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MICHAEL S. FOX

## Ante Ciliga, Trotskii, and State Capitalism: Theory, Tactics, and Reevaluation during the Purge Era, 1935–1939

The Moscow Trials forced the international anti-Stalinist Left to reconsider its most fundamental truths. The old, rigid categories of capitalism and socialism were no longer certain; a new urgency accompanied the question of where the revolution had gone astray. Many of the most outspoken anti-Stalinists searching for new answers had been either adherents or sympathizers of Trotskii. For many of these former staunch supporters, Trotskii's theoretical middle ground—at the same time hostile to the Stalinist bureaucracy but defensive of the land of socialized production—was no longer tenable. One after another, they broke with Trotskii.<sup>1</sup> Yet this entire movement of reevaluation in Trotskii's intellectual entourage either has not been fully explored in discussions centering on Trotskii's views or, in a certain Trotskyist tradition, has been dismissed as a simple move to the Right.<sup>2</sup> One of the best ways to understand both the roots and the context of such an intellectual upheaval is to focus on the key individuals. Ante Ciliga, a leading Croatian Communist, who developed close ties with Trotskii, only to break with him in the late 1930s, exemplifies the many levels on which the new split in oppositionist ranks occurred.

First, Ciliga was prominent among those dissident Trotskyists who expounded new theories of state capitalism and a new Soviet bureaucratic class to explain the Stalinized state. Ciliga's theory of state capitalism, set forth most prominently in his 1938 memoir *Au pays du grand mensonge* but also developed in various writings between 1936 and 1939, caused a furor in Trotskyist circles because it graphically depicted the Soviet bureaucracy as a new exploiting class. In addition, Ciliga eagerly participated in the purge era attempt to explain the Stalinist counterrevolution through the historical search for Bolshevism's original sins. In proper context Ciliga's discussion of the course of Soviet history (including participation in a heated international polemic in 1937–1938 between Trotskii and his critics over the Kronstadt Rebellion) makes clear some results of the new theories propounded about the Soviet system. Finally, Ciliga's own personal and tactical disagreements with Trotskii were influential. Ciliga's collaboration with Trotskii in 1935 and 1936, and the subsequent break that deepened over time, profoundly affected Ciliga's political stance in this period. These three dimensions of Ciliga's developing position between 1935 and 1939—the theoretical, the historical, and the personal—are the basis for understanding the movement of reevaluation during the Moscow Trials as part of an integrated whole.

Ciliga's theory of state capitalism marks one important moment in the anti-Stalinist Left's intellectual confrontation with the emerging Stalinist society, for it contributed to a theoretical

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1. Prominent among them were Victor Serge, Max Eastman, James Burnham, and Ante Ciliga. By 1939 even the orthodox Max Shachtman could no longer defend the Soviet Union as a workers' state. See Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 435–443, 471–477; on Burnham and Eastman and their remarkable shift from the far Left to the far Right, see John Diggins, *Up From Communism: Conservative Odysseys in American Intellectual History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

2. The most complete description of the movement away from Trotskii still remains in Deutscher's *Prophet Outcast*, a book not inclined to take seriously those who questioned Trotskii; see, for example, 435–436.

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revolt against Trotsky's more orthodox views.<sup>3</sup> The idea of a new Soviet bureaucratic ruling class came to have resonance, resurfacing in works from James Burnham's *Managerial Revolution* to Milovan Djilas's *New Class*.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, socialists and anti-Stalinists in the 1940s and 1950s embraced the idea, so controversial to Trotskyists in the 1930s, that the Soviet Union was a new type of nonsocialist society.<sup>5</sup> Yet the innovators of these ideas in the 1930s, Ciliga included, did not produce highly sophisticated theories. Far more than most theories, Ciliga's notion of state capitalism was developed under the influence of experience and current events. Nurtured by his five and a half years in Stalin's political prisons, his idea came to fruition in the painful political impotence facing anti-Stalinist revolutionaries in France after 1935. The ideas Ciliga put forth are notable, then, not for their theoretical rigor but for the insight they give into the larger reevaluation.

Vilified in Moscow, Trotsky congratulated himself that he could still objectively discern the Soviet Union's socialist potentialities. Ciliga, however, shows how others of different political backgrounds and sensibilities rebelled against this intellectual course. While Trotsky seemingly equivocated, calling the Soviet Union a "contradictory society halfway between capitalism and socialism," Ciliga and others passionately preached that the workers' state had become something else entirely.<sup>6</sup> The new stance that this engendered could be conceived as the painful abandonment of previously held dogmas, or, alternatively, as a forerunner of the increasingly arid expositions of state capitalism of dissonant Trotskyists of a later period. In part, it was both these things, but it was also more. Those, like Ciliga, who critiqued the Soviet Union in the 1930s from an "ultraleft" position flavored by revolutionary syndicalism seemed less to be moving in a single political direction than to be searching, like others in this period, to transform the fundamental ways in which the Soviet Union was seen. Ciliga, moreover, is less related to later state capitalism theorists than to those oppositionist critics of the Soviet system who influenced him during his nine-year sojourn in the Soviet Union. He can, thus, be seen as a crucial link between older traditions in the revolutionary movement that gave birth to the new class arguments and the purge-era reevaluation in the west in which he took part.

Ante (Anton) Ciliga was born on the Istrian peninsula in Croatia in 1898, part of the territory ceded to Italy in 1920 by the Treaty of Rapallo. From 1905 to 1914 he went to school in Mostar in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where his uncle worked as an apothecary.<sup>7</sup> As a student in 1918, he joined the Social-Democratic party of Croatia-Slavonia. In 1920 he joined the Communist party of Yugoslavia (CPY) and soon became deeply involved in practical party work. In 1921 Ciliga led a peasant uprising near Pula, on the Istrian peninsula and, after its suppression, was forced to leave Italy. Between 1919 and 1921 he also agitated in Yugoslavia, Soviet Hungary, and Czechoslovakia; from 1922 to 1926 he worked in the CPY apparatus in Prague, Vienna, and Zagreb and found time to receive a doctorate in history. As the secretary of the party's regional committee for Croatia and then as a member of the politburo after April 1925, Ciliga was a prominent spokesman in the party's left wing.

In the first half of the 1920s, the Yugoslav party split into two broad right and left factions.

3. An illuminating account of the early exponents of state capitalism is in Daniel Bell, "The Post-Industrial Society: The Evolution of an Idea," *Survey* 17(Spring 1971), 102-147, but Bell only begins with "Bruno R.'s" 1939 theory of a worldwide bureaucratic class, and only mentions Ciliga and others as predecessors (142). Ciliga himself remains almost unmentioned in historical writing. See Deutscher, *Prophet Outcast*, 327, 436-437; Baruch Knei-Paz, *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 420 n.138, 556 n.203; Pierre Broué, *Trotsky* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), 703, 708, 816. Of special interest are lengthy interviews with Ciliga, "Dvadeseto stoljeće u životu Ante Ciliga," *Start* [Zagreb], esp. 535-537(July 22, August 5, and August 19, 1989).

4. See a book very relevant to this discussion, Michael M. Lustig, *Trotsky and Djilas: Critics of Communist Bureaucracy*, (New York: Greenwood, 1989).

5. Bell, "Post-Industrial Society," 143.

6. Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* (New York: Pathfinder, 1972), 255.

7. Ante Ciliga, *San kroz Europu u ratu, 1939.-1945.* (Rome: Na pragu sutrasnjice, 1978), 120.

Simply put, the left championed an underground Leninist party organization and, after 1922, a federalist program to aid national movements outside Serbia; the right favored a legal party and a nonfederalist, unified political system. Ciliga was militantly opposed to Serbian hegemony and supported extreme federalism, to the point of even proposing separate provincial armies. He strongly supported the non-Serbian national movements as important actors in a fight for national equality, and called for the CPY to negotiate formally with Stjepan Radić's agrarian populist Croat Peasant party, the dominant party of the Croat national opposition.<sup>8</sup> Upon his election to the politburo of the CPY, Ciliga was expelled from Yugoslavia; in May 1926 he became the party's representative to the Comintern's Balkan Secretariat. Later, when the left section of the CPY was replaced, he joined the Soviet Communist party, from which he was expelled as a Trotskyist in 1929. As he prepared to go to the Soviet Union in 1926, Ciliga was a seasoned organizer and polemicist. On 1 October 1926, filled with anticipation and excitement, Ciliga left for Moscow.<sup>9</sup>

In his autobiographical work, *Au pays du grand mensonge*, Ciliga vividly describes his growing sense of disappointment and shock as he watched conditions in the land of victorious socialism. Workers were stripped of rights, non-Bolshevik revolutionaries were persecuted, foreign Communists were pawns, and the ruling officials had adopted remarkably bourgeois habits.<sup>10</sup> A colony of about 120 Yugoslav Communists was in the Soviet Union doing party work at the time; many were in the Communist University of the National Minorities of the West, where Ciliga taught history of the CPY and the Yugoslav peoples. The Left of the Yugoslav Communists, Ciliga wrote, increasingly drew connections between the battle between Left and Right in the CPY, the Comintern, and the Soviet party. By 1929 a Trotskyist group opposed to Comintern policy was fully formed within the Yugoslav Communists.<sup>11</sup> Ciliga himself had been drawn increasingly toward the Left Opposition, and he entered into opposition work in the summer of 1928. Ciliga considered himself an ardent internationalist and strongly identified with the industrial proletariat, so he gravitated naturally toward Trotsky's position.<sup>12</sup>

Ciliga became a leader of the Trotsky supporters among the left Yugoslavs, and he soon got his first taste of official opprobrium. In February 1928 about forty of the Yugoslavs were reprimanded, twenty were sent into exile but kept their party cards, and three, including Ciliga, were suspended from the party for a year.<sup>13</sup> Ciliga was provoked into action. Ciliga and three close comrades, Mustafa Dedić, Stanko Dragić, and Stefan Heberling, formed a central body with two young Russian oppositionists. They drew up pamphlets, agitated in factories and among the Yugoslavs, and kept in touch with Trotsky's Moscow organization.<sup>14</sup> In October 1929 Ciliga moved to Leningrad, teaching at the Leningrad Communist Academy and living at the party house. An agent provocateur betrayed Ciliga's group when it stepped up propaganda for industrial strikes in May 1930. On 21 May 1930 Ciliga and his comrades were arrested, and Ciliga began a five and a half year odyssey of prisons, battles with the secret police, and ideological

8. On the Yugoslav Communist party's factional disputes in this period and on Ciliga's position, see Ivo Banac, *With Stalin Against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 45–60, esp. 56–57; Dušan Lukač, *Radnički pokret u Jugoslaviji i nacionalno pitanje 1918.–1941.* (Belgrade: Institut za Savremenu Istoriju, 1972), 139, 163, 171–172, 182, 185, 186–187, 215, 224.

9. Ciliga, *The Russian Enigma*, (London: Labour Book Service, 1940), 1–12. This is the translation of his 1938 *Au pays du grand mensonge*.

10. Ciliga, *Enigma*, 14, 48.

11. Ciliga has recently said of this group, "We received their material, but we were not a Trotskyist group. Trotskyists no, but the Yugoslav opposition yes." "Dvadeseto stoljeće u životu Ante Ciliga," *Start* 535 (22 July 1989), 74. The evidence does not fully bear this statement out, and in his memoirs Ciliga consistently referred to his faction as a Trotskyist group (*Enigma*, 54–55).

12. *Enigma*, 54; Ciliga to Dewey Commission, 3 July 1937, Trotsky Archive, Houghton Library, Harvard University (hereafter Trotsky Archive).

13. Ciliga, "V bor'be za vyezd iz SSSR: Iz Jugoslavskoi partii noi zhizni," unpublished Trotsky opposition circular, [1936 ?], Trotsky Archive.

14. *Enigma*, 56.

disputes; three years of this time were spent in the political "isolator" at Verkhne-Uralsk, and the rest in exile mainly in Krasnoiarsk. Since he was born in territory that had become part of Italy, Ciliga was able to overcome some scruples and take a passport from Fascist Italy. After several hunger strikes and an attempt at suicide, he was released by the GPU. On 3 December 1935 he crossed the Polish border. He was one of a very few oppositionist supporters of Trotskii to escape with his life.<sup>15</sup>

The evolution of Ciliga's views in prison is difficult to verify, because we have only his own accounts. Clearly, this period was crucial in his life. After four years as a Trotskyist, Ciliga underwent a transition to an ultraleft stance partially distanced from Trotskii. At the time he believed this transition to be temporary, but it had lasting effects. In the Verkhne-Uralsk *politizolator* a fierce polemic raged between organized groups of anti-Stalinists of all shades. According to Ciliga's own calculations, there were 120 Trotskyists, 16 to 17 Democratic Centralists (Decists), a dozen Mensheviks, Georgian SRs, and anarchists, and a handful of Left SRs, Right SRs, Armenian socialists, members of Miasnikov's Workers' Group, and Zionists. All published handwritten newspapers, signed their names to articles on theory, and held organized debates; political prison was the "freest place in Russia."<sup>16</sup> The Trotskyists, split mainly on the level of hostility toward the economic system Stalin was creating, were organized into left and right factions, with Ciliga on the left.

Years later, Ciliga consistently maintained that he left the Trotskyist organization in late 1932. This claim is borne out by his correspondence with Trotskii and Ciliga's self-description as an ultraleft in his article in Trotskii's *Biulleten' oppositsii* in 1936.<sup>17</sup> In later recollections, however, Ciliga always tried to exaggerate his differences with Trotskii and to portray them as beginning in 1932. At least some later disagreements were probably projected onto the past. On leaving the Soviet Union, Ciliga immediately made contact with Trotskii, took instructions from him and offered to visit him in Norway; he also began publishing a projected series of articles in Trotskii's journal and appeared ready to cooperate fully.<sup>18</sup> Only after he broke with Trotskii in the spring of 1936 did Ciliga further distance himself from Trotskii and begin to describe the events in 1932 as the result of deep ideological differences.

Ciliga's prison experiences led him to denounce the Soviet Union as a repressive entity of a new kind. For six months in 1932, the left Trotskyists in Verkhne-Uralsk debated the question of whether the Soviet Union remained a workers' state. Ciliga saw it as a socio-economic order hostile to the proletariat and questioned whether the economic foundations of October persisted. After a long period in which no word was received from Trotskii, the prisoners clandestinely read Trotskii's 1931 "Problems of the Development of the USSR" in the summer of 1932. This work in its first sentences explicitly defined the Soviet Union as a "proletarian state" and denounced the "waverings of petit-bourgeois ultraleftism" in shrinking from defending it; the article strongly strengthened the hand of the right Trotskyists in prison. The left Trotskyists were devastated. Ciliga, along with about ten "negators" who saw little socialism remaining in the Soviet Union, left the Trotskyist prison organization.<sup>19</sup>

15. Ciliga, "V bor'be za vyezd"; "Stalinskie repressii v SSSR," *Biulleten' oppositsii* 47 (January 1936), 1-4; *Enigma*, 135, 300-302; Ciliga, *Sibirie: Terre de l'exil et de l'industrialisation* (Paris: Plon, 1950), 296-297. This work is the second part of Ciliga's memoirs, written between 1938 and 1941; it is translated in a complete reprint of *Enigma* (London: Ink Links, 1979). Other Trotskii supporters who escaped Stalin's prisons included Victor Serge, the Russo-Belgian oppositionist released in 1936 through the pressure of prominent French intellectuals, and an Armenian worker, A. A. Davtian (pseud. Tarov), who escaped the USSR in 1934 and corresponded with Trotskii in 1935 (Broué, *Trotsky*, 816, 1048).

16. *Enigma*, 209-214; Ciliga, "Po sovetskim izoliatoram," *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik* 11 (12 June 1937), 4-8.

17. Trotskii to Ciliga, 10 January 1936, Trotsky Archive; Ciliga, "Stalinskie repressii."

18. Trotskii to Ciliga, 24 December 1935; Ciliga to Trotskii, 13 January 1936, Trotskii to Ciliga, 10 January 1936, Trotsky Archive.

19. Trotskii, "Problems of the Development of the USSR," *Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1930-31*, 14 vols. (New York: Pathfinder, 1973), 204; *Enigma*, 263, 271-272. On these debates and the political life of

Ciliga began to fraternize with Democratic Centralists (Decists)—who had by then reconsidered their commitment to a one-party state—and with followers of Gavriil Miasnikov in the Workers' Group, who preached that the worst features of capitalism had been retained in the USSR and whose slogans were for workers' control of production and multiparty workers' democracy.<sup>20</sup> Here, Decists, Mensheviks, Miasnikovtsy and at least one supporter of Trotskii already advocated variations of new class and state capitalism theories. All sorts of new ideas were voiced. A former Khar'kov economist from the Ukrainian Gosplan, Vladimir Densov, defended his theory of state capitalism in 1930–1931 in *Leninist Bolshevik*, the newspaper of the left Trotskyists, of which Ciliga was also an editor. A young Decist, Vladimir Smirnov, saw a worldwide triumph of bureaucracy and claimed communism was just radical fascism. He was expelled from the Decists in the isolator for his troubles. Under the tutelage of the Decists, Ciliga began to question whether the state ownership of production was ever progressive in the hands of the bureaucracy and even raised the heretical question of Lenin's complicity in the victory of bureaucratism.<sup>21</sup> In the defeated opposition, anti-Stalinism itself often smoothed over political differences. While ready to cooperate with Trotskii when Ciliga made his way to France in December 1935, he was emerging from an intellectual tradition that went significantly further than Trotskii had in condemning the origins and nature of the bureaucracy. The basis for conflict was already well established.

Making his way to Prague by way of Warsaw, Ciliga immediately contacted Trotskii, who was then in Norway, and apparently proposed to rally anti-Stalinist forces and begin a campaign for persecuted oppositionists in the USSR. Trotskii replied with a barrage of instructions and orders: Set up a committee, create a list of "our friends" in three languages, and prepare a memorandum. "The [memorandum] must be written in a calm, but firm tone. 'We' (the composers) are not enemies of the Soviet Union. . . . But the bureaucracy is a crime. . . . Demands: to create an international commission for the verification of acts of terror toward revolutionaries."<sup>22</sup> In a second letter, Trotskii spelled out the goal of the campaign: Ciliga must try to seek new allies and "semi-allies," especially among workers, to demand explanations from Moscow.<sup>23</sup>

Trotskii, with his usual perspicacity, discerned from the very first his potential differences with Ciliga: over the question of a blanket condemnation of the Soviet Union. Tactfully, Trotskii offered him "personal advice":

Do not engage in this question publicly [on the Soviet Union as a whole], since you will be playing a visible role in this campaign, and because (this is purely a personal opinion), since you have just escaped from the oppressive Stalinist bureaucracy, you must work toward a more "socialist" (objective) and less "moralistic" (subjective) evaluation of the whole contradictory regime in the USSR.<sup>24</sup>

Trotskii understood that the urge for a wholesale rejection of the Soviet Union sprang directly from Ciliga's experiences in Stalin's camps; but with his eye out for support, Trotskii hoped to set aside differences and draw Ciliga closer. "In what concerns us, we will be very patient (that I promise you in any case) with all your independent searchings and various directions," Trotskii assured him. "You will meet from our side full preparedness for friendly cooperation."<sup>25</sup>

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the Verkhne-Uralsk Prison, see Pierre Broué, "Les trotskystes en Union soviétique, 1929–1938," *Cahiers Leon Trotsky*, no. 6(1980): 38–40.

20. See Paul Avrich, "Bolshevik Opposition to Lenin: G. T. Miasnikov and the Workers' Group," *Russian Review* 43(January 1984): 1–29.

21. Ciliga, "A Talk with Lenin in Stalin's Prison," *Politics* 3(August 1946): 235–237 (this is the full version of the truncated chapter "Lenin, Too" in *Enigma*).

22. Ciliga's original letter to Trotskii apparently does not survive, but Trotskii's reply does: Trotskii to Ciliga, 24 December 1935.

23. Trotskii to Ciliga, 10 January 1936; Trotskii to Ciliga, 24 December 1935.

24. Trotskii to Ciliga, 24 December 1935.

25. Trotskii to Ciliga, 10 January 1936.

The attempt to set up a committee in Prague to aid persecuted oppositionists met with little success.<sup>26</sup> Ciliga also contacted friends in Yugoslavia to solicit help in publicizing the imprisonment of Yugoslav comrades and other persecuted oppositionists in the Soviet Union.<sup>27</sup> As Trotsky later told Victor Serge, most attempts at gaining releases had produced "not the slightest results."<sup>28</sup> This lack of success, however, apparently convinced Ciliga of the need to unify various left-wing sects under one anti-Stalinist banner. From Prague, Ciliga wrote, "on my own responsibility I undertook negotiations with Russian socialists on exile affairs."<sup>29</sup> This issue of tactics for the opposition led to Ciliga's first major conflict with Trotsky.

Trotsky first brought up the issue of the Mensheviks in connection with the campaign to aid persecuted revolutionaries. "A very serious question," he wrote, "how to deal with the Mensheviks? A commission of inquiry, when formed, must include them as well." In beginning stages of "agitation," however, Trotsky warned that Menshevik participation would be dangerous. In subsequent letters, Trotsky evidently changed his mind. To try at all to involve "powerless emigre groups with a discredited past and no future" would compromise Ciliga's effort. "A bloc with the Mensheviks would be a combination of opportunism and Don Quixote-ism."<sup>30</sup>

Ciliga, after moving on to Paris from Prague, was determined to spread his firsthand knowledge of repression in the Soviet Union as widely as possible. His initial report, "Stalinskie represii v SSSR," was published in the January 1936 *Biulleten' oppositsii*, with the expectation of a series of articles to follow. He also sent a circular to Trotskyists reporting on the experiences of the Yugoslav group.<sup>31</sup> In February, he published a similar account in the revolutionary syndicalist journal, *La Révolution prolétarienne*, and, thus, began a lengthy association with the independent radicals and syndicalists associated with that journal.<sup>32</sup> In April or May of 1936, Ciliga decided to publish another article about Soviet prisons in the Menshevik organ *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*—and soon found out that this was going beyond the limit of acceptable activities for a Trotsky sympathizer. A dispute over this article flared up among Ciliga, Trotsky, and Lev Sedov, Trotsky's son and close collaborator, who also edited the *Biulleten'* in Paris. Incredibly, the argument dragged out until spring of 1937 and soon widened to include basic questions of tactics for anti-Stalinist Bolshevism.

The initial circumstances of the dispute were banal. Ciliga claimed repeatedly that Sedov had agreed with Ciliga's publishing a factual article for the Mensheviks. Sedov denied this and maintained that Ciliga had agreed to put the article off until after he had finished his series for Trotsky's journal. Sedov at first issued an ultimatum, demanding that Ciliga withdraw his article for the Mensheviks; Trotsky, interned in Norway and forbidden to write anything in Russian, sent a letter in German to Ciliga warning that "you must choose between our international organization and the Mensheviks."<sup>33</sup> Ciliga, repeating the obvious point that he was far closer to Trotsky politically than to the Mensheviks, refused on principle to back down.

Matters became more serious when the July-August issue of the *Biulleten'* published a short notice, "On Comrade Ciliga's Articles," effectively banishing Ciliga from the fold:

In his article in the Bulletin, No. 49, Comrade Ciliga briefly stated his view of the USSR as the view of the "ultra-left" wing. At the same time he considers it possible to collaborate

26. Ciliga to Trotsky, 17 January 1936, Trotsky Archive.

27. Ciliga to Milan Čurčin, 11 February 1936, Nacionalna i sveučilišna biblioteka, Zagreb, Manuscripts Division, Uredništvo "Nove Evrope," R7446. I am indebted to Ivo Banac for the information from this archive cited in this article.

28. Trotsky to Serge, 30 July 1936, Trotsky-Sedov papers, Boris I. Nicolaevsky Collection, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California. Hereafter Trotsky-Sedov papers.

29. Ciliga to Trotsky, 17 January 1936.

30. Trotsky to Ciliga, 24 December 1935; Trotsky to Ciliga, 10 January 1936.

31. Ciliga, "V bor'be za vyezd."

32. Ciliga, "La répression en U.R.S.S.," *La Révolution prolétarienne*, 25 February 1936.

33. Trotsky to Ciliga, 6 May 1936, Trotsky Archive; Sedov to Ciliga, 4 December 1936, Trotsky-Sedov papers.

with the Mensheviks. The history of the revolutionary movement is full of examples of ultra-leftists who approached opportunism . . . from the other end of the spectrum. It goes without saying that our Bulletin cannot have any political collaborators in common with Menshevik publications.<sup>34</sup>

This disagreement seemed initially like another of the petty disputes that plagued Trotsky and his organization in the exile years, but, like some other such disputes, deep differences on substantive issues of organization lay behind the squabble. On 14 May Ciliga wrote Trotsky a long, sharply worded, somewhat rambling letter in which he quoted the young Trotsky and declared himself in favor of a united front of anti-Stalinist oppositionists, socialists, and anarchists. He insisted that his article represented a blow against the GPU tactic of *divide et impera*.

Of course, my article can only be a small blow. A terrible blow for Stalin and the Comintern would be a common uprising (*vystuplenie*) of Russian communist-oppositionists, socialists and anarchists—you and the Mensheviks in front of the European proletariat against the Stalinist repression. And, on the contrary, your coming out (*vystuplenie*) against even such a small blow to the Stalinists as my article gives Stalin . . . an invaluable victory.<sup>35</sup>

Ciliga chose not to mention why Trotsky in particular might be adamant against working with the Mensheviks—Trotsky had long been denounced as a Menshevik counterrevolutionary by his Russian opponents—but instead chastised Trotsky for treating the Mensheviks and SRs differently from non-Russian groups. Outlining the abysmal international situation, Ciliga announced that the time was ripe for common action, even among anti-Stalinists with major differences. He concluded on a conciliatory note, regretting the misunderstanding and assuring Trotsky he wished to work with him. “Respected Lev Davidovich! My sincere respect for you has not diminished.”<sup>36</sup>

While the dispute about the Mensheviks went on—Sedov and Ciliga traded accusations as late as December 1936—Ciliga began to wonder if the sectarian Trotskyists were significantly different from the Stalinist bureaucrats themselves. Ciliga tried to respond in the *Biulleten'*, but two double issues went by without publication of his letter.<sup>37</sup> In April 1937, he finally decided to publish his response in *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*. This time he brought his call for an anti-Stalinist united front into the open, proposing a common “manifesto to the international and Russian proletariat.” He charged that Trotsky had violated “the elementary demands of comradely loyalty” and implicitly linked him to the Stalinists: “I hope that soon the editors of the *Biulleten'* will . . . cease the practice of soviet-bureaucratic ‘democracy,’ that is, to say and write what you will about those who think differently, not giving them the chance to reply.”<sup>38</sup>

Ciliga's dispute with Trotsky, involving personal recriminations and an argument over a concrete political matter, was typical of many severings from Trotsky in the purge trial years. Victor Serge, for example, differed with Trotsky in his support for the Spanish Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista. What Serge called Trotsky's sectarianism raised a question that went beyond its polemical value: Was Trotsky not cut from the same cloth as the Stalinists themselves? Ciliga was now ready to develop his differences with Trotsky into a sustained theory and critique. “Trotsky and his supporters,” he wrote, “are too closely linked with the bureaucratic regime of the USSR to be able to conduct the struggle against this regime to its final consequences.” While remaining on cordial terms with Trotsky personally, Ciliga reserved his harshest polemical attacks for the basic similarity between Trotsky and the Soviet bureaucracy. “Trotsky, after all, is nothing but the theorist of the regime which Stalin is carrying out in prac-

34. “Po povodu statei tov. Tsiliga,” *Biulleten' oppositsii* 51 (July-August 1936): 16.

35. Ciliga to Trotsky, 14 May 1936, Trotsky Archive.

36. Ibid.

37. Sedov claimed technical difficulties prevented printing the letter after one issue, but a second issue appeared without it as well (Sedov to Ciliga, 4 December 1936, Trotsky-Sedov papers).

38. Ciliga, “Pis'mo v redaktsiiu,” *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik* 7–8 (27 April 1937): 23–24.

tice," he wrote at his most bitter.<sup>39</sup> This sentiment, linking Trotskyism with Stalinism, was undoubtedly strengthened or even caused by Ciliga's quarrel with Trotskii and Sedov. It was an idea that was also gaining in popularity during the Moscow trials.<sup>40</sup> Once this basic similarity was posited, all sorts of questions demanded answers: What was it in bolshevism or in Bolshevik bureaucracy or in Bolshevik morality that had ruined the revolution? The parallels between Ciliga's course and the experiences of Victor Serge are impossible to ignore. Like Ciliga, Serge objected to Trotskii's sectarianism, was castigated in *Biulleten' oppositsii*, and was compelled to reconsider the large questions of where the revolution had gone wrong. "In the hearts of the persecuted," Serge recorded, "I encountered the same attitudes as the persecutors."<sup>41</sup>

The vastly different backgrounds of Trotskii and Ciliga were most clear in Ciliga's objections to the fanatical Bolshevik *partiinost'* which Trotskyists often shared. In the Trotskyist opposition, he wrote, "a quotation from Trotsky had the value of proof. . . . All the rest were the Devil's own." Anyone who raised doubts about the nature of the Soviet Union as a workers' state risked being labelled an "extreme Left-wing petit-bourgeois Utopist," if not an outright counter-revolutionary.<sup>42</sup> Ciliga's sense of solidarity with those of other leftist tendencies and his stress on open debate eventually clashed with Trotskii's militancy.

Only after Ciliga had fallen out with Trotskii was he denounced and attacked within the Yugoslav party as a leading Trotskyist spy. After his return to the west, Ciliga had naturally renewed contacts in Yugoslavia. Few genuine Trotskyists were in that country, but a small group in Zagreb was centered on a Trotskii supporter named Mirko Kus-Nikolajev, who was apparently in touch with Ciliga.<sup>43</sup> In fact, Ciliga himself returned to Yugoslavia briefly in the fall of 1937 to find a Yugoslav publisher for his forthcoming autobiographical book. As soon as Ciliga crossed the Yugoslav border from his native Istria, he was picked up by the Yugoslav police, taken to Belgrade, and held in isolation for two months. He was accused of being a Trotskyist agent and questioned about his actions in the Communist party in the 1920s. Ciliga, in a letter to Milan Ćurčin, the editor of *Nova Evropa*, claimed that Yugoslav Communists had denounced him to the police.<sup>44</sup>

In fact, Ciliga's fierce anti-Stalinism and Trotskyist reputation had produced alarm in high levels of the Yugoslav party. Tito was informed of his journey to Yugoslavia and issued warnings about Ciliga's possible threat to the CPY. Tito wrote an all-out attack on Ciliga in June 1938 and branded him not merely the head of Yugoslav Trotskyism but an agent of the Gestapo, the Italian secret police, and an "ordinary fascist hireling."<sup>45</sup>

Despite Tito's charge that he was Trotskii's main agent in the Balkans, Ciliga spent the years after 1936 working out the questions initially raised in his dispute with Trotskii in that year. He completed *Au pays du grand mensonge* in 1937 and joined a group of independent radicals and syndicalists contributing to *La Révolution prolétarienne*. In this journal, he complemented writers like Serge and M. Yvon who were also seeking a less-sectarian alternative to the heritage

39. *Enigma*, 272, 273. Ciliga consulted Trotskii on drafts of his book, sent condolences on the death of Lev Sedov, and kept Trotskii informed of the anti-Trotskyist campaign in the Yugoslav Communist party (see Ciliga to Trotskii, 2 February 1937; Ciliga to Trotskii, 20 February 1938; Ciliga to Trotskii, 25 January 1938, Trotsky Archive).

40. Trotskii responded to such criticisms in "Their Morals and Ours," *New Internationalist*, June 1938, 163-173.

41. Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary, 1901-1941*, trans. Peter Sedgwick (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 349. Ciliga sent to Serge a copy of his 14 May 1936 letter to Trotskii, in which he outlined his differences with Trotskii.

42. *Enigma*, 232, 277.

43. Kus-Nikolajev to Sedov, 2 December 1937, Trotsky Archive.

44. Ciliga to Ćurčin, 21 January 1938 and 5 February 1938, Nacionalna i sveučilišna biblioteka, Zagreb, Manuscripts Division, Uredništvo "Nove Evrope," R7446.

45. Josip Broz Tito to Wilhelm Pieck, 11 January 1938 in Tito, *Sabrana djela*, 30 vols. (Belgrade: Izdavački centar "Komunist," 1977-) 4:13; idem, "Protiv trockističkih špijuna i njihovih pomagača," *Sabrana djela* 4:50-52.

of Lenin and Trotskii. Between 1936 and 1938 the question of what went wrong with Russia grew with each new monstrous show trial and each grovelling confession from the mouths of famous revolutionaries. If the Soviet Union was not a "degenerated workers' state," as Trotskii still maintained, and it was certainly not a bourgeois state, what was it?

When Ciliga challenged Trotskii's view of the Soviet Union after 1936, he was pitting himself against a theory, for all its "literal-minded, mechanical Marxism" that many have criticized,<sup>46</sup> that at the time seemed to many to have the full weight of orthodoxy behind it. Despite the many twists and turns of Trotskii's formulations, his basic evaluation of the Soviet Union, as Knei-Paz has shown, remained consistent between 1934 and 1939: Throughout, Trotskii maintained that the state ownership of the means of production qualitatively distinguished the Soviet Union from both bourgeois and fascist states.<sup>47</sup> His prediction also remained constant: Either the proletariat would throw off the parasitic bureaucracy and build socialism or a bourgeois restoration would take place through the bureaucracy's seizure of property rights. Thus Trotskii continued to uphold strictly orthodox Marxist categories: Either there would be capitalism or there would be socialism. The betrayal of the revolution by the Stalinist bureaucracy was only a temporary, unstable stage; revolutionaries must defend the Soviet Union as a potentially socialist order.

Throughout his exile, Trotskii faced a steady stream of critics who wished to define the bureaucracy as a new exploiting class. Bolstered by Marx's assertion that bureaucracy must reflect class interests, Trotskii refused to countenance this:

Each class . . . works out its own special forms of property. The bureaucracy lacks all these social traits. It has no independent position in the process of production and distribution. It has no independent property roots. Its functions relate basically to the political *technique* of class rule. . . . The biggest apartments, the juiciest steaks and even Rolls Royces are not enough to transform the bureaucracy into an independent ruling class.<sup>48</sup>

Trotskii attempted to rebut systematically the theories that assumed bureaucracy had destroyed the proletarian dictatorship. Constantly linking such theories to idealism, sentimentalism, and disregard for the hard realities of Marxist class analysis, Trotskii repeated that the bureaucracy had no property rights and that there was no capitalist competition or private capital in Stalinist Russia. Trotskii was hard-pressed to establish which class the bureaucracy actually did represent; therefore he admitted it had achieved an independence from the economic base of society that had been unknown at any other time.<sup>49</sup>

Ciliga's theory of state capitalism derived from an intellectual tradition that challenged the views of class, bureaucracy and the nature of the Soviet Union still upheld by Trotskii. The term *state capitalism* was used in several ways by so many diverse theorists after World War I that accounts of its genealogy have been misleadingly incomplete.<sup>50</sup> *State capitalism*, in the sense Ciliga inherited, implied not simply a comparison of the exploitation of western capitalism with the Soviet variety of exploitation, but a realization that a new type of economic organization dominated by a ruling class had arisen. The link between an ostensibly socialist system and this new exploitation had origins not simply in the critique of hierarchy, bureaucracy, and centralization but in the indictment of specialists and the intelligentsia. Thus a tradition could be plausibly traced as far back as Nikolai Bakunin's prescient condemnation of future exploitative state control under Marxism or Jan Machajski's "unmasking" of the class interests of the intelligentsia in

46. Robert H. McNeal, "Trotskyist Interpretations of Stalinism," in *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1977), 36.

47. One of the best accounts of Trotskii's view of Stalinism is chap. 10, "The Revolution Bureaucratized," of Knei-Paz, *Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky*, 367-441.

48. Trotskii, "The Class Nature of the Soviet State," *Writings of Leon Trotsky*, 112-113.

49. Knei-Paz, *Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky*, 387-388; Trotskii, *The Revolution Betrayed*, 249.

50. See, for example, Erich Farl, "The State Capitalist Genealogy," *International* 2(Spring 1973): 18-23. This article is useful for a bibliography of Lenin's writings on state capitalism.

the ideology of social democracy. After the October Revolution, many anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists argued that the bureaucracy of the commissars had transferred the exploitative power of private capitalists into the hands of the state.<sup>51</sup> Such fears, however, were hardly contained by party lines. They motivated successive groupings on the Bolshevik Left that condemned bureaucratization, repudiation of workers' control, and conciliation toward specialists.

Old Bolsheviks, according to Stephen F. Cohen, often claimed Bukharin had first developed the term *state capitalism* to describe heavy state intervention in the economy during World War I, especially in Germany. Significantly, Bukharin described the capitalist class "united in a unified trust."<sup>52</sup> The real confusion began when the term was adopted by Lenin in a positive sense in two critical moments, during the short-lived economic policies of the spring of 1918 and the retreat to the mixed economy of NEP in 1921. In 1918 Lenin wrote, "it is not state capitalism that is at war here with socialism, but the petit bourgeoisie plus private capitalism fighting together against both state capitalism and socialism."<sup>53</sup> State capitalism, as the most developed form of capitalism, would encourage further central control and counteract the economic disintegration of a petit-bourgeois small-holding economy. Lenin resurrected essentially the same line of reasoning in 1921 to justify the "state capitalism" of NEP.<sup>54</sup> Lenin's critics on the Left rejected "building communism with non-communist hands" and Lenin's assumption that the dangers of state capitalism would be checked because ultimate political and economic control lay in the hands of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Not only nonparty revolutionaries but members of the Bolshevik Left pointed to the evils of state, bureaucratic, and class exploitation inherent in the term. While Lenin's state capitalism was to be but a sector in the new state's combined economy, critics threw the term back as descriptive of the whole system. The inauguration of NEP was an open invitation to those on the Left of the Bolsheviks somehow to link the new policies with the evils of traditional capitalism. Several Decists and Workers' Oppositionists in the years after the Tenth Party Congress in 1921 developed sweeping critiques and passed them on to others searching for new answers, including Ante Ciliga in Verkhne-Uralsk.

Since 1923 Trotsky and his supporters had popularized the dangers of bureaucratization but had stopped short of challenging the fundamental nature of the regime. Indeed, Trotsky's critique of bureaucracy and calls for workers' democracy after 1923 can be seen as a limited continuation of ideas expressed earlier by other trends on the Bolshevik Left; Trotsky consciously hewed to Leninist orthodoxies regarding the party and proletarian dictatorship. Even within the circle of his followers, temptation grew to go beyond Trotsky. Especially after forced collectivization and industrialization, the notion of a specifically Soviet form of class exploitation gained new impetus and credibility. Yet Trotsky remained consistent; his own familiarity and rejection of "new class" theories dated to his reading of Machajski in 1899. His rejection of state capitalism theory was clear well before he dismissed Miasnikov's formulation of it in 1929.<sup>55</sup>

Ante Ciliga's importance in the transmission of the notion of state capitalism is twofold: He was one of the first, after 1936, to raise the theory in Trotskyist circles and he associated the term with a comprehensive empirical description of a new exploitative order far worse than even west-

51. For the first full-length treatment of Machajski and Makhaevism, see Marshall S. Shatz, *Jan Wacław Machajski* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), especially chap. 7, "Makhaevism after Machajski," 161–177. On anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist use of the term *state capitalism*, see Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), 193; for some of the documents, see Paul Avrich, ed., *Anarchists in the Russian Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973).

52. Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1973), 28–34, 396 n.99; N. I. Bukharin, *Imperialism and World Economy* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1966), 158–159; Bukharin, *Imperialism and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 226.

53. V. I. Lenin, "O 'levom' rebichenstve i o melkoburzhaznosti," 5th ed., 55 vols., *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 36:301.

54. Moshe Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1968), 26–28, 115–116.

55. Shatz, *Machajski*, 22, 164; Avrich, "Miasnikov," 20–29.

ern imperialism. He did this at a crucial time—when a new skepticism and outrage was fanned by the show trials in Moscow. Moreover, he did so in a way that directly challenged Trotsky's position.

In his first year in France, Ciliga had limited his published articles to descriptions of Stalinist oppression and to his call for a united anti-Stalinist front. Only after 1936 did he begin to write about Soviet state capitalism. In an article titled "La Révolution russe et les raisons de sa dégénérescence," he assumed, first, that the counterrevolution had already occurred. A new privileged class, resting on a "corporative-hierarchical base of all public organizations," was master of the means of production and the proletariat. Second, he assumed that this class was composed of "all sorts of responsible Communists and non-party specialists." Ciliga used the bureaucracy, therefore, to prove that the revolution was bankrupt and to promote a position that was hostile to specialists and that defined workers' control as the precondition for socialism. He charged that after the October Revolution tentative attempts had been made to establish collectivist organization in the factories but the rising bureaucracy eliminated them in 1920–1921. The system of "a bureaucratic state capitalism triumphed." At this stage, Ciliga displayed his connections to Trotsky by indicating he still believed a bourgeois restoration would occur in Russia—only he defined this restoration as the culminating point, not the beginning, of counterrevolution. Ciliga, thus, undercut his own assertions that the bureaucratic class was a new phenomenon in an economic system of a fundamentally new type. His call to arms, moreover, came straight out of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution: To save the Russian proletariat Europe must be raised to socialism.<sup>56</sup>

Ciliga's argument raised a number of thorny theoretical problems he did not confront. Chief among these was not only Marx's assumption that a state bureaucracy is never independent as a class, but also the fundamental Marxian idea that the exploiting class is defined by its ownership of the means of production. To suggest that the Soviet bureaucratic class sustained itself simply by its managerial control over industry was defensible but demanded a reworking of Marx's analysis of class exploitation. In addition, the word *capitalism* in the phrase *state capitalism* retained a sharply defined Marxist definition. To use it to describe the Soviet Union—with no market economy and no capitalist class—seemed to critics to be a flagrant error.<sup>57</sup> Finally, the emphasis on a new exploiting class left unanswered the most important questions: What about the control over the bureaucracy itself? What about Stalin?<sup>58</sup>

Ciliga did not attempt to go to the root of these theoretical problems. Rather, he developed a morally charged and bluntly simple version of the theory of state capitalism that drew heavily on his own observations in the Soviet Union. Ciliga's moralism and stark conclusions, however, were representative of the purge era; in comparison Trotsky's theories were sophisticated and refined. Despite all he had suffered at the hands of Stalin, Trotsky had not actually experienced life in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and his analysis always retained a certain removed—he would have called it objective—quality. In 1938 Ciliga formulated his idea of state capitalism in *Au pays du grand mensonge*, a book that overflowed with personal experience and outrage.

From the first, Ciliga tried to taint the Soviet Union with the long-established sins of capitalism. He described the new bureaucratic class as thoroughly capitalist: "Their habits were remarkably bourgeois. One met important officials, powdered and perfumed like *demi-mondaines*." It therefore made little difference whether private capital existed; the results were the same. Above all, exploitation of labor was the same as, if not worse than, it had been under capitalism. Nothing remained of the October Revolution but its hypocritical outward forms.<sup>59</sup>

What Ciliga lacked in theoretical sophistication he made up for in blunt revolutionary ardor.

56. "La Révolution russe et les raisons de sa dégénérescence," *La Révolution prolétarienne*, 25 November 1936, 363, 365.

57. For a contemporary criticism of state capitalism in this vein see Aron Yugow, *Russia's Economic Front for War and Peace* (London: Watts, 1941), 261.

58. This issue was raised by Rudolf Hilferding, "State Capitalism or Totalitarian State Economy," *Modern Review* 1 (June 1947): 266–271 [originally in *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, May 1940].

59. *Enigma*, 48, 108, 137.

Two camps existed in the Soviet Union, the "hard-working and exploited masses" and the "exploiting leaders."<sup>60</sup> Ciliga's castigation of bureaucracy flavored his pronouncements with vaguely anarchist and syndicalist elements, especially in his championing of workers' self-direction of industry. Ciliga never addressed the theoretical aspects of the Soviet bureaucracy's relation to the means of production; he never tried to explain or compare fascism with Stalin's Soviet Union. Despite his radical antibureaucratism, he never suggested a society should function without a bureaucracy, state, or revolutionary party. Instead, he linked the exploitation of workers and the rise of Stalinist bureaucracy to the pessimistic message that nothing of the revolution's degeneration could be salvaged. Above all, he countered the selective condemnations of Trotskii with personal suffering:

Those who have not undergone the prisons, the concentration camps and Soviet exile, where more than five million galley-slaves are kept, those who do not know the greatest forced-labour camps history has known, where men die like flies, are beaten like dogs and work like slaves, they can have no idea what Soviet Russia and Stalin's classless society are.<sup>61</sup>

By the summer of 1938, Ciliga's assessment of the Soviet Union had gained another dimension that distanced it even more from Trotskii's evaluations. His 1936 idea of a bourgeois restoration was dropped, and he now described *state capitalism* as the entrenched order of the ruling bureaucratic coalition. This pessimism, or realism, seemed the direct result of the Moscow Trials. "The liquidation [of the revolution] seems to me so manifest," Ciliga now wrote, "that I consider it superfluous to prove it in this exposition." The problem now was not to prove that the revolution had been destroyed but to give the details of the entrenched new order. He refurbished anticlerical and anti-intelligentsia sentiments to fit the new circumstances and now analyzed the bureaucratic class as a coalition of party officials, nonparty technical elite, and the church hierarchy. In order not to lose power, Stalin had welded these groups into a new ruling class; the purges were a necessary step in this process.<sup>62</sup>

Ciliga's emphasis on the bureaucratic class as a whole in explaining the dynamics of the new order caused him radically to underestimate Stalin's role. In his theory Stalin was the simple executor of the bureaucracy's will. Stalin, he wrote, would himself mount the guillotine as the last Trotskyist if he proved unsuccessful in empowering a united ruling class. "Historically, Russia is moving toward a dictatorship of a reconciled bureaucracy *with or without Stalin*."<sup>63</sup> Stalin's heavy-handed rule over the bureaucracy soon weakened this analysis and, with it, some of the attractiveness of the idea of state capitalism. The increasingly influential conception of a totalitarian social system, using the role of the Leader as a defining element, gained new impetus.<sup>64</sup>

In 1937 and 1938 in Trotskyist and anti-Stalinist circles, others began taking up the issues Ciliga had raised in 1936. In 1937 M. Yvon, a worker who had spent eleven years in the Soviet Union and was also closely associated with *La Révolution prolétarienne*, brought out a pamphlet backing up revisionist theories. In simple language, Yvon propounded ideas strikingly similar to Ciliga's. He defined the new exploiting class in the broadest terms as "responsibles" and dwelt mostly on factory conditions: "I think we have a new kind of social order, with new classes," he wrote. "There are classes in the USSR: a privileged class and an exploited class."<sup>65</sup> In 1938 Yvan Craipeau declared in *La Quatrième Internationale* that the class nature of Soviet society, despite what Trotskii declared, had changed. A new mode of exploitation, based on a "bureau-

60. Ibid., 102.

61. Ibid., 136.

62. Ciliga, "Où va la Russie des Soviets," *La Révolution prolétarienne*, 10 July 1938, 205.

63. Ibid.

64. See, for example, Hilferding, "State Capitalism or Totalitarian State Economy."

65. M. Yvon, "What has Become of the Russian Revolution?" (New York: International Review, 1937), 62-63. This work was originally published as "Ce qu'est devenue la révolution Russe," *Brochures de la révolution prolétarienne*, no. 2 (Paris).

cratic collectivism," had produced a new ruling class based on the privileges of technocracy.<sup>66</sup> Trotsky's reply to Craipeau is instructive on his firm position toward ultralefts during the period. The ultraleft mistake, Trotsky wrote, was not to understand that the regime that safeguards nationalized property against imperialism remains the dictatorship of the proletariat—regardless of its political forms. Moral sentimentality should not obscure the necessity of a proletarian bulwark against imperialism.<sup>67</sup>

By 1939 after the Stalin-Hitler pact, Trotsky's firm position of the last five years was placed in doubt. In his last major theoretical pronouncement, "The USSR in War," Trotsky repeated that the Soviet Union was no more than a degenerated workers' state, but he struck a strangely uncertain note. In responding to Bruno R[izzi]'s thesis (in his 1939 *Bureaucratization du monde*) that a new worldwide bureaucratic class had emerged, Trotsky acknowledged that the Soviet bureaucracy might remain in place without a bourgeois restoration. Trotsky also now adopted a new conciliatory tone toward his ultraleft critics, specifically mentioning Ciliga:

Let us concede for a moment that the bureaucracy is a new "class" and the present regime in the USSR is a special system of class exploitation. What new political conclusions follow for us from these definitions? . . . Certain of our critics (Ciliga, Bruno and others) want, come what may, to call the future revolution social. Let us grant this definition. What does alter in essence? . . . Nothing whatsoever.<sup>68</sup>

Trotsky was creating harmony where it did not exist. Ciliga and others had pictured a social order in which socialized production was not only exploitative but was the defining possession of a new ruling class. This order could hardly be reconciled easily with Trotsky's continuing defense of the Soviet Union on the grounds that it still maintained a nationalized economy. In the coming decades, as the Soviet bureaucratic order remained stable despite Trotsky's predictions, the theory of Soviet state capitalism was refined by writers in the Trotskyist tradition. In the United States, the so-called Johnson-Forrest group led by C. L. R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya within Max Shactman's Workers' party, formed in the spring of 1940, embraced the idea of state capitalism. In 1948 the British Marxist Tony Cliff wrote an entire monograph on Soviet state capitalism.<sup>69</sup> These later versions of the idea were, by nature, vastly different from Ciliga's. Ciliga had never attempted to write a sustained work of political economy. He had never made a systematic comparison between Soviet state capitalism and the capitalism of the industrialized west; nor had he fully described some new mode of production in the Soviet Union. Instead, he used state capitalism as a polemical tool: to proclaim the complete destruction of the October Revolution and to repudiate Trotsky's partial defense of the Soviet Union. State capitalism became just one concept in the overall questioning of Bolshevik methods and morality. Oppositionists now clearly distanced from Trotsky had to examine the origins of the bureaucracy's total victory.

The dispute over the Kronstadt Uprising, and by extension the question of bolshevism's demise, was first brought to international attention by Trotsky. In an open letter to Wendelin Thomas, a former Reichstag member on the United States Dewey Commission investigating the

66. Yvan Craipeau, *Le Mouvement trotskyste en France: Des origines aux enseignements de mai 68* (Paris: Syros, 1971), 210–211.

67. Trotsky, "Un état ni ouvrier ni bourgeois?," *La Quatrième Internationale*, June 1938, 98–102.

68. Trotsky, "The USSR in War," *New International*, November 1939, 325, 325–332; See also Knei-Paz, *Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky*, 419–427.

69. Peter Beilharz, *Trotsky, Trotskyism and the Transition to Socialism* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), chap. 5; Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 190. In the latter see also 172–192 on Burnham and Shactman's break with Trotsky. On state capitalism theory among British Trotskyists see Tony Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia* (London: Pluto, 1974), and John Callaghan, *British Trotskyism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 91–94. In 1956 the state capitalism theory also surfaced in the Polish United Workers' party; see Craipeau, "Le Mouvement trotskyste," 213–214.

Moscow trials, Trotskii referred to Kronstadt and enraged Serge, Ciliga, Souvarine, Max Eastman, and others. "The uprising was dictated by a desire to get privileged food rations," Trotskii told Thomas. The rebellious Kronstadt sailors in 1921 were "deeply reactionary" and, despite what they thought, counterrevolutionary. A vituperative debate soon played itself out in the pages of *Biulleten' oppositsii*, *La Révolution prolétarienne*, and the *New International*. The affair started not as a sudden attack by Trotskii's critics, as Deutscher implies, but as a response to Trotskii's own comments in a disturbing time.<sup>70</sup>

Serge responded quickly and observed that the revolt may have been a threat to the Bolsheviks and the revolution but that it was absurd to claim it had occurred over food rations. Kronstadt, he wrote, had supported a fundamentally revolutionary goal: free soviets and the end to the military methods of civil war. Trotskii's supporters soon struck back: John G. Wright wrote a long piece reviving the old line that Kronstadt's counterrevolutionary sailors were pawns of the Mensheviks and SRs. With a straight face, he added that Serge's contention that the repression could have been avoided "can and does lead only to eclecticism and the loss of all political perspectives." The Trotskyist newspaper *La Lutte ouvrière* also published an editorial condemning the "fetishism of petit-bourgeois democracy" and the "legend" that Kronstadt was a massacre.<sup>71</sup> Thus the two sides never even came close over the basic nature of the rebellion.

Trotskii's own claims, moreover, became more fantastic as the debate wore on. He charged that his critics were involved in a counterrevolutionary conspiracy to compromise the "only genuine revolutionary current"—that is, the Fourth International—and suggested that "Messrs. moralists, you are lying a bit." His charge of conspiracy sounded ominously like one of Stalin's "amalgams." Trotskii even claimed at one point that he had no connection with the suppression and knew nothing of any massacre. "I personally did not participate in the least in the suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion," he wrote, "nor in the repressions following the suppression." Only months before Trotskii's staunch supporter Wright had noted in passing what the surviving documents indicated: The commissar of war had arrived in Petrograd sometime on 5 March, three days before the assault on the fortress. Soon after the controversy broke out, on 19 November 1937, Trotskii had written to Sedov admitting that he had supported the suppression of the Kronstadt rising in the Politburo at the time, while Stalin had counseled negotiation—something Trotskii never mentioned publicly in any of his writings on Stalin.<sup>72</sup>

Substantively, Trotskii argued that the revolutionary elements of Kronstadt had been transferred away from the fortress during the civil war and that, despite the naval base's sterling revolutionary name, the events of 1921 were but one in a series of petit-bourgeois and White Guardist movements. The sailors' goals of "soviets without Communists" would have led inevitably to a capitalist restoration; thus the uprising, "regardless of the 'ideas' of the participants," was by nature counterrevolutionary.<sup>73</sup> Seventeen years after the events, Trotskii thus repeated almost verbatim the accusations he had made during the Bolshevik propaganda campaign that had im-

70. Trotskii, "The Questions of Wendelin Thomas," *Writings of Leon Trotsky*, 358–360 (originally in *Biulleten' oppositsii*, 56–57 [June–August 1937]: 12–14); Deutscher, *Prophet Outcast*, 436–437. See also Paul Avrich, *Kronstadt 1921* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), 229–231, and Peter Sedgwick's perceptive analysis of Serge, with significant relevance to this debate over Kronstadt, "The Unhappy Elitist: Victor Serge's Early Bolshevism," *History Workshop Journal* 17(Spring 1984): 150–156. Relevant articles are collected in V. I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky, *Kronstadt* (New York: Monad, 1986).

71. Victor Serge, "Les écrits et les faits," *La Révolution prolétarienne*, 10 September 1937, 702–703; John G. Wright, "The Truth about Kronstadt," *New International*, February 1938, 29 n.11; "A propos de Makhno et de Cronstadt," *La Lutte ouvrière*, 10 September 1937. See Serge's response, "Les idées et les faits," *La Révolution prolétarienne*, 25 October 1938, 330–332.

72. Trotskii, "Hue and Cry over Kronstadt," *New International*, April 1938, 103; "More on the Suppression of Kronstadt," *New International*, August 1938, 249; Wright, "Truth about Kronstadt," 51. On Trotskii's role, see Avrich, *Kronstadt*, 145–148, 211; Trotskii's letter to Sadov is cited in Deutscher, *Prophet Outcast*, 437 n.1.

73. Trotskii, "Hue and Cry," 103–106.

mediately followed the rising.<sup>74</sup> Trotskii now professed to know nothing about repression or needless victims, but "on this score I trust Dzerzhinsky more than his belated critics."<sup>75</sup>

Serge, replying to Wright and Trotskii, first raised the large historical questions that came to preoccupy the debate: When and how did bolshevism begin to degenerate? The origins, he said, dated far back. The outlawing of the Mensheviks, the suppression of the anarchists in 1920, the granting of inquisitorial powers to the Cheka in 1918—all were gradations in the revolution's decline. Kronstadt was another such event. Once the sailors had rebelled, it was undoubtedly necessary to stop the revolt—but what had been done to forestall the uprising? Serge had been in Petrograd at the time and was a crucial eyewitness, and he strenuously condemned the "abominable massacre" of the vanquished sailors, "who were still being shot in batches in the Petrograd prison three months after." Clearly, Serge concluded, Kronstadt was a milestone in the history of Bolshevik intolerance and brutality that had poisoned the revolution; "That is what it would be useful and courageous to recognize today."<sup>76</sup>

At this point Ciliga released a lengthy pamphlet, placing Kronstadt in the context of a grand historical interpretation of the revolution's demise. Ciliga clearly indicated that he accepted what Peter Sedgwick was to call "the full anarchist glorification of Kronstadt as a radical mass rising, uncomplicated by any danger of counter-revolution."<sup>77</sup> The first glorious years of the revolution, Ciliga wrote, were characterized by the energy and revolutionary spirit of the masses, but by 1920–1921 the revolution had entered a critical phase. The party's solution to economic problems was to increase the power of bureaucracy in the ninth and tenth congresses. "Lenin rigidly carried it through, Trotsky sang its praises." In response, the Petrograd strikes, the Makhno Rebellion, and Kronstadt were the last efforts of the starving, enfeebled masses to assert revolutionary control over the bureaucracy. The demands of Kronstadt—free speech, free parties, and free soviets—were "all of them impregnated with the spirit of October." Thus Ciliga interpreted Kronstadt as a decisive turning point in the rise of the bureaucracy and fitted it in as the historical justification of his theory of state capitalism. NEP he dismissed as "a union of bureaucrats with the upper layers of the village against the proletariat; it was the alliance of state capitalism and private capitalism against socialism." Unquestionably, Ciliga wrote, the final triumph of state capitalist bureaucracy under Stalin, the Moscow Trials, and the events of Kronstadt seventeen years before were inextricably connected.

There is an analogy, a direct link even between what happened at Kronstadt 17 years ago, and the recent trials in Moscow. . . . Today we witness the murder of the leaders of the Russian revolution; in 1921 it was the masses who formed the basis of the revolution who were massacred.<sup>78</sup>

In a symmetrical way, Ciliga depicted Stalinism as the child of bolshevism and the new exploiting class as the product of early Bolshevik brutality. To Ciliga, Trotskii's slander of the revolutionary sailors "reek[ed] of bureaucratic arrogance" and only served to show the continuity in Bolshevik bureaucratism.<sup>79</sup>

Serge saw Ciliga's grand generalizations as empty and false. "One can see, Ciliga, that you did not know the Russia of those days; thence the enormity of your mistake." Only a utopian

74. Israel Getzler, *Kronstadt 1917–1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 256–257. Getzler shows (208) that, despite Trotskii's claims, a large percentage of veteran revolutionary sailors remained in Kronstadt after 1917.

75. Trotskii, "More on the Suppression of Kronstadt," 250.

76. Serge, "Once More: Kronstadt," *New International*, July 1938, 212, 211. Also published as "Sur Kronstadt 1921—et quelques autres sujets," *La Révolution prolétarienne*, 25 August 1938, 263–264. See also his *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, 124–132 and passim.

77. Sedgwick, "Unhappy Elitist," 150.

78. Ciliga, *The Kronstadt Revolt*, (London: Freedom, 1942), 8, 11, 13, 7; originally published in *La Révolution prolétarienne*, 10 September 1938.

79. *Ibid.*, 8.

could imagine that all the rebelling elements of Russia in 1921 were revolutionary; only the 1924 recruitments to the party, the Lenin Levy, had established the bureaucracy's victory. Moreover, the Kronstadt revolt did explicitly imperil the revolution. To Serge, the paradox was that Bolshevik firmness in suppressing Kronstadt, "sick as it was," had in fact staved off a capitalist restoration. Serge agreed that the "atrocious" Bolshevik repression was indicative of the revolution's decline. But to judge the revolution only in light of Stalinism, as Ciliga seemed to be doing, was simply not just. Here Serge made his oft-quoted remark: "To judge the living man by the death germs which the autopsy reveals in the corpse—and which he may have carried in him since birth—is that very sensible?"<sup>80</sup>

Far more than either Ciliga or Trotskii, Serge viewed Kronstadt as a real historical problem. A few weeks after the revolt, the ice in the Finnish Gulf would have broken, and a new intervention might have been launched. Serge believed the revolt did pose a very real threat to Bolshevik power but that suppression of the most ardent revolutionaries of 1917 was an equally odious choice. In contrast, by calling all the masses revolutionary and all the party leaders bureaucrats, Ciliga simplified the event to the point that the motivations for suppressing the revolt were reduced to the class interests of the bureaucracy, the exploiting state capitalists. Similarly, by resorting to the line that all the sailors were objectively counterrevolutionary, Trotskii simplified the event into just another correct decision of the Leninist Central Committee.

Serge's disagreements with Ciliga do not, however, obscure the basic similarity that linked their examinations of Kronstadt. Both were seeking to explain the revolution's downfall through intolerant and repressive strains in bolshevism. Above all, both criticized the mistakes of bolshevism in highly moralistic language.

This emphasis on morality explains the intellectual tone and direction of Trotskii's critics. Serge recognized a key moral dilemma: It may have been ultimately necessary to suppress the Kronstadt rebellion, but the suppression was horrendous in and of itself. Ciliga went further and viewed all Bolshevik mistakes before and after in terms of a moralistic determinism: "It was from this point onwards . . . that the Bolshevik repudiation of morality, so frequently evoked, took on a development which had to lead to the Moscow Trials."<sup>81</sup> Ciliga's writing throughout the period was filled with references to morality and the revolution. Serge and Ciliga both assumed there was a certain socialist way of acting and that it must not be violated. In this underlying moralism, Ciliga and Serge resembled many others in the same period—such as Eastman, Souvarine, and Edmund Wilson—who were questioning the creed of strict revolutionary discipline that Trotskii still upheld.<sup>82</sup>

Trotskii felt obliged to respond to this tide of moralism by writing "Their Morals and Ours" in June 1938, a ringing endorsement of a revolutionary moral code of incorporating means into class-defined ends. His ironic suggestion to Max Eastman—that he write a pamphlet entitled "How to Conquer and Hold Power" for a revolutionary party—might have just as well been meant for Ciliga. But Trotskii's venture into the moral philosophy of means and ends could not stem instinctive reaction to the Moscow Trials. Thus Ciliga's evaluation of Soviet history, in which the evil bureaucracy destroyed early revolutionary triumphs and led the country straight to the Great Purge, simply followed the light the trials seemed to throw onto the past. It makes little sense then to say, as Deutscher does, that the Kronstadt debate was "full of a strange and unreasonable passion."<sup>83</sup> It was filled with passion precisely because the issues it raised seemed so crucial and immediate.

Ciliga's participation in the polemic about Kronstadt demonstrates how far he had come from his cooperation with Trotskii in 1935–1936. Since then, he had advanced his description of

80. Serge, "Reply to Ciliga," *New International*, February 1939, 54; the original is in *La Révolution prolétarienne*, 25 October 1938, 330–332.

81. Ciliga, *Kronstadt*, 13.

82. Trotskii attacked Serge for demanding freedom not from excessive Bolshevik centralism but from party discipline; Trotskii, "Moralists and Sycophants against Marxism," *New International*, August 1939, 229–233.

83. Trotskii, "Their Morals and Ours," 166; Deutscher, *Prophet Outcast*, 437.

state capitalism, developed it into a unified picture of counterrevolution achieved, and finally looked back and found the logic of its development in the past. A series of interlocking theses ruled his emerging views: Trotskii was not that far removed from Stalinist bureaucracy, Stalinism was the heir of bureaucratic bolshevism, and the revolution's degeneration derived from the immoral methods of that bureaucracy. His move away from Trotskii can only be understood as occurring on many levels.

Ciliga's course after he left the Soviet Union reflects two demands placed on Trotskii's sympathizers and other anti-Stalinists reevaluating their stances during the purges: On the one hand, radical transformations in the Soviet Union prompted the need for new explanations in theory, political tactics, and the history of bolshevism. Ciliga's idea of state capitalism, his call for anti-Stalinist unity, and his search through the revolution's past were, in the end, all part of an attempt to formulate a unified and coherent response to Stalin's Soviet Union. Second, the pressing imperative to produce new answers led anti-Stalinists to find refuge in values that were deeply rooted in morality and, in Ciliga's case, socialist ideals. By branding the Soviet Union state capitalist, Ciliga was able not only to bolster his position as champion of the oppressed masses, but also to adapt well-worn condemnations of capitalism to Soviet conditions—at the same time, somewhat paradoxically, suggesting that the Soviet Union under Stalin was something fundamentally new. Ciliga reflected and took part in the surge of moralism that made it possible to repudiate both Stalin and Trotskii. Most importantly, Ciliga's anti-Stalinism, once it was sharpened and refined by a new theoretical and historical critique of Stalinist society, was transformed into a strong and vital anti-Sovietism—something that was always anathema to Trotskii. Indeed, Ciliga and the group of questioning anti-Stalinists to which he belonged did not simply develop answers that solved their immediate intellectual predicaments during the purge trials but also formed aspects of a conceptual framework that was later expanded by many diverse critics of the Soviet Union. The ideas of an inevitable progression from bolshevism to Stalinism, of a new Soviet exploiting class, and of a unique new system created by Stalin, had wide appeal and profound effect. Ciliga himself did not invent these concepts singlehandedly, but he is one of those forgotten ex-Trotskyists who gave them currency in the 1930s.