



**NEW
MEMBER'S
INTRODUCTION
AND
EDUCATION
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**INTERNATIONAL
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MARXIST GROUP**

INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP

NEW MEMBERS INTRODUCTION and EDUCATION GUIDE

Contents

Page 2	The Fourth International
Page 5	The International Marxist Group
Page 6	Candidate Membership
Page 7	Introduction to Education Guide
Page 8	Social Inequality and Class Struggle
Page 9	The State
Page 10	The Family
Page 11	Capitalist Economy and Imperialism
Page 12	Reformism
Page 13	Revolution and the Vanguard Party
Page 14	Stalinism
Page 15	Permanent Revolution
Page 16	The Transitional Programme
Page 17	Tactics and Alliances
Page 18	Classless Society
Page 19	Dialectics and Historical Materialism

From the earliest days of modern industry the working class has been compelled to seek unity on an international level or suffer defeat in its elementary struggles with the capitalist class. Time and again the employers exploit national differences among the workers to break strikes. Today, even the most conservative American union leaders are compelled to seek international collaboration in the economic struggle against the multi-national corporations. Experience also teaches that in the face of working class demands, the capitalist classes of different countries, while remaining rivals to each other, are quick to combine to defeat their common enemy, the working class. Each capitalist class uses its own state apparatus to defeat the workers and the various bourgeois states collaborate to the same end. Therefore every important struggle of the working class tends to become political and international. For the workers to win, therefore, it is necessary for them to construct an international political leadership as well as international trade union solidarity.

The First International

On this understanding of the needs of the working class Karl Marx played a leading role in founding the International Workingmen's Association (the First International). Its aim was to weld the working class into a huge militant force to fight for reforms and to overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie. It never became a mass organisation. Nevertheless, its members and sections participated in every important struggle of the workers and in terms of its influence on the thinking of militant workers it played a historical role immeasurably greater than its numbers would suggest. Within the First International a fierce faction struggle was conducted between the followers of Marx and the anarchists led by Bakunin. The latter rejected Marx's view that the experience of the Paris Commune proved that the bourgeois state had to be smashed and replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat as the inevitable outcome of the class struggle. After the defeat of the Commune in 1871 the First International could not survive the internal dissension and the atmosphere of political reaction. Its headquarters were transferred to America where it played some role for a few years before its formal dissolution.

The Second International

Despite the political reaction following the defeat of the Commune the working class grew with the growth of modern industry. In Germany, the Socialist party and the trade unions enjoyed an enormous increase in following in a short period of time. This growth of the labour movement made possible once again an attempt to construct an international leadership for the working class. In 1889 the Second (Socialist) International was proclaimed. Its guiding theory was marxism. Many of the sections of the second international were mass parties. Within the Second International a struggle took place between revolutionaries and reformists, that is, between those who sought to overthrow the capitalist system and those who held that the capitalist system could be gradually reformed and transformed into socialism without the need for a revolutionary struggle by the workers.

In this struggle the revolutionary marxist were the victors on the theoretical level. But in practice most of the leaders of the Second International, trade union leaders and parliamentarians whose way of life was infinitely easier than that of the mass of workers, followed a reformist line. They collaborated with sections of the capitalist political system rather than fighting the bourgeoisie as a whole. The decisive test came on the outbreak of the inter-imperialist war of 1914. Most of the leaders of the Second International, despite their pledges to act to prevent war, sided with the capitalist classes of their own particular countries. This betrayal of the interests of the working class was resisted by only a few leading figures in the International, best known among them being Lenin in Russia, Luxemburg and Liebknecht in Germany, and John MacLean in Britain.

The Third(Communist)International

The group of internationalists led by Lenin drew the conclusion that the betrayal on the outbreak of war marked the end of the Second International as a revolutionary organisation. It was necessary to organise the genuinely revolutionary forces into a new International to prepare for the revolutionary struggles which would result from the war. Lenin's analysis was confirmed in the Russian revolution and the immediate post-war upheavals. The leaders of the Second International presented themselves as the defenders of capitalism against the workers. Only the Internationalists proved capable of projecting a policy of revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie. The victory of the Bolsheviks in Russia gave a tremendous impulse to the revolutionary wing of the working class on the international level. The beginning of 1919 saw the opening in Moscow of an International Congress which proclaimed the formation of the Communist International(Comintern). The new International drew up policies and rules which clearly outlined the revolutionary alternative to the reformists - the fight to overthrow the capitalist state and replace it with a system of workers councils. The documents and decisions of the first four congresses of the Communist International provide a solid core of marxist analysis and perspectives which are an invaluable guide to revolutionaries up to the present day.

Stalinism and the Left Opposition

The failure of the revolution to spread to the more advanced capitalist countries imposed enormous strains on the new soviet state. The Civil War too saw the loss of many of the most experienced Bolshevik cadres and the retreat by many workers from political activity. These factors combined with the continuing conditions of scarcity led to the development of state officials using their position to obtain privileges for themselves as against the mass of workers. Careerists flocked to the party and state positions making these institutions less and less representative of the masses. It was the Stalin faction which represented this privileged elite which attempted to dominate the party and the state apparatus. The privileged bureaucratic layer had one aim - to survive and maintain its privileges. Such an aim is the opposite of the programme of Bolshevism which seeks to rouse the masses against all privileges and oppression. Under the leadership of the Stalin faction the Communist International was transformed into an instrument of the foreign policy of the soviet bureaucracy rather than a weapon for the international working class against the bourgeoisie.

The Left Opposition was formed in 1923 within the soviet Communist Party to struggle against the false policies of the Stalin faction and the bureaucratic degeneration of the regime. Its central policies were - to strengthen the soviet working class and its alliance with the peasantry through a policy of industrialisation, to curb the tendency towards bureaucratisation of the party and the state, to project a consistently revolutionary line for the Communist International. Winning widespread support within the party and the working class, the Left Opposition was answered by a huge campaign of slander and ultimately repression at the hands of the Stalin faction. The main leader of the Left Opposition, Leon Trotsky, was exiled in 1928 after the expulsion of the Trotskyists from the Communist International and its parties round the world. The International Left Opposition sought to be re-admitted to the Communist International. They maintained that given internal democratic discussion the Communist International could be won to a correct revolutionary policy. Only after the disastrous defeat of the German working class by the Nazis in 1933 and the complete failure of the German Communist Party to lead a fight, or of the Communist International to admit the errors which led to the defeat, did the Left Oppositionists conclude that the Third International was dead as a revolutionary force and proclaim the need for a new International to carry forward the policy of revolutionary marxism.

The Fourth International

Several years of experience were necessary before the Trotskyists on an International scale were able to organise a congress at which the Fourth International was formally launched. In 1938 delegates from a dozen countries met in Europe and approved a document, "The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International," which summarises the experience of the working class and its rev-

olutionary vanguard and projects a programme which can lead the workers from the present stage of the class struggle to the conquest of power. The Fourth International was formed in the shadow of the coming world war after a period of terrible working class defeats. In the war years the Trotskyists suffered severe losses at the hands of the fascists and the stalinists. Even in democratic America the Trotskyist leaders were imprisoned for their ideas. And the movement lost its ablest leader when Trotsky himself was murdered by a stalinist agent in 1940. Despite such repression, the programme of the Fourth International continued to win adherents and after the war an international centre was established in Europe.

In 1953 a heated factional struggle within the Fourth International led to a split which lasted for ten years. The basis for the split is not gone into here. Suffice it to say that two public factions existed, the International Secretariat and the International Committee. By the early sixties it was evident that on most questions the two sides had come together and it was recognised that a separation could not be justified. The majority of the International Secretariat and the majority of the International Committee were in favour of re-uniting their forces. In 1963 a re-unification conference took place and approved a document, "The Dynamics of World Revolution Today," which brought the thinking of the world Trotskyist movement up to date in light of momentous events such as the Cuban and Hungarian revolutions.

On the side of the International Secretariat a grouping headed by Juan Posadas refused to join the reunified International. Posadas today is a figure on the lunatic fringe of left-wing politics in Latin America, advocating nuclear war by the Soviet Union against the capitalist states. On the side of the International Committee a minority led by the Socialist Labour League in Britain and the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste in France refused to join the unification. Since then the SLL and the OCI have split from one another. The SLL, headed by Gerry Healy, has been transformed into the Workers Revolutionary Party. It has degenerated to the extent that it denounces former comrades of the International Committee as stalinist agents. The OCI whose best known leader is Pierre Lambert, is involved in an international grouping (the Organising Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International) which after many years of opposition has now entered into discussion with the Fourth International.

The Fourth International Today

Since re-unification the Fourth International has made significant progress. Over 80% of those claiming to be Trotskyists round the world are now organised within its ranks. The International has swelled its ranks to include sections and sympathising groups in over 60 countries. The radicalisation of youth on a world scale, the new rise of workers struggles and the development of the womens liberation movement have all brought fresh forces to the Fourth International, enabling it to develop its analysis and programme and to deepen its implantation among the oppressed. For a time the French section was able to produce a daily newspaper. By 1977 a number of sections which had suffered splits in the last few years were able to unite their forces and greatly increase their implantation and influence - Spain, Mexico, Canada, Australia.

The highest authority in the Fourth International is the World Congress, composed of delegates elected by the national sections. In its resolutions the Congress sets out the current thinking of the movement on the world political situation. It is also the highest body of appeal in any organisational or disciplinary disputes. The World Congress elects an International Executive Committee which is empowered to act in the name of the International between World Congresses. The IEC elects from among its members the United Secretariat which is charged with carrying out the policies and tasks decided upon by the IEC. A Control Commission is elected by World Congress to investigate any organisational disputes which are submitted to it or which it feels needs investigation. Under the rules of democratic centralism all posts in the Fourth International are subject to election and their incumbents subject to recall if a sufficient proportion of the membership is dissatisfied. The rules of the International, based on the best traditions of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Int-

ernationals are published as Statutes of the Fourth International. These statutes may be altered only by decision of the World Congress. The aim of the statutes is to provide a framework in which the views of the majority prevail while ensuring that minorities are able to play a full part in the International and have the opportunity to win over the majority.

THE INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP

The re-unification of the Fourth International in 1963 did not bring together the bulk of the Trotskyist forces in Britain. At that time most of them were organised in the Socialist Labour League which refused to join in the reunified International. The United Secretariat therefore only had a few dozen adherents in this country and these few were not even in the same organisation. Despite the efforts of the International leadership it proved impossible to unify the rival groupings. By 1965 a short-lived fusion of the groups had ended in a split. From this split emerged the Revolutionary Socialist League which limited its activity to Labour Party circles, and the International Group which attempted activities on a somewhat broader scale. Both groups were recognised as sympathising organisations of the Fourth International by the United Secretariat.

Over the next few years the International Group (or International Marxist Group as it became) strengthened its ties to the Fourth International, in particular by its vigorous defence of the Vietnamese revolution, which was the major campaign of the Trotskyists on the international level. The Revolutionary Socialist League, in contrast, moved rapidly away from the International. By 1969 at the Ninth World Congress of the Fourth International the abandonment of the International by the Revolutionary Socialist League was noted and the International Marxist Group was recognised as the official section in Britain.

By 1969 the IMG had become well known on the left and gained special respect as an internationalist organisation, mainly through its work on the International War Crimes Tribunal and the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign. Since then the IMG has done consistent work in the women's liberation movement, in support of the Irish struggle against British imperialism, against racism and in international solidarity campaigns. It has helped to establish a number of class struggle tendencies within the trade unions and in the student movement, and has campaigned for the creation of a united revolutionary organisation as against the sectarianism of the far left in Britain. It has made significant progress in terms of the experience of its members and leadership, its number of full-time workers, range of publications and its standing on the left.

The IMG is not a party in the sense that it can lead masses of workers in any political struggle. It only claims that its programme, its aims and proposals for action, indicate the road along which the workers and the oppressed will have to travel in order to win victory in the class struggle. For the IMG to become a party it is necessary for this programme to be accepted and acted upon by millions. There is a long way to go. Concretely the IMG is faced with the challenge of linking its programme with wider circles of the working class and with unifying with those forces which are revolutionary marxist or who are moving towards revolutionary marxism.

The Organisation of the International Marxist Group

The IMG is organised along the lines of democratic centralism. Democratic in that there is full freedom of discussion in formulating the policies of the group and electing its leadership. Centralist in the sense that once policy has been decided by majority vote and the leadership elected to carry out this policy it is the duty of all members to carry this policy. The highest body of the IMG is its National Conference, composed of delegates elected by the membership after a period of discussion and debate. It decides the general lines of policy for the period ahead and elects the Central Committee. When there are important differences of opinion these differences are reflected within the the incoming Central Committee. The National Conference is the highest court of appeal within the IMG on any matter of discipline. It also elects a Control Commission, traditionally composed of members with long experience and a reputation for impartiality, to conduct inquiries.

ies into any disputes of an organisational or disciplinary character, to make reports and recommend action to be taken.

The Central Committee meets several times a year to decide the tactics necessary to carry out the decisions of the National Conference and to take decisions on new questions arising since the last Conference. It elects from among its members a sub-committee, the Political Committee, which is charged with responsibility for week to week implementation of policy, preparing Central Committee meetings and speaking on behalf of the whole group between Central Committee meetings. Other sub-committees of the Central Committee are organised on specific areas of activity, trade union, women, education etc. - to report to the Central Committee. The basic unit of the IMG is the branch which is generally organised on a geographical basis.

CANDIDATE MEMBERSHIP

There are many people looking for revolutionary solutions to the crisis. Faced with the imperialist economic crisis, brutal dictatorships propped up by imperialism, the threat of nuclear war, and stalinist repression, many thousands of militants are looking for a revolutionary alternative. Particularly among youth and women this radicalisation is very pronounced. Yet because of the discrediting of the Communist Party on the one hand and on the other the deep sectarianism of the far left there appears to these militants to be no credible alternative. In particular few have the confidence to join a revolutionary organisation in that situation.

To be a revolutionary marxist does entail a genuine commitment to struggle at all times against every form of exploitation and oppression, and to fight actively in the interests of the working class. Such a commitment and understanding does not come spontaneously. Nor does it come from simply reading books. It can only be really developed through involvement inside a revolutionary organisation, with the experience and training that brings.

The opportunities for building a revolutionary international and a revolutionary organisation in this country are enormous. Every day brings further evidence of its necessity. The Fourth International and the International Marxist Group are committed to building such organisations in the interests of the working class and the oppressed. The IMG has expanded significantly over the past period. It now has regional centres in four cities. Its publications have considerably increased their circulation.

Candidate membership has been introduced for all new recruits to the organisation as another aspect of our expansion and growth. All those sympathisers who are in basic agreement with our basic programme and have a commitment actively to aid in the building of a revolutionary organisation are welcome to join the organisation. They join the local branch of the IMG as a candidate member for a period of six months. They have to pay a minimum membership due and are asked to pledge a regular amount on top of that according to their circumstances. Candidate membership is a period of training and learning. The level of commitment and education which is expected during this time is less than that for full members of the organisation. Candidate membership is a period when new members can learn about the organisation and how it operates, and can determine whether or not they want to raise their level of commitment and involvement to that of full members. The IMG aims to use this period to train new members in our programme and to help them to increase their commitment.

Candidate members have full voice in all internal discussion. They join their local branch and participate fully in the internal life of the branch. They do not have all the same rights as full members in the same way as they are not expected to carry out the same duties. In particular candidate members may only have consultative votes in internal discussion and decision-making. During the period of candidate membership the emphasis is on education and training. All candidate members must go through and complete the new

members' education guide which is included in this bulletin. They will also normally be shown by members of their branch other elementary skills for revolutionaries - how to speak in public meetings, how to write a leaflet, typing and duplicating etc. After the six month period of candidate membership the status of the candidate members will be discussed in the branch. The branch as a whole will decide whether the candidate member should become a full member or not based on the branch's and the comrade's own assessment of their period of candidate membership.

INTRODUCTION TO EDUCATION GUIDE

This short study guide has been produced by the National Education Department of the International Marxist Group. It is aimed primarily at education classes for new members, though it may prove useful for private study by individual members.

We feel that the best format for these classes is a regular meeting of a group of comrades going through the whole education programme together. Consistent attendance at each class is very important. Such an approach will help to provide a common educational experience for the comrades who intend using the study guide. The size of the class will obviously vary according to the experience of each branch, but more than a dozen comrades is probably too many and a group well over this size should be divided if possible.

The questions posed with each topic are geared towards drawing out the main theoretical and political points. They are by no means exhaustive. The questions are simply intended as an aid to the discussion and to the comrade leading the discussion. They should be supplemented by historical and contemporary examples of the application of marxist method. The discussion leaders should discuss with each group of comrades in the class the exact format, but a short introduction is suggested to initiate discussion.

It is very important that comrades read the suggested material before, during and after the classes. We have tried to keep the suggested reading material to a minimum with clear proposals how to follow up each class.

The education programme has been constructed around the book:

Ernest Mandel: From Class Society to Communism (published by Ink Links) £1.95

It is ESSENTIAL that all comrades undertaking the course have a copy of this book. We also strongly urge comrades to acquire a copy of:-

Leon Trotsky: The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International.

This can be obtained very cheaply in pamphlet form (15P), but the most useful copy is the Pathfinder Press edition in "The Transitional Programme for Socialist Revolution."

Finally, very many of the short pamphlets suggested for different classes are to be found in:

Marx and Engels : Selected Works. Vol.1 (published by Lawrence and Wishart) £1.50

All the above titles, as well as those recommended for supplementary and further reading, are obtainable on order from the Other Bookshop, 328 Upper St. London N1, or from some other booksellers. Prices quoted here are subject to change.

The National Education Department welcomes comments on this guide and suggestions for future publications.

Session 1. Social Inequality and class struggle

Subject matter: Classes emerge at a distinct point in the evolution of human society on a particular economic foundation. The social inequality which leads to the formation of social classes is accompanied by social struggle and the division of society is maintained or overthrown by means of struggle between the social classes. The modern capitalist class plays a unique role in human progress. Class division plays a decisive role in human development. A classless society cannot be created at will at any time but requires a certain economic basis.

Essential reading: Ernest Mandel - From Class Society to Communism.
Ch.1 and 2 pp35-46.

Supplementary reading: Marx and Engels - Manifesto of the Communist Party.
(Pamphlet 15p or in Marx-Engels Selected Works-
MESW- pp35- 46.)

Questions for discussion:

1. Why is a permanent division of labour or the appearance of social classes impossible in primitive economic conditions ?
2. How is the division of labour made possible and what is the connection between the division of labour and the formation of social classes ?
3. Why does the division of society into social classes constitute a necessary stage in human progress ?
4. Under what conditions is it possible to re-establish equality in society ?
5. What happens if these conditions do not exist and attempts are made to re-establish equality ?
6. Why does the capitalist system lead to an enormous increase in economic production in such a short time compared to societies dominated by previous ruling classes ?

Further reading: Frederick Engels - Anti-Duehring. Parts 2 and 3.
(Published by Lawrence and Wishart at 45p.)

Session 2.

The State

Subject matter: The state is not an eternal human institution but arises at a particular stage in human development. The state is an instrument of class domination. Both violence and ideology have a role to play in class rule. States based on a particular class society can have different forms. Therefore a political revolution need not change the class relations in a given society. Democracy is one form of the capitalist state. A workers state is organised differently from the bourgeois state and may be more democratic than the most democratic capitalist state.

Essential reading: Ernest Mandel - From Class Society to Communism.
Ch.3 pp25-32 and Ch.10 pp 90-98.

Supplementary reading: Ernest Mandel - The Marxist Theory of the State.
(Pathfinder 35p.)

Questions for discussion:

1. What is the distinction between society or the community as a whole and the state ?
2. When does the state become necessary in society ?
3. What is wrong with the notion that the state is the result of a 'social contract' between the individuals who make up society ?
4. Why is the ideology of the ruling class the dominant ideology ?
5. What is the difference between a social revolution and a political revolution ? Do they always go hand in hand ?
6. Why do marxists maintain that both parliamentary democracy and fascism are forms of the dictatorship of the capitalist class ?
7. Why is the role of the state as an instrument of class rule more obvious in times of crisis and instability ?
8. Why is a workers' state necessary after the overthrow of the capitalist state ? Why cannot the working class simply abolish the state altogether ?
9. What measures do marxists advocate to ensure that the workers' state is more democratic than the bourgeois state ?

Further reading: V.I.Lenin - The State and Revolution. (Pamphlet 15p)

Subject Matter: Capital first appears in the sphere of circulation of commodities then enters into production, buying up labour power as a commodity. Competition leads to concentration of capital which leads in turn to monopoly capitalism and imperialism.

Essential reading: From Class Society to Communism.
Ch. 4, 5, 6, 7, pp 33-72.

Supplementary reading: K. Marx - Wages, Price and Profit. (in MESW pp185-266 or as pamphlet 20p)

Questions for discussion:

1. Capitalism existed in societies which were essentially non-capitalist. What form did capital take in those societies ?
2. Why is the distinction between 'selling in order to buy' and 'buying in order to sell' essential to the understanding of capitalism ?
3. What are the pre-conditions for capital entering the sphere of production ? How were these conditions brought about ?
4. What is the distinction between labour and labour power ? Why is the distinction important ?
5. What is surplus value ? How do the capitalists attempt to raise the rate of surplus value ?
6. Why does the rate of profit tend to fall ?
7. In what ways does the imperialist stage of capitalism differ from the stage in which the Spaniards, Portuguese and later the British carved out huge colonial territories ?
8. 'The industrially more advanced country shows the less developed only the image of its own future.' - Marx
In what ways does the imperialist development of capitalism force us to modify Marx's statement ?
9. What effects has imperialism had on the workers and poor peasants of the 'under-developed countries' ?

Further reading: Ernest Mandel - Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory.

Session 5.

Reformism

Subject matter: Reformism is based on the experience of the working class as well as on the interests of privileged layers of workers. Reformism turns to counter-revolution whenever the capitalist system is seriously threatened.

Essential reading: From Class Society to Communism. Ch.8 and 9 and Ch 11
pp 99-101.

Supplementary reading: Rosa Luxemburg - Reform or Revolution.(Pathfinder)

Questions for discussion:

1. Does the growth of trade unions mean that the workers are becoming more conscious of their interests on a political level?
2. What role does the co-operative movement play in working class struggle?
3. What developments within the capitalist system at the end of the last century tended to dampen the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat ?
4. Why do the leaders of the trade unions and the labour parliamentarians tend to be conservative even when the rank and file are tending towards revolution ?
5. Why is it incorrect for working class leaders to join a bourgeois government ?
6. Why was the outbreak of war in 1914 the decisive test for the Second International ?
7. How did the opportunist leaders of the Second International attempt to explain their policy of defence of the fatherland as being in the interests of the working class ?

Further reading: Novack, Frankel and Felman:- The First Three Internationals.
(Pathfinder)

Session 6. Revolution and the Vanguard Party.

Subject matter: Although capitalist society enters its period of general crisis with the imperialist war and the opening of the socialist revolution in 1917, it is only periodically that the political crisis in one or more countries affords the working class the opportunity to take power. The proletarian revolutions unlike other revolutions is a highly conscious process. The working class as a whole cannot arrive spontaneously at revolutionary socialist conclusions. A revolutionary party, grounded in an understanding of the historic process, functions as the memory and the 'brain' of the class, co-ordinating the experience of different layers with the goal of the seizure of power.

Essential reading: Ernest Mandel - From Class Society to Communism.
Ch.9 esp. pp 85-89. Ch.13 pp 122-123.

Leon Trotsky - The Death Agony of Capitalism and the tasks of the Fourth International. Sections entitled - The objective prerequisites for a socialist revolution, the Proletariat and its leaderships, and Under the Banner of the Fourth International.

Questions for discussion:

1. If the chief obstacle to the socialist revolution is the leadership of the proletariat does this mean that the situation is always revolutionary?
2. Why cannot the working class spontaneously reach political class consciousness?
3. What are the three general conditions for a socialist revolution?
4. What is the relationship of the vanguard party to the masses in the unions and the soviets?
5. Why do revolutionaries have a separate organisation? Is this consistent with Marx and Engels' statement in the Manifesto that the Communists do not form a separate party of the proletariat opposed to other working class parties?
6. A vanguard party is organised along democratic-centralist lines. Why is democracy essential for centralism and vice versa?
7. Does the role of the vanguard party come to an end after the socialist revolution?

Further reading: Ernest Mandel - The Leninist Theory of Organisation.

James P. Cannon - The Vanguard Party. (In Fifty Years of Revolution.)

Subject matter: Stalinism as a political trend in the international workers movement arises as the expression of the interests of a privileged layer in the first workers state. The isolation of the revolution in a backward country explains how this layer consolidated its grip. The theory of 'Socialism in one Country' is a break with basic marxist theory. The practice of stalinism is not only an obstacle to the world revolution but weakens the USSR in the face of capitalist pressures. The material basis for stalinism is being eroded.

Essential reading: Ernest Mandel - From Class Society to Communism.
Ch.12 pp 108-121.

Supplementary reading: Leon Trotsky - Stalinism and Bolshevism.(Pamphlet)

Questions for discussion:

1. Why did the Bolsheviks maintain that the speedy extension of the revolution to one or more of the advanced countries was necessary for the healthy development of the revolution in Russia ?
2. What were the main features of the post civil war period which enabled the bureaucracy to usurp political power from the workers ?
3. What were the negative features of the New Economic Policy which the Bolsheviks adopted in 1921 ? How did these features strengthen the bureaucracy ?
4. Why is the Soviet bureaucracy described as a caste and not a class ?
5. What were the main elements of the programme put forward by the Left Opposition to combat the degeneration of the revolution ?
6. What features of stalinist rule in the USSR point towards a restoration of capitalism ? What are the counteracting tendencies ?
7. Why is the crisis of the stalinist regimes deepening at the present period ?

Further reading: Leon Trotsky - The Revolution Betrayed.

Victor Serge - From Lenin to Stalin(Pathfinder)

Session 8.

Permanent Revolution

Subject matter: The uneven and combined development of capitalism in the imperialist phase makes for the possibility and the necessity for the working class to come to power even in the economically backward countries. In backward countries the native ruling classes have shown themselves incapable of completing the tasks of national independence and agrarian reform. In the event of revolution it is permanent in that on seizing power the workers in these countries must press forward along a socialist road, and in the sense that the revolution tends to spread internationally and towards the renewal of all social relationships. If it does not it suffers a regression as in the Soviet Union.

Essential reading: Ernest Mandel - From Class Society to Communism.
Ch. 11 pp99-108.

Supplementary reading: Permanent Revolution, Basic Postulates (from Permanent Revolution - Leon Trotsky.)

Questions for discussion:

1. How does the world imperialist system affect the development of the colonial and semi-colonial countries? Why do national peculiarities reflect uneven development?
2. What role does the national bourgeoisie play in these countries?
3. Why cannot these countries progress to capitalist democracy as in the Western European countries?
4. Why are the peasants as a class unable to seize and hold power in their own interests? Why are the peasants not a revolutionary class when they can become a revolutionary force?
5. Why does the democratic revolution 'grow over' directly into the socialist revolution? Why were there two revolutions in Russia?
6. In what respects does the revolution remain permanent after the seizure of power by the working class?
7. Since Russia was at a low stage of capitalist development and hardly ripe for socialist advance, were the Bolsheviks justified in taking and holding state power?
8. Why is "the completion of the socialist revolution within national limits.....unthinkable"?

Further reading: Leon Trotsky - The Permanent Revolution. (Pathfinder)

Subject Matter: On a world scale the material basis exists for an advance to socialism. Periodically the capitalist political system undergoes a crisis giving the working class an opportunity to overthrow it. Time and again the masses rise in rebellion. Capitalism only survives because of the inadequate leaderships of the working class, principally the stalinists and social democrats. Only the creation of a consistent revolutionary leadership can overcome the crisis of humanity. The purpose of the Transitional Programme is to mobilise the masses in struggle and show the workers through their own experience that the system must be overthrown. The programme must be constantly up-dated to take account of new developments in the three sectors of the world revolution.

Essential reading: Ernest Mandel - From Class Society to Communism.
Ch 13 pp 122-130

Supplementary reading: Leon Trotsky - The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International, "The Transitional Programme."

Questions for discussion:

1. Why does Trotsky claim that "the world political system as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of leadership of the proletariat" ?
2. Is revolutionary leadership enough to make the socialist revolution ?
3. How does the Transitional Programme differ from the reformists' minimum and maximum programmes ? Why is the programme so important to the revolutionary party ?
4. What is the aim of transitional demands ? Aren't they way above the heads of the masses ?
5. What does the Transitional Programme say about the relationship between the working class and the oppressed layers ?
6. What are the different sectors of the world revolution ? Is the Transitional Programme relevant to them all ?
7. Why does the evolution of capitalist society compel workers to think "internationally" ? Does this mean that they tend automatically towards proletarian internationalism ?
8. Why is an international party necessary ? Why then did Trotsky lay such stress on the building of national parties in what is an international programme ?
9. Why was the Fourth International formed when the Third and Second Internationals already existed ?

Further reading: Novack, Franckel and Feldman - The First Three Internationals.

Subject matter: While revolutionaries remain a minority within the working class they can only reach the masses in alliances with other organisations and forces. Entry into alliances must be based on the principle of class independence of the working class and on no restriction on the right of revolutionaries within the alliance to argue for their own views. The united front not only enables the working class to bring its united strength to bear against the class enemy but also enables the revolutionaries to draw nearer to the masses led by the reformists and win them away from their class collaborationist leadership. The highest form of the united front is the soviet or workers council which includes all tendencies in the working class and within which the revolutionaries and their opponents struggle for leadership.

Essential reading: Ernest Mandel - From Class Society to Communism.
Ch.14 pp 131-142.

Supplementary reading: Socialist Workers Party(USA).Education for Socialism
Bulletin - Alliances and the Revolutionary Party.

Questions for discussion:

1. Why is the working class politically heterogeneous ?
2. What political basis should united fronts with reformists and stalinists be around ?
3. Why does the united front include the leaders of the reformist parties ? What is wrong with the concept of the united front from below ?
4. Why is the united class front so important ?
5. What is different about the popular front ? How did it originate ?
6. What underlying political views on the nature of the epoch does popular frontism rest upon ?
7. Why do soviets "crown the programme of transitional demands" ?
8. What role do workers councils and workers self organisation play in raising the consciousness of the masses ?

Further reading: Leon Trotsky - The Struggle against Fascism in Germany.