human race: Get rid of the profit system and private property, which destroy all life on the planet at the speed of light (relative to the pace of past mass extinctions), or die.

I will deal here with the dialectics of climate change and combine this with the dialectics of alienation, and explain why the horrible combination of both could only be (it may be too late) stopped with the socialist revolution; that is, when humanity finally starts to grow up from its infantile primitive stupid era of class societies.

Two periods from the history of planet earth show beautifully how nature and dialectics work when climate change is a normal natural development. The first example, an era 250 million years ago, is known as the Permian Era, a golden era of biodiversity that was about to come to a crashing end. Within just a few thousand years, 95% of the life forms on the planet were wiped out in the biggest

mass extinction the earth has ever known. Paul Wignall, a British scientist, studied the causes for the mass extinction in South Africa. He arrived at a very interesting theory that can be only explained fully by dialectics. It started with massive Siberian volcanoes which released massive amounts of ash that blocked the sun. Gradual global warming took place due to the greenhouse gases released from the volcanoes. This process was really a gradual (social democratic) process that took 40,000 years, and some land animals gradually died out, while life in the seas was OK as the water temperature gently rose. “Then the seas gave up their frozen methane. In just 5,000 years, there was massive loss of species from the world’s oceans. In a third and final phase of the extinction, the Permian killer returned to stalk the land for another 35,000 years. By the end of that process, 95% of the Earth's species were extinct.”²

It took about 40,000 years for Planet Earth to warm up 4 degrees Celsius. *This was the point of no-return*, as the oceans started to release massive amounts of methane that cooked the earth gradually up to ten degrees warmer. This process still took thousands of years. At the end of this process, 95% of life on earth was gone. This is, of course, a summary of an extremely complex and contradictory process which we barely understand. But it is understood well enough that we can call it the social democratic stages of the Permian era. There is nothing in the dialectics that states that processes cannot be gradual.

However, if we turn off the macro-scope and turn on the microscope, we’ll see that the process was really far from gradual. At some critical point (about four or at most five degrees), *the oceans warmed up to the point of no return*; thus, quantity was transformed into quality, and the snowballing of catastrophic climate change was unstoppable.

An even more dramatic change took place 630 million years ago. I explained what happened in my article on dire emergency: “At the bottom of this (Arctic) ocean lays a time bomb of unimaginable proportions: a huge amount of methane that accumulated via organic decomposition 630 million years ago. Methane is a greenhouse gas that is many times more powerful than carbon dioxide.”³

“Scientists worry that as the temperature at the bottom of the Arctic Ocean rises closer to the freezing point, a massive amount of this methane will be released into the atmosphere. In fact, in the last couple of years methane has started to bubble up from the bottom of the Arctic Ocean at an increasing rate.”³

“If the methane at the bottom of the Arctic Ocean is released, the effect of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere will increase to at least 20 times greater than it is now.”³

“This can happen as fast as the flip of a switch, in geological terms — which means in decades, or perhaps as short a time as several years.”³

“About 630 million years ago, most of the earth was frozen, and the temperature was rising very slowly. This slow rise in temperature was transformed very suddenly into an extremely rapid one because a massive quantity of methane was released from the ocean into the atmosphere.”³

“When this happened, the earth was transformed in a matter of decades from an ice-covered planet into a tropical one.”³

“Tropical climatic conditions reached into the Arctic. When the temperature cooled again, the plants in the Arctic all died and decomposed, causing the deposit of a massive amount of methane, much of which still lies at the bottom of the Arctic Ocean.”³

Here, the gradual “social democratic” changes were suddenly interrupted by a revolutionary leap; that is, the revolution that nature created was so massive and fast that in a matter of decades the planet was transformed from an ice-covered planet into a tropical planet, including what is known today as Alaska. Quantity was transformed into quality in a violent revolution, a super-nova. To save the planet and avoid any more versions of the above examples, *the international socialist revolution must move like a violent super-switch within the coming decades. This is the last chance nature gives us.* Our chances to survive and progress as a species depend on the emergence of a rational planned “green” economy with the emergence of non-alienated human beings. We either do it and make

a revolutionary leap in human consciousness and development, or we could die as a species. If we fail, this could be the final negation of the negation for the human race. In reality, there are many variants. While scientists know that we either have crossed or are about to cross the point of no return, no one knows for sure the levels of catastrophe that will develop. These could be “mild” (“only” a few billion people die and humanity descends into acute barbarism, but survives) or severe (a scenario similar to the Permian era, or other eras of mass extinctions). What is clear, however, is that scientists are getting more nervous every year. They have their super-computers with millions of circuits that try to predict how quickly global warming is proceeding. Every year, scientists in the field report that global warming is proceeding faster than the super-computers’ predictions. So they adjust the super-computers (they need a “slight adjustment,” to use the words of Bugs Bunny), and the following year, the scientists in the field report again that global warming is developing much faster than the adjusted super-computers. And why is this? We cannot explain this with formal logic; only a human mind that uses the dialectics can comprehend it.

Computers are machines. Machines are not alive; they “think” formally and abstractly, and they (like the formal and abstract alienated person) cannot understand the incredible complex living dialectic of dramatic changes in nature. A dialectician (even if she or he is not a physicist) can comprehend it better than the super-computers. The reasons for this are relatively simple. What takes nature tens of thousands of years to bring about (a point of no return) has taken barbaric capitalism (with greenhouse gases in the atmosphere) less than two hundred years to create! We are about to be two degrees warmer from the time capitalism started, and, as noted above, the earth was only four degrees warmer when quantity was transformed into quality 250 million years ago—when an unstoppable process that ultimately destroyed most life on the planet began. Capitalism is creating the same phenomenon in an incredibly condensed amount of time. Only the “God” of matter knows exactly what this does to the complex planet. All bets are off. Capitalism is driving another process of mass extinction via an accelerating leap that nobody can fully understand.

From the point of view of dialectics, however, when a process is extremely condensed, the speed can only dramatically accelerate. If you take 10,000 volts and run it through extremely high resistance, the flow of the electrons will slowly warm up the circuit (the process 250 million years ago). But if you decide to create a short circuit (the speed at which capitalism releases greenhouse gasses), the “mad” electrons in the circuit will create a massive explosion—which is precisely what capitalism is doing to climate change: the short-circuit switch is about to be fully turned on, and only the working class and the international revolution can stop it and save humanity.

There are already dramatic changes happening. According to the latest data, about 350,000 people die every year from starvation and flooding directly connected to climate change. Soon the numbers of casualties are likely to reach into the millions. The information that I have provided above, and much more, can be found everywhere: in the newspapers and on the Internet. The average person is aware of it, and she or he feels too helpless and demoralized to do anything about it. What is at stake here is huge and fundamental, so we must ask: Why doesn't humanity rise up against capitalism and overthrow it before it is too late? The dire consequences of climate change (combined with exploitation, oppression, the possibility of a third world-imperialist war, and deep alienation) should drive millions into the street screaming, “We've had enough, and we're not going to take it anymore!” (Remember the movie *Network*?).

There are many reasons why people are quietly going on with their painful routine lives knowing what is at stake here. The “advanced” left is fully aware of the obvious reasons for climate change. The working class is demoralized and is occupied with survival. The leadership is betraying the working class, and unless the working class fights to overthrow capitalism for all the other reasons Marxists have been listing for the last 150 years, humanity cannot deal with climate change.

The cynics will add a few other correct fundamental reasons for the inaction of the masses in regard to climate change. According to public polls, the economy is first on the public's mind, and climate change is the last thing on its mind. The cynics say that this is so because humans react to what is right in front of their noses. Until

climate change affects them directly, they will do nothing. There is, of course, a sad truth to this. What, then, is the difference between humans and animals in this regard? None, say the cynics. Here I depart from the cynics. How can we explain the apathy of the masses from the angles of alienation and dialectics? When hundreds of millions of human beings are going on with their lives and doing nothing, while at the same time knowing perfectly well what is at stake is the survival of their species, what is happening to their brain, their consciousness? I say that at the moment their consciousness is flat. And unless this changes rapidly, we will lose our humanity. We are dehumanized as long as we do not have the courage to risk everything, including our own lives, to save our species.

I do not say that de-humanization is a worldwide development. The most oppressed are fighting back. In Peru, thousands of workers and poor peasants risked their lives as they fought to kick out the imperialist corporations from the Amazon. Their demands were: Imperialists out of the Amazon! Leave the bio-diversity of the Amazon alone! They knew exactly what they were talking about, *because the Amazon is drying out, with more frequent droughts due to climate change*. This is what scientists are saying, and this is what the native Amazonians are experiencing. The native Amazonians cannot survive under these conditions. If this process does not stop, scientists say that the world will turn into a desert with reduced oxygen; it is kissing life good bye. The pro-imperialist Peruvian regime responded to the uprising in the Amazon with bullets, killing hundreds in cold blood. Where was the solidarity in the imperialist countries against the murderers and against the destruction of life on the planet by the imperialists and their puppets? There was no visible solidarity. Millions of “progressive” petty bourgeois and “greens” will not give a damn until it affects them directly. Yes, they are involved in habitat restorations in their own backyard. Big deal! These are simply small actions to place little green dots on the map and make capitalism look a little greener while the entire planet is on the brink of horrific changes.

Alienation has reached its darkest stage. With every passing year during which we do nothing, our alienation becomes deeper and our humanity flatter. Capitalism has created many devices that make human beings flatter, emotionally less engaged and more self-

centered. (See: [*Alienation in the Post Cold War Era.*](#)) Now we have 200-plus TV channels, hundreds of movies that we can watch on-line at any time, the Internet with e-mail, YouTube, Facebook and other mechanisms that keep us isolated without the direct interactions that make mammals, mammals and humans, humans. In order to be human, you need to hear another person's voice, see the person, touch the person, read her or his facial and body expressions—all of which have made us who we are and have allowed us to connect with one another and experience our humanity for thousands of years.

Nowadays, these interactions are being replaced with text and e-mail messages, virtual “friendships” on Facebook and other social networking sites, electronic chatting, and the like. This is not to say that, if only used when necessary, human interactions via machines are not useful. But the alienated and lonely person abuses these means of communication dramatically. What kind of mature adults can we expect to develop from teenagers who communicate with each other day and night over the Internet when they live across the street from each other? Given people's isolation and dependency on machines to interact with one other today, Marcuse's “one dimensional person” was emotionally rich and thoughtful in comparison to today's alienated person. The vestiges of real human communities that remain in the US today are quickly disappearing. The alienated person is more atomized and separated from others than ever. If the dire state of climate change had been known in the 1930s or even the 1960s, it would not have been just a topic of dinner conversation; the masses would have gone into the streets, enraged and ready to fight to save the human race. (Of course, we still would have needed a revolutionary party to mobilize the masses on a class basis, etc.) Dialectically speaking, the bourgeoisie has made us so self-centered and focused on our petty lives that now “my internet friends and I” are the basis of most of our regular and “meaningful” interactions with others.

Thus, our humanity is about to take a final leap backwards to the point of de-humanization at which a person is just an abstraction. This partially explains why the American working class's reaction to the deep crisis of capitalism is so slow (of course, this reason is combined with many other political and historical factors which I

will not discuss here). This does not mean that the human race in the US and most of Europe (in the semi-colonies the struggles are progressing much better) has been numbed to death. A spark that reignites the class struggle will bring solidarity; it will be the key to breaking down the alienation that separates us and keeps us as clueless pawns in the claws of the bourgeoisie. Dialectically speaking, it boils down to two options: Either the working class will fight back to overthrow capitalism by creating mass solidarity and breaking down the walls of alienation, or capitalism will keep us de-humanized to the point (in the future) at which it will be too late to save the planet.

Millions of workers and the oppressed have no choice but to work or look for work to the point of exhaustion. They don't have free time to save the planet. But there are still hundreds of millions of petty bourgeois and privileged workers (particularly in the imperialist countries) who are aware of what is at stake here, but they do nothing about it because of demoralization and deep alienation. They have developed a flat human consciousness in regard to our dire future that is expressed in their subjective consciousness: "I know we are on the edge of a catastrophe that could wipe out my species, but my own self-centered needs are too important for me to change and dedicate my life to organizing with others to stop this." What are those of us who are consciously or semi-consciously aware that capitalism is destroying the planet—knowing that we have merely decades at best to stop it—feel and do? The large pessimistic majority of people with petty bourgeois consciousness needs a greater and greater means of escape from themselves and the pain of the fact that our species is threatened with possible annihilation. Hence the rush to meaninglessly stare at computer and cell phone screens "twenty-four-seven."

This situation is expressed by how the particular (the individual person) is related to the general (capitalism). This has developed historically. As capitalism has become more decadent, so have the levels of decadence taken on by the (pro-capitalist, or apolitical petty bourgeois) individual. The more decadent capitalism has become, the shallower human relations have become, as the flatter individual brain reflects the growing decadence and barbarism of the capitalist system. It is no accident that the flat human Internet "connections"

are evolving side by side with the final stage of capitalist destructiveness.

Humanity has two basic choices when it comes to nature. We are a part of nature and we cannot change it, whether we like it or not. However, unlike animals, we have a choice. We can either use technology to preserve the bio-diversity of nature and live with nature in balance and harmony, or destroy nature to point that nature will turn its tables on us and eliminate the human race because in an evolutionary sense, humans are incompatible with living matter, nature.

Marx wrote that in order to overcome the fundamental alienated feeling of being separated from nature, we need to create a new harmony with nature in which civilization persists. Instead of destroying nature, humans will develop a creative relationship with nature in which we see nature with the “[non-alienated] human eye;” that is, we will restore our lost connection with nature through love and respect for nature, while maintaining the further development of our “civilization,” which arose out of nature. Marx did not mean a destructive civilization, but a civilization that can re-connect with nature via human creativity and a “special human eye.” (See the early Marx’s writing on alienation. Thus, we have higher consciousness than animals, thus we can feel connected to nature but maintain our special status of higher consciousness.

As the capitalists remain on their current destructive course, they are pushing the basic laws of the dialectics of unity and struggles of opposites (Lenin) to a breaking point, because they only use the struggles of opposites (destruction of nature) to the point at which there will be no more unity; nature can no longer sustain us. The extreme disregard of bourgeois society to the dialectics of matter will inevitably destroy humanity. Only a new, non-alienated humanity under socialism on an international scale can bring about a rational relationship with nature and restore our unity with nature. A failure to bring about international socialism in the coming decades will bring the laws of the dialectics to the total breaking point. There will no longer be a unity of opposites, but the extreme “*struggle*, respectively unfolding, of these opposites, contradictory strivings” (Lenin) to the point of a total breakdown of the opposites (humans

versus nature), in which there can be only one winner: nature. Thus planet earth will go backward to the “the apparent return to the old (negation of the negation)” (Lenin). Planet earth, through the convulsions of massive climate change, will destroy most current life forms or the conditions that make human life viable, and many new life forms will have to start over, likely in different evolutionary forms. Thus, eventually there will be a new balance of unity of opposites.

As we approach the breaking point, it is *absolutely* clear that *no* reforms of capitalism are possible when it comes to climate change and the environment. This differs completely from other social reforms called for in the class struggle (better working conditions, better healthcare, etc.). We are approaching a point at which the socialist revolution should have happened yesterday to save the human race. Thus every single green reformer, all the petty bourgeois green organizations and all the Gores of this world only create mass illusions in reforms that will make no difference to the continued accelerated capitalist destruction of nature, or to the acceleration of global warming. Simply put, there is not enough profit in "green" capitalism for the capitalist system to undertake the massive conversions of the productive forces and technology that are needed to stop or even slow down the acceleration of climate change. For every green dot that the petty bourgeois green movement and the “Gores” (the green bourgeoisie) create on the planet, capitalism creates billions of tons of greenhouse gases. Statistics clearly show that despite all of the green dots that have been put on the world map, the release of greenhouse gases is accelerating every year. What more can we expect? “Green” Obama is sending thousands of soldiers to kill thousands of peasants in Afghanistan and Pakistan so that the imperialists can control the area and run a new oil pipeline through Afghanistan. The oil companies can then use “cheap” oil instead of green energy to maximize their profits and release billions of tons more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. The bourgeoisie and their "green" Obama are destroying nature in Alaska for oil as well. We must ruthlessly remind the petty bourgeois “greens” and the left that this is what Obama is really about.

I may be called sectarian when it comes to challenging the environmental “reforms” under capitalism, but the reality is that *the illusions* that the Greens and the Gores are promoting are *fatal* for the human race. The struggle against environmental degeneration and climate change is about *socialism or death*. This is where real objective reality stands. Lenin’s “objectivity of consideration” means that a dialectician needs to look at the real objective reality straight in the face, outside of subjective wishes and illusions. Such objectivity in critical times like today is the most important thing in the world of matter. Objectively, it means that in order to survive, we must establish a humanistic, non-alienated society organized via a rational planned economy.

The opposite of such a socialist society is today’s capitalism, with its small sector of green profits (as greedy and even more exploitative as any other sources of capitalist profit, because "green" capitalism uses the high cost of technology to cut workers' salary). The little green society at the head of the “progressives” and the Gores is a delusion, as in reality, capitalism is controlled by the great majority of polluting multinational corporations which profit from the super-exploitation of the masses and the plundering of nature. Capitalism and imperialism doom humanity to total barbarism or extinction. This is what is on the table *today*, not thirty years from now.

Our name, Humanists for Revolutionary Socialism, comes from the understanding that (at least partially) non-alienated humans within a working class vanguard must lead the fight to overthrow capitalism on an international basis. Because of what is at stake here, this means *the most ruthless struggle* against the Greens and the Gores. The Greens and the Gores create illusions that capitalism can survive and do well with green reforms (dots in the overall bleak reality). Since the Greens and the Gores also know what is at stake, their politics hold back the masses from fighting to overthrow capitalism. The problem of denial of what’s at stake is not confined to the Greens only, but also to the fake socialists, including the fake Trotskyists. One of the latter, David Walter, a sympathizer of Socialist Organizer (the Lambertists), wrote to me:

“Climate change, as real as it is, and its solutions, as real as they ‘may be,’ is not based on political parameters easily set by people, but on climate science and thus, based on

‘computer models’ and climate history and we can do [nothing] to affect that. But it’s not a given, Dov. Politics provides conditions for ‘maybe’ changing the climate; then again, maybe it won’t. And again, it’s possible things might just change if enough political pressure is exerted short of a socialist revolution on a planetary scale. If it is ONLY through world wide socialist revolution that those conditions can change enough politically, we might as well wrap it up and party.” (March 20, 2009)

This mumbo jumbo summarizes well the thinking of the reformist socialist left. Walter does not mention the cause of climate change—capitalism—nor does he mention anything about the class struggle, or if and how the working class can fight climate change. Instead, he writes that maybe climate change is happening, maybe it’s not. Putting pressure on the capitalists may help resolve the crisis. And forget about the socialist revolution. There is no need to tell the working masses the dire consequences if they do not fight to overthrow capitalism and save the planet, because the cynics (like David Walter) tell us that “we might as well wrap it up and party.” Reading these words from someone who claims to be a Marxist and a dialectician makes my stomach turn. No, we should not “party” because we are doomed. We should go to the working class and, as we fight like hell for every issue and transitional demand that will lead to the socialist revolution, and as we build the revolutionary international to lead the socialist revolution, we must tell the masses what is really happening: that with the acceleration and buildup of greenhouse gases, and with the data that every good scientist gives us, *we are beginning to run out of time*. The workers’ movement faces stark choices. It either fights to overthrow capitalism, or it faces the most horrifying forms of barbarism. This is completely consistent with Trotsky’s writing in the transitional program. Cynics like the Lambertists who call themselves “socialists” and “Marxists” are misleading the working class directly to this point of barbarism.

The alienated Greens’ consciousness has become so dull and dead about the objective breaking point (they read every scientific report that we have either crossed the point of no return or are about to cross it) because they do not want to let go of capitalism. This leaves us no choice but to denounce the pro-capitalist reformers in the most

ruthless way. “But they are not fascists,” our opponents are likely to scream. This is true. But let me here use the dialectic to explain the relationship between form and content. The form of the Greens is much milder than the form of the fascists. The fascists talk about violence against the workers now, while the Greens and the Gores only want to put pressure on the capitalist system to make it greener; certainly they call for a “progressive,” mild, liberal form of capitalism. But the real *objective content* of the Greens is ultimately as violent and destructive as the violence of the fascists. The Greens, the “progressive” capitalist regimes (such as the Bolivarian regimes of Chavez and Morales in Venezuela and Bolivia respectively, who talked about the green reforms of capitalism in Poland) and the rest of the left who ignore the seriousness of the situation are aiding the development of a catastrophe that will, in the last analysis, be more destructive and violent than any of the actions of the fascists.

We do not deny that at present and in the very near future the fascists are always our worst enemies, or that workers must organize to destroy them. But while the Greens and Co. talk of a nicer, greener capitalism, they create huge illusions and apathy within the working class; they minimize the dire necessity for the socialist revolution. The content of their politics is ultimately catastrophic for the entire human race and the many other life forms on the planet. This is why a dialectician must examine all the time the contradictions between form and content; that is, the real objective dynamic between form and content. As Lenin put it, [there is] “the struggle of content with form and conversely, the throwing off of the form, the transformation of the content.” If we throw off the form of the Greens (“We just want a greener capitalism.”), we discover the real objective content: A bunch of useless green dots along with rapidly accumulating greenhouse gases in the earth’s atmosphere with powerful destructive potential. Compared to this situation, any forms of past barbarism on this planet (including the two world wars) appear as small episodes in the final chapters of humanity.

Is Dialectics Necessary for the Survival of the Human Race?

Yes. Even if a revolutionary party formally has a great program, it means nothing if such program is not carried out with conscious use of the dialectic. Many times, I have seen Trotskyist organizations

develop a good program and abandon it later. This is just a typical zigzag of centrism; that is, a good looking shell, without any real life inside.

Marxists supposedly know that without a revolutionary party and a revolutionary international it is not possible for the proletariat to take power on an international scale. But how can we build such a party if the revolutionaries do not master the dialectic? Bourgeois society has a profound impact on everybody. Its impact is so devastating that most people remain emotionally like children; they do not have the basic tools to transcend the alienated bourgeois society inside them. It is not possible to build a healthy revolutionary party that can lead the workers to power if the human relationships inside the revolutionary party are relationships among alienated comrades who, under the intense pressure of capitalist society, reflect in their politics the alienated consciousness promoted by capitalist society. The internal relations within the organization can cripple such a revolutionary party. And, since the fate of humanity depends on the development of a healthy revolutionary party, humanity is doomed without it. (See the chapter of my book on the left and alienation, “How the Alienating Features of the Socialist/Progressive Movement Contribute to Its Failure,” in which I describe how Trotsky explains this in regard to the Bolshevik Party).

“This emotional immaturity can be traced to the conduct of key Bolshevik leaders in the period before Stalin rose to power. In his books *History of the Russian Revolution* and *My Life*, Trotsky examined the psychological weakness of the most important Bolshevik leaders — weakness that led to opportunistic positions before the Russian revolution and to capitulation to Stalin later. While Trotsky does not give a full analysis on the interaction between the psychology of such leaders and the objective development of the revolution, his insights are nevertheless quite revealing. Two of the key Bolshevik leaders were Kamenev and Zinoviev.

This is what Trotsky wrote about Kamenev:

‘Although a Bolshevik almost from the very birth of Bolshevism, Kamenev had always stood on the right flank of the party. Not without theoretical foundation or political instinct, and with a large experience of factional struggle in

Russia and a store of political observations made in Western Europe, Kamenev grasped better than most Bolsheviks the general ideas of Lenin, but he grasped them only in order to give them the mildest possible interpretation in practice. You could not expect from him either independence of judgment or initiative in action. A distinguished propagandist, orator, journalist, not brilliant but thoughtful, Kamenev was especially valuable for negotiations with other parties and reconnoitres in other social circles — although from such excursions he always brought back with him a bit of some mood alien to the party. These characteristics of Kamenev were so obvious that almost nobody ever misjudged him as a political figure. Sukhanov remarks in him an absence of “sharp corners.” “It is always necessary to lead him on a tow line,” he says. “He may resist a little, but not strongly.” (Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, Volume One, pages 273-4.)

"In other words, an opportunistic political character that impels one to dilute political principles, can always be traced to a weakness in the fundamental personality — to the inability to withstand social pressure and maintain independent thinking and initiative; to the fear of being ostracized, and of being alone. It is always the case that when a person has a weak core, that person does not have a real nourishing connection to him/herself and to his or her closest friends and comrades. In such a case, political leaders including the best Marxists and socialists, cannot withstand the adverse pressure that involves the defense of big political principles. Such leaders will be driven to embrace the prevailing views of their social milieu. In the case of Kamenev and many others Bolshevik and Communist Party leaders, this meant an abandonment of independent thinking and principles, which are exchanged for the security of the herd.

"Kamenev and Zinoviev did not capitulate to Stalin overnight. (For the sake of simplification, I do not explain their opportunistic history before October 1917. See Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*). They went back and forth between Trotsky's left opposition and Stalinism; they

finally capitulated to Stalinism in 1926 when it was clear that Trotsky was losing. Thus they could not withstand the pressure of being in a small minority against impact of banishment from the party's social milieu. In their case resistance against the Stalinists was also tantamount to risking their life.

"Zinoviev's opportunism was not as straightforward as Kamenev's. Trotsky explains that on a superficial level his character seems to contain the opposite attributes to Kamenev's political identity:

'Where Kamenev was a propagandist populariser, Zinoviev was an agitator, and indeed, to quote an expression of Lenin, "nothing but an agitator." . . . Lacking inner discipline, his mind is completely incapable of theoretical work, and his thoughts dissolve into the formless intuitions of the agitator. Thanks to an exceptionally quick scent, he can catch out of the air whatever formulas are necessary for him — those which will exercise the most effective influence on the masses. . . . Although far more bold and unbridled in agitation than any other Bolshevik, Zinoviev is even less capable than Kamenev of revolutionary initiative. He is, like all demagogues, indecisive.' (Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 285.)

"Zinoviev's capitulation to the social pressure of Stalinism and the Communist Party can be traced to his demagogic character. It can be traced to the demagogue's symbiotic relationship to others in general. The demagogue *needs* the cheering and the approval of the people in the street to achieve unity with others, to overcome the painful separateness. But underneath rules the anxiety of the insecure person, who cannot think clearly and independently. The thoughts of the subjective demagogue do not come from the ability to assess the objective situation, but from the gut feelings of the ego that knows how to say to right things to get the caressing of the crowd. Underneath lies a damaged core that depends on the crowd's approval to feel the self worth. Thus, Zinoviev who, depended on the approval of the crowd, also, like Kamenev, *depended on the*

prevailing social mood of the Bolshevik party and ultimately on Stalin approval — such approval like in the case of many others Communists was more decisive than the principles of a humanistic socialist society that failed so miserably in the Soviet Union.”

(Alienation in the Post Cold War Era, Chapter 12, “How the Alienating Features of the Socialist/Progressive Movement Contribute to Its Failure)

It goes without saying that worse problems of alienation existed within the Third International. The Stalinists were the international of a herd of cows. In order to remain “communist,” the Stalinist leadership and membership shut down any emotional and intellectual independence, which are the pre-requisites of dialectical thinking. The result of this and the Stalinists’ politics were devastating for humanity (the rise of Hitler, World War Two, countless betrayals of revolutions, etc.).

The Trotskyist movement did not do any better when it came to alienation. Since Trotsky’s death, not a single leader has had a clue about how to understand and implement dialectics; therefore, all of the politics of the different Trotskyist sectors have varied from sectarianism to the worst opportunism. The big tendencies (Lambertism, Usec, Militant, Morenoism, etc.) developed opportunistic politics. The smaller groups (SL and its cousins, RWL, etc.) tend to have a mix of opportunist and sectarian politics, with egocentric leaders and extremely degenerated alienated human relationships inside the group. A party with a petty bourgeois alienated internal life cannot become a mass party. This is why the fate of Trotskyism was doomed without leaders who were mature and capable of transcending alienation and building a strong, non-alienated collective leadership that could develop a healthy party, attract the masses, defeat the fake Trotskyists (centrists) and re-claim the banner of the Fourth International. This situation has remained up until today. The sad story is that besides Lenin and Trotsky, there were only a very few people who had any understanding of dialectics outside the realm of abstraction. (I am not talking about some elements of dialectics; many people have to use elements of the dialectics from time to time in order to survive, since dialectics

ultimately reflects how the material world works. Centrists use elements of the dialectics from time to time.)

The Fourth International never had a chance to become anything significant without a steeled leadership that transcended alienation and mastered the dialectic. The result: the absence of a revolutionary international and the degeneration of capitalism to the point it has reached today. In the present crisis, we are witnessing the growing threat of a third world war because of the beginning of the clear decline of US imperialism and the rise of new imperialist countries like China. It looks like it's a race between a new imperialist war and the horrifying destruction of the planet to the point of no return. The dialectic recognizes every second of change in human history, even though humans do not recognize the dialectic. Here we can explain again its central aspect: "the relations of each thing (phenomenon, etc.) are not only manifold, but general, universal. Each thing (phenomenon, process, etc.) is connected with *every other*. . . not only the unity of opposites, but the *transitions* of *every* determination, quality, feature, side, property into *every* other [into its opposite?]." (Lenin). This can be summarized as the interpenetration of each phenomenon in a constantly changing world.

The inability of the Bolsheviks beyond a few leaders to master dialectics made the alien pressure of the bourgeoisie (both physically and ideologically) intolerable to the breaking point. Thus the ability of the revolutionary movement to think dialectically and function as a steeled but mature leadership has vanished after Trotsky's death. The absence of an alternative to capitalism allowed capitalism to degenerate further and further ("each thing [phenomenon, process, etc.] is connected with *every other*"). Now this further degeneration of capitalism (which can be traced back both to the failure of leadership and to alienation) effects the composition of planet earth (bio-diversity is degenerating fast, climate change), and it is even reflected in the areas in the universe around our planet (less heat is reflected back into space because of climate change, capitalist garbage orbits the planet).

I have just illustrated the "the *transitions* of *every* determination, quality, feature, side, property into *every* other [into its opposite?]." (The answer to Lenin's question is yes, but this answer requires a

long explanation.) So far, alienation and the destruction of dialectical thinking and functioning within the revolutionary movement have excluded a progressive alternative for humanity. This has given capitalism the space it has needed to evolve into the monster it is today. Thus all changes, transitions, and interpenetrations of opposites in the class struggle and in historical developments lost a progressive unity and a positive side. Without a socialist alternative, they have evolved into their very opposite: capitalism, which is taking the planet and humanity down the toilet.

In every declining socio-economic system that has outlived its usefulness, the seeds of the new social system begin to emerge within the old system. Thus, the bourgeoisie emerged before the feudal system had fully declined and collapsed. There was a sort of “dual power” for a period of time. This is not taking place today between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie (not in general but in short times of revolutionary situations) because there is a new, complicated dilemma. Capitalism does not decompose organically, or with relatively moderate social upheavals. Hence Leninism (the need for a revolutionary leadership within the proletariat) arises.

The extreme difficulties of getting rid of this barbaric system exist for many reasons (which this article does not cover). One of the most striking reasons is that the seeds of socialism within the capitalist system are rotten and half dead. The seeds must be stronger and better than previous seeds in a declining class society, because this is the last and most resistant class society in the history of class societies that have functioned for thousands of years. A new human being who begins to transcend all the mystics, garbage, fears, lack of emotional and independent thinking (to list just a few items)—that is, everything that makes us a reflection of the stupidity of class society—must emerge at least in an elementary form if we want to build a leadership capable of leading the masses to overthrow capitalism. In other words, a humanistic person who is capable of exploring his or her full potential must begin to develop as an alternative to the submissive humans who follow the destructive road of capitalism despite their desperation and suffering. This is one of the fundamental laws of dialectics: The new begins to emerge within the old, like the new flowers that begin to emerge toward the end of the cold winter.

By “new seeds,” I mean the seeds in a genuine revolutionary international. When we talk about a revolutionary leadership, we mean leaders who are capable of transcending alienation at least to some level, and of mastering dialectics. One task (transcending alienation) is profoundly connected to the other (mastering dialectics); both aspects interpenetrate with each other and should contribute to the further development of strong and mature leaders.

I have no illusions that fighting for the development of such seeds will be easy. Most Trotskyist leaders do not want to talk about alienation (since it is about themselves), and few have a clue how to think dialectically. We are very afraid of dealing with our conditioning under capitalism. After I wrote a book on alienation about ten years ago, I distributed it to my friends. Most of them could not deal with the content, and I received similar emotional reactions: “It’s about me, isn’t it?” I am aware of the difficulties, and I do not want to build a new Trotskyist cult in which everyone meditates for five minutes before and after a meeting and shares their emotional problems before the meeting begins.

However, if we want to go forward, certain minimum developments have to occur. The most important one is our ability to engage in a dialectical dialogue instead of having screaming “debates” when there are differences within the revolutionary party. This requires emotionally mature leaders who are capable of recognizing when their positions are beginning to be governed by emotions and old dogmas. In addition, this means a mature collective leadership without a main leader who is dull when it comes to real dialectical thinking and “rich” when it comes to the manipulation of the membership. Mature leaders need to know when differences are secondary—theoretical or tactical—and are then able to conduct patient discussions, waiting for life and future experience to resolve the differences. We need to trust the opposition because it is mature and capable of examining new developments dialectically, and we need to let the development of the class struggle confirm or deny its positions. In a healthy party such as this, one side eventually concedes an error. When the error or difference is tactical or theoretical, discussion and subsequent experience will only enrich the entire party and sharpen its collective dialectical thinking.

On the other hand, revolutionaries need to see when deep differences arise within the organization which boil down to the reflection of two opposing classes (the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie). In this case, the differences are reflected in the sharp tone of the discussions, and the proletarian side needs to trace the opposition to its class origins. And it needs to do so using the dialectic method.

If revolutionary Trotskyism revives, its seeds will not be rotten and dead. They will buzz with new life, and buds will eventually emerge.

To be continued...

Footnotes

- 1 <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2009/04/09/MN2416V8Q9.DTL>
- 2 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/science/horizon/2002/dayearthdied.shtml>
- 3 <http://e360.yale.edu/content/feature.msp?id=2081>
<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,547976,00.html>
<http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2008/05/could-methane-t>

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 *IDOM*), 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 earthshaking 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 continued 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." (*IDOM*, p.51)

The destruction of the workers' states in Eastern Europe and the USSR, brought about by the 1989-91 counterrevolutions, was a historical defeat for the international working class. The resulting setback is still being reflected via the 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.,...." (*IDOM*, 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 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 *interruptions 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 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. (*IDOM*, 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 leadership 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.'" (*IDOM*, 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 eventually

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." (*IDOM*, 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 bourgeois 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. 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.

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.

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." (*IDOM*, 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." (*IDOM*, 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 percent. The question is what new theory will the muddle-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 counterrevolutions, 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 critical 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 cadre, 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 peaceful 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, 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 locality." (*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

opportunisticly 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 *crucial* 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 dialectics 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 dialectics. 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 (now Humanist Workers for Revolutionary Socialism) 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."

References and Links

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