

. . . ' (p12). And, turning to May 1968, he recognises that 'there was not a really revolutionary situation, since the Gaullist regime was not so paralysed that it could not go on ruling. At no point did de Gaulle lose the capacity for political initiative' (p7).

To all this we can only say, Bravo! With a little more time and a bit more audacity, he will hopefully find his way to making further inroads into the Trotskyist litany of allegedly betrayed revolutions.

Taking another step in the same direction, Mandel now describes as 'analytically absurd' and 'demonological' the proposition that the class struggle in the advanced capitalist countries in the twentieth century can be 'reduced purely to the . . . claim that 'the workers tend spontaneously to be revolutionary but the reformist traitors prevent them from making the revolution' (p59). Not wanting to disturb the more pious (but presumably less literate) comrades, he is careful not to mention that this demonological absurdity is enshrined in the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International, drafted by Trotsky himself in 1938, which declares: 'The multi-millioned masses again and again enter the road of revolution. But each time they are blocked by their own conservative bureaucratic machines'².

The Third World is the subject of the next interview. Mandel undertakes the thankless task of defending, in the face of historical experience, Trotsky's version of 'permanent revolution', according to which 'the victory of the democratic revolution (in underdeveloped countries) is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat'³. Now wrapped in the mantle of Trotskyist orthodoxy, he reproves any talk of 'phases', let alone 'stages', in the revolutionary process, as they introduce 'some notion of time sequences, which is a wrong approach'.

This interview also includes some interesting discussion of economic developments and prospects for Third World countries. However Mandel is claiming too much when he says that, in 1960, he was one of the first people to take note of 'a new attitude by imperialist capital towards the partial industrialisation . . . of a certain number of underdeveloped countries' (p71). In point of fact, some thirty-two years earlier, such a thesis was being argued by British Communists at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern!

In the third interview, Mandel defends the traditional Trotskyist view that the Soviet Union and other socialist countries are 'bureaucratised workers' states' — 'a form of the dictatorship of the proletariat' — of a 'hybrid character', representing transitional societies standing between capitalist and

socialist modes of production. He does not attempt to meet the obvious objection that it is curiously confusing and un-Marxist to affix this label both to the USSR today and to the qualitatively different, underdeveloped, mixed economy existing in Soviet Russia sixty years ago, which really was a transitional hybrid.

The most forced apologetics are to be found in the final interview. Mandel tried to defend the Trotskyist line throughout the second world war, of denying that, because of the nature of the fascist powers, there could be any element of justice in the war fought by the Western capitalist democracies, even when they were allied to the Soviet Union. The belief that their victory was the top priority was, Mandel asserts, 'the major danger for revolutionaries in the second world war' (pp 165-7).

Whilst admitting that Trotsky made some 'faulty short-term predictions', Mandel makes some quite amazing claims for his 'extraordinary lucidity about the long-term tendencies of history'. Answering his Trotskyist interviewers' point that nearly all Trotsky's predictions about the aftermath of the war turned out to be false, he argues that Trotsky was right in forecasting that neither the fascist dictators nor the colonial empires would survive (172). But he conceals from the reader that Trotsky's whole argument was that both the struggle for colonial liberation, and the overthrow of Hitler and Mussolini 'will occur only under the leadership of the Fourth International'⁴. In arguing that Trotsky foresaw the new rise of world revolution he omits to state that Trotsky decried the role of Communist Parties throughout the world as 'cynically counter-revolutionary' and declared that only the Fourth International could resolve 'the crisis of the proletarian leadership'⁵. Neither Mandel, nor any other Trotskyist has yet adequately faced up to the implications of the fact that all the post-war socialist revolutions (except for Cuba) were led at every stage by these 'counter-revolutionary' Communist Parties — whereas more than four decades after the formation of the Fourth International even the largest of the component bodies into which it has split has, in Mandel's words, 'yet to achieve a breakthrough in any country' (p226).

Monty Johnstone

¹ *New Left Review* 47, p48; E Mandel, *From Class Society to Communism* (London 1977), p123.

² *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (SLL, London 1970), p13.

³ L Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*, New York 1965, p153.

⁴ *Death Agony*, *op cit*, pp43,47.

⁵ *Ibid*, p47.

REVOLUTIONARY MARXISM TODAY

Ernest Mandel

NLB 1979 236pp pb£4.75

This book consists of four extended interviews (two of which have appeared less fully in *New Left Review*) with the chief theoretician of the main Trotskyist Fourth International. The interviewers are themselves leading members of that organisation. The intention is to present 'a comprehensive synopsis' of its analysis of the contemporary world scene.

The first interview starts off predictably by rejecting the idea that the advanced capitalist societies of Western Europe require a strategy for the conquest of working class power different from the model of the Russian Revolution of October 1917 with Soviets, dual power and insurrection. Indeed, what Mandel calls the 'Leninist schema' — defined as the strategy of *State and Revolution* (1917) and the first four congresses of the Communist International (1919-22) — is today, in his view, 'much more applicable' in these countries 'than ever it was in Russia'.

However, in answering questions on specific historical situations, he makes a significant shift from certain traditional Trotskyist positions that he was still affirming as recently as 1977. Previously he held that 'there was a revolutionary situation in France in 1936 and in 1944-47' and that a 'victorious socialist revolution' would have been objectively possible there in May 1968 (as 'in Great Britain in 1919-20, in 1926, in 1945!')¹. He now accepts that the 'partial development of consciousness' of the striking French workers of 1936 did not enable the situation to develop beyond 'a preliminary, preparatory stage' (p10). Hence, he tells us, Trotsky's proclamation at the time that 'the French revolution has begun' was 'not false(!), but rather incomplete'. Mandel, aware how dangerous it can be even to go that far in Trotskyist circles, adds boldly: 'No doubt I will be accused of revisionism on this score, but that does not bother me!' (pp9-11).

On the period of the Liberation he now says: 'I do not think that an immediate struggle for power was possible in countries like France as soon as the Nazi front collapsed. Nor do I think that we can treat as insignificant the presence of American troops