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INTER-DEPARTMENTAL GROUP ON SUBVERSION
IN PUBLIC LIFE

THE NATURE OF TROTSKYISM -
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE UK

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Cabinet Office
8 August, 1977.

THE NATURE OF TROTSKYISM -
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE UK

Background

1. The dictionary definition of a Trotskyist is:-

"A Communist who supports Trotsky's view that excessive Russian nationalism is incompatible with true international Communism."

Trotskyism then can be said to be, like Maoism, an attempt "to integrate the universal truth of Marxism with concrete practice" (Mao, 6th Plenary of the CCP, 1938). It is not so much a philosophy as a code of practice, not (in Lenin's words) "what is to be done" but how.

2. Trotsky can be regarded as a classical Marxist. According to his biographer, Isaac Deutscher "he represents the Marxist school of thought in all its purity, as it existed before its debasement by the social democratic and Stalinist orthodoxies". The bulk of his revolutionary writings belongs to the period 1929-40 after his exile from Russia and before his murder in Mexico.

3. If there is one theory which is regarded as Trotsky's unique contribution to the Marxist canon, it is the theory of "permanent or continuous revolution". In fact this theory was originated by Marx himself. Nevertheless it resulted in the birth of Trotskyism because it was the cause of the final break between Trotsky and Stalin.

4. Marx saw the revolution as consisting of two stages, the first "nationalist" stage which would be led by the bourgeoisie, and the second "socialist" stage which would result in the overthrow of the bourgeois leaders and the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the Russia of the revolution there was virtually no urban proletariat and the peasantry, said Trotsky, was essentially counter-revolutionary and could not be relied on. Thus, he believed that for the revolution to succeed it would be necessary to win the support of the international proletariat. The revolution had to continue and it made no sense to attempt to limit it to one country, as Stalin wished. This pragmatic conclusion was subsequently elevated into a major revolutionary principle and lies at the heart of Trotskyist dogma.

5. Trotskyists maintain that they are the only pure revolutionary Marxists. They abhor the "Stalinists" (as they call them) and regard Russia, as Trotsky did, as a

"degenerated workers' State". They look with equal disfavour at the "social democrats". In Trotsky's own words, "Social Democracy, which prostitutes Marxism, and Stalinism are both mortal enemies of the proletarian revolution".

6. Trotsky, like Marx, did not regard representative democracy as an essential element of the socialist society which he envisaged. He equated Western parliamentary democracy - what he called the "bourgeois dictatorship" - with capitalism. "It is based on capitalist property; it assures the propertied class of their economic and social supremacy and consequently of their cultural and political predominance". Trotskyism is essentially revolutionary: to quote Trotsky again, "The strategic task of the Fourth International lies not in reforming capitalism but in its overthrow. Its political aim is the conquest of power by the proletariat for the purpose of expropriating the bourgeoisie".

The Transitional Programme

7. A further vital component in Trotskyist theory is the programme Trotsky wrote for the international body he created, the "Fourth International" (which succeeded three earlier Communist internationals) in 1938. This programme is called the "Death Agony of Capitalism" - or, more popularly, the Transitional Programme - and it is today regarded by all Trotskyists as scripture, to be revered in the same way as Marx's Communist Manifesto.

8. It lays down what Trotskyists are to do in the period of transition between the present day and the revolution which Trotsky, like all Marxists, believed to be both inevitable and reasonably imminent. The task of the Fourth International "lies not in reforming capitalism but in its overthrow". The method is to be "the proletarian revolution". The programme lays down precise guidance for a series of transitional demands; the workers are to demand a sliding scale of wage rises, and a progressively diminishing scale of working hours; factory committees are to be established, there is to be workers' control, business secrets are to be abolished, and "key branches of industry vital for national survival" are to be expropriated. In order to guarantee the "inviolability of workers' organisations and meetings", a system of strike pickets is to be established and workers' groups for self defence and an armed and trained workers' militia are to be set up.

9. Throughout, the Transitional Programme makes it clear that the demands being put forward are revolutionary and not an attempt to improve the system by reform. "If capitalism is incapable of satisfying (these) demands, then let it

perish". The whole programme is to build up to a situation in which "dual power" has been established, with the old State on one side and the new workers' soviets on the other. The achievement of this will mark the culminating point of the transitional period. After that, since "Two regimes, the bourgeois and the proletarian, are irreconcilably opposed . . . conflict between them is inevitable". The existing State structure and the "bourgeois dictatorship" of Parliamentary democracy are "not pledges for the future but decayed survivals of the past. The epoch of wars and revolutions will raze them to the ground".

10. Although modern Trotskyism has incorporated other ideas, notably from the revolutionary philosophies of Cuba, these principles remain clearly recognisable in the policies of UK Trotskyist bodies and, indeed, can frequently be used as criteria by which to measure the extent of Trotskyist influence in a body not otherwise overtly Trotskyist.

Trotskyist Organisations in the UK

11. There are more than 20 separate Trotskyist organisations in the UK but only four have a membership of more than 5-600. These are:

The Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP)
Membership c.5000

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) (formerly
the International Socialists)
Membership c.3500

The 'Militant' Tendency (MT)
Membership c.1000

The International Marxist Group (IMG)
Membership c.750.

12. The first British Trotskyist group emerged out of what was then the British Communist Party in 1932 with a miniscule membership. Various other groups were set up in the years that followed but it was out of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) (established in 1944) that modern British Trotskyism developed. The RCP, which came to an end in 1949, gave birth to three separate bodies all of which were at the time "entrism" groups within the Labour Party.

13. "Entrism", as Trotskyists call it, may be defined as the secret penetration of another organisation aimed at influencing and ultimately controlling its policies. It has always been an integral part of Trotskyist activity and its importance was best expressed by Trotsky himself when he urged that

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Trotskyist groups should retain the closest possible contact with the mass movements of the working class. "The Koran says that the mountain came to the prophet Mohammed; Marxism counsels that the prophet should go to the mountain". Some Trotskyist groups regard entrism as a tactic, to be employed or discarded as political circumstances dictate. For others it has become a permanent strategy.

14. Of the three groups which survived the RCP one, led by Gerry HEALY, was expelled from the Labour Party and became the Socialist Labour League in 1959 and the WRP in 1973; the second, led by Tony CLIFF, came out of the Labour Party and became the International Socialists, changing its name to Socialist Workers Party in January 1977; the third, known initially by the names of its leaders as the Grant-Deane Group, became the Revolutionary Socialist League in the mid 1950s. This last group adhered to entrism and in the late 1960s disobeyed the instructions of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI), the international Trotskyist group of which it was the British affiliate, that it should come out of the Labour Party. It has remained within that party ever since, abandoning its name and becoming increasingly clandestine until it was known only by the name of the Marxist paper, the "Militant", which it controlled and behind which it concealed itself.

15. The fourth of the major British groups, the International Marxist Group, also began as an entrism group in the Labour Party but established itself as an overt group in the late 1960s, becoming the British section of USFI in place of the disaffiliated RSL.

16. Until the middle 1950s all UK Trotskyist groups were very small. The impact of the Soviet intervention in Hungary and of Khrushchev's revelations about the Stalinist period at the 20th Congress of the CPSU began a period of steady though not dramatic growth; recruits came both from disillusioned members of the CPGB and from the ranks of what was then called the "New Left" - those extreme Left wingers who were deterred from joining the CPGB by its inflexibility and its reputation of being under Soviet domination.

17. A diagram illustrating the development of UK Trotskyist groups and the relationship between them is to be found in the Appendix.

Trotskyism and Violence

18. "History down to now has not thought out any other way of carrying mankind further than that of setting up the revolutionary violence of the progressive classes against the conservative violence of the outworn classes".

"The revolution logically does not demand terrorism . . . But the revolution does require of the revolutionary class that it should attain its ends by all methods at its disposal - if necessary, by an armed rising; if required, by terrorism".

Trotsky:
"Terrorism & Communism"

Unlike the Communist Party of Great Britain, Trotskyist groups have never accepted the feasibility of a peaceful British road to socialism. No Trotskyist group in the UK is known so far to have planned either an armed rising or terrorist activity. If questioned on the subject they would without doubt maintain that objective conditions in the UK do not at present require such action; and indeed that such "adventurist" behaviour "would open the door to the most savage oppression of all Left wing groups" (Workers Press: 20 September 1973). Nevertheless Trotskyists adhere to the belief that the working class is continuously oppressed by the violence of the State and that they are wholly justified in using violence against the State in self-defence. "Every capitalist society has an element of institutionalised violence which has become increasingly apparent since the decline of capitalist economy in the late 1960s" (Tariq Ali, August 1973).

19. The violence associated with Trotskyist groups on picket lines and other demonstrations since 1967, their consistent (though qualified and, since the passing of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, muted) sympathy for the aims if not the methods of the IRA, and the WRP's current links with the Libyan Government and with terrorist groups in the Middle East make the possibility of Trotskyist violence a factor to be taken seriously into consideration in any assessment of the significance of their activities in the UK.

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The British Trotskyist Groups

