

# Genesis of bureaucratic socialism

## Part II - Second revolution

**S**ocialism, because of its transitional nature, can be thrown or retreat back to capitalism, can attempt to maintain the status quo or can try and progress onwards to communism. It is in relationship to this sometimes inseparable, and yet often reciprocal, complex of possibilities, or impossibilities, that the major political trends which emerged in the 1920s Soviet Union positioned themselves and struggled. Given the nature of politics at this juncture - a declassed proletariat, a substituting apparatus - differences took the form of splits on the central committee itself and a clash of wills between its leading personalities: ie, what Lenin called the *main danger* in his *Testament*. His perspicacity is confirmed again by the fact that of the six individuals he named two became leaders of the Left Opposition: Trotsky and Pytafov; two later joined them in forming the United Opposition: that is, Zinoviev and Kamenev; while the remaining two, Stalin and Bukharin, led the centre-right bloc until 1928.

Taking shape within the rarefied, marooned and tragic Soviet apparatus, the warring factions, blocs and majorities organised around these personalities did not have a closely defined, active base among the mass of the population. Their centre of gravity was of course the existence and perceived interests of the workers' state - which it must be emphasised was undergoing a metamorphosis, not merely suffering from a chronic, bureaucratic wasting disease. Nevertheless the path of each trend through the historical travail was perceptibly influenced by the contradictory tug of the various NEP classes and strata. Overcoming Russia's oppressive economic backwardness was the impulse, the compulsion and prize. Yet, though the competing trends all put forward perspectives for economic advance, social factors and interests justified, moulded and inspired the combatants' programmes, psychology and trajectory. Each economic growth formula involved different class or sectional pluses and minuses, compromises and sacrifices; and even in the abstract such interests cohered, aligned and realigned the conflicting but kindred trends.

Naturally great play was made of indexes of industrial and agricultural production. Perhaps too much. Despite being even more ambiguous and prone to disputation, as we have said, socio-political criteria must be primary. What programmes did, or were most likely to have, increased the direct power, revived the self-initiative and added to the weight of the working class? Though, especially under formal socialism, the answer can never be divorced from economic performance in general and industrial performance in particular, the two are by no means in automatic correspondence. As evidenced by capitalism and bureaucratic socialism, accumulation does inexorably increase proletarian numbers. But the price is paid by relatively and absolutely screwing down on working class subsistence levels, dehumanising work and turning the worker into an object. According to Marx such accumulation turns the product against the producer, *alienates* the worker from their "species being" and from each other.<sup>1</sup>

Socialism can only be socialism if

*within* the wealth already accumulated in society it *positively* begins the return of humanity to itself. Socialism is the dawn of human liberation and our true goal is not communism, "as such", but the free development of what Marx termed the human essence: ie, fully social humanity.<sup>2</sup> This negation of alienation - not the accumulation of products, nor the nationalisation (universalising) of private property - lies at the heart of Marxism. It is therefore with human, not merely economic, criteria that we assess and judge the trends of the Soviet apparatus.

So before tracing the course of Stalinite centrism, let us briefly examine its rivals in the 1920s. The left groupings were the most responsive to the pull of working class interests - this was on occasion, as with the Workers' Opposition and Democratic Centralists, decidedly utopian and syndicalistic. For all that, they and the more substantial left oppositions that followed, were associated in general with the call for the restoration of party democracy, support for the world revolution and defence of workers' living standards.

However, not least because of its position within the apparatus, the approach taken, for example, by the 1923 Left Opposition, which was tacitly backed by Trotsky, smacked of technocratism. Arising during the so-called 'scissors crisis', which saw industrial prices rise at the expense of agricultural prices, the Left Opposition was of the considered opinion that the triumvirate of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin was incapable of avoiding the impending "extremely acute economic breakdown".<sup>3</sup> As it happened, without any "well considered, planned and energetic measures", they did just that.<sup>4</sup> Two consecutively good harvests allowed the resumption of grain exports and with official pressure industrial prices began to fall. Idle plant and machinery were brought back into production. The scissors began to close.

Though the Left Opposition platform called for democracy in the party, it steered clear of foreign policy. Nevertheless Trotsky's own interventions into this minefield, in particular the pivotal German question, show that disputes at this time were still presented as those of shade. In fact Trotsky's stance appeared to place him on the *right* of what was then the Comintern spectrum. No wonder his factional opponents sneakily reinvented Trotskyism so as to brand it a social democratic deviation.

Having talked down the revolutionary situation triggered by the French occupation of the Ruhr in early 1923<sup>5</sup>, Trotsky presented with hindsight the October fiasco, ten months later, as a "now or never" missed opportunity.<sup>6</sup> Dragging up the past (a hostage to fortune given his own background), he berated Zinoviev and Kamenev for their vacillation on the eve of the Bolshevik insurrection in his September 1924 essay *The lessons of October*. Yet despite drawing a crude parallel between their record in 1917 and the German events of October 1923, the fact of the matter was that Maslow, Fischer and Thaelmann - ie, those pressing for an immediate uprising in Germany (wrongly in my view) - were aligned with Zinoviev, not Trotsky. Within the top echelons of the

Communist Party of Germany it was the scapegoated Heinrich Brandler whom Trotsky backed. Again on the international terrain, though Trotsky's present-day followers make great play of his fight against 'socialism in one country', the fact was that for two years he kept quiet on the notorious second edition of *Foundations of Leninism*, where Stalin signalled his conversion to the theory. Trotsky considered Zinoviev his main rival.

Even after the break-up of the Zinoviev-Kamenev-Stalin triumvirate and the emergence of the Stalin-Bukharin duumvirate, Trotsky continued to present his differences as a matter of emphasis. Stalin and Bukharin stressed the need to maintain the NEP worker-peasant alliance. Trotsky and his allies, most notably Evgeny Preobrazhensky, stressed industrial growth at the expense of the peasantry.<sup>7</sup> Indeed it was Trotsky's writings on the economy that were perhaps the most revealing of the narrowing field of vision Russian conditions were imposing even on such a panoramic and towering intellect. In *The new course*, published in January 1924, Trotsky stated that the development of "state industry" was the "keystone of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the basis of socialism".<sup>8</sup> And in similar vein he bluntly maintained in his August 1925 *Towards capitalism or socialism?* that the "premise for a socialist economy is the nationalisation of the means of production".<sup>9</sup>

The equation of nationalisation with socialism is a widely held idea. But, as we have more than once noted, it has nothing to do with the Marxist outlook.<sup>10</sup> I am not trying to prove Trotsky a philistine or an opponent of Marxism. That would be stupid. Nevertheless till the end of his life he considered that the Soviet Union possessed a socialist character, essentially because of the nationalisation of industry, land, transport, etc. Like the left-Ricardians of the 19th century, his critique of the relations of distribution were full of insight and savage condemnation. But his analysis was not able to penetrate to the depths of the system, to the relations of production themselves. His equivocal position on the Mensheviks was reproduced as an equivocal position on the Soviet social formation. In power, in opposition, in exile he remained a man of the Soviet state. It is not surprisingly then that Trotsky's initial forays against the rising bureaucracy were based around the demand for higher rates of growth in the state sector and central planning. He appears to have believed that the ruling group was incapable of delivering such a package. For Trotsky salvation lay with Gosplan, not workers' self-activity.

This technocratism was pointedly referred to by Lenin in his *Testament*. "Comrade Trotsky," Lenin argued, "is personally perhaps the most capable in the present central committee, but he has displayed excessive self-assurance and shown excessive preoccupation with the purely administrative side of the work." Ditto with the other Left Opposition leader-to-be, Pytafov: "He is unquestionably a man of outstanding ability," said Lenin, "but shows too much zeal for administration and the purely administrative side of work."<sup>11</sup>

Trotsky's technocratic approach led

him, when he was in a position of power, when he was the 'prophet armed', to advocate the most authoritarian measures, including the "militarisation of labour", not only because of Russia's parlous economic state, but because as a "general rule, man strives to avoid labour".<sup>12</sup> Hardly something that endeared him to the workers. Furthermore, because it was born out of a technocratic ethos, when the opposition attempted to rally mass support it utterly failed (what support it did get came mainly from members of Komsomol and the Red Army). Of itself this is no indictment. After all the working class was de-activated. But the message of the Left Opposition was not directed to the working class.<sup>13</sup> It spoke the language of the industrial manager, the state official. No wonder Stalin was able to scornfully dub Trotsky "this patriarch of bureaucrats".<sup>14</sup>

As EH Carr suggests, Trotsky was probably the "most westernised" and "least specifically Russian" of the Bolshevik leaders.<sup>15</sup> And it was precisely this self-perception which initially sided him with the camp of Martov and the Menshevik faction. In the name of the advanced mass workers' parties of western civilisation he pronounced himself an adherent of "opportunism in the organisation question" and against Lenin's supposed backward "Jacobinism".<sup>16</sup> Though quick to break with Menshevism, though he played a heroic role in the 1905 revolution as the last president of the St Petersburg soviet, Trotsky remained a bitter opponent of Bolshevism till 1917. There exists a sustained but rather unrewarding polemic between Lenin and Trotsky, which simply due to the heat of factional rivalry often obscures the basic agreement between the two. The perennial dispute over 'permanent revolution' and the peasant question was, when it came down to it, a matter of nuance, not principle. What kept them apart and at loggerheads was the "organisation question": ie, the party.

Trotsky was in many ways the personification of the revolution (not the party). And it was the February Revolution which brought both Trotsky's return to Russia and the party. Unity negotiations between his small group, the Mezhraiontsy, and the Bolsheviks were completed by August 1917. Despite often being fraught, they secured Trotsky's entry into party membership and onto its leadership. Past bitterness between Lenin and Trotsky immediately evaporated. Making the revolution permanent in practice took Trotsky to Lenin's side. And once there he was an invaluable asset. Trotsky brilliantly fulfilled the most exacting tasks. It was Trotsky who masterminded the October insurrection. It was Trotsky who built and directed the Red Army. It was Trotsky who was the pen of the Communist International. Friend and foe alike joined the names, Lenin and Trotsky, when referring to the Soviet regime.

Stalin had the *advantage* of neither being a theoretician nor an independent personality. The death cult of an infallible Lenin served him admirably. He had no established history of standing in opposition to Lenin either in deed or thought. His differences, despite being revealing, were episodic or practical. Sta-



lin could therefore pose as the humble and ever so faithful disciple. Trotsky grabbed at Stalin's conciliatory stance in the couple of months proceeding the February Revolution. But it was an unequal contest. In any exchange of thunderbolts culled from the writings of Lenin, Stalin was bound to be the winner, Trotsky the loser. Even Trotsky's inspired record post-October was turned against him. Being an outstanding leader in his own right, he clashed with Lenin over a number of important issues: eg, Brest-Litovsk and trade unions. Such disputes, natural in any healthy Communist Party, are soon forgotten once life decides who is right and who is wrong. Only after Lenin's death did disagreement with him become some sort of anti-party offence.

While the main reason for the defeat of the Left Opposition was the objective bureaucratisation of the party, absence played its part too. It was not only the past that weighed heavily on the leader of the Left Opposition. In terms of theoretical sophistication Lenin and Trotsky were equals. In terms of political standing no one stood higher than Trotsky except Lenin. However, as subsequent events were to show, he owed that standing not simply to his abilities as an organiser, but to Lenin's patronage and protection. His bygone anti-Bolshevik polemics, his meteoric rise to the top, his sheer talent meant that other leading personalities did not trust him. Indeed they mistrusted him and feared that he might entertain Bonapartist ambitions. Hence, even as Lenin lay dying, his closest comrades were aligning themselves with Stalin and manoeuvring to block Trotsky's succession.

Against Stalin, Lenin surely would have galvanised the party and workers alike. His political skill, authority and standing among all sections of the party as well as the masses are a matter of record. Lenin would in all likelihood therefore have had a large body of support on the central committee and a popular base. On the other hand, Trotsky, in no small part due to his pre-1917 anti-Bolshevik past, his arrogance and his technocratism, found himself virtually isolated on the central committee and without a mass following. Moreover, when he did associate himself with an opposition faction, he presided over one tactical blunder after another.

So the role of the individual was crucial. In the struggle for the body and soul of the party, Trotsky proved unequal to the task. For two or three years following Lenin's death Trotsky suffered from a strange illness, which put him out of action on many important occasions (quite possibly the malady was psychosomatic). But that was the least of it. When Trotsky opened his attack on "sectarian bureaucratism" in late 1923 he did not come out openly and publicly. Instead of boldly organising an opposition which might have been able to rally to its side the workers, Trotsky confined himself to dashing off letters to the central committee and allowing their contents to percolate down into the ranks of the party. Undoubtedly they met with a certain degree of sympathy. Stalin astutely retreated in order to buy Trotsky's silence and keep him isolated.

Drafted by Trotsky, Stalin and Kamenev, a resolution was placed before and unanimously agreed by a joint session of the politburo and presidium of the central control commission on December 5 1923. Though "factional groupings" were again condemned, Trotsky imagined it vindicated his point of view. The cliché-ridden resolution recognised "the unequal importance of Gosplan", the danger of "bureaucratisation ... in party officials", the "degeneration under NEP of a section of party workers" and the need for "a serious change in the party course in the direction of a real and systematic application of the principles of workers' democracy".<sup>17</sup> But under the new circumstances it remained a mere piece of paper. A split with the formidable Trotsky had for the moment been averted and his non-factionalism maintained - something he only reversed two years later, by which time the bureaucracy was fully consolidated.

The party's 13th conference of January 1924 took place in Trotsky's absence - he was ill. Notwithstanding that, it was used as a platform to vehemently denounce 'Trotskyism'. Down to the middle of December 1923 the leadership had "been anxiously concerned to drive a wedge between Trotsky and the opposition".<sup>18</sup> At the 13th Conference caution was thrown to the wind. Delegates were no longer elected on a proportional basis and the opposition found itself in a tiny minority. Despite having kept his distance, Trotsky and the opposition were lumped together and together furiously denounced. For the first time, at issue was not the political line of the party, but personalities. Trotsky had to be neutralised. Hence the 13th Conference can be considered "a more decisive occasion in party history" than the 12th Congress that preceded it and the 13th Congress that followed it in May 1924.<sup>19</sup>

The Left Opposition's technocratism, unwillingness to contemplate a split and lack of working class support contributed to the ease of its defeat. The same diagnosis can also be made for the failure of the organisationally much more weighty opposition which emerged in 1925. Its origins too are in the party hierarchy and the struggle for personal position. Trotsky's defeat removed what kept the triumvirate together. Zinoviev and Kamenev quickly came to realise just how strong and dangerous Stalin had become. In what was also their bid to remain at the top they shed their pro-peasant orientation and revealed themselves again as ardent spokespersons on behalf of the working class - in particular those in Leningrad. Together with Krupskaya and the financial expert Sokolnikov, they formed a joint platform directed against the rightist Bukharin and his 'moderate' guardian Stalin.

Midway through 1925 the slowly recovering economy suffered another one of its periodic setbacks. Agricultural deliveries to the towns declined and as a result living conditions of workers deteriorated. Bukharin, who now emerged as the main apologist for the pro-peasant policy, proposed an NEP "far more widely in the countryside than hitherto".<sup>20</sup> Bukharin's neo-NEP brought its inevitable rejoinder from those Old Bolsheviks - they were in fact Lenin's closest comrades - who, while not being against tactical retreats, opposed turning the politics of retreat into a full-blown doctrine. Instead of the hollow pretension that NEP was the high road to socialism, they fought for a pro-worker line.

Zinoviev, president of Comintern from its foundation till 1926, led the attack. In *The philosophy of an epoch* and in particular the book *Leninism* he polemicalised against those unnamed leaders pressing for more concessions to the forces of commodity production at the expense of the worker. Zinoviev reiterated Lenin's sober description of the Soviet Republic as "state capitalism in a proletarian state".<sup>21</sup> He demanded a halt to retreat. Interestingly Zinoviev also took up the cudgels against 'socialism in one country' (one year before Trotsky), insisting that socialism in the Soviet Union could only be built as part of the world revolution. Going it alone could prove disastrous. Progress in the economy could be made. But, he argued, because of internal and external dangers, the Soviet Union could not build full socialism, which had to go hand in hand with the withering away of the state and the merging of classes.

Zinoviev did not repeat Trotsky's mistake of a year earlier and limit himself to the spoken and written word. "He recognised that argument must be reinforced by organisation."<sup>22</sup> But this was now a war between office and office and Zinoviev only had command of Leningrad - which, though it carried enormous prestige and concentrated the largest numbers of the most militant and class conscious workers, had become equally bureaucratised as the rest of the party. In the polemical battle between *Leningradskaya Pravda* and its Moscow namesake the "fiercest and most telling blows" were dealt "from the side of Leningrad".<sup>23</sup> Yet the odds were hopeless. Stalin, because of his domination of the

party machine apart from the second capital, succeeded in overwhelming the opposition. At the 14th Congress, delegates "on both sides, nominally elected by their party constituencies, had been hand-picked by the party organisations, and a solid phalanx of Leningraders were isolated in a hostile audience".<sup>24</sup> The result was a foregone conclusion. The 65 Leningraders were swamped by the "hand-picked" delegates supporting the centre-right bloc.

Within a fortnight the resistance of the Leningrad organisation was effectively over. Stalin simply replaced Zinoviev's men with his own and the rank and file meekly followed out of habit, shrewdness or fear. The legendary Vyborg district was among the first to surrender. Zinoviev's belief in the combativity of the working class proved illusory. The masses were, Victor Serge recalls, "apathetic and dormant".<sup>25</sup> Zinoviev's 'impregnable fortress' crumbled and left him and his followers in the same exposed position as Trotsky. However once again we see the role of the individual, Trotsky, illustrated negatively. In spite of the similarity between his politics and those advanced by Zinoviev, Kamenev, Krupskaya and Sokolnikov at the 14th Congress, Trotsky did not speak up in their support. His 'leading centre' declined to join battle.

After he was edged aside in 1923 by Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin from the commanding heights of the party, Trotsky retreated into a period of self-imposed purdah. Putting personal feelings before politics led to the worst sort of behaviour. His sympathetic biographer Isaac Deutscher tells how between 1923 and 1925 he would turn up at central committee meetings "dutifully ... take his seat, open a book - most often a French novel - and become so engrossed as to take no notice of the deliberations".<sup>26</sup> His grudge against Zinoviev and Kamenev meant he looked upon the monumental fight which began under his nose on the central committee and continued at the 14th Congress with disdain, even contempt. Too much bad feeling existed.<sup>27</sup> The Left Opposition remained sulking in its tents: a mistake only rectified when the decisive moment had passed.

At Kamenev's initiative a rapprochement was sought and the United Opposition was formed. However, in its turn the United Opposition was, with almost effortless ease, rebuffed by Stalin. The attempt to mobilise popular support got nowhere. Opposition activity had to be carried out in conditions of semi-illegality. To even be associated with it was to risk one's job and certainly one's career prospects. Within the party the "gravedigger" could now bury his enemies. Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev and their supporters were surgically removed from leading positions - the latter from the presidency of Comintern. Others, including Krupskaya, announced their capitulation. Stalin enormously enhanced his authority and power. That notwithstanding, there was another, final, burst of opposition activity, beginning in the spring of 1927.

The communist-Kuomintang alliance in China ended in the mass slaughter of the Shanghai workers. Zinoviev, Trotsky and Radek had been clamouring for an immediate change of line, but the politburo had pig-headedly insisted on the continued subordination of the Communist Party of China to the nationalists (the Chinese revolution thus lost its proletarian content - it continued under the military leadership of Mao Zedong as a peasant movement). Even worse for the leadership, the Tory government in Britain broke off diplomatic relations and cancelled the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement. The foreign policy of Stalin and Bukharin lay in tatters. Economically too things began to deteriorate once more.

Michael Reiman is of the view that the "importance of the left opposition is often underestimated", and presents a picture of a "substantial influence" both within the party and the population at large.<sup>28</sup> The resources and energy of the politburo would not have been expended on something insubstantial, he naively argues (surely it was the mass potential of the opposition that was feared, not its

actual numbers).<sup>29</sup> Whatever the case by the end of 1927 the opposition had been routed. Trotsky and Zinoviev were expelled from the party prior to the 15th Congress, which had not a single oppositionist among its 1,600 delegates. Despite this physical absence the opposition haunted the proceedings. In September 1927 its platform had been outlawed. Now the party was readied for the destruction of its cadre. The "opposition", declared the congress resolution, has "become objectively a factor in the anti-Soviet struggle, and that "membership of the Trotskyite opposition and propaganda of its views is incompatible with remaining in the ranks of the Bolshevik Party".<sup>30</sup>

Stalin by now felt free to deal with the opposition using police methods. In the run-up to the 15th Congress the GPU raided apartments, the militia intervened to prevent public manifestations of opposition activity and a number of party members were actually placed under arrest. For the Zinovievites this and the threat of mass expulsions was enough to bring forth capitulationist declarations. To stay within the framework of the bureaucratic regime they were prepared to drink from the cup of humiliation - it proved to be hemlock. They duly became "political corpses".<sup>31</sup> With the opposition divided, with the central committee and politburo cleansed, with the secret police fully involved in party life, Stalin was confident enough to banish Trotsky and the principal opposition leaders from Moscow. In the "name of the party" they were "invited to leave Moscow" by the GPU.<sup>32</sup> Trotsky refused to go voluntarily and had to be forcibly removed. He and his family reached Alma-Ata, the capital of Kazakhstan, 160 miles from the rail-head at Frunze, on January 25 1928. Other oppositionists were similarly treated and scattered over Siberia and the far east. Whether they chose Zinoviev's path of endless humiliation through loyalty to the party or Trotsky's path of endless resistance through loyalty to the revolution, they were to share the same terrible end.

Let us now proceed to deal with the right. Once one of the foremost zealots of the Left Communist faction in 1918, Bukharin flipped 180 degrees after Lenin's death. The "favourite of the whole party" - was perhaps prone to such an about-turn because his rather "scholastic" theory, could be "classified as fully Marxist only with great reserve".<sup>33</sup> Be that as it may, what Bukharin lacked in consistency he more than made up for in breadth and originality. Not surprisingly then, having undergone a conversion which placed him on the party's right wing, he almost immediately became its most prominent figure.

The right of the party was never a faction as such. It was more a tendency, defined primarily by systematic defence of NEP as a strategy for socialism in one country. Bukharin and the other main leaders of the right, Rykov and Tomsky, were consequentially against a "second revolution" or any "intensification" of the class struggle in the countryside. They believed that full socialism could be achieved through an indefinite continuation of NEP. To ensure the passage of all classes - crucially the peasantry - through the eye of the NEP needle into the socialist paradise, the right favoured ditching the baggage of world revolution and a *modus vivendi* with the forces of the market and petty commodity production. For Bukharin world revolution became dependent on the Soviet Union's island socialism.

Accommodation with the peasants, the right admitted, meant slow industrialisation at first. It would proceed "at the pace of the peasant's nag", famously quipped Bukharin. No matter. If industry "turned its face to the village" and pushed the village "from the remote backgrounds of history into its front rank" through "Americanising" it on a "socialist basis", this would "ensure the maximum rate of development".<sup>34</sup> Evidently in Bukharin's view industrial growth was a function of accumulation in agriculture. That is why, much to his later regret, he once urged the peasants to "Enrich yourselves".<sup>35</sup>

Accordingly Bukharin and the right were considered the biggest danger by those on the left. For some time Stalin was in contrast thought of as a 'moderate', drawn either to the right or the left, depending on circumstance and the balance of forces. Certainly, while NEP sustained economic revival, Stalin was quite content to let the right theorise its virtues and emphasise the need to keep the *muzhik* happy. Rescue from abroad appeared increasingly remote - especially after the German failure in October 1923. NEP allowed the cohering bureaucracy to present socialism in one country as the only realistic course and at the same time legitimise its role in society. A mixed economy under the guidance of the apparatus filled bellies and promised to put the country back on the fast lane of development. All that banking on the world revolution ever brought were the ashes of disappointment.

By its very logic however, NEP plus socialism in one country becomes a negation of communism. The bureaucracy was against what it considered adventures aimed at reactivating the working class, simply because any success here would open a Pandora's box of disruptive movements and demands. It was not only that its meagre, but highly valued privileges might be challenged. It was that the tangible achievements of NEP would be endangered. Again the USSR would fall into civil war and be prey to foreign intervention. Why risk everything for the sake of ideological purity? Hence in their honest desire to defend what had been gained brave revolutionaries were often, in spite of themselves, changed into their opposite. Each administrative solution to a political question, each adaptation of principle to convenience, each temptation not resisted delivered its batch of cynical bureaucrats.

A strange kind of dual power came to characterise NEP. There remained the vestigial forms of the workers' state. Trade unions were strong, formal authority resided with the soviets, the sole legal party was the CPSU and the vocabulary of public debate, to the extent it existed, was Marxism. Yet, as effective workers' power dissolved, the elements of a new power crystallised. From within the party-state a caste had emerged and was pragmatically developing an agenda that was antagonistic to both the historic mission of the working class and its exhausted material self in the USSR.

To secure autonomy and further its sectional interests the bureaucracy precariously straddled between what threatened it: ie, the forces of socialism and capitalism. On the one side of the social equation was the working class - even in itself the proletariat represented a considerable force and a constant menace. Therefore passive working class support for the regime was considered vital. That is why left oppositions were so dreaded. Their agitation could at any time, it was feared, spark a working class revival and fire an anti-bureaucratic revolt. On the other side there was the spontaneous growth of elements who by their very nature would support the restoration of capitalism. The bureaucracy held the strategic levers of credit and finance in its untutored commissariats. Big industry was nationalised and foreign trade was a state monopoly. That said, the bureaucracy was obliged to stand guard over money as the regulator of exchange. Such social categories reflect and reproduce definite social relations. Hence, in spite of itself, the bureaucracy found itself compelled to make one concession after another to the money-accumulating, proto-capitalist class: nepmen, who were relentlessly expanding in the internal consumer market, and kulaks, who had their fist round the surpluses of grain.<sup>36</sup>

Such a balancing act was inherently unstable and before long unsustainable. The sullen power of workers in the workplaces, protective legislation, social benefits, etc, limited the scope for primitive socialist accumulation in the industrial sphere; it only entered profit "for the first time" in 1923-4.<sup>37</sup> The high prices the state was compelled to shell out so as to ensure adequate grain deliveries - both to meet the needs of the urban population and for export - had the same



effect as limiting surpluses gained from the agricultural sphere.

Industrial recovery had so far been achieved by rationalisation and bringing unused plant and machinery back into operation. Wear and tear and general deterioration imposed definite physical limits on such a strategy and meant that eventually there would be a relapse. In the mid-1920s things came to a head. Investment was urgently needed merely to sustain existing levels of production.

The left proposed to exploit the peasant system of economy. Primitive, or preliminary, socialist accumulation could be carried through via "tribute", i.e. for the left a painless process of unequal exchange between the state and private (predominately rural) spheres of the economy. Tax and price were its weapons of class war.

Time pressed. Choices had to be made. Unless state industry took the lead, the left insisted, the law of value would fully reassert itself and snap the link between the workers' state and the peasantry. Priority should therefore be given to expanding heavy industry. If NEP was continued in the present form, the end result would be capitalist restoration, the left sternly warned. Either the socialist economy would devour the petty bourgeois economy or else the socialist economy would be "dissolved in the elemental forces of commodity economy".<sup>38</sup> Against the left's industrialist thesis Bukharin complacently replied that the socialist state could obtain the funds it needed "on the basis of the growing rationalisation and growing profitability of the peasant economy".<sup>39</sup> Cooperatives were Bukharin's way forward.

In the summer and autumn of 1925 this agriculturist thesis was ascendant. Yet the bumper harvest of that year produced not record deliveries, but shortages. As Kamenev coolly observed, the harvest had a "social content".<sup>40</sup> Sellers were reluctant to sell. And despite progressive price increases, the grain still did not come. The richer the peasant, the more bargaining power they possessed. Poor peasants sold their grain in autumn, middle peasants in spring. But the kulaks could afford to hoard and even buy grain in the expectation of making more money later. The well-to-do peasant was no longer cash-strapped, "and with little in the way of available supplies of industrial goods on which to spend it, found himself in a position of being able to hold the state to ransom".<sup>41</sup> Grain exports had to be suspended. Bukharin's programme of industrialisation, pulled along by the peasant's nag, proved to be mere wishful thinking. The kulak had no intention of hitching his fine beast to industrialisation. He was not going to enrich the Soviet state.

Events themselves forced the bureaucracy to conclude that industry must be rapidly developed. Having effortlessly fended off the United Opposition at the 14th Congress, the leadership proceeded to steal its slogans with impunity. Nevertheless a coherent programme was still missing. How to industrialise remained the thorny and unanswered question. The bureaucracy tried to have its cake and eat it: i.e. preserve NEP and industrialise. During the years 1927-8 the industrial budget was expanded without extracting substantial new surpluses from the countryside. Things soon ran out of control.

Extra capital spending financed by the printing press produced both a buying fever and a goods famine. The decline in the value of the rouble and the shortage of industrial products found its knock-on effect in the decrease in agricultural products finding their way to the market. Food shortages threatened the big cities with hunger and dislocation. The proposed first five-year plan could only be presented to the party's 15th Congress in the vaguest terms. Grain exports had to be drastically curtailed. The balance of trade deteriorated sharply and the Soviet Union's modest foreign exchange reserves were in danger of wipe-out. To save the situation imports were cut. Shortages of spare parts and raw materials in turn negatively impacted on industry, especially metallurgy. The gap between projected and actual industrial

production widened to 21.4% in December 1927. Industrial debt grew and tax revenues declined. NEP met its nemesis.

Evidence shows that the speed of the economic crisis caught the leadership "completely off guard".<sup>42</sup> Coming as it did amidst a series of imperialist provocations - emanating in particular from Britain<sup>43</sup> - and fear of new wars of intervention, the crisis forced the bureaucracy to resort to extraordinary measures. Top officials were dispatched to the countryside armed with special powers to personally oversee what quickly became a campaign of forced grain requisitions. There was an orgy of violence as the GPU sought out and confiscated grain 'surpluses'. Often peasants were left without sufficient to meet their own needs. The rural masses seethed with discontent - there were 150 recorded revolts. Bukharin and the right did not put up any serious objections. Frankly there was little else the leadership could do.

Unquestionably now *primus inter pares*, Stalin had to think beyond the moment. Robert Tucker credits him with being bold, confident and conscious in terms of "programme".<sup>44</sup> As shown by later events, he quite clearly came to the practical conclusion that for the 'socialist island' there could be no return to the NEP system. His alternative was administrative and, for the bureaucracy, necessary. First, crush the peasants. The bureaucracy would in this way remove the possibility of economic blackmail from the countryside. Second, there had to be rapid industrialisation. The Soviet Union would catch up with the capitalist powers and free itself from their warmongering threats and intimidation - many writers argue that as with the tsar internal policy was primarily dictated by "the needs of external policy".<sup>45</sup> No doubt there is an important truth here. Nevertheless again it cannot be emphasised too strongly that things only develop from themselves. Given the right external conditions, chickens hatch from eggs. But no matter what the external conditions, stones hatch nothing.

Stalin must have decided some time in 1928 to launch a 'second revolution'. Giving a cunning twist to the party's 15th Congress resolution on cooperatives, Stalin called for the elimination not only of kulak, but individual peasant agriculture (the left of course envisaged this too, but in the distant future and then on the basis of a voluntary coming together, so as to fully utilise advanced technique). Under Stalin's slogan of 'socialist' collectivisation the peasants were to be expropriated. Their economic independence was to be ended and their forced "tribute" would, it was said, pay for rapid industrialisation - thereby securing the position of the regime against internal and external enemies.

The plagiarism was crude and obvious. Many oppositionists - Zinovievites and Trotskyites alike - used Stalin's supposed left turn to excuse capitulation. Trotsky himself was full of enthusiasm for the first five-year plan. Indeed he even welcomed as "self-clarification and self-purification" the notorious 'wreckers' show trial of 55 technical specialists and engineers from the Donbass mining town of Shakhty as an unconscious attack on the agents of capitalism.<sup>46</sup>

But for Bukharin and the right extraordinary measures could only be temporary. The material prerequisites for the rational collectivisation of agriculture did not exist, Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky pleaded in their joint platform. Here they were on solid ground. Agriculture in the USSR was technically feudal, certainly pre-capitalist. Tractors were rare. Sowing was by hand and harvesting by sickle and scythe. Collectivisation would *ipso facto* be "military-feudal", not socialist. Instead of forced collectivisation and rapid industrialisation the right advocated the continuation of NEP along with incentives for small and middle peasants. However, NEP had palpably failed. Despite that the right's platform commanded considerable sympathy among wavering elements on the politburo - Kalinin and Voroshilov. NEP, the reasoning went, had to be preserved or the split between the workers and peasants Lenin warned of in his *Testament* would

actually happen. Of course, showing how much distance the state had put between itself and its origins, what they really feared was a peasant-worker *jacquerie* against the bureaucracy. Bukharin astutely argued that as a result of the growing chaos the economy had "reared up" and was threatening to "make [all] the classes [in Soviet society] rear up too".<sup>47</sup> The governing bureaucracy quite clearly now saw itself as an entity inimical to the workers. Christian Rakovsky, one of Trotsky's most intransigent friends, was therefore right when he famously wrote in August 1928 about the differentiation between the working class and the apparatus beginning as "functional" and becoming "social".<sup>48</sup> The bureaucracy was no longer an estranged part of the working class. A new social category had arisen.

Both sides in what was now an openly divided leadership reportedly made clandestine overtures to the left opposition. Stalin furtively sent intermediaries to court Trotsky in his Alma Ata exile. Certainly in July 1928, with the full agreement of Rykov and Tomsky, Bukharin contacted Kamenev, who had just returned to Moscow, having been readmitted to the party. Some have supposed a right-left bloc that would have stopped Stalin and the subsequent horrors associated with what is commonly called Stalinism. To this writer such speculation demonises Stalin, the individual, and fails to grasp the socio-economic dynamics that by this time propelled the Soviet bureaucracy as a whole towards a unique solution. By the late 1920s the bureaucracy had no material or moral loyalty to working class interests. What dictated its actions was self-survival. That could be ensured neither by NEP nor capitalist restoration. Genuine workers' power would certainly pare it down to size and put it on a short-term contract as society's servant. Something else had to be invented.

Momentarily the right appeared to hold sway on the politburo. But mounting international tensions and a bad harvest in 1929, brought about in no small measure by the draconian requisitions of the previous year, necessitated the very extraordinary measures Stalin advocated. NEP had ceased to represent safety. Quite the reverse. A revival of market forces, even a relaxation of coercion, would have opened the floodgates to popular rebellion. Though there was no road map, the route was obvious. Reiman cleverly notes that Stalin's "policy during the first half of 1928 reproduced the conditions necessary for the continued existence of that policy".<sup>49</sup> Others go further and actually claim that Stalin deviously contrived the grain collection crisis.<sup>50</sup>

Be that as it may, the GPU was again ordered to enforce grain procurements. Agricultural taxation became extortionate and the peasants were in one way or another robbed and cheated. Areas under crop declined and herds shrank. Traditional farms were completely ruined. Grain deliveries consequentially fell far short of requirements. The prospect of famine began to loom. In fact the whole rural socio-economic structure was being destroyed so that it could no longer pose a threat to the position of the bureaucracy.

To save himself and the bureaucracy Stalin careered off into the unknown. Stalin cited the example of Peter the Great and his "attempt to leap out of the framework of backwardness".<sup>51</sup> The tsar whom Alexander Herzen had described from exile as the "crowned revolutionary" ruthlessly subordinated the whole of society to his autocratic will in the feverish attempt to thoroughly modernise the Russian state and its armed forces. But where Peter had failed Stalin was determined to succeed. The country would be transformed from above, using what Stalin called Bolshevik methods. Under the general secretary's pressure the politburo demanded what were, given the country's material resources, madcap rates of industrial growth - a target of over 20% was agreed for 1929. Agriculture was 'planned' in a similar Peterine fashion to industry. Reiman comments that the implication of such methods "depended directly on a very brutal attack on the living and working conditions of industrial

workers and the rural population".<sup>52</sup> The first five-year plan was "a plan of organised poverty and famine".<sup>53</sup> Clearly 1928-29 was the birth pangs of a new *exploitative* social formation.

The first five-year plan was originally drafted by technocrats, whose primary aim was economic growth. In fact it became Stalin's 'second revolution'. Social relations were defensively and cruelly transformed. Workers' rights were trampled into the dust and the peasants effectively re-enslaved. Though the Cliffites would have it otherwise, conjoined with the counterrevolution against the masses there was a total destruction of capitalism. The market was eliminated along with its human representatives - the nepmen, kulaks and the bourgeois intelligentsia inherited from tsarist times.

Bureaucratic socialism sprung forth from the rotting carcass of deformed formal socialism, drenched in blood and programmed for homicidal mass slaughter. Stalin intuitively coined his 'Marxist' justification - the barbaric doctrine of the intensification of the class struggle: to atomise the population it was to be repeatedly terrorised.

The right responded to the 'second revolution' cryptically with renewed attacks on "Trotskyist super-industrialising" - by which of course they meant Stalin's first five-year plan. Not surprisingly this helped Stalin win allies from the conciliatorist wing of the left opposition - Preobrazhensky, Radek and Pyatakov among many others. Stalin could afford to treat them with contempt. If Bukharin had a right-left bloc in mind, he played his hand with an extraordinary lack of skill. Firing at the left and not directly at the Stalinites ensured that the rapprochement Bukharin attempted with Kamenev came to nothing. It also assisted Stalin in another way. He agreed that there needed to be a struggle against the left. But stating the obvious, it had been much weakened due to his efforts; he was indeed preparing its physical destruction. However, with food shortages in the towns and turmoil in the countryside being blamed on nepmen and kulaks, he could self-evidently and quite logically claim that the main danger now came from the right.

The right found itself completely outmanoeuvred. NEP had failed. Yet the right had no alternative. Its polemics against the left by definition missed their intended target. Meanwhile Stalin began a campaign against anonymous rightists in the press and party bodies. Rumours of an armed rightist putsch were started. Arrests were made by the GPU and through salami tactics sympathisers of the right were removed from positions of influence. The *coup de grâce* came in January 1929. Despite the objections of Bukharin, Tomsky and Rykov, the politburo agreed to the deportation of Trotsky to Turkey, in order to "end his counterrevolutionary activities." Almost simultaneously left oppositionists distributed leaflets in Moscow detailing the contacts between Bukharin and Kamenev in July 1928. Whether or not this was a provocation cleverly engineered by Stalin is a matter of dispute. Whatever the truth, Stalin got what he wanted. Bukharin and the right could be accused of factionalism with people now officially branded counterrevolutionaries.

It was not only the right that was politically neutered. The ruling party which had functioned - albeit to a diminishing degree - as a political organisation with debate and minorities, was remade by Stalin into a rigidly hierarchical structure similar to a military institution. Any hint of opposition or independence was henceforth to be subject to police investigation and criminal charges.

## 2.1. The first five-year plan

The first five-year plan was launched on a short, though genuine, wave of popular enthusiasm among urban workers, especially the young. The idea of the plan combined to appeal to their national and socialist traditions and desire for personal betterment. Stalin's propaganda machine promised much. The plan would improve the living conditions of the Soviet peo-

ple beyond recognition, require mass recruitment of a 'socialist' intelligentsia, create a modern economy and allow the 'socialist fatherland' to stand up to foreign threats with a powerful defence industry. Whether it was through misplaced collectivity or simply fostering canny ambition, the plan succeeded in overcoming the 'normal' intensity of labour. Workers attacked their work. The 'advanced' were willing to perform heroic feats of self-sacrifice to reach or surpass targets. Each new power plant, factory and blast furnace was notched up by them as an imagined victory for human liberation or, failing that, a step forward for the chances of personal gain. Either way it served the state's purposes.

Heralded not only as the triumph of revolutionary élan, the plan's objectives were presented in hard, exact figures that had allegedly been carefully calculated, taking into account the manifold interconnections and technical potential of every branch and unit of the Soviet economy. The whole thing was supposed to move like a finely tuned machine. Outputs were to perfectly match the need for inputs. Production and consumption would proceed in scientific harmony.<sup>54</sup> The figures were certainly sensational. Industrial production was to increase twofold between 1928 and 1933, with Department A going up by as much as 230% and Department B by 144%. Coal output was planned to rise from 35 to 75 million tons, and oil from 11.6 to 22 million tons. Similarly pig iron was to reach 10 million tons from a 1928 base of 3.3 million tons, while steel was to go from 3.9 to 10 million tons.

Stalin however wanted to overcome the USSR's backwardness in the "shortest possible time".<sup>55</sup> During the course of 1929-31 the leadership therefore relentlessly upped these and other targets in the name of 'optimal planning'. One wild addition leapfrogged another till the initial target figures were themselves nearly doubled. Moreover in February 1931 Stalin spoke of fulfilling the control figures of the five-year plan in "the basic, decisive branches of industry" not in four years, but in "three years".<sup>56</sup> This was the same speech where he issued his well known justification: "We are 50 or 100 years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in 10 years. Either we do so, or we shall go under."<sup>57</sup> Nove obligingly, and half apologetically, adds the obvious, but heavily pregnant, fact that "1941 was ten years away".<sup>58</sup>

Stalin might have had a premonition of the coming war. Nevertheless, by maximising output in such a fashion, the economy moved forward in a completely chaotic, lopsided manner which squandered labour power. For instance the plan for oil production was reached in two and a half years. Naturally this was cause of much official celebration. But it completely disrupted and overwhelmed auxiliary sectors. Storage, refining and transport facilities were not in place to handle twice what had been projected. Where in the petroleum industry there was a discrepancy between oil as output and oil as input, in engineering there was a discrepancy between its raw materials and its output. The plan was fulfilled in three years and output increased fourfold. Yet steel production fell short by some 40%.

How machines were built without the planned inputs of steel is explained by the very low base level in this sector and the ability of managers to circumvent the plan by unofficially competing for scarce raw materials and labour - thus denying others. Such improvisations became the norm across the economy.

The plan was in other words inherently planless. The figures were completely arbitrary. Shortages became endemic. Output was often useless. As a Cold War observer of the Soviet scene recognised, the only way the authorities could cope with the mess "was to improvise, to waste precious materials and leave other things undone".<sup>59</sup> By stages the regime was compelled to impose its own priorities that circumvented the plan. Centre designated key projects and ensured that they received the required allocation; thereby of course further adding to the plight of



non-priority projects. The contradictions and laws of bureaucratic socialism were already beginning to show themselves.

The results of the first five-year plan were in comparative terms unarguably impressive - the rest of the world was in the throes of the great crash. In the leading capitalist countries industrial production fell by 10-50%, while in the Soviet Union it officially doubled. At the end of 1932 Gosplan triumphantly announced that the plan had been fulfilled in four and a quarter years. In 51 months, it was claimed, gross output of Soviet industry leapt from 15.7 to 34.3 billion roubles; which represented 93.7% of the planned target for the five-year period.

There is no serious dispute nowadays that these claims were absurd exaggerations. Recomputations by western experts even in the 1940s had revealed much lower increases. Indeed their estimates for growth in the USSR's national income between 1928 and 1937 - ie, two five-year plans - vary from between 33%, 64% and 74% (the discrepancy between these figures largely resulting from the use of US 1925-34 prices, US 1940 prices or real 1926-7 Soviet prices as statistical weights).<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, even allowing for the gross inflation and inaccuracy of Soviet figures, the production of waste and the effective destruction of the statistically invisible, but economically significant handicraft, small workshop and domestic sectors, a "great deal was achieved".<sup>61</sup> The first five-year plan saw the sprawling engineering works in Moscow and Leningrad comprehensively updated with the purchase and installation of foreign technology; the giant Dnieper hydro-electric dam completed with amazing speed; Magnitogorsk rise vast from nothing; the 20th century brought to backward Asian areas and, all in all, a total of 1,500 new factories and other industrial undertakings constructed.

Albeit at enormous cost in human labour the Soviet Union was being modernised.

Marx showed in *Capital* that the "starting-point" of capitalist development was the "expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil".<sup>62</sup> Herein was the 'secret' of primitive capitalist accumulation. Preobrazhensky and the supposed 'super-industrialisers' of the left proposed, as we have seen, a painless primitive socialist accumulation, not by expropriating the peasant, but through uneven exchange and taxation.

The original draft of the first five-year plan adopted a similarly cautious approach to the countryside. Even the approved, sixth, highest version of the plan envisaged that by 1933 out of 25 million peasant households only six million would be organised in *kolkhozi* (a term which in the late 1920s still included the many loose agricultural cooperatives, as well as the much rarer collectives). Individual peasant farms would account for the bulk of agricultural deliveries; three-quarters by the end of 1933, and half the marketable grain. Moreover the area sown by individuals was actually expected to expand by almost two million hectares to 97.4 million hectares.

The industrialisation drive, by its very unplanned nature, precipitated a goods shortage and, as its velocity was recklessly increased month by month, it reached the point of famine. Runaway inflation punctured the value of the rouble. The real worth of the fixed price paid for agricultural products sunk below the cost of production. If there had been something to buy the peasants still might have gone to market. But there was not. Hence the state's options effectively closed. Higher real agricultural prices would divert, maybe halt, industrialisation and reassert the peasants' bargaining power with a vengeance. Special measures and forced grain requisitions inevitably resulted in a sowing strike and diminishing returns. Stalin, following the line of least resistance, had to go for "total" collectivisation.

On January 5 1930 a decree was sent to all local organisations instructing them to "lead the spontaneous growth" of collectivism - in its own way a euphemism no less sickening than *Kraft durch Freude* (strength through joy). Behind the show of voluntary union there was untold human suffering. The real history

of collectivisation was written not by Stalin's propagandists, but his harassed petty officials. Their meticulous, incomplete, and still partially suppressed lists of confiscation, deportation and execution bare truthful, though unintended, witness to the innumerable victims. In the 13th century Genghis Khan and his successors laid waste to old Russ. In the 1930s Stalin did the same to the new Russia. He unleashed a 'silent' civil war on the countryside, ordering a massacre of the village bourgeoisie - the kulaks were to be liquidated as a class. Those so deemed were expropriated. Many were handed over to the OGPU or exiled to remote regions like Siberia. Perhaps 1.5 million people were deported, among them so-called 'ideological' kulaks: ie, those middle or poor peasants who opposed collectivisation.

Collectivisation had nothing to do with civilising, let alone socialising agriculture. Robert Conquest is quite right when he says that the "idea of smoothly planned progress was quite inapplicable".<sup>63</sup> Collectivisation was carried through coercively and barbarically and resulted in agriculture being hurled backwards, not least by the peasants' gluttonous attempt to retain what was theirs. Mikhail Sholokov's 'socialist-realist' novel *Virgin soil upturned* vividly conveys the private killing of property that accompanied its collectivisation.

Not only those who had joined the collective farm, but individual farmers also slaughtered. They killed oxen, sheep, pigs, even cows; they slaughtered animals kept for breeding. In two nights the horned cattle of Gremyachy were reduced to half their number. The dogs began to drag entrails and guts about the village; the cellars and granaries were filled with meat. In two days the co-operative shop sold some 200 poods of salt which had been lying in the warehouse for 18 months. 'Kill, it's not ours now!' 'Kill, they'll take it for the meat collection tax if you don't.' 'Kill, for you won't taste meat in the collective farm.' The insidious rumours crept around. And they killed. They ate until they were unable to move. Everybody, from the youngest to the oldest, suffered with stomach-ache. At dinner-time the tables groaned under the weight of boiled and roasted meat. At dinner-time everybody had a greasy mouth, everybody belched as though they had been at a funeral repast in memory of the dead. And all were owlish with the intoxication of eating.<sup>64</sup>

Even when the butchery finally stopped the collectives were totally lacking in the expertise necessary for husbanding what little livestock remained. Neither the peasants nor the mobilised workers sent from the towns had been prepared or resourced for the technical consequences of collectivisation. Tending two or three cows was within the grasp of any peasant. Milking, feeding, sheltering and reproducing herds of 200 or 300 was an entirely different matter. Not surprisingly many animals "died from neglect".<sup>65</sup> Stalin's determination to purge the party in the countryside of elements - often mobilised workers, who had 'gone native' and become sympathetic to the peasants: ie, storemen, bookkeepers, agronomists - only made what was bad worse.

The result was that between 1928 and 1932 the number of cattle was reduced from 70.5 to 38.4 million head, pigs from 26 to 11.6 million head and sheep and goats from 146.7 to 52.1 million head. Shortages of draft horses, due to slaughter and lack of fodder, the absence of tractors to replace them and sheer ignorance also disastrously reduced the grain harvest to below 70 million tons between 1931 and 1935.

Given urban growth due to industrialisation and the consequent increased demand for food, state procurements followed an upward trajectory while harvests fell.<sup>66</sup> Workers ate less meat. Those in the countryside ate less of everything to the point mentioned above, where in the catastrophic years 1932-3 starvation took the lives of millions of people.

Ellman gives a figure of five million.<sup>67</sup> Conquest quotes Soviet sources in 1988 who claim that the "deaths in the terror-famine cannot have been lower than 6 to 7 million".<sup>68</sup> Here was the human cost of Stalin's voluntary collectivisation! The birth of the new system was celebrated cannibalistically!

It is worth noting that in his memoirs, Khrushchev, a member of Stalin's inner-circle and his successor, reckoned he had "no idea" how bad "things were" during collectivisation.<sup>69</sup> Yet the surely less well informed correspondent of the *New York Evening Post*, HR Nickerbocker, could pun at the time that: "The plan is a method for Russia to 'starve itself great'".<sup>70</sup>

That aside, there can be no question that it took some considerable time for Soviet agriculture to recover in absolute terms from the catastrophe of collectivisation. Indeed in comparative terms it remained hopelessly inefficient right through until the fall of Gorbachev in 1991. Whatever the public declarations of those in the Kremlin, dearly collectivisation was just as much about securing the bureaucracy's political domination over the countryside as increasing the 'tribute' (surplus product) needed for primitive accumulation through economies of scale. As things turned out there were massive *diseconomies* through collectivisation. Despite that peasants would never again withhold grain from the state - and that for Stalin is what counted.

The grain appears exactly as it did before. It possess the same colour, weight, size and other physical properties, but a new social soul has with brute force entered its body. Before collectivisation it was cultivated by a mass of small independent producers. Now the peasants are organised into huge units. But instead of giving the peasants strength, the collectives give power *over* them and their product to the state. The peasants had controlled the land; now the land dominates them. Formerly the grain was partially consumed by the immediate producers, the surplus being marketed as a commodity for a small return. Now the bulk of it becomes a target value, over which the producers have no right. It has to be delivered at prices which were only a disguised form of plunder.

Not surprisingly much controversy remains as to whether or not, or to what degree, the peasants' grain provided the 'tribute' necessary for primitive accumulation. Agriculture, according to Nove, "made a decisive contribution to the financing of the plan".<sup>71</sup> Official Soviet historiography also claims that a "substantial contribution to industrialisation was made by the Soviet countryside".<sup>72</sup> But the statistics presented belie this and show that agriculture as a source of funding plummeted. In 1928, "Agriculture contributed 54% of accumulation for industrial growth, but in 1933 the figure dropped to 25%".<sup>73</sup> Collectivisation demanded massive investment in tractors, combine harvesters and fertilisers. Hence industry "developed chiefly on the basis of its own resources".<sup>74</sup> The US expert James R Millar argues that collectivisation was actually counterproductive and became a drain on industry and industrialisation.<sup>75</sup> Ellman takes a somewhat different view. Though the state obtained increases in marketable food there was no *net* transfer of surpluses from agriculture to industry. Taking his cue from the work of Soviet researcher AA Barsov, he suggests that there was no rise in unequal exchange (Barsov claims the amount of unequal exchange was higher in 1913 and 1928 than in the late 1930s).

Aside from this debate, Ellman rightly emphasises the role of coercion in the whole process and the "fall in urban real wages".<sup>76</sup> Force was the prime economic mechanism. Wages in the first five-year plan were cut by some 50%. Overall urban living standards did not decline to the same extent due to the ending of unemployment, etc. In spite of that it was only after the second five-year plan that urban consumption overtook what it had been at the beginning of the first five-year plan.

Collectivisation and dekulakisation certainly allowed industry to recruit a human

mass - and in return for extremely low levels of subsistence at that. Press gangs were not needed. Peasants not surprisingly preferred poverty wages in the towns to starvation in the countryside. In the course of the first five-year plan the number of employees rose from 11.3 to 22.8 million. The urban population reached nearly 40 million (compared with the 32.5 million projected by the plan). Here, in the simultaneous fall in average living standards and the huge increase in the number of workers made available by collectivisation, we find the 'secret' of primitive bureaucratic accumulation.

The figures speak for themselves. The share of national income devoted to accumulation rose from "19.4% to 30.3% in 1932".<sup>77</sup> Squeezing consumption for the benefit of accumulation in fact became a permanent feature of the system. Estimates of total private consumption in 1952-3 show an increase of between 22% and 31% from the base year of 1928. Yet what was available for the state, including for accumulation, grew in the same period by some 11 or 13 times over.<sup>78</sup>

A sizeable chunk of the original workforce had before them the prospect of promotion into the ranks of what was to become a labour aristocracy of shock workers and the new intelligentsia of technicians and administrators - during the first five-year plan more than 100,000 party members entered higher education.<sup>79</sup> This deliberately cultivated privileged stratum was not going to oppose the uninterrupted five-day week, nor the fall in the wages of unskilled workers. As for the new workers (mainly female or youth), they were in no position to resist except passively and individually. Rootless and bewildered, they changed jobs frequently and on occasion sabotaged machines. As the world of things available to the state increased, the world of this mass decreased. Primitive bureaucratic accumulation produced and reproduced the oppression of the workers ●

Jack Conrad

1. K Marx *Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844* London 1973, p114.
2. *Ibid* p146.
3. L Trotsky *The challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-25* New York 1980, p398.
4. *Ibid* p398.
5. In an interview with Arthur Ransome, the correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* Trotsky explained that "it is not at all to our interest that the revolution should take place in a Europe exhausted and drained of blood". A war between France and Germany might mean "the bleeding and destruction primarily of those generations of the working class which are the bearers of future". This would lower European culture "over a long period" and the "postponement of revolutionary perspectives" (Quoted in EH Carr *The interregnum* Harmondsworth 1969, p174).
6. L Trotsky *The challenge of the left opposition 1923-25* New York 1980, p233.
7. "The task of the socialist state consists ... not in taking from the petty bourgeois producers less than capitalism took, but in taking more from the still larger incomes which will be secured to the petty producer by the rationalisation of the whole economy, including petty production, on the basis of industrialising the country and intensifying agriculture ... The more backward economically, petty bourgeois, peasant, a particular country is which has gone over to the socialist organisation of production, and the smaller the inheritance received by the socialist accumulation fund of the proletariat of this country when the socialist revolution takes place, by so much the more, in proportion, will socialist accumulation be obliged to rely on alienating part of the surplus product of pre-socialist forms of economy and the smaller will be the relative weight of accumulation on its own production basis, that is, the less will it be nourished by the surplus product of the worker in socialist industry" (E Preobrazhensky *The new economics* Oxford 1967, pp89,124).
8. L Trotsky *The new course* London 1972, p64.
9. L Trotsky *The challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-25* New York 1980, p332.
10. In his *Anti-Dühring* Engels lambasted the theoretical flaws in the notion. "All the social functions of the capitalist are now performed by salaried employees. The capitalist has no further function than the pocketing of dividends, tearing off coupons, and gambling on the stock exchange, where the different capitalists despoil one another of their capital. At first the capitalist mode of production forces out the workers. Now it forces out the capitalists, and reduces them, just as it reduced the workers, to the ranks of the surplus population, although not immediately into the industrial reserve army ... the transformation, either into joint-stock companies (and trusts), or into state ownership, does not do away with the capitalist nature of the productive forces" (F Engels *Anti-Dühring* London 1969, p330). Engels also had fun excoriating the "spurious socialism" which declares all state ownership to be socialistic. If that was the case, he said, then Napoleon and Metternich "must be numbered among the founders of socialism" (F Engels *Anti-Dühring* London 1969, p329). Later Lenin's pamphlet *Imperialism and Bukharin's Imperialism and the world economy* comprehensively showed that one of the principle characteristics of capitalism in its decadent phase was the development of state capitalism. Yet whether the function of capital was exercised by individual capitalists or the capitalist state collectively was a secondary question. Commodity production remained and, more to the point, so did the class relations between the wage workers and the bourgeoisie as the personification of capital.
11. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 36, Moscow 1977, p595.
12. L Trotsky *Terrorism and communism* London 1975, pp144,148.
13. "The section of the rank and file of the party whom the opposition at this time was least successful in rallying to its side was the industrial working class. The material appeal of the opposition was to the interests of industry, but to the managers and technicians rather than to the industrial

14. *JV Stalin Works* Vol 6, Moscow 1953, p29.
15. EH Carr *Socialism in one country* Vol 1, Harmondsworth 1970, p157.
16. L Trotsky *Our political tasks* London nd, p108.
17. Quoted in EH Carr *The interregnum* Harmondsworth 1969, pp313,314.
18. *Ibid* p348.
19. *Ibid* p348.
20. Quoted in EH Carr *Socialism in one country* Vol 2, Harmondsworth 1970, p80.
21. *Ibid* p83.
22. *Ibid* p125.
23. *Ibid* p143.
24. EH Carr *The Russian revolution from Lenin to Stalin* London 1990, p83.
25. V Serge *Memoirs of a revolutionary* London 1984, p211.
26. I Deutscher *The profit unarmed* Oxford 1982, pp249-50.
27. Zinoviev and Kamenev had actually taken the lead in vilifying Trotsky - something the former later described as the greatest mistake of his life (See EH Carr *Foundations of a planned economy* Vol 2, Harmondsworth 1976, p7).
28. M Reiman *The birth of Stalinism* London 1987, p19.
29. Estimates of those supporting the opposition platform vary between 4,000 and 26,000 - each being a small figure. In a speech during November 1928 Stalin said that about 6,000 had voted for the opposition and against the leadership at the time of the discussion prior to the 15th Congress. Official CPSU history gave the central committee's thesis 725,000 votes. Stalin conceded to a heckler that it might have had 20,000 sympathisers, who for one reason or another did not vote (See EH Carr *Foundations of a planned economy* Harmondsworth 1976, p44).
30. Quoted in *Ibid* pp51-52.
31. V Serge *Memoirs of a revolutionary* London 1984, p233.
32. Quoted in EH Carr *Foundations of a planned economy* Vol 2, Harmondsworth 1976, p55.
33. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 36, Moscow 1977, p595.
34. N Bukharin *Notes of an economist* Belfast 1980, pp19-20.
35. EH Carr *Socialism in one country* Vol 1, Harmondsworth 1970, p280.
36. Kamenev estimated in the autumn of 1925 that 14% of peasants had harvested 33% of the grain and held 61% of the marketable surpluses (Quoted in EH Carr *Socialism in one country* Vol 1, Harmondsworth 1970, p321).
37. EH Carr *Socialism in one country* Vol 1, Harmondsworth 1970, p356.
38. E Preobrazhensky *The new economics* Oxford 1967, p232.
39. Quoted in EH Carr *Socialism in one country* Vol 1, Harmondsworth 1970, p264.
40. Quoted in *Ibid* p321.
41. *Ibid* p317.
42. M Reiman *The birth of Stalinism* London 1987, p44.
43. Britain backed an attack on the Soviet legation in Peking, and in May 1927 it severed diplomatic relations.
44. RC Tucker *Stalin in power* New York 1992, p44.
45. This was the argument originally advanced by the historian PN Milukov. Trotsky took up the theme in chapter one of his remarkable *History of the Russian revolution*. See RC Tucker *Stalin in power* New York 1992, p45.
46. L Trotsky *The challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-25* New York 1981, p149.
47. Quoted in M Reiman *The birth of Stalinism* London 1987, p73.
48. C Rakovsky *Selected writings* London 1980, p126.
49. M Reiman *The birth of Stalinism* London 1987, p84.
50. RC Tucker *Stalin in power* New York 1980.
51. Quoted in EH Carr *Foundations of a planned economy* Vol 1, Harmondsworth 1974, p350.
52. M Reiman *The birth of Stalinism* London 1987, p89.
53. *Ibid* p88.
54. Even with the advantage of hindsight official Soviet propaganda tracts continued to peddle the notion that the first five-year plan was the result of scientific rationality. "The formula for industrialisation contained in the plan envisaged a balanced development and creation anew of those industries which were of decisive importance for fulfilling the planned targets" (L Danilov *Soviet five-year plans* Moscow 1985, p9).
55. *JV Stalin Works* Vol 13, Moscow 1953, p41.
56. *Ibid* p32.
57. *Ibid* p41.
58. A Nove *An economic history of the USSR* Harmondsworth 1982, p189.
59. T Zavalani *How strong is Russia?* London 1951, p15.
60. See N Jansy *The Soviet 1956 statistical handbook* Michigan 1957, p32.
61. A Nove *An economic history of the USSR* Harmondsworth 1982, p194.
62. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, Moscow 1970, pp715-6.
63. R Conquest *The great terror - a reassessment* London 1990, p20.
64. M Sholokov *Virgin soil upturned* Harmondsworth 1977, pp127-8.
65. A Nove *An economic history of the USSR* Harmondsworth 1982, p174.
66. The plan demanded a 40% increase in the value of exports, including exports of grain, in order to pay for imports of foreign machinery. There was a big problem however. The world economic crisis resulted in a precipitous fall in basic commodity prices. Hence, to keep its imports up to plan requirements, the Soviet Union would have had to increase the volume of exports by 57%. That proved impossible. Imports could only be increased by 35%. The foreign correspondent of the *New York Evening Post* reported that "many factories in the Soviet Union failed to receive important orders because imports had lacked coming up to plan by five percent" and that the export drive meant that "there was still less for the population to eat, wear and use" (HR Nickerbocker *The Soviet five-year plan and its effect on world trade* London 1931, p12). Perceptively this US bourgeois stressed that under Stalin's plan "it is the state that is to become at once more powerful, not the population that is to become better fed, clothed, more comfortable and happy ... Power for the state has become an end in itself under the five-year plan" (*Ibid* p236).
67. See M Ellman *Socialist planning* Cambridge 1989, p106n.
68. R Conquest *The great terror - a reassessment* London 1988, p20.
69. N Khrushchev *Khrushchev remembers* London 1971, p58.
70. HR Nickerbocker *The Soviet five-year plan and its effect on world trade* London 1931, p240.
71. A Nove *An economic history of the USSR* Harmondsworth 1982, p212.
72. *Istoriya sotsialisticheskoi ekonomiki SSSR* Vol 3, Moscow 1977 quoted in *Socialism: theory and practice* April 1979.
73. *Ibid*.
74. *Ibid*.
75. See JR Miller *Soviet studies* July 1970 and *Slavic review* December 1974.
76. M Ellman *Socialist planning* Cambridge 1989, p107.
77. A Nove *An economic history of the USSR* Harmondsworth 1982, p196.
78. See N Jansy *The Soviet 1956 statistical handbook* Michigan 1957, p43.
79. See S Fitzpatrick *Education and social mobility in the Soviet Union 1921-34* Cambridge 1979, p187.