Chapter Four – The Question of the Cold War

This chapter analyses an important document by the American Socialist Workers Party in order to try and comprehend whether it the forces claiming to be Trotskyist are able to develop a programme for the period of history known as the cold war.(1) What will be important are issues such as the development of the post-war split between the USA and USSR and its effect on the consciousness of the international working class. It will also be necessary to understand whether the various programmatic documents are a credible advance from the time when the Transitional Programme was written. This chapter will also try to evaluate the influence of the Cuban revolution on the SWP and Fourth International and whether this has result in the tendency for opportunism or the consolidation of principled politics. Ultimately this chapter will also try to extract the conception of history and establish its capacity to be a reliable guide to the development of strategy and tactics.

The first document justifies the reunification of the American SWP with the International Secretariat of the Fourth International.(2) This means splitting from the International Committee of the Fourth International. The document is very similar in style to the Transitional Programme. Its first point suggests that the productive forces have matured for the prospects of the realisation of global communism. This point is argued in terms of the social conditions in the third world and the importance of the boom in the advanced capitalist countries is glossed over. Reference is also made to the fact that capitalism has created the prospect for the nuclear destruction of the planet. This point is an attempt to outline Trotsky’s predictions about the favourable prospect of the transition of capitalism to socialism in contemporary terms. But the importance of the boom for the class struggle and class consciousness is not mentioned. This means the increased support for reformism and the weakness of the forces for revolution within the advanced capitalist countries is not established. In other words whilst arguments can be made that the progress of economic development and technology indicate the maturity of the historical situation for transition to communism they also represent the possibility for material gains for the working class to be made within capitalism. The point is that the crisis of the 1930’s has been replaced by the possibility of progress within capitalism, even if this progress is uneven and global poverty is still present. Hence is it theoretical effective to repeat Trotsky’s point about the productive forces and make it the major emphasis as to why socialism is a superior alternative. Would it not also be necessary to indicate the alienation of the working class and why this, and the situation of exploitation, is the most important aspect of class contradictions and the prospects of advance to a higher form of society. Consequently the role of class struggle is more important than productive forces determinism when outlining the prospects for communism. The progress of the class struggle indicates the development of conditions for transition to a new society but a situation of relative class harmony would mean that the prospects of social transformation are not yet maturing. This is the situation that the Fourth International has to explain but it is reluctant to do so because of its dogmatic and timeless repetition of the maturing conditions for communism.

The second point of the document argues that the traditional leadership of the working class is responsible for the delay in the development of world socialist revolution. This point has been established in terms of the role of Stalinism and Social Democracy in the periods of revolutionary upheaval between 1918 and 1947. But it is also necessary to outline how the development of the cold war and the boom has meant the lowering of class consciousness because of the apparent division of the world into competing blocs and the ability of capitalist development to raise material standards. The cold war has meant that the USSR and socialism seems to be an antagonist that has to be opposed and the result is the justification of class collaboration against this common enemy, and the boom has meant that the association of capitalism with crisis and poverty has been modified by actual experience. In this situation reformism has thrived and the arguments for Marxism no longer have popular appeal because of the limitations of capitalism. Marxism itself seems to have been discredited by the very logic of capitalist development. This means the arguments for Marxism have to be renewed and elaborated. It is necessary to outline how the capital-labour relation can never overcome the subordination of labour within the relations of production and the reformist leadership has made its peace with an exploitative system. But it is also necessary to acknowledge that it is an oversimplification to reduce the continuation of capitalism to the crisis of leadership and the role of class compromise. Instead other economic and political factors have strengthened reformism such as the cold war and the boom. The hegemony of USA imperialism seems to be justified because of the expansion of the USSR, and the development of capitalism is resulting in social improvement. This has meant reformism has popular support within the working class itself. Marxism will have to develop arguments about how the working class can never reconcile itself to the capital-labour relation in order to renew Marxism. But this work was never satisfactorily carried out until Meszaros’s Beyond Capital in the 1990’s.(3)

The third point calls for the formation of revolutionary parties and the advocacy of transitional demands in order to overcome the contradiction between immediate aspirations and the ultimate strategic aim. It is also suggested that entryism should be used as an important tactic in order to build these parties. The implication is that if these guidelines are followed it will be possible to build principled parties. But what is not addressed is the fact that the situation is presently unfavourable to the development of revolutionary organisations, and this means the tactic of entryism cannot in and of itself improve this situation. Indeed it could be argued that entryism can intensify political problems because the result of being within a reformist organisation is to dilute politics and undermine the development of a principled standpoint. What is crucial is the elaboration of a strategy that will attempt to address the important questions about the inability to promote the creation of mass revolutionary parties. This will also mean the strength of reformism has to be admitted and addressed and the isolation of Marxism recognised as an expression of the development of capitalism in economic and political terms in the post-war period.

In other words it is one thing to suggest that we require revolutionary parties. The very history of the class struggle indicates that the role of the revolutionary party is crucial if the prospect of political success for the working class is to be realised. It is also necessary to be honest about why the forces of the revolutionary party have not been able to relate effectively to the mass movement. This means explaining why reformism is not just unprincipled but has also been successful in its aims in the post-war period. The approach of the revolutionary party has been apparently refuted for a historical period, and the situation of regular economic crisis has been replaced by a process of boom and improvement. What is required is a programme that will explain this situation and how it can become transformed into its opposite. A collection of dogmatic truisms inherited from the past is not satisfactory in this regard and instead we have to recognise how the present differs from the past. Instead of the rivalry between imperialist powers we have an apparent harmony of imperialism under the hegemony of the USA, and the Cold war seems to have stabilised the political situation. Furthermore, reformism is no longer unable to defend the interests of the working class and unable to oppose reaction and instead has become the most successful political project of the post-war period. The arguments of revolution seem to have been refuted by the ability of reformism to manage society. Point five of the document calls on the revolutionary party to oppose the bureaucratic character of reformism and to win the rank and file of Social Democracy and Stalinism to Principled Marxism, but this is rhetoric because it is not explained how this possibility can be realised. The point is that the working class will not oppose the privileged and bureaucratic character of reformism as long as reformism is able to also gain social benefits for the working class in general. In this context Marxism seems to be an ideal that is based on principles that lack material validity. Marxism is not able to satisfactorily explain why socialism and communism can represent a superior economic and political system as long as capitalism and reformism are able to generate benefits to the Western working class. Hence socialism seems to have become only applicable to the Third World. The document does outline that principled Marxists should oppose the view of various intellectual currents that reject the prospect for revolution in the contemporary period, but this is only an empty affirmation of principles. Nothing is suggested at the level of theory that could refute the standpoint of intellectual pessimism and reformism in terms of practice.

Consequently it is interesting that no mention is made of the discovery of the works of the Young Marx. The view that the working class is alienated, and that this alienation cannot be transcended because of the character of capital-labour relations, represents the beginning of the defence of the view that the working class is still potentially revolutionary in a period of affluence and gains made under capitalism. This understanding is actually obscured by the view that the major aspect of the argument for communism is based on productive forces determinism. The argument for communism is not primarily because of the apparent contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production which is hard to prove and is a controversial aspect of Marxist theory. Instead the primary argument for communism is related to the logic of the contradictions and antagonisms of the class struggle which is caused by the alienation and exploitation of labour. The problems for reformism are that its success can never transcend the continuation of the class struggle, and the class struggle is likely to intensify when a situation of boom is replaced by that of crisis. In this context the major argument against reformism is that it’s very practice is based on legitimising the subordinated and alienated role of labour. Reformism can only be successful if capitalism is successful and the working class accepts the domination of capital. Hence reformism is based on the empirical rejection of what the working class can become in favour of the apparent material benefits gained by accepting the continuation of capitalism. But this reformist perspective can only be successful as long as capitalism was in a situation of boom. It could also be argued that even in this situation the alienation of labour meant periods of unrest still developed. Consequently the revolutionary perspective of Marxism was to develop a strategy to oppose the alienation of labour in a situation of boom. The principled standpoint was to reject what was present as natural and given, and instead to argue in terms of what could be possible if alienation was no longer dominant. But this perspective was ignored in terms of supporting the anachronistic approach of productive forces determinism as outlined in the Transitional Programme.

Point four of the document outlines the importance of democratic centralism as the method of organisation of parties. This includes the right to form tendencies and factions and for the full realisation of internal democracy. We can agree with the importance of this standpoint. Without internal democracy it will be difficult to develop principled parties that are able to discuss issues of theory, programme and perspectives in a manner that is able to enhance the prospect of the development of revolutionary forms of practice. But this commitment has not been able to oppose a process of splits and fragmentation. The problem has been that any difference that has developed about issues in the class struggle has resulted in a tendency for splits between majority and minority factions. It was differences about the Cuban revolution that were the latest manifestation of this tendency for splits. Both factions of the Fourth International regarded the other as being unprincipled and either opportunist or sectarian. Consequently the frequency for splits was a major problem in the process of the development of a mass revolutionary party. This situation was related to the view that the monopoly of truth was with a given faction and error was represented by the other faction. It could also be argued that the increasing antiquated character of the Transitional Programme meant that its ability to be a guide to action was flawed and unreliable, and so was unhelpful as a principled evaluation of the new and changing events in the class struggle. But nobody actually wrote a document that could unite the Fourth International on a principled basis. Instead people wrote competing documents with distinct evaluations of the class struggle. This meant one faction wrote that the Cuban revolution was the latest expression of what was a genuine proletarian revolution and the other faction tried to deny the revolutionary significance of what had happened in Cuba. The prospect of unity despite the differences was precluded because of the bitterness of the dispute that developed. This situation indicated that the pressures of reformism and Stalinism were intense despite the commitment to revolutionary politics and the tendency was to dilute principles in order to try and relate to the mass movement that seemed indifferent to the aims of principled Marxism. In these circumstances the organisational commitment to internal democracy was not sufficient to withstand the tendency to fragmentation and instead only the adherence to a common programme could have provided an alternative to splits.

Point six is about Stalinism. The USSR was defined as a degenerated workers state, but its nationalised economy meant advances had been made in the productive forces: “This great new fact of world history bears witness to the mighty force inherent in planned economy and demonstrates the correctness of the Trotskyist position of unconditional defence of the degenerated workers state against imperialism.”(4) This position of effective support of the USSR in the cold war is very problematical. What is being argued is that the USSR represents a superior form of social system when compared to capitalism and therefore should be supported against capitalism. But the USSR is not socialist and Trotsky accepted that exploitation occurred within the relations of production. The durability of the USSR meant it was not a transitional society, and instead its ability to defeat the forces of German imperialism and to compete with the USA for supremacy within the world represented a situation that the degenerated workers state had managed to evolve into a distinct social formation. The USSR defined the international situation as expressing global rivalry between capitalism and socialism, but what this meant was that a rival to capitalism had emerged that had social power based on a distinct extraction of the surplus. It was a system that had the potential to undermine the global hegemony of the USA because of its having distinct economic and political tendencies that were different to capitalism. The result was competition for global hegemony, even if the USSR tried to make this seem ideologically acceptable in terms of defining this as peaceful co-existence.

In contrast to accepting this social development the American SWP tried to impose a social definition on the USSR that might have been true in the past but which had become invalidated because of the consolidation and transformation of the social system. The result was that they supported the USSR in the cold war because it was still defined as a type of workers state and so should be critically defended in the process of conflict with the USA. This meant what was a form of imperialist type expansion was upheld as an expression of the defence of the USSR. The result was a confusing standpoint in which on the one hand the USSR was defended against imperialism and on the other hand political revolution was also supported within the Stalinist states. This meant there was a paradox between the suggestion that the USSR was progressive because of its capacity to develop the productive forces, and so should be defended against imperialism because of its anti-capitalist impulses, but it should also be opposed because of the reactionary role of the bureaucracy. The overall political result of this confusing standpoint was that the USSR should be supported in the cold war, and the connections between the reactionary character of the bureaucracy and its international aims were glossed over because USA imperialism was defined as being more retrogressive. In other words the label of the degenerated workers state was the term used to effectively define the bureaucratic mode of production that was considered to be more progressive than capitalism. This meant the expansion of the USSR into Eastern Europe was considered in terms of the overthrow of capitalism which was critically supported, and the aspects of imperialist expansion and the fact that this process facilitated the cold war was glossed over by the SWP. Hence the creation of what were called deformed workers states was supported as an extension of the October revolution and a distorted part of the world revolution against capitalism. The fact that the working class is not involved in these forms of the overthrow of capitalism is glossed over because the result is the success of the anti-capitalist impulse promoted by the Second World War.

Hence the inability to comprehend the cold war effectively becomes the basis of a form of justification of the actions of Stalinism as an expression of a distorted development of the advance of anti-capitalism and the related creation of deformed workers states that must be supported against the opposition of imperialism. The geo-political character of the process of expansion of the USSR is not understood sufficiently in terms of the extension of its domination in order to oppose any future expansion by German imperialism. This process facilitates tensions in international relations and differences about the political organisation of Poland results in the effective proclamation of the cold war by Churchill. The Soviet domination of Eastern Europe is not compatible with the aim of the USA to promote capitalism in global terms. Thus Soviet acceptance of the Western part of Europe as being part of the capitalist economy is not satisfactory to the USA and UK. The result is crisis in international relations. The overthrow of capitalism in Eastern Europe is not a progressive act in this context and is instead primarily about the consolidation of the military power of the USSR. This means the impulse of anti-capitalism does not create deformed workers states because the role of the plan and the nationalised economy is entirely subordinated to the interests of the USSR. The bureaucratic system has been extended from the USSR into Eastern Europe but this very process indicates that a degenerated workers state no longer exists in the USSR. Instead we have a type of system that is not capitalist and it does not have progressive impulses such as opposing imperialism in the principled terms of advancing the gains of the working class. The exploitation and domination of the working class has been intensified by the extension of the power of the USSR. This process cannot be a distorted extension of the world revolution and instead represents geo-political impulses because of the reactionary character of the system in the USSR.

Consequently the dogmatic adherence to the label of the degenerated workers state for describing the USSR, and the related conception of the process in Eastern Europe as the creation of deformed workers states, means that the Soviet bloc is supported in the Cold war. Implicitly this process is considered to be the distorted expression of world revolution. However what this approach represents is the tendency for the USSR to militarily dominate in international terms and become a rival of the USA. This means it cannot be principled to support the USSR against the USA, and instead what should be recognised is that two forms of reactionary systems are in opposition for world supremacy. Thus the extension of Soviet power in Eastern Europe does not result in the formation of deformed workers states that can be critically supported and instead what occurs is the extension of the Soviet empire and the development of a new anti-capitalist system of exploitation. Historical experience has indicated that the working class can be exploited by a social system that is not capitalist and so the expansion of this system cannot be supported. In contrast the American SWP does provide critical support for this process of Soviet expansion because it is equated with the development of socialism despite the complete lack of working class participation in this process. The extension of the nationalised economy becomes sufficient criteria for the creation of deformed workers states and the importance of exploitation within the relations of production is ignored.

The SWP tries to ignore the significance of the above because of its continued adherence to the necessity of proletarian democracy within the USSR and the perspective of political revolution. However this standpoint is undermined by the fact that they have become critical supporters of the process of Soviet expansion into Eastern Europe. In concrete and empirical terms, the SWP recognises Stalinism as a progressive force that is capable of creating deformed workers states that should be supported and defended. But in the last analysis the traditional perspective of political revolution and the overthrow of Stalinism should be affirmed. The question that arises what should have priority: the anti-capitalist impulse of Stalinism or its continued parasitic and reactionary aspects? The assumption seems to be that the very capacity of Stalinism to act in an anti-capitalist manner that creates deformed workers states seems to represent the fact that it has a historically progressive mission and character. This is why the USSR should be supported in the Cold War because it is ultimately an instrument for world revolution. The programme of political revolution is an expression of what can and should occur after the Cold War is over. Only when more favourable conditions for the progress of socialism have been created does the programme of Trotskyism become operative. Until this situation develops the aim should be support for the USSR in the Cold war.

In other words the advance of the world revolution is creating the conditions for the transformation of Stalinism: “As a result of the new upsurge of the world revolution, above all the tremendous victory in China which changed the relationship of class forces on an international scale, the Soviet proletariat – already strengthened and made self-confident through the victory over German imperialism in World War 2 and the great economic, technological and cultural progress of the Soviet Union – has exerted increasing strong pressure on the bureaucratic dictatorship, especially since Stalin’s death.”(5) The advance of the world revolution led by Stalinism and the progress of the nationalised economy is undermining the very social power of the bureaucratic system and creating the conditions for political revolution. This process is resulting in mass pressure for reform and the prospects for change are also enhanced by the various splits in the Stalinist monolith and the challenges to the domination of the USSR. What is ignored is the other tendency for Stalinism to attempt to reinforce its domination through repression such as the crushing of the Hungarian revolution. This situation made explicit that genuine independence was not possible and instead the Soviet empire would be maintained and consolidated. Hence the tendencies towards crisis within the Soviet system have not been sufficient to create the momentum for consistent reform and political transformation. The aim of the Khrushchev era was to limit the pressure for change to what was still acceptable to the interests of the bureaucracy. Consequently the tendencies for crisis did not create an inexorable process of change. Instead change became limited to concessions and criticism of the Stalin regime. The point is that the bureaucratic system of could not undergo a process of self reform because that would undermine the continuation of the economic and political domination of the bureaucracy. Furthermore what is called world revolution by the SWP, or the process of Stalinist expansion, has to be upheld by the continuation of state repression and the denial of national self-determination and so the introduction of reforms cannot alter this situation.

The hope of the SWP is that a process of self-reform would open up the possibilities of more radical change because this perspective conforms to the implicit view that Stalinism has progressive tendencies, and it is suggested that the very advance of Stalinism on an international scale creates the contradictions and impulses for fragmentation too occur that will result in a process of political revolution. Hence the SWP has an evolutionary logic that suggests the more Stalinism expands and economically develops the more the tendencies will be promoted that support processes of change. But actual change has been kept to a minimum after Stalin and the development of genuine mass struggle was crushed. This indicates that there is no evolutionary logic caused by the extension of world revolution or the role of technological and cultural progress that inherently facilitates processes of change. The system is actually generally resistant to change and the working class is not allowed any genuine forms of self expression. This suggests that revolution will not result as the culmination of evolutionary reform and instead only crisis will create the conditions for change. But the approach of the SWP promotes illusions in the reformist tendencies of the bureaucracy and so they tend to project the aspirations of the working class for genuine socialism and democracy into a real mass movement that is likely to bring about substantial economic and political change: “This slow but solid strengthening of the position of the proletariat in the European workers states is one of the basic causes of the world crisis of Stalinism.”(6)

This optimistic standpoint is apparently reaffirmed by the appearance of a workers state in Cuba that is not primarily influenced by Stalinism. The suggestion is that this development will enhance the prospects for the transformation of Stalinism and the enhancement of an evolutionary logic of change. But the actual dependency of Cuba on the USSR for economic support because of the American blockade meant Cuba effectively became part of the Soviet empire, and the bureaucratic mode of production of the USSR was extended into Cuba. It also has to be mentioned that the Cuban revolution never created popular organs of struggle that indicated the primary influence and role of the working class within the revolution. Instead it could be argued that what was effectively a bourgeois democratic revolution became bureaucratised and incorporated into the Soviet system because of exceptional circumstances including the aggressive role of USA imperialism. However the dependent relationship of Cuba on the USSR meant it could not represent an alternative to Stalinism. Cuba could not become an alternative leadership to Stalinism and the impetus to a genuine world revolution. In contrast the USA SWP and the USFI did conceive of the Cuban revolution as a decisive turning point that would internationally undermine Stalinism and advance the process of world revolution in a more principled manner. This illusion was upheld despite the effective incorporation of Cuba into the Soviet system in 1962-63.

The Cuban revolution also led to an important strategic illusion. It was argued that the process of revolution could become socialist in the third world despite the lack of a leadership that was truly proletarian. It is suggested that the problems of creating stable forms of capitalism will result in an objective dynamic towards the creation of a workers state. Principled Marxist leadership is not necessary in order to realise this prospect and instead the implication is that the role of Stalinism and guerrilla war will be sufficient. What is being referred to is the situation in Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam and Cuba. But the point is that genuine proletarian revolutions have not occurred because of the lack of organs of popular will and the failure to realise a society that is a socialist democracy. Instead the ultimate result is the consolidation of a bureaucracy that has a dependent relationship with the USSR. This does not mean that important tasks have not been realised like land reform, but the type of government that has been formed is unaccountable and promotes the extraction of a surplus from the working class and peasantry. However the SWP gloss over these aspects because of their reference to the creation of a workers state and planned economy. The importance of democracy to the creation of a genuine workers state is not mentioned.

The section on the situation in the advanced capitalist countries is also based on a false sense of optimism. It is arguing that the period of boom and the expansion of the productive forces is coming to an end and that this will be replaced by the intensification of the class struggle. This is the application of wishful thinking that has little relationship to reality. The development of a class struggle perspective for the advanced capitalist countries has to have a sounder basis. Instead of predicting economic catastrophism and the imminence of economic crisis it would be more principled to elaborate how capitalism even in its periods of greatest prosperity and harmony cannot transcend the limitations caused by the subordination of the working class within the relations of production. This means that capitalism cannot overcome the importance of class struggle. Hence the various reformists that argue about the class struggle being over are only generating an ideological illusion that cannot be sustained as historical truth. Marxism is still superior to reformism because it does not gloss over the importance and relevance of class struggle and instead tries to prepare the working class for when the period of the class struggle will intensify. The fact that this period is not yet present in the early 1960’s does not mean that it will not happen in a later period because of the intensification of the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. But it will be to the discredit of Marxism to present the future prospect of class struggle as if it is happening now, and this means that aspects of reality such as the problem of inflation are presented in a misleading and exaggerated manner. It can never be principled to present material social reality in a one-sided manner. To imply that crisis is occurring in the present is to reject the importance of analysis of crisis when it actually occurs. Instead the major argument of Marxism should be to prepare for the development of class struggle in the future when the contradictions of capitalism have genuinely matured. But subjectivism and impatience means that this task is rejected and instead an imaginary conception of reality is justified by the SWP in order to advocate a type of class struggle politics that would be premature and not serious. This indicates that the approach of the Transitional Programme is being defended in a timeless manner and the importance of the post-war boom is being denied.

The SWP also argue that the only alternative to nuclear war is socialism. This contention seems true in general terms, but it could also be argued that the development of mass movements for unilateral disarmament can make immense progress towards overcoming the threat of nuclear war. Revolutionary Marxists should be involved in these movements and they could become very important for radicalising people in class struggle politics. The point is not that nothing can be done within capitalism because of the aggressive character of imperialism and capitalism, but that instead the very popular concern with the prospect of nuclear war can become the basis of the formation of mass movements that act greatly to undermine the nuclear threat.

One of the last points of the reunification document is to argue that the USA is the most reactionary and counterrevolutionary force on the planet and European revolution will immensely advance the prospect of the overthrow of capitalism in America. This point seems to be empirically accurate in that one of the most important roles of USA imperialism was to oppose the development of national liberation struggles and to aggressively continue the cold war with the USSR. But this view is also based on the conception that the USSR is a degenerated workers state and so should be supported in the cold war with the USA. However we can agree that the USA is the most reactionary force in global terms and still not support the USSR in the cold war. This is because the USSR does not act as a genuine opponent of USA imperialism and instead its central concern is to extend its influence, privileges and the prospect for extending the Soviet empire. Hence these expansionary aspirations mean that the USSR is not a distorted instrument of world revolution and instead its central concerns are geo-political considerations. For example, the aim of the USSR in the Korean War was not to promote Korean self-determination but instead to extend the Soviet empire. (But the goal of the Korean people was self determination) This means we have to often differentiate between the motives of the Soviet bureaucracy from the aims of the given national liberation struggle and the local participants in the struggles against USA imperialism. Consequently we can consider that the aims of the USSR are not progressive and yet still support the aim of self determination in the particular situation. This means we can support the struggle of the Vietnamese people for independence and yet not support the role of the USSR.

In contrast the USA SWP tends to blur over the differences between the role of the USSR and the particular national struggle. The USSR is considered to be an integral part of world revolution, and this is why it should be defended. This view is illusory because of the importance of the reactionary character of the Soviet mode of production. This economic and political system was not anti-imperialist and instead it promoted imperialist type expansion in the interests of the development of a surplus and for reasons of political prestige. Hence the USSR could not be considered to be an expression of the impetus of world revolution and the defender of world revolution against the aims of USA imperialism. The conflict between the USA and the USSR was because there could not be a single focus of global power and instead the rivalry of two superpowers meant constant tension. This situation was ideologically justified by the USSA as the struggle of socialism with capitalism, but this was not possible because the USSR could not be socialist because of the monopoly control of the means of production by the bureaucracy. It was the attempt to develop popular support for the USSR that led to the justification of the system as socialist. Consequently the USA SWP capitulated to the ideology of the USSR, and therefore was unable to recognise the reality of social relations. This development was based on the dogmatic interpretation of the works of Trotsky and so the conception of the degenerated workers state was defined in timeless terms. The result was that the Cold war was not understood and instead the reactionary practice of the USA justified the standpoint that the USSR was in comparison historically progressive and should be defended in its conflict with the USA. Hence the rigidity of the label of the degenerated workers state was a major problem when trying to develop a programme for the cold war era. These problems were worsened by the failure to properly acknowledge the importance of the boom and the related strength of reformism. This meant what was defended was a caricatured interpretation of the Transitional Programme that was actually unable to explain important new developments in the post-war period. Consequently a genuine new programme was not written for the cold war period.

Thus it is not a surprise that the Cuban revolution should have acquired immense historical, theoretical and practical importance for what it meant to be a Trotskyist in the post-war period. The fact of the Cuban revolution became the criteria of the character of the era and defined the prospects of revolutions that could overcome the prospect of Stalinism. This was an apology for socialism in one country because isolated Cuba became to be considered principled and what was necessary without the importance of international revolution. The point to be made is that the Cuban revolution could not have had the immense historical significance bestowed on it by the American SWP unless it overcame its isolation. Hence this important criterion would apply even if the revolution was a genuine proletarian event. In other words it could be questioned whether the Cuban revolution was an event that changed world history in terms of advancing the process of international revolution and changing the balance of class forces in favour of socialism. Instead the forces of American imperialism succeeded in maintaining the isolation of the revolution and military and political action ensured that the Cuban revolution was not repeated within Latin America. Furthermore the unfavourable situation meant the revolution became bureaucratised and the popular and democratised aspects were limited by the formation of a strong state and the onset of personal dictatorship. The Cuban regime had elements of Bonpartism, and it was the opposition of American imperialism that ensured its continued popular support. But organs of popular will were never constructed and the regime could not be characterised as a socialist democracy. Despite these problems the USFI and the USA SWP insisted that the regime was not Stalinist and could be the prelude to international revolution. The capacity of USA imperialism to contain the Cuban revolution was minimised and instead euphoria replaced the role of cautious analysis. In the last analysis the Cuban events were not the turning point of the development of world revolution.

In another document: ‘Dynamics of the World Revolution Today’ the US SWP argue that the process of world revolution has not occurred as expected.(6) The success of the proletarian revolution has not occurred initially in the most developed capitalist countries and instead defeats have occurred in the periods of revolutionary upheaval of 1918-23, the 1930’s and 1943-47. However victory has been realised in the less developed capitalist countries and workers states established in Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam and Cuba. But it is questionable whether what has occurred is a form of development of world revolution. Capitalism has been effectively overthrown in these countries but it would be questionable to suggest that the working class has been actively the major revolutionary agency of this process. Instead the role of the party has dominated what has occurred and the role of other classes has been an expression of the leadership of the party which has dictated a campaign of guerrilla warfare. This has meant capitalism has been overthrown in a bureaucratic manner and the situation has been influenced by the close relations of the given party to the Soviet bureaucracy. Hence what has actually occurred is the extension of the bloc of countries led by the USSR, and therefore a gain for the USSR in the cold war with the USA. The so-called socialist camp has been increased and the power and privileges of a bureaucratic elite has been enhanced, but the lack of genuine involvement of the working class in this process of social transformation would mean that the creation of workers states has not occurred. But the USA SWP would argue that the character of the degenerated workers state in the USSR means that states of a similar type have been formed with the overthrow of capitalism in the less advanced capitalist countries. This means the advance of the world revolution despite the deformations in the process. In other words what is important is the result, the overthrow of capitalism, and not the character of the activity by which it is achieved. The lack of socialist democracy and the revolutionary role of the working class are not considered important in comparison to the possibility for workers states to be created by bureaucratic means. Furthermore the growing influence of the USSR is not considered opposed to the interests of genuine world revolution instead the justification of these events as the expression of the formation of workers states makes concessions to the view that the USSR is the bulwark of world revolution despite the problem of Stalinism.

It is argued by the USA SWP that the process of proletarian revolution in the advanced capitalist countries requires the construction of a genuine revolutionary party that is able to mobilise the working class in the class struggle in the most principled manner. But in the less advanced capitalist countries conditions of the lack of agrarian reform and the corruption of the ruling class mean that what are centrist parties can lead an effective struggle against capitalism. The problem of the lack of revolutionary leadership in the advanced capitalist countries and the boom undermines the development of the struggle against capitalism. But the major issue is the strength of the ruling class and its ability to undermine the development of revolutionary struggle: “The weakness of the enemy in the backward countries has opened up the possibility of coming to power even with a blunted instrument. The strength of the enemy in the imperialist countries demands a tool of much greater perfection.”(7) Important economic and political differences mean that there are three interconnected aspects of world revolution. These are the colonial revolution, the political revolution in the Stalinist states, and the revolution in the major imperialist countries. Advances in one sector will facilitate advances in the other sectors.

It is an oversimplification to suggest that the process of revolution is primarily undermined in the advanced capitalist countries because of the role of the ruling class. This view actually underestimates the importance of reformism and the influence of the standpoint that reforms and not revolution is the most appropriate basis to realise the interests of the working class. Furthermore, the historical importance of the boom in the past-war years has strengthened reformism and contributed to what has become the marginalisation of revolutionary Marxism. The stabilisation of the conditions of capitalism have seemed to vindicate reformism and discredited the views of revolutionary Marxism which has had difficulty relating to the mass movement. The strength of the ruling class in this period has been reinforced by the role of USA imperialism that has used its economic and political might to facilitate the prospect of boom and to repress the instability caused by the intensification of inter-imperialist rivalry. In other words the very ability of capitalism to develop in this period has supported the standpoint of reformism and undermined the credibility of revolutionary Marxism. This situation has often been important for explaining the events in the third world. Contrary to the document the situation has not been characterised by the overthrow of capitalism and instead the influence of the boom and the role of USA imperialism has generally resulted in the creation of a global type economy and the acceleration of capitalist development. The national bourgeoisie has been able to establish hegemony in these circumstances. Hence the overthrow of capitalism by Stalinism has been exceptional, and was the result of very specific conditions in countries like China and Vietnam. In Cuba events were influenced by the hostility of USA imperialism towards the revolution and the intervention of the USSR. The Cuban revolution did not result in repeats and instead it was an exceptional event that contradicted the general consolidation of the former colonial countries under the hegemony of USA imperialism. Hence the role of the USA was a formidable opponent to the prospect of undermining the domination of the national bourgeoisie in the Third World. The USSR was also often more interested in developing allies within the national bourgeoisie of the Third World than supporting revolutions against capitalism. Consequently the situation was conducive to the general stabilisation of capitalism under the hegemony of the USA. The influence of the USSR was secondary and often the bureaucratic elite did not advocate the overthrow of capitalism. The process of party revolution in the Third World was because of strong Communist parties and the weakness of a discredited national bourgeoisie. This meant even the USA was reluctant to support the Chinese national bourgeoisie in the civil war because of the problem of corruption.

Consequently it would be a caricature of reality to argue that the situation was characterised by the advance of world revolution in the Third World compared to the delay in the advanced capitalist countries. The Chinese events certainly represented an immense anti-imperialist revolution that established national independence, but the most direct effect was that China became part of the Soviet bloc. This development was not an expression of world revolution because the party led revolution could not be characterised as a type of proletarian revolution. Until the Korean War capitalism was not overthrown in China, and the process of the demise of capitalism in China could be considered to be part of the cold war conflict rather than the intensification of revolutionary class struggle. Thus the domination of Stalinism and USA imperialism in the Third World meant the beginning of world proletarian revolution would have to occur in the advanced capitalist countries. The problems of developing revolutions in the advanced capitalist countries meant the actual beginning of a genuine world revolutionary process was actually undermined by the importance of the cold war and the stabilisation it had created on a global scale. The occasional Stalinist led revolutions did not mean that the process of world revolution had actually started. Indeed it could be argued that the genuine beginning of world revolution was created by the Hungarian uprising of 1956 that led to a popular working class uprising in favour of national independence and the end of the domination of Stalinism. This event was an inspiration to the working class of the West and showed that the possibility of proletarian revolution could still occur because of the role of militant and collective struggle.

Hence the only principled conclusion that could be made from this period of apparent class harmony was that the development of genuine proletarian revolution still required the construction of a principled leadership and that the actions of a Stalinist party did not constitute some type of socialist transformation. Thus the world revolution was not making progress under the leadership of Stalinism and this meant Stalinism could not act as a blunted instrument of proletarian revolution in the Third World. Only the construction of an International party with mass support could promote the necessary relationship between the mass movement and Marxism that would contribute to the generation of the political conditions of the development of class struggle. Hence it was necessary to be honest about why the prospects of international revolutionary struggle were not likely to occur in this period of boom and the stability created by the cold war system. This meant it was not a particular difficulty of the advanced capitalist countries that explained the protracted character of the prospect of world revolution. Instead the problem of developing class struggle, and the promotion of proletarian revolution, was a generalised aspect of the situation in the 1950’s and 1960’s. The actual vanguard of the prospect of proletarian revolution was in Stalinist countries like East Germany and Hungary. However the USFI actually minimised this development because of an emphasis on the self-reform of the bureaucracy as the expression of revolutionary transformation. This illusory perspective was the result of diluting the view that Stalinism was counterrevolutionary and instead Stalinism was considered a distorted expression of world revolution.

The document describes the importance of the colonial revolution in terms of the advance of world revolution: “In the process of world revolution – first the Chinese revolution and then the whole chain of upheavals – has prevented any temporary stabilization of the imperialist system on a world scale such as occurred after 1921. It has turned the international relationship of forces against capitalism, forcing imperialism to fight – and in many cases lose – a series of defensive battles and wars, which it has launched in its efforts to halt the advance of world revolution in the ex-colonial world. It has given tremendous impetus to anti-capitalist forces everywhere in the world. It has provided the Soviet Union and the other worker’s states the necessary breathing spell necessary to overcome the qualitative advance in the military field which came into the hands of imperialism as World war two reached its climax.”(8)

This is the explicit expression of the view that the expansion of Stalinism represents the advance of world revolution and so should be supported against the opposition of USA imperialism. The view that workers states have apparently been formed in China and elsewhere is an indication that the impetus of world revolution can be represented by Stalinism. Hence the conception of Stalinism as counterrevolutionary has been diluted and transformed by the view that it is capable of overthrowing capitalism and forming workers states. This means that in the situation of antagonism between the forces of Stalinism and imperialism the former must be supported because it represents the impulse to create workers states and the latter represents the defence of imperialism and reaction. This indicates that the only principled basis to maintain the standpoint that Stalinism is counterrevolutionary is to conceive that the bureaucratic overthrow of capitalism does not create a type of workers state and instead creates a new type of exploitation and rule of a new class. The document argues that Stalinism can create a workers state in the third world because the role of a principled revolutionary party is not necessary, and instead some other type of party is sufficient for this purpose. Hence it is being argued that a bureaucratic party is capable of the bureaucratic overthrow of capitalism in the third world. This suggests that a process of progressive bureaucratic revolution is being carried out because in a distorted manner this represents the advance of world revolution. But what is actually being realised is the advance of the Soviet empire in the situation of the conflict of the cold war. What are popular people’s uprisings against imperialism in China, Yugoslavia and Vietnam became part of the process of the expansion of Stalinism. This is not the advance of world revolution even in a distorted form because the ultimate result is not the creation of some type of workers state. This means the impulses for anti-capitalism are not identical to the prospect of the creation of a workers state. For a workers state to be formed requires the active involvement and organs of struggle of the working class. This would also mean the role of a revolutionary party that did not have the aim of the advance of the interests of a bureaucratic class. Instead the process of the advance of anti-capitalism is being generated by the counterrevolutionary means of the creation of bureaucratic states by reactionary and elitist measures. There is no genuine democracy and expression of popular will, and so the process of the October revolution is not being repeated in some distorted manner. Instead we have the development of the opposition between Stalinism and imperialism on a world scale in terms of the advance of national liberation and the aspiration of national independence. This is why the Chinese and Vietnamese events can be supported as being the genuine expression of national liberation but this should not be mistaken with also being part of the process of world proletarian revolution. These events did result in the overthrow of a comprador bourgeoisie that was subordinated to the forces of imperialism, but the result is not social emancipation because of the generation of new types of exploitation. Stalinism has not changed its counterrevolutionary character and become some form of instrument of the emancipation of the working class.

This also means that the estimation of the advance of the progress of world proletarian revolution and the change of the international balance of class forces is incorrect. Revolutions that have increased the social power of Stalinism in the Third World ultimately result in the increased strength of the Soviet bloc in its struggle with the USA in the Cold war. The forces of one counterrevolutionary bloc have increased in relation to the social power of another counterrevolutionary bloc. This means the prospects for the real development of the class struggle for socialism depend on the advance of the interests of the working class against the domination of both the USA and USSR. The working class represents a third force that is opposed to the role of both the USA and USSR. Consequently to support the USSR as the expression of the interests of world revolution is an illusion that can only promote the interests of counterrevolution and cannot advance genuine world revolution. Stalinism cannot be an instrument of world revolution and so it should not be critically supported in the cold war. The Hungarian revolution against the domination of Stalinism is an indication that whilst the Soviet bloc is not capitalist it is also not socialist. In other words both the USSR and USA represent mechanisms for the stabilisation of the forces of domination and exploitation and opposition to the advance of proletarian revolution. Their conflict is not the expression of the opposition of capitalism and socialism and is instead the rivalry produced by the opposition of one form of exploitation in conflict with another. But the Fourth International has conciliated the approach of Stalinism and has outlined its own form of the antagonism between socialism and capitalism in terms of the opposition between the degenerated and deformed workers states and the forces of imperialism. The former are to be supported as representing social progress and the revolutionary process.

This approach has been consolidated by the Cuban revolution. It is argued that: “The victory in Cuba marked the beginning of a new epoch in the history of the world revolution: for, aside from the Soviet Union, this is the first workers state established outside the bounds of the Stalinist apparatus. Such a development, whatever the size of the country involved, was a turning point whose effects have necessarily reverberated on a tremendous scale throughout the world communist movement.”(9) However what is ignored is that the prospect for the continuation of the Cuban regime is dependent on the support of the USSR and the effective incorporation within the Soviet bloc. It is also important that the Cuban revolutionary process has not led to the development of organs of popular will and the result has been a tendency for bureaucratisation. The situation became more favourable for the creation of the rule of a new class than the development of a genuine socialist democracy. Furthermore the tension between the USA and USSR over Cuba was part of the Cold war and not an expression of the impulses of a world revolutionary process. The heroic character of the Cuban revolution will be an inspiration for all types of struggles for national liberation and social transformation but Cuba itself has not started a new phase of world revolution. Hence the problem is not primarily in the type of struggle adopted in Cuba, which is guerrilla war. This might become an appropriate form of struggle in order to realise social transformation. Instead the problem was that the guerrilla army did not have the aim of the creation of a socialist democracy. But the American SWP could argue that a socialist democracy was the aim of the Cuban revolution because the result of the revolutionary process was the formation of a workers state. The conception of the formation of a workers state on the basis of socialist democracy is the most principled approach towards whether a genuine proletarian revolution has occurred, but the problem was that this had not happened in Cuba. Instead the ultimate outcome of the process in Cuba was the creation of a Stalinist state, which may have been more popular than most Stalinist regimes because it was the result of a popular revolution. But a popular revolution does not mean that the result is the formation of a genuine democratic society, and instead the role of the USSR influenced what Cuba became at the level of social formation. This also means that the Cuban events did not become the prelude to further advances in the world revolution. Instead the USSR had expanded its sphere of influence outside of its typical sphere of influence.

The SWP are more realistic and principled when arguing that the major result of the colonial revolution was the success of the national bourgeoisie and the creation of states dependent on an economic relation to the countries of advanced capitalism. It is suggested that this situation has created problems for the accumulation of capital by the forces of capitalist imperialism but that generally the situation has stabilised the domination of advanced capitalism. It is argued that the prospect of a major setback in this economic and political relationship would require a further advance in the creation of workers states.(10) The problem with this standpoint is that the conception of what is meant by a workers state is not clarified. This is because the difference between a state created by Stalinism and a genuine proletarian revolution is not established and instead the two distinct processes are conflated. This confusion is intensified by the fact that the conception of permanent revolution in the Third World is considered to have an inherent dynamic resulting in the formation of a workers state because of the limitations of the national bourgeoisie in trying to resolve important social problems after the establishment of political independence. The national bourgeoisie is unable to carry out radical land reform in a satisfactory manner and so creates popular unrest within the peasantry. The weakness of the national bourgeoisie means it is also unable to consistently develop industry in a manner that would satisfy the material aspirations of the people. These problems when connected to the importance of the working class and peasants indicates the prospects for permanent revolution to be carried out by either Stalinism or the more principled Cuban type approach of revolutionary socialism. The recent influence of the Cuban revolution could mean that future revolutions are an expression of the more principled approach towards the formation of a workers state as the result of colonial revolution.

In terms of its analysis of class contradictions in the Third world the USA SWP is making perceptive comments. The national bourgeoisie is having difficulty in trying to create successful capitalist societies that can resolve important issues such as land reform and industrialisation. But does this mean that the strategy of permanent revolution should be diluted? The suggestion that Stalinism, or even the forces of bourgeois democracy as in Algeria, can carry out permanent revolution, is problematical. The success of Stalinism has led to the attempt to resolve problems like land reform and industrialisation in a bureaucratic manner, and the result has been the alienation of the peasantry and the introduction of five year plans that have effectively enhanced the generation of exploitation. It is questionable whether this is the resolution of the tasks of permanent revolution. It is also very contentious whether these events have become a prelude to international revolution, which is one of the crucial tasks of permanent revolution. Indeed Stalinism would be opposed to international revolution because of the adherence to socialism in one country. Thus the only aspect of permanent revolution that is actually carried out by Stalinism in the process of national liberation is to bring about the demise of the domination of the national bourgeoisie and the party becomes the major instrument of the tasks of industrialisation and land reform. Thus the party represents the instrument of the historical tasks that are said to belong to the national bourgeoisie. But the result is not the advance of the process of the development of a workers state. Instead we have the realisation of the domination of the rule of the new class.

The American SWP argues that the Cuban regime because of its principled character represents the classical manner in the carrying out of the tasks of permanent revolution and the advance of world revolution. This situation is contrasted with the conservative Stalinism of the Chinese communists and the conciliation of imperialism by the Yugoslavian CP. But the intransigence of the Cuban CP is the result of its present tense relationship with USA imperialism. Thus it is not surprising that the Cuban regime lacks any perspective of proletarian revolution. The SWP suggest that any strategic issues can be resolved by the influence of Trotskyism. But this view is wishful thinking because of the close relations between Cuba and the USSR. There is no prospect that Cuba will become the vanguard of a process of permanent revolution. Indeed the USA acted effectively to isolate Cuba and to undermine the popular influence of the revolution. The situation in the early 1960’s is that the USA is able to act effectively as the counterrevolutionary opponent of any radical aspiration in the Third World. This means the prospect of the development of Stalinism has been contained after the success of the Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions and the influence of Cuba has been isolated. The result is that despite the weakness of the national bourgeoisie in the Third world the process of colonial revolution has generally been compatible to the interests of world imperialism. Consequently the Third World provides the raw materials and markets for the boom in the advanced capitalist countries.

The point is that the process of permanent revolution was not carried out in any country of the Third World during the post- war period and instead capitalism was stabilised on new post colonial settlements. This was because in no Third World country did the working class become the hegemonic class that was able to combine the carrying out of the realisation of bourgeois democratic and socialist tasks. The lack of success in this regard was because in most countries mass revolutionary parties were not constructed, and in the countries where mass parties were built, like Bolivia and Sri Lanka, the result was problems at the level of strategy and tactics. In contrast, Stalinism was occasionally able to overthrow capitalism and carry out the process of industrialisation in a bureaucratic manner, but this was not the realisation of permanent revolution. Nor can the Cuban revolution be defined as permanent revolution because what was lacking was the leading role of the working class in these events. In other words what is defined as a type of permanent revolution is the success of Stalinism in overthrowing capitalism. But there is more to permanent revolution than the demise of capitalism because what is crucial is the way in which capitalism is overthrown. Does the process involve the democratic actions of the working class, or is the role of the bureaucratic party more important? The SWP narrowed the conception of permanent revolution to the prospect of the overthrow of capitalism and became effectively indifferent as to how this was achieved. In this manner the apparent distortion of permanent revolution became conceived as the new norm, and it replaced in strategic importance the classical and more principled approach. But the point was that the only valid type of permanent revolution was the principled one of proletarian revolution. The so-called distorted conception of permanent revolution was the actual expression of the ability of the Stalinist party to overthrow capitalism, and the result may be a type of independence from imperialism but it resulted in a new form of subordination within the Soviet bloc. Only principled permanent revolution can result in social emancipation, but the Stalinist overthrow of capitalism led to new types of exploitation and the subordination of the working class within the relations of production. The US SWP tried to gloss over the objective effects of so-called distorted permanent revolution by emphasising the importance of the overthrow of capitalism at the expense of all other important social factors.

The US SWP argues that the end to the isolation of the USSR because of the advance of world revolution has also promoted the development of reforms and the encouragement of mass pressure for concessions. This process is also connected to the increased attractiveness of the Soviet model for the third world because of the development of the productive forces and technological progress. However it is necessary to distinguish between mass pressure and the more effective mass action within the USSR that could result in workers control and management and socialist democracy. The introduction of concessions by the bureaucracy and the criticism of Stalin are not the development of political revolution and instead are measures that are utilised in order to resolve the problems of mass discontent. In other words, the US SWP attempts to maintain an important differentiation between the implementation of concessions and the political revolution. In this manner the intention is to uphold the principled character of Trotsky’s perspective of political revolution. Consequently, whilst it is admitted that the working class of the Stalinist countries has become stronger, and the problems created by the isolation of the USSR have been modified by the expansion of the system, this does not mean that reforms will in and of themselves result in revolutionary changes. The mass mobilisation of the working class is still required if revolutionary transformation is to occur. This attempt to relate orthodoxy to recent changes results in important inconsistencies. On the one hand the view has been articulated that the expansion of Stalinism, via the creation of deformed workers states, is an expression of the imperatives of world revolution. Hence the conception of Stalinism as the instrument of world revolution is being defended. This is why the USSR has to be supported in the cold war. On the other hand the bureaucracy is still portrayed as the antagonist of the working class and the only principled perspective is the overthrow of the bureaucracy by the act of political revolution. Various theorists like Deutscher and Pablo recognise this standpoint as inconsistent and so suggest that the situation can be transformed by the act of self-reform of the bureaucracy. The US SWP ignored this inconsistency and formally upholds the approach of political revolution despite the apparent incompatibility of this perspective with the view that Stalinism has become the expression of the progress of world revolution. Ultimately the emphasis has to be on the apparent progressive and anti-capitalist character of Stalinism or to stress its counterrevolutionary character and the related importance of political revolution.

It is the continued adherence to the conception of the degenerated workers state that has led to this inconsistency. The view that Stalinism could act in an anti-capitalist manner and create workers states meant it could be a distorted instrument of world revolution. But the apparent continued necessity of political revolution if these workers states were to make future historical progress meant the orthodox Trotskyist perspective retained its validity despite these changes in the world situation. But it is actually absurd to argue that Stalinism is both an instrument of world revolution and reactionary and opposed to the development of world revolution. This illogical standpoint is an attempt to reconcile opposites that cannot be reconciled. The logical position is to argue that either the USSR upholds the interests of the world revolution, or that it is against world revolution and its bureaucratic expansion is not an expression of the development of the international class struggle. The US SWP tries to gloss over this illogical inconsistency by suggesting that the world revolution can make progress under the leadership of Stalinism, but that it would advance even more quickly after the process of political revolution had been successful in the USSR and Soviet bloc. This is a classical example of having your cake and being able to eat it! The establishment of genuine socialist democracy in the USSR would promote support for permanent revolution in the colonial countries and end the support of the USSR for the national bourgeoisie in the Third World. This situation would also make the creation of mass revolutionary parties in the Third World more likely, and so the struggle for social transformation would be advanced. The political revolution in the USSR would also increased support for socialism in the West and overcome the influence of anti-communist arguments that socialism means state repression. The process of the rebirth of genuine mass Communist parties in the West would also make progress: “In this way the crisis of revolutionary leadership could eventually be overcome and new objectively revolutionary situations would open the road for the victory of the proletariat.”(11)

In other words, the influence of political revolution would be to undermine the hegemony of reformism in the West and so promote class consciousness and struggle for the overthrow of capitalism. In contrast the continuation of Stalinism means that it is part of the forces of reformism and the result is the marginalisation of Marxism. This means the ultimate influence of Stalinism in the West is to contribute to the stabilisation of capitalism. The result is retardation in the progress of world revolution. But the USA SWP are also careful to suggest that the continuation of the USSR is not an absolute impediment to the progress of the world revolution, but rather that the process of advance is slower than if the situation is changed by political revolution in the USSR. The USSR provides an important alternative for the Third World, and its provision of material support can enable countries to contemplate a non-capitalist prospect for economic development. The Cuban revolution would not have been able to survive without Soviet support for its sugar industry in the context of the USA blockade. But it has also to be remembered that the Third world is likely to remain capitalist because the Soviet bloc is less powerful than the West, and the USSR tends to support the anti-imperialist national bourgeoisie rather than promote anti-capitalist revolution. Furthermore, the argument of the Stalinists that peaceful economic competition can promote world revolution is false: “The view that the economic and technological advances of the worker’s states can in themselves decisively modify the relationship of forces between the classes in the imperialist countries, or contribute decisively to the overthrow of capitalism in these countries, must be rejected as false.”(12) It is not denied by the US SWP that the technological and cultural progress of the USSR can generate support for socialism within the working class of the West, but this prospect is not identical to the creation of the very process of revolutionary transformation. Stalinism both promotes revolution in the West because of its social advances, but it also undermines the class consciousness of the working class because of the continuation of state repression and the fact that Stalinist parties are often reformist like the mass Italian and French parties. Thus the peaceful coexistence approach of Stalinism does not promote world revolution as effectively as a principled revolutionary perspective of intransigent class struggle, but it is not absolutely counterrevolutionary and aspects of this standpoint make a valid contribution to the progress of world revolution, especially in the colonial countries.

This standpoint represents an important concession to the view that Stalinism is progressive because of its contribution to world revolution. If we consider that the expansion of Stalinism represents the advance of world revolution then it could be defined as historically progressive. But this is an illusion. Stalinism has expanded in order to primarily promote the privileges and economic power of a New Class. The emancipation of the working class has not been advanced by this expansion. Stalinism may have come into conflict with imperialism but this is not because of revolutionary objectives and instead it is an expression of rivalry between competing economic and political blocs. The class consciousness of the international working class has not been promoted by these developments because they tend to equate socialism with geo-political expansion and the repression of democracy. The reactionary character of Stalinist political actions means that it is quite plausible for USA imperialism to present its standpoint as the defence of democracy, and the result of this ideological situation is that support for capitalism is reinforced within the international working class. The influence of anti-communism is not just the result of bourgeois propaganda but is also because of the reactionary character of the role of the Soviet bloc. This means the enlargement of the area that is not capitalist is not some indirect contribution to world revolution and is instead the outcome of the political actions of a counterrevolutionary class that is not capitalist. In other words the reactionary character of the expansion of capitalism promotes the ideological stabilisation of capitalism in the West and Third World because it seems that the very advance of socialism does not advance the cause of human emancipation. Hence it is concession to Stalinism for the US SWP to try and tentatively argue that Stalinism is still a factor in the development of world revolution, even if the revolutionary process would advance quicker with the success of political revolution in the USSR. What this approach tries to ignore is that the prospects of revolution in the West were seriously undermined because bourgeois democracy was considered to be superior to the lack of any type of democracy under Stalinism. The economic gains of workers in the USSR were also considered to be inferior to the welfare states of the West. Hence the arguments for reformism were enhanced by the very limitations of the USSR, which was considered to be the result of the flaws of a revolutionary process of social change. In this context the views of the US SWP were only justified because the extension of the geographical area of non-capitalism was considered an absolute gain for humanity and the expression of progress of the world revolution. If this dogmatic view was rejected it could be understood that the working class had made no social gains and was still subordinated and exploited within the new relations of production.

Thus despite the formal rejection of peaceful coexistence as unprincipled, the SWP did not entirely rejects its premises. They did not absolutely reject the view that the progress of socialism, via the economic development of the workers states, would facilitate more favourable political conditions within the international class struggle. This view also suggested that the expansion of Stalinism was effectively the advance of world revolution, and would make socialism more attractive for the international working class to support. So whilst the US SWP rejected the aspects of peaceful coexistence that seemed to uphold class compromise and the rejection of revolutionary methods of class struggle, they also supported its perspective that the progress of socialism would advance the world revolution. The US SWP did not reject peaceful coexistence absolutely as the reactionary ideology of the expansion of the Soviet bloc, and opposed to the real advance of principled and genuine proletarian revolution. Hence they provided critical support for aspects of peaceful co-existence even if they formally tried to deny this standpoint of conditional approval of Stalinist expansion. The result was that a differentiation developed between what was considered possible in the present and the ideal conditions of principled struggle for socialism in the future. Hence the SWP opted for support of what was considered to be the unprincipled advance of socialism. This represented a type of pragmatism that formally accepted that Stalinism was reactionary and yet all that was possible in the present unfavourable conditions of international class struggle. Only the development of the revolutionary process in the West would create the conditions for principled international class struggle, but this was not yet happening. This was why we had to be content with the role of Stalinism in the present, despite its limitations and the problems it created for the advance of world revolution.

The US SWP situation in the imperialist countries is based on a relative stabilisation of capitalism based on the influence of the economic boom and the credibility of reformism. The result of this situation is to create support for the view that the Western working class is no longer capable of revolutionary action. This perspective maintains that the prospect of socialism becomes an external process based on the progress of the USSR generating the conditions for the social transformation of the West, or else the development of the colonial revolution will result in the development of international class struggle. These approaches are flawed because the advance of the colonial revolution does not undermine the economic and political stability of the advanced capitalist countries and the progress of the USSR is not sufficient in order to increase support for socialism in the West. Instead it will be internal causes such as the onset of crisis that is likely to develop the prospect of revolutionary transformation. These arguments are generally valid but what constitutes the strategy required for a period of overall economic and political stability. The document mentions only briefly the importance of alienation and it is not connected to the prospect of the development of class struggle. Instead class struggle is reduced to the significance of the struggle for increased wages and reforms. It is argued that the working class is still capable of collective class action that can extract concessions from employers and the state. The economic development of capitalism has indicated the ability of the working class to organise the activity of increasing complex means of production and so the conditions are created for the possibility of workers control of production.

In other words the prospect of socialism is located in the future. The present situation is one characterised by reforms and the economic and political conditions will have to change in order for the working class to mobilise in increasingly militant and ultimately reformist terms. Hence the document contends that in the future the boom will end and the increasing competition of capitalist companies and the competition of the imperialist countries will lower the rate of profit. This situation will result in the lowering of wages and the class struggle will develop around this issue. It will be possible to raise transitional demands that if supported will generate increasing support for the revolutionary struggle against capitalism and the slogan of the workers government will become feasible. The problem with these predictions is not that they are lacking in credibility, but that they cannot explain how to overcome the problems of the class struggle in the present. Instead all the aspirations of the prospect of the development of the class struggle are located in the future and so the importance of issues like the continuation of the boom and the influence of reformism are ultimately not tackled in a serious manner. Thus the issue of pessimism about the class struggle is considered to be an issue generated by various intellectuals and not something that has objective importance because of the apparent harmony between the classes. In other words, the US SWP try to dismiss the challenges created by the complexity of the situation in the 1950’s and 1960’s, and this means they effectively ignore the relation between the present and the future. What is not explained is how the very successful development of capitalism in the present can undermine the possibility for the intensification of the class struggle in the future.

This point can be made specifically. The document contends that reforms won by the action of the working class can actually contribute to the working class becoming militant. But the creation of the welfare state was an action primarily carried out from above even if it was based on the influence of mass pressure. It seemed that the working class could improve its standard of living without the intensification of the class struggle. This situation was related to the importance of the boom that provided the objective material basis for the development of the welfare state. Hence if the working class consciously rejected the aim of the revolutionary transformation of society it could improve social conditions and living standards. The very prosperity of the working class seemed to depend on the success of the capitalist economy which had not been the situation in the inter-war period. This period was characterised by crisis and mass unemployment, and the only gains were made by the militant actions of the workers. The post-war period was different because the mechanisms of the economy and state seemed to generate the conditions for the improvement of the situation of the working class. Reformism was successful and the approach of revolution seemed discredited in practice. Hence the class struggle could be diluted in practice and become a type of pressure for the realisation of more reforms. The US SWP document formally recognises the importance of the boom and reformism but does not elaborate their actual influence on the class struggle. Socialism became marginalised or diluted to the approach of reforms because the working class could make social progress that was not possible in previous periods of capitalism. Marxism seemed discredited by the very character of post-war capitalist development. Instead of trying to tackle this important theoretical challenge, the US SWP insist that the working class had won the reforms by their own militant action or that the period of reforms would be temporary and be replaced by more militant and increasing revolutionary class struggles. This prediction may be credible, and it was credible, but it does not substitute for the necessity to indicate the revolutionary possibilities of the working class in the present. What connected the working class in the present to a different historical future?

The answer to the above question that is glossed over by the document is the issue of alienation. The success of reformism and the importance of the boom did not overcome the continued problem of the subordination and alienation of the working class within the relations of production. However affluent workers became because of the possibility of higher wages and the role of the welfare state they would still remain exploited and estranged from the objects they created in the process of production. This meant discontent with the capital-labour relation remained within the context of the very success and material prosperity of capitalism during the boom. Hence workers remained in trade unions, and the role of trade unions became even more important in the period of the boom, and the mood of class antagonism was not overcome by economic success. The period was not conducive to the prospect of revolutionary struggle because of the material gains but the militancy of the future was not surprising because work remained monotonous and boring, and the creativity of the workers could not be realised even in these periods of economic boom. Indeed, the discrepancy between the material advances and the inability to realise creative work became acute. This meant the defenders of capitalism and the reformists had no answer to the problem of alienation because resolution of this problem seemed to suggest the necessity of the transformation of the relations of production which they could not support. Only Marxism had a credible answer to the problem of alienation which was the advance of workers control of production. If progress was made in these terms the ability of the working class to define the character of production could be enhanced and the balance of class forces could be changed in favour of socialism. However these aspects were ignored by the US SWP which attempted to gloss over the significance of the reformist period and to instead project all its hopes for socialism and revolutionary class struggle into the future. Their perspectives were based on the imminent prospect of crisis in the future which would intensify the class struggle. This approach may have been accurate but it meant they could not provide any strategic guidance for the present. What should the working class do in the present to make progress in the realisation of its interests? The answer was to develop struggle against alienation and for workers control, but this approach was ignored by the US SWP. Instead it only articulated workers control as something possible in the future because of the logic of economic and technological development. The very aspiration for socialism was projected by them into the future in terms of the intensification of class contradictions and the possibility of social transformation.

The document predicts that because of the slowing of the expansion of capitalism and the squeeze of wages and the rise of unemployment that the prospects of revolution could be realised within Western Europe within ten years. This prospect would also advance the possibility of revolution in the USA and the progress of world revolution will be facilitated by the rise of the leadership of Cuba. The optimism of this perspective ignores the importance of present realities and instead makes a miraculous leap from the present to the future. The US SWP does not explain how the influence of reformism will be quickly overcome and nor does it explain why the economic situation will become suddenly acute. Indeed it could be argued that the approach is catastrophist because the prospect of economic crisis is considered to be identical to the development of a revolutionary situation. This standpoint is actually an expression of wishful thinking and the expression of extreme objectivism in that the worsening of social conditions is considered to be identical to the resolution of the crisis of revolutionary leadership. The possibility that the development of a revolutionary party may not occur because of legacy of past weakness and the fact that the situation of crisis may result in the disorientation of the working class that has been used to the past period of reforms. It would also be an over-generalised assertion that revolution in Western Europe will also hasten further revolutions in the colonial countries and the Western bloc. Thus economic crisis becomes the determinist expression of world revolution. It is not being over-cautious to suggest that the programme should not have such dogmatic predictions and instead make more cautious comments about the possibility that economic crisis will intensify the class struggle. In this context it would be a matter of assertion and not accuracy to suggest that revolution will be the automatic result of increasing economic crisis. It is entirely possible that crisis could weaken the working class and bring about important defeats and the end of the period of social gains.

The US SWP contends that the USA has mobilised the other imperialist powers in defence of capitalism and against the workers states. Its major aim is opposition to international proletarian revolution. This apparent conflation of world revolution with defence of the workers states represents the justification for support of the Soviet bloc against USA imperialism. The USA defends counterrevolution and this is why it has to be opposed and the USSR critically supported. The threat of nuclear war is primarily expressed by the willingness of USA imperialism to carry out this threat, and the only alternative is for the success of international revolution. Only the advance of socialism will withstand the threat of nuclear war. This analysis is another indication that the US SWP considered that the USSR was ultimately progressive when compared to USA imperialism. Hence the fact that the USSR had nuclear weapons was necessary in order to deter the USA from starting nuclear war in relation to situations like Korea, Berlin and Cuba. Consequently the counterrevolutionary role of the USSR was glossed over and the importance of its own reactionary aims in the Cold war was not articulated.

However this pro Soviet approach seems to have been modified by the following comment: “Insofar as changes in the relationship of forces due to the colonial revolution, the class struggle in the capitalist countries, the economic situation of capitalism, or the economic progress of the workers states do not threatened to put an immediate end to capitalism, a new compromise is always possible between the heads of the two main opposing camps. As long as they do not face an immediate major threat, both US imperialism and the Soviet bureaucracy will remain facing each other, striving to gain better positions or to avoid falling into worse ones, to strengthen their economic and military power, to acquire new allies or to avoid losing old ones, always seeking a compromise when the opponent appears ready to plunge into war. It is a dangerous game.”(13) This comment seems to suggest that the conflict between the USA and the USSR is an expression of rivalry between competing superpowers. Hence the view that the USSR should be automatically supported in the cold war is called into question by this approach, and it is also hinted that the outcome of the tensions between the superpowers can be a tense equilibrium that indicates the possibility of stalemate and the necessity of compromise. This approach suggests that the USSR and the USA have attained an understanding that rival spheres of influence have been established that have to be respected, and therefore the USSR is less likely to support revolution and the prospect of expansion because it would undermine relations with the USA and the USA is less likely to promote aggression because it would increase tensions with the USSR. The implicit suggestion is that this stalemate has arisen as the outcome of the Cuban missiles crisis and the recognition that if rivalry is carried to its extreme the result will be nuclear war. Hence what has become possible because of the stalemate is a genuine realisation of peaceful coexistence, and the acceptance of the reality of the Soviet bloc and the imperialist camp.

The US SWP does not evaluate what this situation means for the progress of world revolution. On the one hand the implicit suggestion is that the prospect of revolution will be discouraged by the USSR because this would undermine its political relations with the USA. But on the other hand the imperialist adventures of the USA are also less likely because of the detrimental effect that this situation would have on its relations with the USSR. Hence we are entering a new period in which cold war is being replaced by a different situation and this is expressed by the gradual replacement of the rivalry between the USA and USSR with a new period of mutual cooperation and common cooperation in the running of the world. This analysis seems quite perceptive but it also means that the conception that Stalinism can be an impetus to the world revolution has become completely antiquated. The aim of the expansion of the Soviet bloc has been replaced by the prospect of the common exploitation of the world in connection to the effective acceptance of the division of the world between the USA and USSR. The Stalinist bureaucracy recognises that Cuba represents one of the last prospects for the expansion of the Soviet bloc because the Cuban events have generated the prospect of the acceptance of the durability of both rival spheres of influence. This means the ideology of peaceful coexistence can become truly practical and the conception of peaceful competition can replace class struggle as the method for evaluating the prospects of either capitalism or socialism. In practice the ideology of peaceful coexistence can become the standpoint of the acceptance of the status quo and the rejection of the perspective of the expansion of the Soviet bloc that was the approach of Stalin after the Second World War.

But the US SWP do not utilise this understanding in order to modify their conception of the cold war. They still consider it as a distorted expression of the international class struggle and the progress of the world revolution. They do not make the necessary conclusion from their own analysis that the cold war is being replaced by the effective establishment of equilibrium between the two superpowers and this means the role of the USSR is to ensure that its relations with the USA are maintained. Hence even the action of the USA in Vietnam does not undermine this situation of the realisation of what is a genuine form of peaceful coexistence. The leadership of the USSR is generally content with the size of the Soviet bloc and wants it internationally recognised by the forces of imperialism, and the USA is satisfied that its role as the instrument of counterrevolution has been accepted in the area outside of the Soviet bloc. This situation does not mean that the Stalinist bureaucracy has changed, but rather that its counterrevolutionary role has been modified in accordance with these changing circumstances. The Stalinist bureaucracy of the USSR has always been opposed to genuine proletarian revolution but it was more prone to expansionism during the Stalin era because of the problem of international containment by the forces of the USA and NATO. The revolutions in Korea, China, and Vietnam, together with the domination of Eastern Europe, were considered necessary in order to enhance Soviet power and undermine the aggression of USA imperialism. But once the threat of encirclement of the USSR was undermined by the nuclear capability of the USSR, and the Soviet bloc was consolidated, the prospect of agreement with the USA became possible. The very prospect of nuclear war over Cuba indicated that a relaxation of political tensions was preferable to this possibility of the third world war, and the result was an implicit détente replacing the tensions of cold war. Consequently the Soviet bureaucracy had not changed from being revolutionary to counterrevolutionary rather the forms of its counterrevolutionary stance changed because of the establishment of different relations with the USA. In this situation the Stalinist bureaucracy remained opposed to the prospect of international revolution. This standpoint was justified by the elaboration of the approach of peaceful coexistence which explicitly replaced the importance of the class struggle with peaceful competition. The theory conformed to the practice of acceptance of the international status quo. The USA remained adventurist in this situation because of the necessity to oppose any expression of revolution against the domination of imperialism. Thus the USA was prepared to undermine its relations with the USSR in order to oppose the development of national liberation in the whole of Vietnam. But the USSR did not reject the closer relations that had developed with the USA after the Cuban crisis because it preferred to maintain the status quo.

The document of the US SWP contends that Trotskyism has been proved historically right about the limitations of the approach of socialism in one country, the opportunist character of popular frontism, the principled character and realisation of permanent revolution in China, Yugoslavia and Cuba, the opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy, and the principled character of the Cuba revolution. It has also been able to recognise the changed balance of class forces in favour of world revolution and the resurgence of the class struggle in the Western countries. However what is praised as the confirmation of Trotskyism often meant the justification of dogma and the dilution of principles and strategy. The inflexible adherence to the view that the USSR was still a degenerated workers state led to the opportunist conception that Stalinism could act in a revolutionary manner and should be supported in the cold war. Hence the expansion of Stalinism was considered to be the progress of the world revolution. But primarily the Fourth International failed to understand the significance of the cold war as the competition between two rival reactionary systems. This understanding would explain why the USSR should not have been supported in the cold war. The result was an unprincipled pro-Sovietism that replaced true proletarian internationalism. This would have meant recognition that world revolution could not be advanced by Soviet expansion. Instead of these important theoretical and programmatic limitations, the US SWP argued that the primary limitations of post-war Trotskyism were organisational. It is accepted that mass revolutionary parties have not been built despite the superiority of programme and the relationship between Trotskyism and the requirements of world revolution. It is argued that the increasing crisis of Stalinism and the end to the monolithic character of Stalinism will facilitate the increasing importance of what is the only principled Marxist alternative. But the increased potential for the development of Marxism because of the crisis of Stalinism can be undermined by either opportunism or sectarianism.

The document defines the tasks of the process of party building in the following manner: “The building of an alternative leadership of the working class; i.e., of new revolutionary mass parties remains the central task of our epoch. The problem is not that of repeating over and over again this elementary truth, but of explaining concretely how it is to be done. In fact, the building of mass revolutionary mass parties combines three concrete processes: the process of defending and constantly enriching the Marxist revolutionary programme; of building, educating and hardening a revolutionary Marxist cadre; and of winning mass influence for this cadre. These three processes are dialectically intertwined. Divorced from the mass movement, a revolutionary cadre becomes a sect. Divorced from the programme of revolutionary Marxism, cadres immersed in the mass movement eventually succumb to opportunism. And divorced from practical testing by cadres struggling as part and parcel of the masses, the revolutionary programme itself becomes ossified and degenerates into a sterile incantation of dogmatic formulas.”(14) This expression of good intentions does not explain the actual trajectory of the Fourth International and the USA SWP. The attempt to uphold what they considered to be orthodoxy especially the conception of the degenerated workers state led to the dilution of principles and the process of adaptation to the mass movement. This resulted in the implicit view that because Stalinism could create workers states it should be supported in the cold war. Trotskyism became the critical ally of Stalinism. Hence it was the failure to try and explain the post-war world, such as the development of the conflict of the cold war, which led the US SWP and Fourth International to adapt to the view that Stalinism could be progressive and indirectly act in a revolutionary manner. What was required was a new type of programme that could explain in a non-dogmatic manner that Stalinism was still counterrevolutionary in changing circumstances and so it could not promote the cause of world revolution. Instead only the working class acting in terms of the influence of a principled revolutionary leadership could advance the class struggle for genuine socialism. Socialism could not in any sense be identified with the role of Stalinism. Instead the US SWP and the Fourth International identified Cuba as being the expression of anti-Stalinism and this meant what became a satellite of the USSR was proclaimed the leadership of the international class struggle. The banner of an independent revolutionary programme was undermined by these illusions in progressive Stalinism.

In other words, the result was that Trotskyism adapted to the mass movement around the forces of Stalinism, and the programme was changed and adapted in these terms. The result was a type of opportunism and support for the mass movement in terms of a process of conciliation rather than the struggle for independent politics. This meant sectarianism was identified with all those forces that were still critical of Stalinism and the role of the Cuban leadership. The development of the programme was reduced to the standpoint of optimistic perspectives about the world working class rallying to the side of the Cuban revolutionary leadership. The actual incorporation of Cuba into the Soviet bloc was glossed over. It is not surprising that this adaptation to Stalinism provided the precedent to adapt to all forms of the mass working class movement. The result was support for entryism which actually meant critical support for both Social Democracy and Stalinism and rejection of the importance of the struggle to win the mass movement to the Marxist programme. Instead the aim was to put pressure on leftist and centrist currents to lead the struggle against capitalism: “The revolutionary nuclei actively participate in building left-wing tendencies capable of leading broader and broader sections of the masses into action. Through the experiences built up in these actions, they assist in transforming the best forces of these centrist or left-centrist tendencies into genuine Marxists.”(15)

Consequently from the inability of the majority of the post-war Trotskyists to understand the primary features of the cold war era, the result was the ultimate rationalisation of the rejection of a principled programme and intransigent strategy. The US SWP had originally argued that workers states could be created in the colonial countries without the role of a revolutionary party, and this opportunist perspective had been universally extended to apply to any situation. It would be pressure on mass movements that would advance the prospects for socialism, and the importance of an independent programme and strategy would be reduced to a process of adaptation to left centrist currents. The role of pressure by the revolutionary organisation on the centrist forces would create the political conditions for the process of social progress and the prospect of transformation. This would mean that mass Social Democratic and Stalinist forces would be receptive to the prospect of radicalisation and so would respond to the call for support of a programme that was left-wing. It would not be necessary to elaborate and propagandise for a complete revolutionary programme because the mass movement would mobilise in support of more limited aims that would have the potential to become an expression of the process of socialist transformation. It would be possible to obtain mass support for demands like ‘Labour to power on a Socialist Programme’ and the various Communist Parties already had a Parliamentary conception of the transition to socialism. Hence what was necessary was that these forces should seriously mobilise in support of their own programmes on the basis of the influence of the forces of revolutionary Marxism. This process would also be promoted by the role of entryism which would mean that a revolutionary current would be created within the mass Social Democratic and Stalinist forces. This current would advocate politics that would generate support for the prospect of mass action in favour of left-wing demands that would create a momentum in favour of the socialist transformation of society.

However this perspective meant that it would be counterproductive to raise the complete programme of Trotskyism. This is because this programme was not compatible with the existing consciousness of the working class and their mass reformist organisations. Instead it would be necessary to raise demands that were similar to the various programme of socialism that were being supported by Social Democracy and Stalinism. The perspective of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism was replaced by what was effectively a centrist understanding of the conception of the process of transition to socialism. Hence this meant the importance of workers councils and extra-Parliamentary activity was replaced by critical support for the Parliamentary conception of the realisation of socialism. What this dilution of programme did not recognise was that the very conception of socialism had become discredited in this period of boom and the creation of the welfare state. Consequently the forces of Social Democracy and Stalinism were not susceptible to the prospect of radicalisation and becoming advocates of a socialist programme, but instead they aspired to adapt to capitalism in the most principled manner. The approach of socialism belonged in a distant future and what was important for the present was the management of capitalism in the most progressive manner. This meant the dilution of programme in order to adapt to Social Democracy and Stalinism by the forces of revolutionary Marxism was an important mistake, and it meant that Trotskyism became the left wing of reformism. The response of Trotskyism in this situation should have been the defence of an independent revolutionary programme, which would have meant demarcation from Social Democracy and Stalinism. Instead of adaptation to the reformist illusions of the mass movement, the forces of revolutionary Marxism should have elaborated why they did not share these illusions. This would meant that whilst admitting the present period was not favourable to the prospect of the revolutionary transformation of society, the conclusion to be made was not that reformism would promote socialism and instead the conditions for the continuation of reformism would ultimately be undermined by the very requirements of capitalism. The result would be the crisis of Social Democracy and Stalinism and the vindication of revolutionary Marxism.

In the present the task of revolutionary Marxism was to suggest that the reconciliation of reformism with capitalism could have only momentary success. The pragmatism of Social Democracy and Stalinism was a rejection of the socialist programme. Thus the task was not to dilute the revolutionary programme in order to conform to the reformist adaptation to capitalism, and nor did it mean suggesting the reformist approach was compatible with the transition to socialism, but instead to bring out the historical differences between the Marxist and reformist approach. On the one hand Marxism was about ideological struggle for socialism in what was an unfavourable period, and reformism was about the management of capitalism. Hence the attempt to make revolution and reform conform to each other was an opportunist illusion and indicated that the forces of Trotskyism had become centrist. This process of political degeneration was the result of being unable to develop a principled programme for the cold war period. But this process of opportunist degeneration is excused because of the necessity to relate to the mass movement. The apparent failure to influence the mass forces of the working class via the role of a diluted programme will be the development of a propaganda group that is isolated and marginalised. Consequently what is considered to be inconceivable is the prospect of the building of a mass revolutionary party on the basis of firm adherence to principles. Instead only the application of flexibility and the apparent dilution of principles can overcome the limitations of this situation. What is called for is the sensitivity of the party to the character of the class consciousness of the working class. But this approach suggests that rigid adherence to principles will mean an inability to build a mass party. Only the dilution of the programme will enable the revolutionary party to acquire influence within the mass movement. This advice is offered in what is considered to be a situation favourable to the progress of world revolution. The apparently revolutionary character of the epoch suggests that revolution can be made via adaptation to the mass movement.

This standpoint is flawed because the cold war era is not favourable to the prospect of proletarian revolution. The combined social strength of the USA and USSR has undermined the development of situations that could result in genuine proletarian revolutions. In contrast the document reaffirms the view that the formation of workers states does not necessarily require the role of a revolutionary party. It also suggests that the role of the party may be limited to the very situation of revolution and that the dynamic of the mass movement is sufficient to create a revolutionary situation. Thus what is conceived as a distortion from the norm, the formation of a deformed workers state, has effectively become to be recognised as the general form of development of the world revolution. The role of the revolutionary party is not indispensable for the formation of a workers state, and instead because the epoch is favourable for the development of world revolution the actions of mass popular struggle or the role of Stalinist type organisations can in and of itself bring about the overthrow of capitalism. This means the role of the revolutionary party is reduced to being a possible additional aspect of this process, but it is not crucial. The supporters of Trotskyism have outlined why Trotskyism in its political and organisational form is not historically important. However the actual conclusions from the cold war era are the opposite of those of the standpoint of the US SWP. This is because the expansion of the Soviet bloc does not represent the formation of workers states and instead the bureaucratic overthrow of capitalism generates the creation of new types of exploitation. Consequently even when there are aspects of popular and mass struggle as in Yugoslavia, China and Cuba, the result is the generation of this type of result because party led revolution does not create mass organs of struggle that could promote an emancipatory alternative. The process of proletarian revolution cannot be the outcome of what is a Stalinist led political process. Furthermore the concept of the deformed workers state is ontologically invalid because the only type of workers state that is feasible is the result of mass revolutionary action by the working class. This process would also require connections to a mass working class party that was not bureaucratised and which rejected an affinity to the social power of the USSR.

In other words, the only conclusion that could be made from the cold war era was that it was immensely difficult to realise the success of genuine proletarian revolution because of the global influence of the reactionary forces of the USA and USSR. It was an illusion to conceive of the progress of world revolution when the only possible type of revolution that was possible was based on national liberation. The point is not that were not important social upheavals and the prospects for a genuine and democratic overthrow of capitalism. Hence the possibilities for a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism was not impossible and some mass struggles did develop that suggested this prospect, as in Bolivia in the early 1950’s. This development was connected to the role of what could be considered to be a revolutionary party, and so corresponded to the premises of a principled Trotskyist programme. But these types of developments were occasional because of the very dominance of the USA and USSR. The stability of the cold war system meant that the prospects for proletarian revolution were unfavourable and this was related to the importance of the boom and the connected strength of reformism. The situation would have to be replaced by a process of the intensification of the contradictions of capitalism if the prospects for the development of the international proletarian revolution were to be enhanced.

In contrast the illusions of the US SWP led to its opportunism. It presented an unfavourable period for the development of world revolution as being favourable and the result was the justification of opportunism in terms of the perspective that Stalinism could overthrow capitalism and establish workers states. Hence the perspective was rationalised that the role of a revolutionary party was not necessarily important if capitalism was to be overthrown and replaced by a type of workers state. The influence of dogma meant that the conception of the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a new type of exploitation was rejected as being not feasible. But it was actually this approach that represented the most principled basis for rejecting opportunism and upholding revolutionary Marxism. Thus it was the very attempt to maintain orthodoxy that led to the justification of unprincipled politics. The continued adherence to the importance of the degenerated workers state led to accommodation to Stalinism and an inability to satisfactorily explain the development of the cold war. There was also a reluctance to explain the significance of the boom and reformism and this meant the conception of the revolutionary role of the working class was outlined in rigid and inflexible terms. It was argued that the boom would soon be replaced by crisis that would generate the prospect of revolutionary class struggles. But this perspective was not outlined in terms of detailed economic and political analysis, and instead was basically an assertion. The result was the justification of economic catastrophism that represented the glossing over the strategic problem of the difficulties of the present unfavourable conditions for the development of the class struggle.

THE COLD WAR IN THE 1970’S

The US SWP in the 1970’s attempted to understand the new period of détente between the USA and USSR. This was outlined in a document by Jack Barnes called ‘The Unfolding World Situation’.(16) The purpose of the document was to suggest that the international situation had changed. It was argued that the period of USA hegemony and antagonism towards the USSR was being modified. This also meant that the conception of the USSR as an agency of world revolution also had to be modified. The cold war rivalry created by the situation of USA hegemony and the expansion of the Soviet bloc had led to a new situation that was based on stabilisation of the respective spheres of influence. This meant the USSR was less likely to promote the formation of workers states as a response to the hegemonic pressures of the USA. The aim of the USSR is to create support for peaceful coexistence in return for increased trade with the USA and Europe, and the USA attempts to moderate its commitment to opposition to the Soviet bloc because of economic crisis and the war in Vietnam. Détente with the USSR and China will promote the stabilisation of international relations and uphold the economic hegemony of the USA in the situation of economic crisis. What is being attempted is a new policy by the USA in order to manage the process of its decline within the world economy and to maintain its hegemonic position in the context of reduced ambitions such as acceptance of the existence of the Soviet bloc.

This analysis indicates the fact that the US SWP have not sufficiently analysed international relations in the past. If they had done so they would have recognised that the cold war had lessened in the 1960’s in the aftermath of the Cuban crisis. The conflict in Vietnam was an exception to what was a new period in the stabilisation of international relations, and the USSR acted to ensure that the USA involvement in Vietnam did not undermine better relations between the superpowers. Nor did the USA allow the Soviet intervention in Prague in 1968 to renew the tensions of the cold war. But the US SWP seems to have failed to modernise its understanding of the international situation because it connected the cold war with the impulse for world revolution. The world view of the US SWP was premised on the relation between the cold war and the creation of workers states. Consequently the process of the relaxation of tensions in the 1960’s and then the official proclamation of détente in the 1970’s was an important challenge to its view of international relations. Indeed, it could be argued that the US SWP never fully came to terms with the proclamation of peaceful coexistence in the mid 1950’s by the USSR. This meant the USSR was effectively committed to the perpetuation of the status quo since the mid 1950’s and was trying to get USA support for this approach. But various events undermined this possibility until the Cuban missile crisis indicated that nuclear destruction could result from the continuation of the cold war. The Soviet approach to international relations became the unofficial basis of diplomacy in the 1960’s, and this was officially recognised by the realisation of détente in the 1970’s.

Barnes argues that the two major aspects of détente are the acceptance of the Soviet bloc by the USA and the USSR should attempt to limit the development of colonial revolution, and especially its tendency to promote the formation of workers states. In other words the present status quo should be recognised as being in the interests of both superpowers. But this was the interpretation of Kissinger of détente and it differed from the Soviet view. The Soviet leadership did not deny that anti-imperialist revolutions could result in socialism. Hence the USSR did not have the ability or capacity to oppose genuine revolutionary developments and this was how they interpreted the situation in Angola and Mozambique in the mid 1970’s. But to them détente also meant not effectively opposing the actions of the USA, as in Vietnam. However the major aim for both the USA and USSR was that international conferences and summits would be able to resolve issues of tension and possible conflict. Consequently the era of détente did not actually mean that the USSR would no longer support the expansion of the Soviet bloc, but the prospect of this expansion would be connected to the importance of diplomacy and the continuation of relations with the USA. The USSR understood that the relaxation of the cold war by the USA meant it had become weaker and so could not oppose some of the prospects of Soviet expansion, as in Africa. Hence the recognition of the Soviet bloc by the USA was a historic gain for the Soviet bureaucracy and indicated that to some extent it had emerged stronger from the cold war. Thus the view of détente outlined by Barnes is over-generalised and dogmatic. He contends: “We can expect more and greater betrayals of the world revolution by both Moscow and Peking as they vie for the political and economic favour of world capitalism. That is the logic of peaceful coexistence; that is the historical logic of Stalinism.”(17) The point is that the counterrevolutionary character of Stalinism means that it always puts its narrow interest before the prospects of the development of international class struggle. In this context, the generation of conflict between the USA and the USSR does not mean that Stalinism is becoming principled and revolutionary but rather that the aim of the expansion of the Soviet bloc and the imperatives of capitalism cannot be reconciled.

In other words, the tensions of the cold war do not mean that the USSR had become a supporter of world revolution. If this logic was true this would mean Joseph Stalin was actually the promoter of international class struggle. Instead the rivalry of the USSR and the USA within the context of the cold war means that their geo-political interests cannot be reconciled. The USSR wants a buffer in Eastern Europe and the USA wants bourgeois democracy in Eastern Europe in order to promote the role of the market. Furthermore, Stalin considered Korea as part of his buffer and opposition to the containment of capitalism and so promoted war in Korea. Only after the consolidation of the Soviet bloc did the ideology of peaceful coexistence become practical to the Soviet bureaucracy. They then wanted the leaders of USA imperialism to recognise the Soviet bloc, but if necessary they would still support the further extension of the Soviet bloc, as in relation to Cuba. The Soviet bureaucracy was prepared to undermine the prospects of peaceful coexistence in order to incorporate Cuba into the Soviet bloc. But they also understood that the events in Cuba could have led to world war, and so the process of defending peaceful coexistence became the justification of the relaxation of international tensions. This standpoint was upheld to the extent that the result was a split with China who effectively rejected peaceful coexistence and supported the old policy of Stalin. This development was not the betrayal of world revolution but instead an acknowledgement that the expansion of the Soviet bloc had possibly come to its effective end. More was to be gained from the USA by means of increased trade, and the continued support of new revolutionary developments was not precluded.

Thus we have to understand the changing policy of the Soviet bureaucracy in relation to circumstances and the fluctuations in the balance of forces on a world scale. The increasing weakness of the USA meant that it could not promote its historical goal of the demise of the Soviet bloc. Instead the USA came to recognise the historical durability of the USSR via the process of détente. The worsening of the situation of the USA meant that it had to support the process of détente that had begun by the countries of Western Europe. It also wanted Europe to share the defence expenditure of NATO. Hence because of increased inflation and the economic problems of the USA its policy towards the USSR had to change. The cold war was officially over. The US SWP generally supports these conclusions. Barnes maintains that the attempt of the USA to overthrow the workers states is ended and replaced by the attempt to undermine the Soviet bloc by increased trade. One of the major aims of détente is to undermine the prospect of the victory of the Vietnamese revolution and to encourage the USSR and China to put pressure on Vietnam to agree to a settlement promoted by the USA. But the inspiration of the Vietnamese struggle for the process of world revolution remains and the USA will find it difficult to contain class contradictions and to maintain the status quo. Competition will also increase between European countries and the USA in relation to trade with the USSR. Hence the US SWP is trying to suggest that in this new period the prospect of the development of the world revolution is not over because of détente. But its perspective is undermined because the major impulse it identified for the development of the world revolution and the creation of workers states was the role of the cold war. Consequently it tends to consider that détente is a major problem for the promotion of the process of the overthrow of capitalism. This means that they tend to suggest that the USA, USSR and China will be successful in getting the agreement of Vietnam to an American sponsored treaty. Barnes also implies that the USA and USSR will be a powerful force for the enforcement of the status quo. He is unable to articulate where and how the advance of world revolution will be made in the situation of détente apart from the utilisation of economic reductionism and the assertion that increasing crisis will generate revolutionary prospects.

Consequently the modification of the understanding of Stalinism from being the distorted expression of world revolution to counterrevolutionary has caused a crisis for the US SWP. According to their approach détente should not have happened and they effectively did not recognise that détente unofficially began in the mid 1960’s. Hence it seems that the world view of the International Committee has been vindicated, which was that Stalinism acted to stabilise capitalism because of its counterrevolutionary role. However the International Committee could not explain the tensions of the cold war period and the process of the expansion of the Soviet bloc. Instead they projected détente onto the 1950’s when the cold war was intensifying. Their position only became confirmed with the onset of détente in the 1960’s and 1970’s. But they ignored the fact that rivalry between the Soviet bloc and the USA was not ended and the process of Soviet expansion still continued. The USSR utilised what they perceived of as American weakness in order to promote expansion in new spheres of influence like Africa. The US SWP defined this development as part of the role of Cuba in the progress of world revolution. The involvement of Cuban troops in Southern Africa was considered to be an expression of the development of new forces that were not Stalinist in favour of world revolution. In reality the role of Cuban troops occurred with the permission of the USSR. It was an indication that détente was declining and that it was unable to contain the further expansion of the USSR. But this was not an advance of world revolution because what was actually being promoted was modernisation in Southern Africa under the supervision of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Nor could the International Committee explain these developments because they could only envisage the USSR acting as support of the reactionary role of the USA. The inability to recognise the possibilities of Soviet expansion meant none of the forces of Trotskyism could explain the weakness and contradictions of détente.

Indeed it could be argued that the very victory of the Vietnamese struggle indicated the problems with détente. Kissinger believed that agreements with the USSR and China could result in the limitation and containment of the advance of the various national liberation struggles. Hence he had an illusion that the USSR had total control over the actions of the forces of national liberation. But this was not the actual situation because the various national liberation forces had their own conception of what was in their interests and so were prepared to ignore the advice of Moscow in favour of moderation and caution. This was why the Vietnamese were prepared to effectively ignore the treaty they had signed and to resume the struggle for national unification. The result was defeat for the USA and what was learnt by oppressed peoples was that the USA in a situation of decline could not effectively oppose the development of struggles against imperialism. Both the USA and USSR lacked the capacity to contain struggles, and the USSR increasingly realised they had strategic possibilities for taking advantage through utilising the weakness of the USA in its favour. The fact that the USA was unable to militarily intervene because of public opinion meant the USSR could interpret détente in a manner that favoured the possibility of expanding the Soviet bloc. Consequently, the USA by 1976 was committed to a process of détente that was increasingly not functioning as they would hope and the USSR was able to exploit the weakness of the USA. This meant that the general view of the US SWP that détente would undermine the progress of struggles against USA imperialism was shown to be pessimistic. The period of uncritical acceptance of détente and American objectives by the USSR was short, and replaced by a new upsurge in the cold war. Soviet intervention in Southern Africa meant it was the USSR that undermined its own conception of peaceful coexistence and supported an effective policy of exporting the revolution (expansion) because of the possibility of exploiting the temporary weakness of the USA. This policy culminated in the invasion of Afghanistan in order to consolidate the revolution that had taken place in that country and to secure the buffer area around the USSR. But this action was counterproductive because it motivated the USA to reject the limitations of the period of weakness and to intensify its opposition to the USSR. Détente was officially over.

The US SWP argued that one of the intentions of détente is class peace. But the cold war was not an expression of the intensification of class struggle. This is because the cold war was connected to the boom and the ability of capitalism to realise the material demands of the working class. The result was relative class harmony. On the other hand the USSR accepted Western Europe as the sphere of influence of the USA and so they were not interested in the overthrow of capitalism in this area. The role of the mass Communist parties of Italy and France was to act as militant opponents of USA imperialism rather than to support the overthrow of capitalism. Consequently it would be a caricature to consider that the cold war was an expression of international class struggle. Instead the cold war limited the class struggle to what was acceptable to the USSR and USA. This meant the expansion of the USSR expressed the so-called progress of socialism and the USA supported the role of reformism in Western Europe. The prospects of international class struggle were very unfavourable in this period. Barnes suggests that the end to the situation established by the Bretton Woods agreement facilitates the prospect of inflation, and the situation is characterised by stagflation and increased economic rivalry between the major capitalist countries. They compete with each other for trade with the USSR. The economic contradictions of capitalism are intensifying and this will result in a response from the working class because the rise in prices is greater than the rise of wages. But his conclusion is simply assertive and exaggerated: “What we are witnessing is a further confirmation of the judgement that capitalism is in its death agony. The new developments highlight the incapacity of American capitalism, the most powerful the world has ever known, to police, control and dominate the world according to the pattern envisioned at the end of World War 2. The much heralded American century has turned out to be much shorter than one hundred years.”(18) Barnes has taken aspects of the development of crisis and reached an outlandish conclusion that this situation represents the beginning of the end of capitalism. He completely dismisses the possibility that it will be possible to resolve this crisis at the expense of the working class, and he does not provide an argument that would prove that this is a fundamental crisis that cannot be resolved and which would create the political conditions for socialism. Indeed, it is possible that he has projected manifestations of a possible crisis into being an expression of a deep crisis and the indication that capitalism can no longer consistently develop the productive forces. This standpoint is premature but the conception of the weakness of capitalism is utilised in order to suggest that USA imperialism can no longer dominate the world in the manner that it has been used to. This reference to the decline of the hegemony of USA imperialism is accurate, but it is the result primarily of the defeat in Vietnam. The economic and political problems caused by the war in Vietnam led the USA ruling class to advocate détente with the USSR and China. Previously Barnes had suggested that the USA might be successful in this new attempt to undermine the progress of anti-imperialist struggles because of the role of the USSR in upholding the status quo. But he also contradicts this assessment in order to suggest in economic reductionist terms that détente will fail because of the development of economic crisis. What he is actually ignoring is the political reasons for the demise of détente such as the ultimate victory of the Vietnamese revolution and the tendency of the USSR to promote further expansion of the Soviet bloc. The influence of the economic crisis in the early 1970’s is not as immense as Barnes predicts. It does result in the increased militancy of the working class but the anticipation of the actual demise of capitalism and the transformation of international relations is a dogmatic prediction.

Barnes refers to a speech by Kissinger that calls for Europe to be prepared to increase its share of the burden of the military interests of the West. The speech is considered significant in this situation of rivalry because of the problems caused by the economic crisis. But Kissinger’s speech is unremarkable as a response to the situation of American decline as the outcome of the economic situation and the situation in Vietnam. Kissinger is trying to outline the new tasks involved in maintaining the domination of the USA in global terms. Barnes does not elaborate whether détente can succeed or fail because his world view is based on the conception that the world revolution advances most successfully in the period of cold war. The implication is that détente might succeed because the USSR has become a willing partner in the process of supervising the world. Thus in order to uphold an optimistic perspective, Barnes has to suggest that the economic crisis will undermine the aims of détente. However on the other hand the counterrevolutionary role of the USSR and China, and the reactionary consequences of their rivalry, will promote détente. Increased trade between the capitalist countries and the Stalinist countries could also overcome the crisis in the West and so uphold détente despite the decline of the USA. Hence he tries to reconcile the possibilities of economic crisis with the apparently opposing tendencies represented by the role of the various Stalinist bureaucracies. But this represents a superficial assessment because it is the very decline of USA imperialism that encourages the USSR to support détente in a very flexible manner. The ultimate victory of the Vietnamese revolution also undermines détente because the actions of the Vietnamese indicate that the USSR and China cannot repress the advance of an anti-imperialist revolution. Thus détente is full of contradictions. In contrast, Barnes suggests that the role of the USSR and China will ensure the success of détente. Actual developments completely refute this view, and it is not possible to reconcile this view with his opposing stance that the economic crisis will undermine détente.

Despite the tendency for Barnes to suggest that détente promotes political stability he also argues that the economic crisis and the continuation of the colonial revolution because of the historical weakness of the national bourgeoisie, represent counter tendencies. Furthermore, the radicalisation of youth and women, the importance of the situation produced by Vietnam, plus the contradictions of American capitalism and the rise of the class struggle in Europe represent additional factors that undermine the stability represented by détente. This means that the period of détente cannot overcome the tendency for new revolutionary upheavals despite its promotion of class compromise. The situation is characterised by the crisis of leadership and Cuba has not been able to promote the resolution of this problem despite its anti-Stalinist character. This analysis is an indication that the inauguration of détente has resulted in the attempt of the US SWP to assert a type of orthodoxy. The Stalinist counterrevolutionary role is emphasised and its connection to opposition to world revolution is related to the development of détente. It is also suggested that the role of the Cuban party is not a substitute for the necessity of a principled party that can provide an intransigent programme in order to facilitate the working class coming to power. Suggestions that Stalinism can create workers states are relegated in importance and instead the era of détente indicates the importance of the role of Trotskyism. But the view that the process of the historical detour in which Stalinism can create workers states is still confirmed, and the principled non-Stalinist approach represented by Cuba is upheld. However the Pabloite conclusion that the importance of Leninist organisation can be reduced to an option that is not always necessary is rejected: “We view the construction of Leninist parties not as a preferable method but as the necessary method to lead the workers to victory and to guarantee that victory.”(19)

Hence the period of détente seemed to suggest to the US SWP that the period of the revolutionary role of Stalinism was effectively over. This period belonged to the cold war between the USA and the USSR. But détente meant the USSR became the partner of the USA in opposing the prospect of the development of world revolution. However détente actually occurred when the conditions were maturing for the development of proletarian revolution and so the consolidation of the counterrevolutionary role of Stalinism meant the necessity of the construction of principled Marxist parties was vital in this period of the intensification of class contradictions. The Pablo view that the Leninist party was an option that was not always required for the overthrow of capitalism was shown to have become anachronistic, and the limitations of the Cuban leadership also indicated that there was no organisational and political alternative to the development of mass Trotskyist organisations. But the apparent return to a principled standpoint was actually partial because it was based on a dogmatic view of détente that was unable to understand its contradictions. Détente was not monolithic and it was instead fragile. This meant the USSR still supported the possibility of the expansion of the Soviet bloc. Consequently the fragmentation of détente would create the political conditions for the US SWP to re-assert its views about the importance of the internationalist role of the Cubans and the possibility that Stalinism could act in a revolutionary manner. In other words, the US SWP did not have a world view that could comprehend Stalinism in a consistently principled manner. For consistently to develop would meant the rejection of the standpoint that the USSR was a degenerated workers state, and this would enable the view to be developed that Soviet expansion was both anti-capitalist and reactionary. Instead the era of détente enabled the US SWP to consider the USSR as counterrevolutionary, but this label was based on a flimsy method that was susceptible to fluctuations and the effective adoption of opposing conclusions. The actual actions of Stalinism refuted the methodology of the US SWP.

In another document: ‘The World Political Situation and the Immediate Tasks of the Fourth International’ the historical situation of capitalism is analysed and what is described as the overall process of economic decline is contrasted to the development of the productive forces in the Stalinist states.(20) Development of the energy crisis is considered to be an indication that the period of boom is being replaced by crisis and the increased militancy of the working class. The period of the cold war is coming to an end and being replaced by a situation of the intensification of the class struggle. The cold war was based on the stabilisation of capitalism under the domination of USA imperialism. Stalinism acted to overthrow capitalism in Eastern Europe, which indicated it could act in an objectively revolutionary manner despite its overall counterrevolutionary character. The pressures of the Korean war led to the overthrow of capitalism in China and this represented immense progress of the world revolution. The victory of the Cuban revolution created the conditions for the prospect that the world revolution would be developed in anti-Stalinist terms: “Although they were of petty-bourgeois origin, the Castro-Guevara team outflanked Stalinism from the left, opening a new phase in resolving the world crisis of leadership despite the fact that they themselves faltered in this task and eventually gave it up.”(21) The strategy of guerrilla war used successfully by the Cubans was a failure in Latin America, and did not replace the traditional methods of the class struggle of working people.

Hence the apparent failure in the progress of the world revolution under the leadership of Stalinism or the Cubans has led to the apparent return to orthodoxy of the US SWP. But this has not meant the rejection of the method of the adaptation to Stalinism which was the conception of the antagonism between the degenerated workers state and capitalism. The cold war is identified with the conditions that enabled Stalinism to overthrow capitalism in Eastern Europe and China, and this meant Stalinism had to be critically supported against the counterrevolutionary forces of USA imperialism. Instead of the rejection of these perspectives of the cold war as representing accommodation to Stalinism it has been the resurgence of the class struggle in Europe that has led to the pragmatic shift towards a more traditional emphasis on the importance of the Marxist programme and role of the party. Militant actions by workers in Latin America, the French general strike of 1968, and mass mobilisations in Italy and the UK has shown that the strategic emphasis on guerrilla war has been temporary and is being replaced by more traditional forms of class struggle: “Above all the Fourth International calls attention to the turn in the pattern of world revolution. Today the urban masses, with their own forms of struggle and organization are moving to the centre of the stage.”(22) This process will also influence the colonial revolution that will become more proletarian and based on anti-capitalist objectives.

In other words the US SWP has not rejected or revised any of its conception of the Cold war. It has not critically scrutinised its understanding of Stalinism and opportunist conception of world revolution. Instead the actual developments in the class struggle, primarily the world historical importance of the French general strike, have refuted the opinion that has the working class no longer has any revolutionary possibilities because of the development of the affluent society. In this context the US SWP can dismiss the strategic importance of guerrilla war because of the fact it underestimates the importance of the urban working class. They can point to empirical developments for indicating that the militant action of the workers is a generalised international tendency. This opinion can be combined with acknowledgement that the support of the USSR and China for détente shows that their counterrevolutionary role has become dominant in the present period of the increasing crisis of capitalism. Hence the shift in strategic emphasis of the USA SWP is a manifestation of their latest adaptation to what is considered to be the prevailing tendency within reality. The possibility of a new turn towards Stalinism in the future cannot be ruled out because of the fact that their shift is dictated by the importance of new developments and does not result in the questioning of past positions and the tendency for adaptation to the mass movement. Indeed it could be argued that the present position is based on a form of adaptation to the latest expression of mass militancy rather than a principled return to the standpoint of revolutionary Marxism. This is why the emphasis is on the failure of the various guerrilla struggles, combined with the significance of the reactionary role of Stalinism, rather than a detailed elaboration of the creativity and importance of the latest manifestation of the struggles of the workers. Hence the emphasis on the international tasks of the working class and the role of a world party is outlined in timeless terms and is not related specifically to the latest developments in the class struggle. We have no sense that the struggles of the workers have the potential to realise a new society and that militancy can result in progress towards workers control and the promotion of socialist relations of production. Thus it seems that what has happened is actually a surprise to the US SWP and so they have difficulties in developing a strategy for the advancement of social transformation. Consequently the approach of their document is to describe various struggles and their outcomes and not to make suggestions about how success could have been promoted and defeat avoided.

For example reference is made to the defeat of the French general strike because of the role of Stalinism but nothing is said that could have indicated what could have represented a strategy for victory. The fact that the working class was occupying the factories gets only the briefest of mentions. In other words the potential of the events in France to represent the character of proletarian revolution in the contemporary period is not acknowledged. Instead the events of 1968 are considered in euphoric terms as an expression of the development of world revolution but this is not interpreted in strategic terms as representing the advance of how the process of the overthrow of capitalism is possible. This means that no actual lessons are gained from the class struggle and the contemplative method of applauding the various struggles does not result in the extraction of an understanding of the strategy that would promote the process of social transformation. The document does outline the various difficulties for the progress of world revolution such as the importance of defeats in Indonesia and Chile, but the limitations of Stalinism and reformism are not outlined in this context. The question of how these defeats could have been avoided is not articulated. The setback represented by the treaty of 1973 in Vietnam is mentioned but this was actually only of a temporary nature and did not undermine the continued progress of the national liberation struggle in Vietnam.

Furthermore, the major lesson of this empirical and descriptive analysis of the progress of the international class struggle was not elaborated. This should have been that the militancy of the working class is not sufficient if capitalism is to be overthrown. Militancy has its own illusions that the mass strength of the working class is sufficient to realise class aims, but the actual development of the class struggle in Italy and the UK indicated that whilst militancy can realise important victories the domination of capital is not effectively challenged. Hence it is necessary for the working class to go from militancy to support for the revolutionary and the social transformation of society in order to realise continued advance. Reliance on militancy cannot guarantee that at some point strikes and other methods of struggle will become problematical and so result in defeat. This is why militancy has to be transformed into the conscious struggle for state power. The alternative will ultimately be an offensive of capital against the gains of labour. However the very adaptation of the US SWP to the prevailing methods of popular struggle means that it is incapable of making this criticism, and instead it repeats the view that the role of the party is important if revolution is to be possible. The actual relation of the party to the various struggles is not outlined. But the resurgence of trade union struggles generates the necessity for the revolutionary party to establish its attitude towards militancy and to develop an independent perspective that can challenge the various illusions that all that is required for success in the class struggle is the process of mass mobilisation against the employers. This view is becoming the illusion that is as problematical as the support given to reformism. Marxism has to have an alternative. It cannot be absolutely opposed to militancy because this would mean undermining the very progress of the class struggle but it also cannot support the illusions generated by illusion such as view that the role of the relation of Marxism to the mass movement has become superfluous. Hence Marxism has to outline a guide to action for the period of militant struggle. This is exactly what the US SWP has failed to do, and instead they effectively uncritically support the various militant struggles as they are, or adapt to the very limitations of the mass movement.

The US SWP return to orthodoxy means that they uphold the role of permanent revolution in terms of the importance of the role of the revolutionary party. Hence the situation in which Stalinism could lead the process of permanent revolution is considered to be part of the long detour from the classical pattern of world revolution that is now over and reference to the prospects of Stalinism overthrowing capitalism is not mentioned. Instead it is argued that only revolutionary Marxism can effectively challenge the limitations of the national bourgeoisie in the former colonial countries and provide a leadership to the mass movement. It is also argued that Marxism should support the struggles for national liberation in the imperialist countries. The depth of the estrangement of the US SWP with Stalinism is indicated by its support for national self determination in the Stalinist countries. It is argued that this demand is connected to the development of political revolution in Eastern Europe and the USSR, but what is also suggested is that the apparent relative progressive role of Stalinism has become so problematical that it would actually be a historical advance if self-determination was realised in terms of the restoration of capitalism. The question of national liberation is connected to the development of the various struggles against Stalinism in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia, but the suggestion is that the interests of the working class would be enhanced even if the result was the establishment of the relation between capitalism and national self determination. Consequently the implication is that the world revolution not only is no longer related to the role of Stalinism but that the very overthrow of Stalinism could be necessary for the realisation of the interests of the working class in Eastern Europe and the USSR. The preference would be that this overthrow results in socialist democracy, but the prospects of national independence via the establishment of capitalism would not be a counterrevolutionary outcome because it would mean the end of Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and the liberation of the oppressed nations within the USSR.

The standpoint of revolutionary Marxism would have to also support the demand for unconditional self-determination. But this is because we do not consider the overthrow of capitalism within Eastern Europe to be a progressive act and instead it was part of the generation of the expansion of the Soviet bloc and the intention of the Stalinist bureaucracy to create a buffer zone. The result of this process was the consolidation of a bureaucratic mode of production that was based on the exploitation of the working class. Consequently the conception that a progressive act was carried out in a counterrevolutionary manner was an absurdity. The overthrow of capitalism could only be progressive if it was the action of working people. Only a genuine proletarian revolution could be progressive. However this does not mean that we would also consider the restoration of capitalism to be preferable to the continuation of Stalinism. This is why the preference of principled Marxists was for a new revolution that would result in the realisation of socialist democracy. But we were aware that acceptance of the unconditional demand of national self-determination could result in the restoration of capitalism. The point is that wanted the integrity of the Soviet bloc to be undermined by the revolutionary action of working people and so this process would not be the response to the pressures of USA imperialism and the influence of reactionary forces. However the US SWP was also unprincipled in exclusively raising the relevance of national self determination in the era of détente. This demand was also necessary during the cold war because the Soviet bloc was not some type of defence of socialism and was instead only in the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy. However the question at all times for principled Marxists was how to promote national independence from Stalinism without supporting the restoration of capitalism. The advocacy of international revolution was important in this context.

The document refers to the importance of the role of youth and women in the process of mass unrest and struggle against capitalism. It argues that these struggles are an integral part of the struggle for the revolutionary transformation of society. This is a principled observation but the question is how can these new struggles advance the progress of social transformation? Instead of answering this important question the document prefers to empirically describe the various events involved in the radicalisation of women and youth. What are not outlined by the US SWP are the very ideas and arguments that would make Marxism the theory of the struggles for women and youth. It could be argued that this important task has never been accomplished by Marxism and so as a result other ideologies have become the rationalisation of the opposition to female oppression. The role of various Marxist feminists has not been sufficient in relation to establishing the connection of women to the struggle for socialism.

The position of the US SWP concerning Cuba became confusing. On the one hand they attempted to retain the view that Cuba represented a non-Stalinist expression of the impulses of the world revolution. On the other hand they criticised its various concessions to Stalinism as unprincipled, and opposed its strategy of struggle of guerrilla war as not being theoretical and elitist. The US SWP also opposed the apparent reconciliation of the Cuban regime with various national liberation forces and its opportunist support for the Popular Unity regime in Chile. However what makes this criticism inadequate is that the US SWP does not acknowledge that the actions of the Cuban regime are motivated by the fact that it has become part of the Soviet bloc. The material support of the USSR means that Cuba has become incorporated within the camp led by the USSR. It also has a conception of socialism that is modelled on the planned economy of the USSR. Hence it is not surprising, or an aberration of principles, that Castro criticised the Prague Spring of 1968. Cuba cannot provide an inspiration for world revolution because its actions are based on the interests of Stalinism and it is a subordinated part of the Soviet bloc. The isolated Cuban regime could not survive without the economic and political support provided by the USSR. This is why its strategy of revolution and ideology has increasingly become identical to the perspectives of the USSR. Consequently, it is not the Cuban regime that is inconsistent. Instead the issue of inconsistency is with the US SWP that despite all that has happened since 1962 tries to deny the relationship between Cuba and the USSR. However the US SWP has reluctantly accepted that its claim that Cuba is the leadership of the world revolution has become historically exhausted. But the US SWP does not make the logical conclusion from this recognition which would be that Cuba has become a bureaucratised workers state. Instead in a dogmatic manner, and despite all that has happened it clings to its view that Cuba is not a deformed workers state despite its isolation and incorporation within the Soviet bloc.

The new orthodoxy of the US SWP means that they emphasise the role that the USSR and China has had in effectively supporting the USA in undermining the prospect of a complete victory for the national liberation forces in Vietnam. This war has intensified the problems of USA capitalism and led to the formation of a mass and popular discontent, but this has not been sufficient to end the involvement of the USA in Vietnam. This perspective is actually pessimistic. The era of détente does not undermine the realisation of the victory of the forces of National liberation. Also the limitations of Vietnamese Stalinism do not outweigh the determination to bring about victory. It could be argued that this victory of Stalinism has become exceptional in the period after the intensification of the cold war. But actually because the war in Vietnam expressed the decline of the USA the result was further Soviet expansion in Africa. In terms of the standpoint of the US SWP, the forces of Stalinism resumed the long detour of world revolution. But the approach of principled Marxism would suggest that whilst the Vietnamese victory was an immense historical achievement it did not represent progress in the world revolution and the continued expansion of the Soviet bloc was not a gain for the international working class. However the standpoint of the US SWP that the USSR would willingly subordinate its interests to those of the USA was shown to be superficial because of the effective demise of détente in the mid 1970’s. The politicians of the USA began to recognise that they had to replace the policy of détente if the continued expansion of the Soviet bloc was to be opposed. This situation indicated that the counterrevolutionary role of the USSR did not meant that it would accept the dominant role of the USA for any length of time. Instead it understood that détente represented the decline of the USA and therefore détente could only be temporary. In this context the USSR would utilise its increased strength to undermine USA hegemony in Africa and elsewhere.

It could be argued that the era of détente even led to the support of ultra-leftism by the USA SWP. The document is emphatic that not it impermissible to provide political support for the national bourgeoisie in the colonial countries because of its ultimate relationship to world imperialism. This would seem to represent opposition to any form of the anti-imperialist united front as unprincipled regardless of the situation. In addition the Allende regime in Chile is characterised as an example of the Peoples Front which should not be supported. It is true that this is a regime of reformism and class compromise, but it is also very unstable and is based on mass support. Consequently the conditions may have been present for the call to be made that this government break with the bourgeoisie and act against capitalism. Obviously this prospect may have not happened but it would have helped educate the working class in the limitations of reformism and motivate working people to organise their own organs of mass struggle. It would also have been necessary to provide critical support to the Popular Unity government against the threat from reaction and to utilise this support in such a manner that the revolutionary forces are strengthened. Ultimately the creation of the forces of mass organs of struggle would have enabled them to oppose the counterrevolution in a more organised and effective manner. In contrast the US SWP document calls for the formation of a revolutionary party that is opposed to the policy of class compromise. But the point is that this intention has to be connected to a strategy that can develop support for mobilisation against the threat of reaction and in this manner advance the cause of revolution. In this context critical support for the Popular Unity government in Chile would not be opportunist and instead would create the optimum political conditions for the mobilisation of the working class against the prospect of counterrevolution and for the formation of mass organs of struggle.

The US SWP document describes the process of détente in terms of the consolidation of the approach of compromise advocated by the USSR and China: “Moscow and Peking see the détente as the consummation of the class collaborationist policy each has pursued for decades as the bureaucratic alternative to the revolutionary internationalism practiced by Lenin and Trotsky before the degeneration of the first workers state.”(23) This comment is one sided. It is true that detent e did mean a temporary setback to the progress of the Vietnamese revolution, and also has resulted in increased accommodation between the USSR and USA in order to obtain grain for the people of the Soviet Union. Détente was also a method for managing the decline of the USA and increasing its prosperity because of increased trade with the USSR. This policy could only be at the expense of its imperialist rivals that had also increased trade with the Soviet bloc. But the impression given by the US SWP document that détente would be durable because it represented the means to undermine political revolution in the Soviet bloc was misleading. Certainly détente led to increased food supplies for the USSR and so this could decrease discontent about material standards, but the USSR also recognised that détente indicated the decline of the USA. This meant, despite the effective predictions of the US SWP, détente could not be stable. Instead the USSR would act to utilise the opportunities provided by the manifestation of the weakness of the USA. It would also mean that the Vietnamese forces would soon act to renew their offensive. The very weakness of the regime in the South of Vietnam, and the effective withdrawal of the USA involvement would mean that the stalemate of 1973 would soon be over. Thus contrary to the views of the US SWP détente did not mean a serious reversal in Vietnam and the related end of the progress of the expansion of the Soviet bloc.

But détente did mean that the USSR and USA were united against the prospect of genuine proletarian revolution. In this sense the stability of the cold war period was maintained despite the changing balance of power between the USA and the USSR. It could be argued that only the Hungarian revolution of 1956 and France 1968 had represented the possibility of proletarian revolution. The system of international relations was orientated to opposing the manifestation of any development of international revolution. However the intensification of the contradictions of capitalism had led to generalised militancy, but the next level of class struggle, the aspiration for social transformation had not been realised. But what this militancy had shown was that the myth that the working class could not act in a revolutionary manner was false. Actual practice had shown that the working class was not content with capitalism. However the elaboration of a strategy of transformation was lacking and in this manner the crisis of leadership was manifested in this situation. But the approach of the US SWP did not represent a guide to action. It was unable to understand that the period of détente would be temporary and that the USA would have to establish a new policy of counterrevolution if the increased strength of the USSR was to be opposed. The USA would also have to overcome the reluctance to support military involvement on a global scale and take more decisive action to overcome the further economic decline of the American economy. Instead of being able to understand the prospect of these developments the US SWP could only envisage the prospect of international revolution. Hence they could not anticipate the possibility of the offensive of capital and the development of the neo-liberal agenda.

THE TASKS OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

The USA SWP summarise the apparent gains of the class struggle in the following manner: “The class struggle has registered big ups and downs over the decades since 1938. Among the major victories can be listed the survival of the Soviet Union in World War 2, the subsequent overturns of capitalism in Eastern Europe, the victory of the Chinese revolution and the resulting overturns of capitalism in North Korea and North Vietnam, and finally the victory of the Cuban revolution.”(24) It is important to understand that these are not gains of the international class struggle. This understanding is connected to recognition of the difference between the success of anti-imperialism and national liberation when compared to the character of proletarian revolution. The defeat of German imperialism by the USSR was significant because It meant the defeat of one of the most reactionary regimes in history. The Nazi regime was trying to impose a form of slavery on the Soviet people as well as carrying out a form of racial extermination that would have contributed to the success of barbarism and the defeat of the forces of civilisation. In this situation the victory of the USSR represented the triumph of national liberation and the defeat of these plans to introduce a regime of racial supremacy and slavery. But this victory was not the advance of the class struggle of the working class. The Stalinist bureaucracy benefitted from victory over German imperialism by expanding its power and privileges in the form of military control of Eastern Europe. This meant the overthrow of capitalism in Eastern Europe was not some distorted expression of the advance of the class struggle, and instead what had occurred was the expansion of the Soviet bloc. The power of Stalinism was consolidated but this also meant increased tensions with the USA that considered this development to be unacceptable and opposed to the interests of world capitalism. What was occurring was not a form of class struggle but instead was the expression of tensions between two different forms of reactionary modes of production. The USSR suppressed any tendency for proletarian revolution in Eastern Europe and the process of the overthrow of capitalism was strictly controlled by the role of the party.

Developments in Yugoslavia and China represented a national process, but the result was identical to that in the rest of Eastern Europe, which was the bureaucratic overthrow of capitalism. The success of national liberation struggle had resulted in the consolidation of an anti-capitalist bureaucracy. Nor did the Cuban revolution deviate from this pattern because the Cuban regime was only able to survive because of its incorporation into the Soviet bloc. In other words it represented a tragic illusion to define these events as the distorted expression of class struggle of the working class against capitalism. This illusion could only be sustained by dogmatic adherence to the conception of the USSR as a degenerated workers state. With this approach it was possible to equate the expansion of Stalinism as the progress of socialism. This standpoint meant accepting the world view of Stalinism and making concessions to the view that the USSR was the bulwark of world revolution despite the limitations represented by Stalinism. The result of this conciliation of Stalinism was bound to create political crisis within the Fourth International. But this crisis could never be resolved because most of the oppositional forces still adhered to the view of the USSR as a degenerated workers state. Hence they also made concessions to the conception of the USSR as historically progressive, or else tried to affirm the understanding of the USSR as being counterrevolutionary in the most dogmatic terms which denied its cold war antagonistic relations with the USA. Both of these trends were unable to explain the period of the cold war. This meant they could not develop adequate programmes for this period and instead relied on dogmatic truisms as a substitute for the elaboration of a principled perspective.

The US SWP and the majority of the Fourth International returned to some form of orthodoxy in the 1970’s because the development of détente raised serious questions about their conception of the progressive historical role of Stalinism. They began to reassert the merits of the revolutionary party and emphasised that Stalinism was based on compromise with imperialism. This apparent return to principles was also unsatisfactory because it could not evaluate the instability of the era of détente and underestimated the potential for Stalinism to still be the historical antagonist of the USA and capitalism. The point was that because of dogma the USA SWP and the Fourth International was still unable to explain reality in an adequate manner. It assumed that Stalinism had become historically exhausted and capitalism was entering a period of acute crisis. These were premature assumptions and the US SWP was still unable to explain developments in the class struggle in a creative and detailed manner. Instead it was assumed that because of the apparent crisis of Stalinism the prospects for international revolution would quickly develop. The US SWP argued that it is necessary to understand the latest developments in the class struggle, but it questionable whether their approach is adequate to the task. Hence they repeat that the situation is still characterised by the crisis of leadership but an understanding of the actual balance of class forces is not elaborated. It is outlined how capitalism is still stable in the major advanced countries but it is also argued that the situation was rapidly becoming pre-revolutionary and unstable. The prospect of upheavals is considered to be imminent despite the insistence on the present stability of capitalism. This is an either/or approach that is actually undecided about how it can comprehend the advances and retreats in the class struggle. In fact the period 1971-74 was one of generalised militancy in the major capitalist countries, and the class consciousness of the working class was rising. This did not mean that a pre-revolutionary situation was imminent but it did indicate the growing discontent with capitalism. The role of a revolutionary party would be to advocate a strategy that would facilitate the process of transition to a pre-revolutionary situation of more frequent struggles.

However it was unlikely that the US SWP would elaborate this type of strategy because of the very fact they had underestimated the importance of the growing militancy in the advanced capitalist countries. Instead they developed a type of party fetishism that suggested that building a mass party would resolve the important problems of the class struggle. This is why their understanding of the question of strategy is organisational. They insist that once a party is able to overcome the tiny size of the propaganda period it acquires the capacity to become a mass force and so the important aspect of the progress of struggle to the point of revolutionary transformation: “The Trotskyist influence in the class struggle today remains bound to developments in the objective situation completely beyond the control of our movement. To transcend this stage, to reach the point of being able to bring the objective situation under conscious control, that is, through negating bourgeois rule and establishing proletarian rule, requires massive forces – numbers so great as to make a qualitative difference. Once this qualitative point is reached, actions which have an aim qualitatively different from both the propaganda stage become possible and necessary. The struggle for power, previously excluded, is placed on the order of the day.”(25) What this suggests is that the process of revolution is identical to the building of the party. The actual importance of the creativity and initiative of the working class is obscured by the apparent justification of a party conception of revolution. Formally the task of the constant elaboration of the programme in order to correspond to the tasks of the class struggle is stressed, but what is actually emphasised is the organisational importance of the building of the party if the prospect of the success of the revolution is to be realised. This means the relation of party and class in the advance of the class struggle is not articulated and instead all that matters is the success in the organisational tasks of party building. Success in this sense is what makes all the difference between a pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situation.

In other words the US SWP document has a one-sided understanding of the relation of the party to the mass movement in the class struggle. The party can be important for promoting the ideas of socialism and communism as the strategic aim of the class struggle. But this does not meant that the party itself is the central factor of the possibility of transition from capitalism to communism. The party is indispensable for the process of ideological struggle and opposing the ideas of the defenders of capitalism and reformism, and in this manner the party can contribute to the development of class consciousness. But this does not mean that the revolution is the act of the party. All forms of party led revolution represent the bureaucratic overthrow of capitalism by the Stalinist elite. Instead the role of the party should be to promote and influence the class struggle to become more militant and ultimately revolutionary. The formation of mass organs of struggle by the working class itself should become the basis to establish whether the situation is maturing to the point where the overthrow of capitalism has become possible. Hence the role of the party is to attract mass support for the programme and strategy of communism, but the act of revolution is carried out by the working class. The role of the party should be to provide support and advice to this process, but if the party is the dominant factor this would mean that the revolution is not a genuine act of the self emancipation of the working class.

Consequently the strategic approach of the US SWP has been influenced by the role of Stalinism. In the period of the cold war the Fourth International tended to adapt to the mass movement led by Social Democracy and Stalinism and so diluted their programme in order to attract popular support. They attempted to relate to left currents within these forces and so effectively rejected the necessity of the political independence of the working class and denied the role of an intransigent programme. Instead it was believed that the centrists originating within Social Democracy or Stalinism could lead the process of the overthrow of capitalism. The role of Trotskyism was to act as a critical supporter of this development. With the replacement of the cold war by détente it seemed that the counterrevolutionary aspects of Social Democracy and Stalinism had become primary, and therefore the Fourth International and US SWP insisted on its revolutionary role. But this was not based on a principled understanding of the relation of the party to the class. It was not properly understood that the upsurge of the class struggle in the early 1970’s was creating new opportunities for Trotskyism because of the influence of militancy and the increasing criticism within the working class of the role of reformism. Trotskyism could become the party that provided a strategy for the advance of the class struggle in this period of militancy. Instead of this understanding the US SWP influenced by Stalinism advocated a party led revolution and effectively argued that the possibility of a revolutionary situation was the outcome of the role of the party. The importance of the class struggle to the progress of the prospect of social transformation was not properly articulated. Instead what was being advocated was party revolution. The lack of the development of a strategy for facilitating progress in the class struggle was the outcome of past opportunism and the tendency for ultra-leftism in the present.

Despite these criticisms the US SWP seemed to have a perceptive understanding of the tasks of the party as being propaganda, agitation and organisation. The tasks of the present are generally modest and include the development of organisations by the influx of people who can become cadres. This organisation should attempt to influence the organisations of the working class like the trade unions and avoid adventurism and involvement in guerrilla type activity. However what is ignored in this approach is the possibility for the mass growth of the revolutionary organisations if they relate in a principled and perceptive manner to the upsurge in militancy of the working class. This is why strategy is so important because if a strategy is elaborated that is able to relate to the development of the class struggle it is possible that Trotskyism could quickly establish an influential relationship to this militancy. Hence it is important to elaborate the Transitional Programme for this period of militancy and to develop the perspective of workers control in a theoretical and practical manner. In contrast to this relation of tasks to what was happening, the US SWP outlines its organisational tasks in a timeless manner. This means the emphasis on propaganda, agitation, and organisation, is not concrete and have become anachronistic. Propaganda is important for the propagation of complex ideas, but the tasks of the early 1970’s are simple. They are summed up by the question: how is it possible to advance from militancy to a higher level of struggle? The attentions of the US SWP and Fourth International should have been orientated in this manner. Instead the US SWP advocates a modest programme that does not address these important strategic issues.

The US SWP call for a world congress of Trotskyism in order to discuss strategic issues, but the programme they advocate is modest and limited. They call for the formation of left-wing currents within the trade unions and work with the youth, support for national liberation organisations and participation in peasant struggles. There should also be support for women’s liberation. None of these aspects are necessarily controversial but the problem is does not represent the basis of a guide to action and the promotion of the class struggle in the contemporary period. The crucial issue of the day was how to transform the increasing discontent with capitalism into support for the revolutionary transformation of society. Struggles in France and Italy had indicated the potential support of the working class for this perspective because of alienation and the increasing crisis of Stalinism. The stability of the cold war period was being replaced by the instability of détente. But the limitations of the approach of the US SWP indicated that it was actually unable to articulate the possibilities of the class struggle of the present. Its most consistent strategy was based on adaptation to Stalinism and it was not able to replace this with a perspective that was able to promote an intransigent strategy for the working class in the era of détente. The recognition of the counterrevolutionary role of Stalinism was not contrasted with a renewed emphasis on the strategic importance of the working class. Instead there was a vague support for a party led revolution and the call for the US SWP and Fourth International to adapt to the importance of the trade unions. This standpoint was found wanting because what the working class urgently required was a strategy that would enable it to challenge the conservatism and sectionalism of the trade union leaders. The very militancy of the working class meant it was spontaneously becoming critical of the role of the trade union bureaucracy. Furthermore the character of the spontaneous class consciousness was an expression of dissatisfaction with capitalism and the aspiration for an alternative. The role of a communist programme should have been to transform this militant mood into support for the striving for communism. Instead of this ambition the US SWP becomes content in the era of détente with modest growth of the organisations of the Fourth International. This organisational conservatism is an expression of similar political conservatism that does not recognise actual opportunities for the party to interact with the mass movement and to provide a programme that will represent working class aspirations.

Hence it is the dogmatism of the US SWP that means in the period of the cold war it is unable to provide a perspective for the independent development of the working class in unfavourable conditions. Instead it promotes the myth of the advance of the world revolution, which is actually the process of the expansion of the Soviet bloc. Then in the era of détente the very necessity to construct an alternative revolutionary perspective by the US SWP is not carried out. It is unable to relate creatively and in a principled manner to the upsurge in the class struggle. This means it defends a dogmatic conception of party led revolution which is combined with organisational modesty and conservatism about political tasks. The defence of an ambitious and intransigent approach is with their rivals the International Committee and then the Workers Socialist League. But it is questionable whether any organisation developed an adequate programme for the period of the cold war and détente. This was because of the failure to understand Stalinism in a principled manner. The influence of dogma meant that adaptation to Stalinism was a characteristic of the major forces of post-war Trotskyism. The result was an inability to relate to the mass movement in a principled manner, and the development of programme as a guide to action was not carried out. Thus the cold war period was never properly understood and instead truisms from the past were used as a substitute for theoretical clarification. But it is to be hoped that the critique of the approach of the US SWP provides an important sense of what could have been a principled programme for the cold war period.

FOOTNOTES

(1)American SWP Dynamics of World Revolution Today Pathfinder Press New York 1974

(2)For Early Reunification of the World Trotskyist Movement p13-24

(3)Istvan Meszaros Beyond Capital Merlin Press London 1995

(4)American SWP p16

(5)p17-18

(6)Dynamics of the World Revolution Today p25-73

(7)p29

(8)p31

(9)p42

(10)p33

(11)p48

(12)p49

(13)p59

(14)p69

(15)p70

(16)Jack Barnes ‘The Unfolding World Situation’ p75-109

(17)p80

(18)p87

(19)p109

(20)p111-175

(21)p124

(22)p130

(23)p172

(24)p176

(25)p178-179