C.L.R. JAMES AND REVOLUTIONARY LENINISM BY PHIL SHARPE

INTRODUCTION

This article is a commentary about CLR James work: 'Notes on Dialectics. (1) In this work he outlines a systematic differentiation between Leninism and Trotskyism. He utilises a reading of Hegel's dialectic in order to provide the methodology for this study. It is necessary to establish from the beginning that the approach of James could result in justifying philosophical idealism because the utilisation of philosophical method may not be identical to the character of reality and understanding events. Instead James assumes that Lenin's grasp of Hegel's Logic meant that he is better qualified to understand the political events of his time. We can only support this assumption in terms of study of these events, and an attempt to objectively understand the character of developments in the period between 1914 and 1923. Nor do we necessarily support the view that Trotsky’s conception of the dialectic was not adequate, and so represented an inferior understanding of Stalinism and the class character of the Soviet state. Instead we want to try and ignore James's bias about Trotskyism and therefore establish what he meant by revolutionary Leninism in terms that are not polemical and based on opposition to the Fourth International of his time. The point is that his conception of Leninism is worthy of support in the present even if we do not support all of his political conclusions.

James contends that: “A philosophic cognition means a cognition in which the categories of thought are adequate to the object it is thinking about.”(2) We can agree with this comment because many Marxists have only a limited understanding of contemporary capitalism and the role of the class struggle. But his argument in favour of this view is dogmatic because he assumes that the Stalinism is inherently based on opposition to private property and support for state capitalism. However, it could be argued that Stalinism is capable of upholding private property when it is in the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy. It is also capable of undermining private property when the state bureaucracy is able to extend its economic and political control in this manner. Hence the role of philosophical cognition is to connect the counter-revolutionary role of Stalinism with a changing attitude towards the continuation of private property. What is constant is the opposition of Stalinism concerning the possibility of the emancipation of society by the working class. Hence in Spain in 1936 they defended the democratic republic against the prospect of revolutionary socialism. But after the Second World War they nationalised the Eastern European economy as the alternative to genuine workers control of production. Hence James is right to maintain that Stalinism is not counter-revolutionary because it primarily defends private property. But it does frequently defend private property if its interests demand this approach in order to undermine the prospect of proletarian revolution. It is one-sided to define Stalinism in terms of the extension of state property. Certainly, this is part of its character, especially in the period 1940-50, but it is also able to accommodate itself with the existing role of private property.

James implies that Trotsky's thought was based on justifying the rigid categories of nationalised property for defining the USSR. But we could make the same point about James and his definition of the USSR as state capitalist. The point is that both of them were one-sided because these definitions were unable to explain the inability of the Soviet bureaucracy to extract a surplus product. The assumption of both of these theories was that the bureaucracy could extract a surplus because the character of the relations of production was based on the nationalised economy which was defined as either a form of a workers state or state capitalism. This approach was at the level of limited understanding because these definitions could provide some explanatory value but they could not explain the full extent of the contradictions of society based on the disorganised character of much of the economy – excluding the war economy. James indicates the limitations of Trotsky's approach because he is unable to explain the character of the bureaucracy and its organic relationship to state property: “Trotsky believed also that the Stalinist bureaucracy would try to restore private property because only the socialist proletariat would support state property and labour bureaucracies always support private property in the end. It is an awful thing to contemplate but the large majority of politically literate workers always knew better and; the bourgeoisie knew better... Empiricism is better than Understanding gone astray.”(3) But Trotsky has the last tragic laugh in the long term. He does have an inconsistent understanding of forced collectivisation because he cannot connect this development to the determination of the bureaucracy to defend state property.(4) Hence he is unable to explain important particular events because of his tendency to equate the role of the bureaucracy with capitalist restorationist tendencies. But under specific circumstances his conception becomes valid. The point is the bureaucracy is motivated by power and is effectively indifferent to the property relation if its domination is realised. Under changing conditions the attachment to state property can be rejected. Hence a dialectical approach has to allow for fluid and unexpected developments. Not all events occur in terms of the pattern of development established by a definition of the given phenomena. Thus the rigidity of Understanding can define the thinking of the most dialectical of theorists. That is precisely why Lenin did not understand the role of the Second International in 1914. It also explains the reluctance to recognise the process of capitalist restoration in the USSR. James does not provide the criteria to understand the actual degeneration of the USSR in the 1970's and 1980's because he has also projected the importance of state capitalism in terms of durability and permanency. State capitalism is considered as the prelude to socialism and not the prospect of movement towards the restoration of private property. James is operating with a dialectical schema of the process of progressive development, and so the possibility of regression is excluded.

In contrast, Trotsky knew that the very aspect of autonomy of the bureaucracy from the role of state property implied the development of regression and the ultimate prospect of the restoration of capitalism.(5) This standpoint did not represent any dogmatic dialectical conception of historical development but instead it expressed the structural limitations of the unstable relations of production. This possibility of restoration could be connected to the external impact of war and the conciliation of the bureaucracy with imperialism. In contrast, James is utilising a schema of historical progress which suggests the only outcome of the contradictions of state capitalism is movement towards socialism. The point is that the utilisation of a dialectical approach combined with an emphasis on historical optimism can undermine the importance of stressing the role of the empirical and the tragic character of actual history.

James comments: “To say that the workers are fooled is to condemn the workers as being playthings of chance. No. The phenomenon of Stalinism requires that you take it as an impulse from below and incorporate it into your categories and drive them forward. This emphasis on the concrete is the most difficult thing to grasp about the dialectic.”(6) You would be forgiven for thinking that Stalinism was effectively progressive because of its relationship to the working class. Indeed, Stalinism is conceived by James as the distorted expression of the aims and motives of the working class. But the awful truth is that Stalinism is a repressive monstrosity that is only able to obtain support from the working class by deliberately spreading deception and propaganda about the USSR. The working class supports Stalinism because it is based on the myth that it upholds the emancipation of working people. This relationship can only be undermined if the working class reject the ideological illusions expressed by Stalinism. The relationship between Stalinism and the working class represents an antagonistic contradiction because the former symbolises the interests of reaction and the latter is the expression of historical progress. James understands this but he still conceives of Stalinism as the outcome of the imperatives and actions of the working class because it is conceived as a transitional form to socialism: “What Hegel is saying is this, Stalinism is concrete truth, you watch it, accept it, respect it. This is the truth. But we are not empiricists. So our ideas, our speculative reason, our mental spectacles, our theory must be strenuously and systematically expanded to include Stalinism as a necessary, an inevitable, form of development of the labour movement. The workers are not mistaken. They are not deceived. Not in any serious sense of these words. They are making an experience that is necessary to their own development. Stop saying they are deceived.”(7)

But the person who is fooled is James. He is implying that the mass support for Stalinism will establish a historical telos of change towards socialism and so will represent the promotion of the forces of socialism from Stalinism. But this prospect can only occur if the working class break with Stalinism and instead adopt an independent standpoint. In contrast, he is deceiving himself to consider that Stalinism can in some distorted manner adopt the genuine interests of the working class. The CPSU in the USSR upholds bureaucratic exploitation, whilst the mass communist parties effectively defend a reformist strategy. The truth is the working class is deceived by the historic utilisation of the claims of Leninism by this counter-revolutionary force. But Stalinism is not Leninism because it does not advocate and represent the aims of genuine proletarian revolution. Hence the fact that the USSR is in conflict with the USA does not represent the tension between progressive state capitalism and reactionary private capital. Instead what is being expressed is the rivalry between two different forms of exploitative regimes. The USSR does not express some form of distorted proletarian interest because it constantly undermined the development of the class consciousness and activity of working people. The only principled manner in which Stalinism could be transformed would have been its overthrow by the working class.

In contrast, James has a more ambiguous standpoint which suggests: “I am going to say that Stalinism is a terrible reality and because it is real it is reasonable.”(8) This comment can only imply that Stalinism represents some type of historical logic rather than the reactionary outcome of the international defeat of the working class. Stalinism is actually the result of the inability of the working class to overcome capitalism by means of world revolution, and instead expresses a historical impasse in the class struggle. In contrast, James glosses over this standpoint and implies that Stalinism is the outcome of the very progress of the global class struggle. It represents the fact that whilst capitalism has not been overthrown concrete results have been achieved because state capitalism represents some sort of progress, or the historical transition to the realisation of world socialism. In this sense the working class expresses the ability to put pressure onto Stalinism to confront capitalism. Stalinism still needs to be overthrown if the realisation of socialism is to be achieved, but its role is logical because to some extent state capitalism represents the aspiration of the working class to overcome private capital. This perspective is a grand illusion. The development of Stalinism represents a terrible defeat for the international working class. Hence the aim of realising socialism requires the overthrow of both Stalinism and private capital. Stalinism is reactionary because it represents the very illusion that socialism is being advanced. In actuality the interests of the bureaucracy are being upheld at the expense of the working class. This means Stalinism cannot be a reasonable or a progressive interlude before the realisation of world socialism and is instead a reactionary social formation that undermines the development of revolutionary class consciousness and awareness of the tasks of the world proletariat.

But then James makes a powerful critique of Trotsky. He outlines how the definition of the workers state in terms of the importance of nationalised property became a dogma despite changing events and even acceptance of the rejection of Marxism. (9) Thus Trotsky claimed that if the bureaucracy overthrew the workers state it would question the very validity of Marxism.(10) The reason for this dogma is that Trotsky utilises categories from Lenin's revolutionary practice and refuses to modify them despite changing events. The inflexibility of the categories is unable to explain historical development. In this context, Trotsky is unwilling to acknowledge that the degenerating workers state has been overthrown by the actions of the bureaucracy. The working class is defined as the ruling class on the basis of the continued importance of nationalised property despite its complete lack of influence in relation to the activity of the economy. Trotsky conducted a polemic in terms of what is principled Leninism, socialism in one country, or the prospect of the bureaucracy restoring private property. None of these debates were effective because the bureaucracy ignored this criticism and instead built the economy on the basis of state property. Thus Trotsky imposed his categories onto reality and ignored the actual importance of the practice of Stalinism, which James defines as being that of the development of state capitalism. Thus Stalinism was more than an ideological distortion of the categories of Lenin's revolutionary practice; it was instead the expression of the development of a new form of exploitative society. The point is that Stalinism had discovered its own categories which expressed the aim of developing state property. Trotsky's inability to understand this situation meant he could not orientate to the working class to advocate Lenin's vision of a genuine socialist society. He could not develop the conception of a commune state, or a Soviet society, because he was concentrating on Stalin's corruption of the Leninist party. Nor could he understand the support for the Third International for the building of state capitalism in the USSR. Primarily he could not go beyond understanding the role of the CPSU and the parties of the Comintern which he defined as centrist. He did not support Lenin's revolutionary perspective which would have been to go directly to the German working class in 1930. Lenin understood the necessity to encourage the revolutionary spontaneity of the working class in 1917; Trotsky never advocated this strategy in relation to the struggle against the bureaucracy, or in terms of influencing developments within the Communist International.

Hence, James has discovered an important historical truth in relation to the evens of the 1920' and 1930's. The existing organisations of the working class, from the CPSU to the Communist International had become bankrupt. The only strategic alternative was to make a direct appeal to the working class. In these circumstances the working class had shown that it was more capable of opposing fascism and challenging capitalism than the traditional political organisations of the working class. This was the essential truth discovered by Lenin in 1917, but which was not assimilated by the Bolshevik party or Trotsky. However it could be argued that these lessons were learnt by the Fourth International during the 1930's. Hence the Transitional Programme is emphatic that the limitations of the Stalinist and social democratic organisations indicate their unsuitability for the task of proletarian revolution: “The orientation of the masses is determined first by the objective conditions of decaying capitalism and second by the treacherous politics of the old workers organizations. Of these factors, the first is the decisive one: the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus... No matter how the methods of the social betrayers differ …..they will never succeed in breaking the revolutionary will of the proletariat. As time goes on, their desperate efforts to hold back the wheel of history will demonstrate more clearly to the masses that the crisis of the proletarian leadership, having become the crisis of mankind's culture, can be resolved only by the Fourth International.”(11) This comment in a partial manner grasps the essence of Lenin's approach to the class struggle. The practical emphasis is on the importance of establishing a direct connection between the Fourth International and the working class. But this recognition is undermined by the objectivist conception of the importance of the laws of history. The dynamic character of the class struggle is obscured by this perspective. It is being suggested that recognition of the laws of history bring about inevitable success.

But the very emphasis of Lenin's strategy is that the task of overcoming capitalism requires the importance of the aim of genuine struggle for democratic and authentic Soviet power. Unless this aim is realised the limitations of the class struggle will be evident. (12) In other words, if proletarian struggle is to be successful it require not merely a break with all the opportunist parties, but also a conscious attempt to realise the principles of authentic socialism, or at least the possibility of transition to socialism such as the establishment of the commune state. Hence the principled character of the activity of the working class is defined not merely by what we are against, which is opportunism, but instead the emphatic expression of what we are in favour of realising. We are not just against the betrayers of the working class for negative reasons, but instead our aim is to connect class struggle with the aspiration for Soviet power. Hence the task is not limited to developing the leadership of Bolshevism, or the Fourth International. Instead the aim of the party should be to promote the initiative of the proletariat to struggle for the completed flourishing of the Soviets. Trotsky's 1938 programme does make the aim of the Soviets the primary culmination of the struggle for transitional demands. But what he does not outline in detail is how this development also represents the generation of the self-activity of the working class. Hence he has not fully accepted the Leninist conception of class struggle. However, his emphasis on the dynamic role of the class struggle indicated that he has made at least an important break with the party orientated standpoint of 1923. The experience of the 1930’s indicates that he is capable of changing categories in order to be compatible with the requirements of the class struggle.

Unfortunately James cannot accept the advances made by Trotsky towards genuine Leninism because he projects the confusion of the Fourth International on the question of the class character of the Soviet state onto the limitations of the 1923 period. But the problem is that James considers the only alternative to the theoretical limitations of Trotsky is to define the relationship of the working class to Stalinism as being historically progressive. He defines the ability of Stalinism to reject the defence of private property and national boundaries as being progressive in comparison to the Menshevik support of private capital. He concludes that: “The workers following Stalinism therefore have repudiated vast areas of bourgeois ideology, they have left it behind. The Stalinists use this high stage of advancement in the service of imperialism. But it is a high stage. It is the present concrete stage of the proletariat on the road to socialism.”(13) Hence the working class still has to overthrow Stalinism, but it has made progress towards that aim because of the very development of Stalinism. But this view implies that the state capitalism of the USSR has some relationship to the process of the emancipation of the working class and the achievement of socialism. However, this connection is not established. Instead there is a contradiction, because on the one hand it is acknowledged that Stalinism exploits and oppresses the working class. On the other hand it is ambiguously suggested that in some undefined manner the working class is able to utilise Stalinism in order to make historical progress. This position is similar to Pabloism and its conception that Stalinism represents the advance of socialism in terms of the formation of bureaucratic workers states. (14)

Hence James seems to be arguing that state capitalism expresses in a grotesque form the advance of the principles of socialism. But this standpoint can only be upheld in terms of the defence of the role of the objective laws of history. However, this perspective is the very opposite to Lenin's emphasis on the subjectivity and dynamism of the proletariat. Consequently: “We know that Stalinism today is the true state of the labour movement. It is revolutionary, repudiating parliamentarianism, private property, national defence and national boundaries. It is however attached to imperialism as a patron and is bureaucratic and aims at totalitarian control of labour and then of capital.”(15) The point is that the working class can only have a subordinated role within this process of Stalinist expansion and development. Thus the working class accepts its domination in order to support the Stalinist unconscious mission to advance the possibilities of socialism. This perspective is the very opposite of the approach of Marx and Lenin, who outlined the very strategy of working class self-emancipation via the formation of the Commune or soviet state. But according to James's dogmatic dialectical logic the authentic international will emerge from Stalinism. However, this strange conclusion suggests that in some manner Stalinism educates the working class in the tasks of realising socialism. But nothing can be further from the truth. Stalinism only acts to repress any sense of the independence of the working class as a class, and rewards dissent with repression and labour camps. Hence the only possible progressive relationship of the working class to Stalinism is if the former acts to challenge the latter. It is one thing to suggest that Trotsky's adherence to the conception of the workers state was dogmatic. But James's alternative of state capitalism is equally dogmatic, not because it might not be a valid understanding of the USSR, but rather because it is equated with the role of historical progress towards socialism. Instead the victory of state capitalism can only be portrayed as counter-revolutionary because it replaced a workers state with a new form of exploitation. This is not historical progress, and is instead social regression. Primarily, James cannot articulate in any precise and concrete manner how state capitalism has advanced the process of transformation in favour of socialism. Instead he can only plausibly outline how tragic and repressive is the rule of state capitalism. But despite this admission this very process of repression is somehow considered as being progressive. However, he also defines the role of the subject as negativity that is aspiring to constant change. If this subject is the proletariat, which it must be in Leninist terms, then the subject is effectively repressed and dominated by the reactionary forces of Stalinism. The antagonistic character of the relationship of Stalinism to the working class means that the former cannot be a bureaucratic promoter of the interests of socialism.

This misguided historical optimism is extended to the CIO trade union organisation which is defined as distorted Leninism. No precise reasons are provided for this definition instead it is assumed that an organisation of the working class is likely to be in opposition to the imperatives of capital. The actual ability of the CIO to mobilise the working class is not studied, and it is assumed that the situation in 1948 is closer to socialism than capitalism because of the advances made by Stalinism and the trade unions. Conclusions are made from the elaboration of a dialectical process of movement which means that the CIO is advancing and the possibility of regression is denied, and the situation of a labour movement on the defensive in the USA because of the cold war is glossed over. Hence the possibility of the ability of capital to re-organise and undermine the gains of the working class is effectively denied because the character of the dialectical process of movement can only recognise the advance of the working class. This is why the perspective of the restoration of private capitalism within the USSR is effectively denied. It represents an unlikely prospect because the advance of the proletariat is connected to the expansion of Stalinism. Trotsky's conception of Stalinism cannot explain its ability to oppose the domination of private capital. In this manner the working class make progress despite being dominated by the CPSU and Communist International. Hence Trotsky cannot explain the process of change and its development. This criticism may have some truth in relation to the ability of Stalinism to withstand the forces of counter-revolution and emerge stronger from World War Two. But there is a limitation to this approach because this explanation does not seem to allow for the importance of the role of the working class. Or, at least, there is a contradiction between the dynamic emphasis on the role of Stalinism and that of the working class.

James's starting point is the identity between the party and class in the period of the Second International. Bernstein changed the categories of the Second International in order to adapt to capitalism. But the unrest generated by the World war and the October revolution indicated that the working class remained potential revolutionary and was able to articulate the possibility of the development of socialism within capitalism in the process of the formation of the Soviets: “But the objective proletariat had not changed its categories. It does not work by categories. In 1917 and 1918-20 it burst all over Europe. It wiped away the old ones and created, all by itself, a new one, the Soviet, all by itself. Not a god-damned soul had told it anything about Soviets.”(16) The proletariat was able to overcome the influence of capitalist categories that were expressed in the ideology of the Second International, and instead create a new category by its mass action which was the Third International. The dominant and ultimately dynamic aspect of the role of the proletariat is its creation of categories in its unceasing struggle against capital: “Or the consciousness would move further along the road of finding truer, more rich, more clear, i.e. more concrete categories of its own truly proletarian nature, its unending fight against capital.”(17) The discovery of James is to recognise that only the mass actions of the working class can represent definite progress in the struggle against capital. In this context the Second International was both the expression and rejection of the authentic voice of the working class. The formation of the Third International would represent the same contradiction. The struggle of the proletariat with the organisations it had founded would continue until it was able to overcome capitalism. Hence the organisations of the working class represent the influence of the bourgeoisie and conservatism, and only the dynamic action of the working class is truly revolutionary and able to promote movement towards the overthrow of capitalism. Indeed the contradiction between conservatism and revolutionary dynamics is within the working class itself because it represents the alienation of the influence of capital over labour. This situation is intensified by the role of the most privileged and bureaucratic layers of the working class. Historically this situation was represented by the bourgeois influence of the Second International, but increasingly it has been expressed by the importance of the Third International dominated by Stalinism. The point is that the actions of the working class will overcome this problem in relation to the tasks of realising the overthrow of capitalism: “The development of the antagonistic elements in the labour movement is clear: constantly higher stages, sharper conflicts of development between it as an object and it as consciousness, increasingly violent and profound attempts by the masses to break through this.”(18)

It is now possible to understand the complexity of the dialectic of James. The actions of the working class have expressed a progressive dialectical logic between 1914 and 1948. This means the working class is increasingly establishing the prospects of its own self-emancipation and so overcoming the petty-bourgeois influence of the Stalinist party. These represent the development of mass parties that are increasingly transformed by the pressure of the working class into becoming the direct representation of the role and importance of the interests of the proletariat. Mass parties of two million cannot be sustainable, and instead express the tendency to be transformed in terms of the imperatives established by the working class in struggle. The proletariat will establish its identity as the unity of itself as object and consciousness by the end of the division of labour between the mass organisations and the role of the elite Stalinist party. This process indicates the ability of the working class to transform the situation by means of its own methods and action. The role of the reactionary Stalinist parties will be replaced by the direct expression and representation of the working class in its own organisations, such as Soviets. But for this process to be comprehensible the Stalinist parties must have some form of relation to the working class. They must be both the party of the petty-bourgeois elite and the working class. Hence the Communist International is not simply the tool of the Kremlin and is instead a contradictory relationship between the role of the bureaucratic elite and its mass working class support.

The problem with this perspective is that it underestimates the problem of the inertia imposed by the domination of the Stalinist bureaucracy, and the fact that effective democracy does not exist in the various Communist parties. Hence working class discontent was expressed by people leaving the Communist parties in 1956. The problem was that this unrest did not create new mass organisations of a revolutionary character. Instead the domination of discredited Stalinism continued. But it could be argued that the Hungarian revolution against the hegemony of the USSR led to new forms of expression of the Soviet idea. Hence the working class could rebel against Stalinism but this would not automatically result in progress in terms of the consolidation of new organisations of the working class and connected advances in subjectivity. Instead it was necessary to promote an alternative form of Marxist ideology because spontaneity was not sufficient in order to promote the possibility of new political developments. This means the tasks of the Fourth International were not resolved by the advances in the consciousness of the working class. The emphasis on the ability of the working class to resolve the crisis of Stalinism in a revolutionary manner was over-estimated by James. He still required the role of a Marxist organisation in this context. However, James is not wrong to argue that the most dynamic aspect of the possibility of the transformation of the consciousness of the working class is the role of its spontaneous action. The role of the working class indicated what possibilities could be developed and expressed how progress in the class struggle could be realised. But this meant the working class would have to undermine the very domination of Stalinism over the labour movement. In relation to achieving success in this task it would be necessary to be guided by the heritage of the historical importance of the Fourth International. James seems to deny this significance in relation to his emphasis on the capacity of the spontaneous transformation of the situation by the working class. This approach is not wrong but it is one-sided. However his defence of the spontaneous role of the working class means that he underestimates the organised aspect of the transformation of Stalinism. The working class cannot bring about the demise of Stalinism because this reactionary force is more progressive than Menshevism and able to repress the forces of private capital. Instead the working class will have to develop a critique of Stalinism, and not rely on the logic of the dialectical movement of history. Overcoming Stalinism has to be connected to the role of the highest expression of contemporary Leninism which is Trotskyism. This is denied by James because he considers Trotskyism to be some form of restriction or limitation on the complete flourishing of Leninism. Hence he argues the realisation of proletarian class consciousness is a return to Leninism but without its Trotskyist mediation. But primarily the working class will overcome Stalinism by learning about themselves and being able to articulate this understanding in a revolutionary manner. He does not deny some limited role for the Fourth International in this process, but what is most important and effective is the working class generating the spontaneous capacity to overcome Stalinism. Hence Stalinism must be overcome because it is part of the very character of the working class and its process of movement to achieve this goal: “Stalinism....... is part of a process. Through the process of its own development, the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative, the labour movement goes through all its experiences and reaches its completely realized self only by conquering them one after the other. And only at the end, when the labour movement finds itself fully realized will we see what is in its very truth.”(19)

It is part of the tragic experience of the class struggle that this approach has some validity. The party cannot instruct the class in the process of developing activity and development. Instead the class can only instruct itself and learn to overcome problems. In this context, James argues that Stalinism is part of the very experience of the working class, and so it is an objective of the very struggle against capital to overcome this reactionary force. The illusion of Trotskyism was that it considered it could teach the working class how to overcome this counter-revolutionary limitation and so advance the cause of socialism. However empirical experience indicates the over-optimism of James standpoint. Indeed he qualifies his own approach because he considers that Leninism is the necessary mediation of the spontaneous class struggle. But his argument is that Leninism is not an instructor for the class struggle and is instead a theoretical expression of the very dynamism of the practice of spontaneous class struggle. The point is that Leninism is not the defence of the distinction between party and class but instead Lenin discovered in 1914 that the task was to promote the very initiative of the spontaneous dynamism of the working class. Organisation should be subordinated to the role of spontaneity. Hence it was logical that the task of undermining Stalinism should belong to the working class. No other force could realise this task. Indeed, Stalinism was to some extent the distorted expression of the very aspirations of the working class, and so its rejection was the completion of the task of transforming state capitalism into the vision of socialism.

The point that James is making is that the very daily struggle of the working class cannot avoid having some type of relation to the ultimate goal. Hence we know that the formation of the Commune in 1871 provides us with some reference point of the aims of authentic socialism. This aim provides logic and direction to the spontaneous struggles of the class struggle. Hence to the extent that Stalinism undermines and restricts the struggle for the formation of the Commune means that it is necessary to overcome it and subsume its development within the immature period of the class struggle: “No the form was the First International, the essence was the labour.... And we have established that the revolutionary movement today was the workers that followed Stalinism are not the same workers who followed Menshevism. They are further advanced qualitatively, further advanced along the road of their ultimate goal.”(20) The very contrast between the Commune and the society of state capitalism indicates the necessity to overcome Stalinism and make advances towards the formation of a new Commune. This is the imperative for the working class to act to transform Stalinism, but this process is made easier by the fact that Stalinism is in some sense the outcome of the very development of the working class. The point is that the very dynamics of the working class represent the particular limitations of the class struggle at any given moment in time. The ideological limitations of the past like Anarchism are part of the experience of the working class. But this experience also represents the possibility to overcome these limitations in terms of the aspirations and attempt to realise the ultimate goal of the Commune. In this context Stalinism is part of what the working class is, and yet it is also a limitation to be overcome and rejected in terms of the authentic ideology of Leninism and the goal of communism.

Hence the dynamics of historical development is the process of generating reflections of particular viewpoints and movements, and then rejecting them in terms of promoting an adequate understanding of the ultimate goal: “The essence of the proletariat is its movement to incorporate in itself experience of the evils of capitalism until it overcomes capitalism itself.”(21) Consequently: “The essence of the proletariat is not that it is revolutionary and tries a lot of different parties and rejects them because they fail......It negates not only its own reflection, and it does more than that, it further negates its own experiences and stores them up, so that it is always further then it was in its special purpose......Its negation is a specific negation of its own contradictions, inherent in capitalism and therefore inherent in it as inseparable from and in fact unthinkable except as an opposite to capitalism.”(22) The influence of the Hegelian dialectic means that James understands the process of movement in the class struggle in terms of the realisation of progressive negations that result in advance towards the end goal of communism. What would be more challenging is a recognition that contradictions cannot be necessarily resolved, and so the process of change is more complicated than the conception of the realisation of an essence that becomes increasingly effective and able to achieve the end goal. Indeed we learn from Lenin the importance of tackling defeat and resolving the issue of setbacks in the class struggle. For example, the events of the First World War indicated the strength of opportunism within the parties of the Second International. The necessary response was not to lament this situation but instead to declare the importance of a break with opportunism and to prepare for the formation of revolutionary parties. (23) Lenin's approach is not based on the possibility of success or the workings of the dialectic. Instead he is outlining what is the most principled and most intransigent policy under the given circumstances. The point is that the parties of the Second International mostly support the policy of social chauvinism and oppose the struggle for world revolution. This means we must break with them, even though the forces for revolution will initially be tiny. The point is that he does not utilise these developments in order to promise victory. Instead he outlines what has to be advocated if class compromise and opportunism is to be opposed.

In contrast, James defines revolutionary politics in terms of the imperatives of the dialectic. Events may express defeat, but this is secondary when compared to the advances that the working class is making because of the progressive logic of the class struggle. The class has grasped the revolutionary character of \Leninism and is realising this approach in the form of influencing the development of Stalinism. But would Lenin have provided such assurances of victory? He would be concerned that the forces of revolutionary Marxism were effectively tiny and limited to the Fourth International. He would be concerned about the lack of promotion of genuine proletarian internationalism and the ability of Stalinism to convince the working class that it represented genuine Leninism. In other words, he would consider the influence of Stalinism as a setback for the working class. Only the building of the revolutionary party could compensate for this problematical development. In contrast, James consoles himself that the working class has in its spontaneous expression grasped what is Leninism. It is advancing towards communism in the form of transforming Stalinism. To James the essence represents movement which means that in reality progress is occurring towards the realisation of the end goal. But the actual logic of empirical reality suggests that the domination of the Stalinist movement indicates the influence of counter-revolution and the connected undermining of the possibility for progress in the class struggle. The problem of Stalinism cannot be wished away by suggesting that it is being transformed by the dialectical movement of history. Instead it has to be consciously opposed by the development of a strategy to undermine its influence. The development of proletarian ideology is crucial if the consciousness to undermine Stalinism is to be generated and encouraged. But James resolves this task by subsuming it into the objective process of movement of history that is represented by the class struggle. History becomes an objective process which neglects the successful realisation of ideological and subjective tasks.

James is concerned with the person who is unable to understand the process of movement because they are over-influenced by past categories, such as Trotskyism located in pristine Leninism. But he is unable to recognise that movement can be undermined by the strength of the forces of reaction. Stalinism has obstructed the process of change because it ultimately upholds the domination of world capital. The prospect of movement requires the demise of the counter-revolutionary influence of Stalinism. This means the working class makes a conscious break with Stalinism and is no longer influenced by its counter-revolutionary ideology. The irony is that James actually recognises this problem. He is not always consoled by the dialectic. Instead he can in precise terms outline how Stalinism is the major force that undermines the development of the class struggle: “Labour always had capital in its concept....and Leninism had Stalinism in its concept. How Stalinism? Because as long as the new organism, socialism, had not been achieved, the revolutionary determination, Leninism would be attacked by the reflection within it of the fundamental enemy of the proletariat, capital, and state capital within the labour movement is precisely Stalinism, as Menshevism was monopoly capital...within the labour movement.”(24) Thus if the class struggle is to progress it is necessary to rediscover the essence of \Leninism by overcoming its dominant form in Stalinism. This is the most revolutionary formulation of James. He recognises that the working class can only advance by making genuine progress in elaborating true Leninism and overcoming its false Stalinist form. The process of advance is by overcoming the reactionary interpretation of Marxism, just as genuine progress was made when Leninism replaced the dominant influence of the Mensheviks. But he also justifies the view that it will be the proletariat, as the dynamic of the dialectic, that ends the domination of Stalinism. This underestimates the necessity of ideological struggle and the importance of the development of revolutionary Marxism. Consequently he contends that the task of overcoming Stalinism is imminent. The dialectic of history has led to this possibility: “The other of Stalinism is an international socialist order, embracing from the start whole continents. Their truth consists only in relation to each other. Each contains the other in its own concept. It goes forward by overcoming this specific opposite. We have not laboured in vain.”(25)

This latter view implies Stalinism is transcended by the primary aspect of its contradiction which is the proletariat. But it could be argued that the very dynamism of the working class is undermined as long as it remains the other of Stalinism. The actual strength of the working class is indicated by its capacity to become an independent force. In this context the actual self-limiting illusion is the view that in some sense Stalinism represents socialism. Only when the working class recognises Stalinism as counter-revolutionary will it be able to overcome its alienating illusions and so make genuine progress in the class struggle. In contrast, James glosses over this task because he upholds the consolationist schema that the working class is able and willing to break with its reactionary other of Stalinism. Illusions in the role of the dialectic obscure the difficulties involved of bringing about a conscious and emphatic break of the working class from Stalinism. But James would reply that he has not underestimated the difficulties involved in overcoming the role and influence of Stalinism because the very character of the proletariat is defined by resolving this relationship in revolutionary terms. Hence: “The negativity of free creative activity of the proletariat can only come completely into play when it is in contradiction with a concrete obstacle, something to which to release its own nature, it must overcome.”(26) In this sense the relationship of the working class to Stalinism is antagonistic but is also necessary because only by resolving it can it be possible to make progress in the class struggle. However, what is assumed is that this contradiction will be resolved in favour of the working class, and therefore advances the prospects of success in the class struggle. But empirical events have indicated that this contradiction was resolved in the interests of capital and this was because the relationship of Stalinism to capital was stronger than its connection to the working class. Furthermore, this development meant that the conception of an upward movement of the dialectic, via the role of class struggle, was shown to be a simplification that could not explain the full complexity of the balance of class forces.

James would reply and argue that only free creative activity can overcome its antagonistic other. This is a philosophical truth that has been underestimated by Trotskyism in the name of the conscious factor. But it is also a simplification because the class struggle can only overcome problems and limitations when it is influenced by the role of Marxism. Indeed James recognises this point because he admits that the character of the class struggle is not complete prior to the realisation of socialism. Before then the working class is not a fully formed and completed self-acting subject. Instead it is continually learning lessons about how to overcome the limitations of capitalism and Stalinism. The working class is in a finite condition that strives to become more coherent and collective, or more able to realise revolutionary goals. But he also argues that this finite condition that may undergo setbacks does not undermine the ultimate resolution of the class struggle by the inevitability of socialism. This is the ultimate flaw in the approach of James. The point is it may be possible to establish this inevitable prospect in philosophical and dialectical terms, but actual developments in the class struggle undermine any reliance on the teleological premises of an idealist approach. The problem is that even the highest levels of the class struggle do not represent the possibility of an inherent process of movement towards socialism. Hence the workers may be able to establish Soviets but this does not ensure movement towards socialism. Instead this prospect depends on the balance of the class forces and the inter-connection of the role of the external and internal. Thus the working class may establish Soviets in national terms but the forces of capital are still dominant internationally. This problem can only be resolved by definite progress in the world revolution, and this process may suffer serious setbacks and even the questioning of the very revolutionary capacity of the working class. But to James these difficulties are temporary because any problems are ultimately resolved by movement of the dialectic. This means the conception of the idealist dialectic becomes imposed onto reality and the proletariat is conceived as world spirit. However, James has understood a crucial truth despite his limitations. The outcome of world history depends on the activity of the working class. This truth needs to be recognised by Trotskyism. Hence the continuation of capitalism is because of the present inability of the working class to achieve revolutionary change. This situation still indicates the importance of the working class in negative terms.

LENINISM

James argues that Lenin recognised the importance of a leap in consciousness in 1914. The majority of revolutionary forces had not understood the extent of the degeneration of the Second International and the importance of opportunism. In order to understand these developments it was necessary to carry out a philosophical revolution. But Trotskyism has not recognised this task in relation to its understanding of Stalinism. It has defined Stalinism in terms of obedience to the Kremlin and not recognised the promotion of state capitalism as a possible prelude to socialism. This is why the working class support it. In contrast to the rigidity of Trotsky's approach, Lenin wants to understand the influence of opportunism. He locates it in the role of the labour aristocracy. This analysis meant his understanding of the relationship of organisation to spontaneity changes. His emphasis before 1914 was on the role of organisation in order to oppose opportunism and to guide spontaneity. But after 1914 organisation becomes orientated to encouraging spontaneity: “But after 1914, Lenin no longer saw the organization of pre 1914 as an ideal. That organization had become the enemy of the very thing it had been formed to develop – the revolutionary creative activity of the workers. Lenin therefore sought to organize anew – not what had been his aim before 1914, but a body of revolutionaries, who starting from what had been permanently achieved.....now tried to organize the revolutionary creative instincts of the people.”(27)

James has outlined a profound truth. Lenin recognised that it was not sufficient to create an organisation if it was to result in accommodating to the opportunist pressure of the labour aristocracy. This meant the previous basis for opposing opportunism in terms of the role of organisation guiding spontaneity was no longer sufficient. This relationship had not undermined the opportunist degeneration of the Second International. Instead the outcome of the world war meant the task of the revolutionary party was to encourage the flourishing of the spontaneous discontent of the most exploited and oppressed sections of the working class. The party should act to promote the spontaneous discontent of the working class with capitalism. Thus Lenin argues: “But in all the advanced countries the war has placed on the order of the day the slogan of socialist revolution, a slogan that is the more urgent, the more heavily the burden of war presses upon the shoulders of the proletariat, and the more active its future role must become in the re-creation of Europe.....Notwithstanding all obstacles the working class will create a new international. Opportunism's present triumph will be short-lived. The greater the sacrifices imposed by the war the clearer will it become to the mass of the workers that the opportunists have betrayed the workers cause and that the weapons must be turned against the government and bourgeoisie of each country.”(28) Lenin is suggesting that the present situation means the international working class can begin a revolt against the reactionary policies of its existing organisations and uphold the perspective of revolutionary defeatism versus the approach of class compromise. This process of proletarian revolt will encourage the formation of a new principled international that will encourage this struggle for world socialism. But the emphasis of his approach is on the primary importance of working class struggle to transform the situation. He is aware that the forces of conscious revolutionary Marxism is presently in a tiny minority. Hence the initiative to transform the situation is with the prospect of an international proletarian revolt in order to transform the imperialist war into civil war. The renewal of the importance of the revolutionary party is entirely dependent upon this prospect of the generation of international working class opposition to the imperialist war. This spontaneous development can also have a crucial role in undermining the domination of the opportunist forces of the Second International and so prepare the basis for the formation of a principled Third International.

In an important sense, Lenin is no longer suggesting that spontaneity is the opposite of organisation. This was the position of 1903. But in 1914 he is arguing that the forces of spontaneity represented by proletarian discontent can resolve important organisational questions such as encouraging the formation of the Third International. It will be spontaneous proletarian revolt that discredits the role of the Second International and so facilitates the development of the forces of organised revolutionary Marxism. This spontaneous discontent of the working class will indicate that the policy of the Second International is in the interests of imperialism and capitalism. The result of this development is ultimately the beginning of international proletarian revolution against capitalism. Only in this context will it be possible to develop revolutionary parties with popular support. Lenin is suggesting that the lack of mass action will seriously undermine the promotion of the role of the revolutionary party. The whole validity of the revolutionary party is based on the justification provided by the popular opposition of the working class to the imperialist war. Therefore James is right to suggest that Lenin's new approach meant: “It was organization for spontaneity, i.e., for the socialist revolution.”(29) But it also has to be emphasised that Lenin considered the spontaneous action of the working class would resolve outstanding organisational tasks such as generating the creation of a revolutionary party to oppose the parties of opportunism. Hence the primary aspect of this relationship was now with the impulses of spontaneity. Without the revolt of the proletariat against imperialist war it would be difficult to create the revolutionary party. At present revolutionary Marxism represents a propaganda group because of its lack of popular support and isolation from the working class. This situation can only be overcome by the mass activity of the working class against imperialist war. This development will create the political conditions to promote the formation of a revolutionary International with mass support.

However, James understands this situation in a one-sided manner. He maintains the only alternative to mass Stalinist organisation is the demise of organisation: “Organization as we know it is at an end. The task is to abolish organization. The task today is to call for, to teach, to illustrate, to develop spontaneity – the free creative activity of the proletariat. The proletariat will find its method of proletarian organization. And, contradiction par excellence, at this stage the vanguard can only organize itself on the basis of the destruction of the stranglehold that the existing organizations have on the proletariat by means of which it is suffering ghastly defeats.”(30) But this approach is not supported by Lenin. His starting point has become the primacy of the role of spontaneous action, but this must promote the aim of the creation of new forms of revolutionary organisation. James is ambiguous about this point, with his reference to self-developing proletarian organisation. This implies that the character of new organisation may be very primitive and possibly not connected to definite revolutionary goals. Lenin is not rejecting the aim of developing revolutionary organisation. But what he is suggesting in 1914 is that the credibility and validity of revolutionary parties will be connected to the role of mass discontent. It is no longer satisfactory to envisage the promotion of small groups led by intellectuals. Instead the principled character of revolutionary parties will depend on its connection to spontaneous struggle against the imperialist war. The revolutionary party will be a mass working class organisation, and in this manner it can challenge the validity of the Second International.

In contrast, James is arguing that the logical conclusion of the dynamic of spontaneity is the transcendence of organisation, or the reduction of organisation to the norms of proletarian spontaneity. This is a one-sided conclusion that is justified by the view that: “But there comes a stage when organization and the maintenance of the organization become ends in themselves in the most direct conflict with the essential movement of the proletariat.”(31) Lenin would disagree. The task is to promote the formation of an organisation that is compatible with the dynamism of the spontaneity of the working class. In this manner the very role of spontaneity is to develop an organisation that is consistent with its own creative and militant actions. The creation of this organisation can only be revolutionary in aims and principles. This is why Lenin relates spontaneous opposition to imperialist war with the creation of a popular Third International. Hence the role of spontaneity is to provide new forms of justification and validity for revolutionary Marxism. In contrast, the Second International is opposed to spontaneity because of its very rejection of revolutionary aims. The Second International utilises bureaucratic norms in order to repress the impulses of spontaneity. Lenin welcomes the role of spontaneity because it can establish an organisation compatible with the revolutionary tasks of the moment. This connection is not accepted by James because he considers the logic of spontaneity is the transcendence of organisation. Such a conclusion is like suggesting that the role of revolutionary Marxism in party form has become superfluous. But a party is still vital because that is how spontaneity realises its complete potential. Historical development has indicated that only the party-class relationship can bring about the overthrow of capitalism. Spontaneity in autonomous terms is not sufficient for this task. But this seems to be the illusion of James. He implies that spontaneity can only realise its potential by the transcendence of organisation. Lenin would argue the relationship of spontaneity to organisation is still how revolutionary tasks are realised.

James argues that what will undermine the domination of Stalinism is the development of the spontaneity of the working class. This perspective could have been true to some extent, and was realised in 1968. The problem is the very development of spontaneity poses the necessity of organisational tasks. If spontaneity results in mass activity, and the generation of the task of the overthrow of capitalism, this possibility can only be expressed by the realisation of connected organisational aims. Hence the revolutionary activity of the working class creates the importance of Soviets. The task of 'All Power to the Soviets' is a combination of the role of spontaneity and organisation. It also requires a party to advocate this strategy. In contrast, James's approach seems to be a logical realisation of the importance of spontaneity in terms of the denial of the role of organisation. But in practice this aim is over-ambitious and does not connect to the fact that the working class itself develops organisations that are compatible with its spontaneous power, like factory committees and Soviets. However, what James has established is that the principled character of the revolutionary party is based on its ability to represent an organisation that can advance the prospects of spontaneity. All the various organisations of the working class have become an expression of the rejection of the importance of spontaneity. This trend has to be changed, and Lenin provides the politics to connect organisation to the possibilities of spontaneity.

James argues that world socialism is the universal that completes the struggles of the working class. This standpoint is articulated by Marx's description of the Commune as an expression of the type of society that should be emulated, and Lenin makes this description more precise in his elaboration of what is meant by socialism. But, Trotsky's conception of the permanent revolution lacks this content. This is an unfair criticism. Trotsky had already noted in 1905 that the concrete expression of the process of permanent revolution was nationally expressed by the role of Soviet power. (32) What he did deny was that this was sufficient to realise socialism. This point was quite realistic given the level of the productive forces. There is nothing to suggest that Lenin disagreed with this view. What we can say is that Lenin did elaborate what was meant by Soviet Power. This meant the realisation of the approach of developing a commune state which would represent the democratic aspirations of the workers and peasants. The task would not be the introduction of immediate socialism, which was not possible, but instead the realisation of measures that would attempt to resolve the immediate problems of food for the cities and the disorganisation of industry. It would also bring about land reform. (33) The point is that Lenin's position is not in opposition to Trotsky. Rather he has made it more precise, practical and related to the immediate tasks of strategy and the policy of a future Soviet government. The standpoint of Lenin and Trotsky in 1917 is not in opposition, but is instead complementary. However, James is right to suggest that Lenin established the criteria of socialism better than Trotsky. Lenin outlined the connection of the advance of socialism with the role of Soviet power or the commune state. Any degeneration of the relationship between Soviets and working people is an expression of problems in the development of the Commune state and the aim of socialism: “The fight against the bureaucratic distortion of the Soviet form of the organisation is assured by the firmness of the connection between the Soviets and the “people” meaning by that the working and exploited people, and by that the flexibility and elasticity of that connection.”(34)

Lenin has outlined why the definition of a workers state is based on the importance of the Soviets for achieving of economic and political tasks. In contrast, Trotsky argues that the character of society under Stalinism is still an expression of a workers state because of nationalised property: “The state assumes directly and from the beginning a dual character: socialistic insofar as it defends state property in the means of production; bourgeois, insofar as the distribution of life's goods is carried out with a capitalistic measure of value and all the consequences ensuring there-from.”(35) What is glossed over by this definition is that it is entirely possible to exploit the working class on the basis of nationalised property, and so this criterion cannot be the principled definition of the workers state. Nor can Trotsky explain the expansion of the USSR in terms of the role of state property because he has predicted the restoration of capitalism. James is making an important point that Lenin was perceptive to equate the workers state with the role of the Soviets. Only in this manner can the class definition be based on the participation of the working class in the organisation and administration of both state and economy. Hence at a certain point without this aspect, the state becomes an instrument for exploitation by a ruling class. James is arguing powerfully that Trotsky was wrong not to recognise this point. A workers state can only be realised by the involvement of the working class in its development, and this took the form of Soviet power. Lenin established that the concrete form of the aim of socialism was connected to the role of the Soviet. The conscious and creative activity of the working class can realise world socialism.

But James suggests the role of the party has disappeared to Lenin, and has been replaced by the creative activity of the working class. This is a one-sided view. Lenin always understood these tasks in terms of the relationship of party to class. Hence: “For the first time in human history a socialist party has managed to complete in the main the conquest of power and the suppression of the exploiters, and has managed to approach directly the task of administration.....We must fully realise that in order to administer successfully, besides being able to convince people, besides being able to win a civil war, we must be able to do practical organisational work. This is the most difficult task, because it is a matter of organising in a new way the deepest rooted, the economic, foundations of life of scores of millions of people. And it is the most gratifying task, because only after it has been fulfilled.....will it be possible to say that Russia has become not only a soviet, but also a socialist republic.”(36) This means the role of the party is to encourage the initiative of the working people to realise important economic, political and organisational tasks. If this development does not occur, and the party undermines the development of the capacities of working people to organise society, then a process of serious degeneration will have occurred within society.

James is making the point that the appearance of the Soviets represented a higher period of historical development. They represented the spontaneous potential of the world working class to realise socialism. In relation to Russia Lenin is suggesting: “Without the creative power of the workers, there would be no socialist revolution....That is how he saw the task of the government, to evoke, to draw out this creative power, to clear out of its way the remnants of the old bourgeois ideology, with its objective basis in the old society.”(37) This perspective failed not because it was not credible, but instead because of unfavourable objective conditions and the isolation of the revolution. This meant he was proposing in the trade union debate that it was necessary for the trade unions to defend the workers from the situation of the bureaucratic degeneration of the state: “The economic and cultural interests of the workers were to be protected against the party, for the party was the state.”(38) Lenin also encouraged the role of the peasants as an alternative to the degeneration of the state, and this aim was another extension of the view that the development of the Soviets was the only alternative to bureaucratic regression.

But James also makes ultra-left conclusions from his approach. He argues that the situation in Germany in the early 1930's indicated the necessity of destroying the traditional organisations of the working class if fascism was to be effectively challenged. This is part of the standpoint that suggests the formation of soviets was more relevant that the role of the mass party organisations. But how is it possible to destroy the parties? This is not something that the working class will carry out given their support for Social Democracy and Stalinism. Instead Trotsky was right to argue for a defensive united front in order to initiate the struggle against fascism. The question of the formation of soviets could only be posed after the successful development of the united front and its advance in the struggle against Fascism. Trotsky was right to suggest that the tempo of development would mean the question of what mass organisations were relevant was created by this logic of struggle. In that sense the question of soviets was not relevant in all situations and instead there generation would be suggested by the success initially realised in development of the class struggle. (39) In contrast, James has a rigid understanding of the relationship between tactics and strategy because he assumes that soviets are relevant on all occasions because they express the spontaneous creative power of the working class. This represents strategic rigidity that does not allow for the complexity of situations in the class struggle. It is not a denial of the spontaneous potential of the working class to be reluctant to call for soviets on every occasion. Instead our ultimate aim should be to advocate soviets in order to advance the aim of the overthrow of capitalism.

James argues that Leninism is not Trotskyism because the latter represents a rigidity of thought that is unable to understand new developments. He suggests the differences are based on the defence of the importance of the role of the proletariat for defining socialism instead of nationalised property: “The revolutionary concept of 1917 was for Lenin, the soviet and what it meant to the people. Lenin brushed aside nationalized property, confiscation. Not nationalized property, but the Soviets plus nationalized property.”(40) In contrast, Trotsky is criticised for making an aspect of socialism into a universal. He made what was finite into a universal and so glossed over Lenin's emphasis on the Soviets as the essence of socialism, via the role of the working class. Hence Trotsky could not recognise that the end of the importance of Soviets was the undermining of socialism, instead he argued that the continuation of nationalised property was the distorted expression of this historical condition under Stalinism. This view does accurately relate to the fact that Trotsky generally defines the class character of the worker state in terms of nationalised property. But Trotsky also considers that Soviets are the major organ of class rule of a healthy workers state. (41) Hence his definition of the workers state changes with the advent of the domination of bureaucratic degeneration when he emphasises the importance of nationalised property. Hence his actual methodological limitation is that of eclecticism rather than rigidity because his understanding of the character of the workers state between 1917 and 1923 is changed into a different criterion in order to understand Stalinism.

James considers that the basis of the major limitation of Trotsky is that he effectively rejects the role of the working class in the construction of socialism. This criticism could certainly be made of works like 'Terrorism and Communism'. But the very attempt to critique Stalinism and explain its degeneration means that Trotsky is able to discover Lenin's understanding of what is meant by socialism: “If the democratic soviets had preserved to this day their original strength and independence, and yet were compelled to resort to repressions and compulsions on the scale of the first years, this circumstance might of itself give rise to serious anxiety. How much greater must be the alarm in view of the fact that the mass soviets have entirely disappeared from the scene, having turned over the function of compulsion to Stalin, Yagoda and company.”(42) Thus the original workers state is defined by the importance of Soviets, but some form of bureaucratic deformation is expressed by its exercise of repression. However, the present society of Stalin is characterised by the end of the importance of the Soviets, and so the only aspect of the workers state that remains is the role of nationalised property. This understanding seems compatible with that of Lenin given that we do now know how Lenin would comprehend the character of the USSR under Stalin's domination.

James seems to entirely contradict his position on spontaneity when he seems to change his position about the relationship of party to class: “The party is the knowing of the proletariat as being. Without the party the proletariat knows nothing...The proletariat is the only historical class to which the party, the political party seems essential.”(43) This view seems to contradict the previous emphasis on the tension between spontaneity and organisation which implies the development of the conditions for the transcendence of organisation. The aim of proletarian revolution would seem to depend on the demise of organisation, which can only restrict and undermine the realisation of the logic of spontaneity. But James has now contradicted and apparently undermined this understanding. This contradiction needs to be explained. James makes the point that between 1903 and 1914, Lenin understood that party organisation was essential to the development of revolutionary class consciousness within the working class. But he denies the previous understanding that Lenin recognised how the limitations of party organisation had begun to restrict the spontaneous capacity of the ability of the proletariat to oppose capitalism. But James then inconsistently claims that the logical step of the working class in 1948 is to transcend organisation. The working class has gone through the experience of the Stalinist party state, and been repressed because of the bourgeoisie organised in a party in order to realise counter-revolution. Hence the bourgeoisie organise the party in order to suppress the role of politics and to repress the working class. The lesson from these developments is that revolution is advanced by the transcendence of the party: “That is our new universal – the abolition of the distinction between party and the mass.”(44) This perspective means that the continued importance of the proletariat organised as the party is an aberration, or an aspect of the residue of rigid Leninism. The task of revolution and the creative organisation of the socialist society imply the end of the role of the party. But in a tenuous manner, James also implies the present task is for the working class itself to organise the party: “Today, every cook, every worker, to a man, to join the party, the revolutionary party, which today, not tomorrow, not after the revolution, but today in its ranks will begin the destruction of the bureaucracy.”(45)

Therefore if we attempt to understand James without any tensions or unnecessary contradictions we can establish that the lessons of the present period is that the bourgeoisie, and petty bourgeoisie has transformed the role of the party into the most reactionary political form in order to defend capitalism and state capitalism. In this context we need to extend Lenin's understanding that organisation should not restrict the dynamism of the spontaneity of the working class. The time has arrived for the working class to form its own genuine revolutionary party in order to encourage the spontaneous dynamism that is required in order to oppose capitalism and bureaucracy and so promote the very transcendence of the role of organisation. The period 1848-1905 had shown the progressive importance of the proletariat being organised in terms of the educational role of the Second International, but in 1905 the working class developed Soviets in the Russian revolution and few Marxists understood their significance. However, the Second International, and Menshevism, became the trend of the new petty bourgeoisie and opposed the struggles of the working class. This trend was complemented by Stalinism which utilised the proletariat on behalf of the new state petty bourgeoisie in Russia against the private bourgeoisie. This situation resulted in the destruction of the revolutionary character of the Third International. Hence the Communist International by the 1930's no longer called for proletarian revolution. The result was acceptance of the destruction of the German working class by fascism, and the counter-revolutionary policy of Popular Frontism. Consequently because the party form has become the expression of the new petty bourgeoisie that upholds counter-revolution and state capitalism, the task is to develop a new organisational form that represents the aims of proletarian revolution and socialism. But this organisation can only be principled if it is working class and dedicated to the aim of destroying Stalinism and capitalism. Hence this process represents a dialectic in which the dynamic is to transcend the very limitations of organisation and promote the full dynamism of spontaneity.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the occasional contradictions and tensions in the approach of CLR James, his conception of the class struggle is the most explanatory and principled. The last thirty years has shown that a working class that is on the defensive, and unable to engage in spontaneous struggle because of the restrictions imposed by the trade union bureaucracy. This means the working class is forced to undergo constant defeat and retreat. Hence the aim of the forces of the revolutionary party is to encourage the working class to emancipate itself from its present organisational restrictions and instead to develop its capacity to engage in the most militant forms of struggle, including the formation of Soviets. In this context, the lessons made by Lenin between 1914 and 1923 are still invaluable and vital if we are to encourage the development of the class struggle and to promote the aim of realising socialism.

FOOTNOTES:

(1)CLR James: Notes on Dialectics, Allison and Busby, London, 1980

(2) ibid p15

(3) ibid p25

(4)Thomas M Twiss: Trotsky and the Problem of Soviet Bureaucracy, Haymarket books, Chicago, 2014 p233-251

(5) ibid p418-422

(6)James op cit p29

(7) ibid p29-30

(8) ibid p30

(9) ibid p33

(10)Leon Trotsky: In Defence of Marxism, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1973 p31

(11)Leon Trotsky: The Transitional Programme, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1973 p113

(12)Lenin: On of the Fundamental Questions of the Revolution, volume 25, Progress Publishers, 1964, Moscow p370-377

(13)James op cit p42

(14)Dave North: The Heritage We Defend, Labour Publications, Detroit 1988 p184-198

(15)James op cit p43

(16) ibid p58

(17) ibid p58

(18) ibid p61

(19) ibid p65

(20Ibid p77

(21) ibid p78

(22) ibid p78

(23)Lenin: The Collapse of the Second International volume 21, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1964, p249-250

(24)James op cit p86

(25) ibid p87

(26) ibid p91

(27) ibid p116

(28)Lenin, The War and Russian Social Democracy, Volume 21 Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1964, Moscow p33-34

(29)James op cit p116

(30)Ibid p117

(31) ibid p117

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(34)Lenin: The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government, Collected Works volume 27 p274

(35)Leon Trotsky: The Revolution Betrayed, New Park, London 1974 p54

(36)Lenin, Immediate Tasks op cit p242-243

(37)James op cit p143

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(39)Leon Trotsky: On France, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1969 p166-167

(40)James op cit p153

(41)Trotsky Revolution Betrayed op cit p261

(42) ibid p107

(43)James op cit p172

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