In this two part essay the author, a post-graduate history student, discusses the historical method and theory of the eminent historian E. H. Carr in relation to the struggle between Stalin and Trotsky in the early years of the Soviet State.

E. H. Carr is best known for his *History of Soviet Russia*, the first three volumes of which have been published by Penguin, but he has also written on the philosophy of history. In 1961 he gave the George Macaulay Trevelyan Memorial lectures at Cambridge University on the theme *What is History?* In these lectures Carr placed great stress on the importance of historical causation. Some historians and philosophers consider causation of little importance in history. R. G. Collingwood, an important philosopher of history, for instance, regards the essence of history to be the thought that lies behind events and that to discuss this is sufficient to explain what happened in history.1 Herbert Butterfield, Professor of History at Cambridge, has said that all an historian can do to explain events is to amplify the detail in order to establish greater concreteness.2 On the other hand, Carr asserts that causation is the very basis of history: "The study of history is a study of causes."3

In this article there is an examination of Carr’s model of historical causation and its relevance to one of the central issues dealt with in his *History of Soviet Russia*: the factional struggle of 1923-4, which might be referred to in a short-hand way as the Stalin-Trotsky struggle. This is a point of some interest; it lends itself to a consideration of Carr’s methodology, in particular the degree of success he achieved in putting theory into practice in a specific historical work. Carr’s presentation of the causes of the intra-party struggle offers a suitable test of his ideas on historical causation.

Carr’s views may be expressed thus. He attaches great importance to causation in history. Man’s actions are not pre-determined; nor is anything and everything possible in human affairs. Human actions have a cause or causes, but an individual is morally responsible for his or her personality. It is the historian’s task to uncover the causes of what happened in the past. In doing this the historian works through explanation hypotheses, but the final test of the validity of a hypothesis is an empirical one. In considering possible causes the historian will consider a multiplicity of
causes; he will, however, rank them in some sort of order of importance. In doing this he will be governed by an end-in-view which will be largely influenced by the values he brings to the subject matter under consideration. The historian will seek to reduce the complexity of history to order and he will seek to simplify his explanation — to fix on the major cause. Historians do not assume that events are inevitable, but they are principally concerned with explaining why one particular course rather than another was taken. “Accident” or “chance” affect history but it is the historian’s task to examine the causal sequences rationally and pick out the causes which provide a basis for fruitful generalisation and for the drawing of conclusions.

It can be said immediately that Carr’s practice does not measure up completely to his theoretical model. As G. R. Elton has observed, in a rather hostile treatment of Carr’s views, Carr’s history of Soviet Russia is largely a narrative one; it is difficult at times to find the causal thread. The party crisis at the end of 1923 in which Trotsky and the opposition were defeated is not dealt with separately and at no time does Carr offer a full explanation hypothesis. Partly this arises from the nature of Carr’s history. It is a mammoth enterprise, and is at the one time a history of the Russian revolution and its development, a history of the Russian Communist Party, a history of Soviet Russia’s relations with the world and a history of the international communist movement. Carr himself admits, more than once, that it has got out of hand, and yet there is a rationale for each topic which is included.

Carr sees Russia at the heart of a world revolution so he feels obliged to write a history of Soviet Russia in this way. At the same time he has created difficult methodological problems which he hasn’t solved successfully. In order to grasp how Carr sees the factional struggle of 1923 it is necessary to range over the three volumes of *The Bolshevik Revolution* 1917-1923, *The Interregnum* 1923-24, and *Socialism in One Country* 1924-1926, volume I, and it is only in the latter volume that there is what one feels is an adequate attempt at an explanation sketch of the political struggle inside Russia. Nevertheless, scattered through the other volumes there is quite a deal of causal analysis in which Carr offers an explanation of events.

For the purpose of this article attention is mainly on the situation up to and including the thirteenth party conference which began on January 16, 1924. Carr believes this to be the crucial turning point and holds that the thirteenth congress four months later only completed Trotsky’s rout and confirmed the bankruptcy of his platform and the eclipse of his authority in the party. The struggle against trotskyism continued through 1924 and 1925 and eventually Zinoviev and Kamenev found themselves at odds
with Stalin and they joined the opposition; but the main implications of the political struggle, which by the end of the decade engulfed Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky too, had become apparent by the end of 1923. ‘So it is on the defeat of Trotsky and the opposition in 1923 that we must concentrate.’

Carr’s account suggests a great number of causes. For convenience they can be divided into groups. There are causes which can be described as historical, that is, they arose from the specific Russian milieu: such things as the backwardness of Russian life and the peculiar social differences of Russian society. Apart from numerous scattered references Carr brings these causes under notice in two chapters of *Socialism in One Country*, Vol. 1: “The Legacy of History” and “Class and Party”. He states that the Russian historical pattern had three important consequences: first, a chronically ambivalent attitude to western Europe; secondly, development rested on the conception of “revolution from above”; and thirdly, a pattern not of orderly development, but of spasmodic advances by fits and starts. These factors influenced the development of social differences. Russia was now more sharply than ever divided between “a society” which solaced itself for the backwardness of Russian life in the contemplation of western ideas and the enjoyment of the trappings of civilisation, and the “dark” mass of the Russian people plunged in the immemorial Russian tradition of poverty and ignorance. The hot-house-like development of Russia, particularly its industry, produced the industrial manager, who from the first was “the administrator, the organiser, the bureaucrat,” and the greatest proportion of the new generation of industrial workers, who were still peasants in factory clothes. The small proportion of more urbanised and sophisticated workers was dispersed by the exigencies of revolution and civil war, and the balance was further upset by the early period of the New Economic Policy (NEP) under which heavy industry, in which the worker’s outlook and status diverged most from the peasant, was neglected. Above all, there was the huge peasant mass which gave its characteristic qualities to Russia. Russian society had a highly self-conscious intelligentsia, but it had no counter-part to the western middle class.

Carr sees the difference between the “westerners” and “easterners” as a basis of deep division. The Mensheviks were “westerners” and the Bolsheviks “easterners”. The Mensheviks, including Trotsky, attacked the Bolsheviks as slavophil Marxists. After 1917 the same division affected the Bolsheviks and tended to be reflected in the differing emphasis given to the claims of agriculture and industry. At the time of the “scissors crisis” in 1923, the majority were eager to maintain the status quo and let the future wait; the revival of heavy industry must be postponed until more propitious times. But
the minority, soon to be the “opposition”, approached the “scissors crisis” from the standpoint of industry. On this view, the primary cause of the crisis was the failure of the revival of industry to keep pace with the revival of agriculture, and the remedy could only be to come to the aid of industry, and primarily of heavy industry as its essential base.¹⁰

Carr traces this element in the principal characters. Trotsky was the most “western” of the Bolshevik leaders and the least specifically Russian. He idealised western Europe; ‘above all the Russia against which Trotsky reacted was the peasant Russia of his youth. The mature Trotsky was wholly urban’.¹¹ On the other hand of all the early Bolshevik leaders Stalin was singular in the absence of significant “western” influence. Alone among them he had never lived in western Europe, and he neither read nor spoke any western language. Those who stood closest to him — Molotov, Mikoyan, Kaganovich, Kirov, Voroshilov, Kуйбyshev — were as innocent as himself of any western background. As a polar opposite of Trotsky, Stalin, in spite of being a Georgian, was not merely non-western but distinctly “Russian” in the narrower sense. Not only was he the most “Russian” of the early leaders, but he was outstanding in his low rating of the local nationalisms of the former Russian Empire and he was one of the engineers of the forced bolshevisation of his native Georgia.¹²

Not at all unrelated to the western-eastern question lay a cultural difference which Carr emphasises as an important causal factor in the split of 1923. Ever since 1917 Trotsky had championed the cause of the specialists. Lenin generally gave his support. They both asserted that the use of ex-officers in the Red Army and technical experts and managers in industry was inescapable. In spite of demands for workers’ control and the proletarian dictatorship, the importance of one-man management in administration was upheld. Lenin constantly deplored the lack of culture in the handling of business affairs. However, in 1922, 65 per cent of the managing personnel were officially classified as “workers” and 35 per cent as “non-workers” (only one in seven of these being party members); a year later these proportions had been almost exactly reversed, only 36 per cent being “workers” and 64 per cent “non-workers” of whom nearly one-half were now party members.¹³ This was a result of NEP and a policy of encouraging former bourgeois managers and specialists to join the party, i.e. to become “Red managers” or “Red industrialists.”

In April 1923 at the twelfth party congress, Trotsky presented the central committee report on industry and underlined the role of “the director who strives for profits.”¹⁴ Theorists were well represented in the opposition and they included some of the best
economic brains in the party. Most of the important early Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, with the exception of Stalin, and perhaps Zinoviev, were pre-eminently intellectuals and they were uneasy about any course of action which could not be justified by theoretical argument; in this respect Trotsky had a remarkable facility and for sheer force of intellect could hardly be matched. On the other hand, for Stalin doctrine was subsidiary to strategy and tactics. Trained in a Georgian seminary for the orthodox priesthood, he showed a marked distrust of too imaginative an approach to matters of policy.

The position of the working class in this setting is a paradox. In a negative sense, Carr sees "the disintegration of the working class" as a cause of the split. The Russian working class was a new working class, small in relation to the total population and a fairly fragile social formation. The stress of revolution and civil war depleted the working class dramatically. By 1921-2 it had fallen to half its 1913 numbers; and the wastage was heaviest among skilled workers. By the end of 1920 Petrograd and Moscow had lost about half their population. Not only did the proletariat decline in numbers but it lost its distinctive character. "In 1923 heavy industry, before the war the main occupation of the skilled and class-conscious worker, had still scarcely risen above the record low levels of 1920 and 1921." The opposition urged the majority to rectify the neglect of heavy industry without which an advance to socialism could not occur, but they saw the problem as one of economics — resources, finance, planning, efficiency, management. They did not seek allies in trade union circles and the workers' opposition groups, who approached the problem as one of employment, wages and trade union influence in management. In particular the trade unions suspected Trotsky, who was the one potential leader of an "industrial" opposition, because of his record as the protagonist of the militarisation of labor under war communism, and as the champion of the "statisation" of the trade unions. In the heat of the trade union controversy in December 1920 he rallied to the defence of bureaucracy on the score of the low political and cultural level of the masses; and there was a wide gulf between his convictions as a centraliser and a planner in economic organisation and the quasi-syndicalist views of the "workers" groups. At the twelfth party congress in April 1923 Trotsky not only looked forward with relative equanimity to increased unemployment resulting from the rationalisation of industry and the dismissal of redundant workers, but condoned the continuous downward pressure on wages as a necessary contribution to "socialist accumulation." It was because of Trotsky's stand on these issues that Stalin was able, at the thirteenth Party conference, to stigmatise Trotsky as the "patriarch of the bureaucrats."
The backwardness of Russian life rested on poor technological development and low economic achievement. In this lay a general economic cause. Added to the general backwardness was the great cost to the economy of the abnormality from 1917 to 1921. With the introduction of NEP in March 1921 economic policy became an issue around which opposition crystallised. Differences on many points — finance, trade, prices, employment, wages, management etc. — tended to revolve around the state of heavy industry. Agriculture, rural and artisan industry, even the consumer goods industries, revived but capital goods-producing industries remained stagnant. Opposition party criticism of economic policy was concerned with the adverse effects of NEP on heavy industry, and sought first and foremost to mitigate these effects through an extension of state subsidies — if necessary by curtailing the benefits which NEP had conferred on the peasant by increasing the burdens on him. Trotsky, in the winter of 1922-23, became the spokesman of industry in the Politburo, where he more than once pressed the demand for a more generous credit policy. This was the situation in which the so-called "scissors crisis" developed. Carr treats it as an immediate cause of the intra-party struggle.20

At the twelfth party Congress in April 1923, in the course of his report on industry for the central committee, Trotsky produced a diagram which had the appearance of an open pair of scissors. From a point of parity with 1913 prices in September 1922, industrial prices and agricultural prices had increasingly diverged until they reached, in March 1923, 140 per cent of the 1913 prices for industrial prices while agricultural prices had sunk to 80 per cent. This situation had come about because of the priming of the consumer goods industries with commercial credit and the drive for profits by the industrial syndicates with a resultant rise in prices. The economic picture was complicated by a currency reform which set out to replace depreciated roubles with gold-backed chervonets. Under the impact of NEP unemployment rose rapidly from a half million in September 1922 to a million and a quarter at the end of 1923.21 Although at first largely confined to "Soviet workers" (i.e. clerical workers or other workers dismissed from Soviet institutions), and the unskilled casual labor of semi-peasants, it eventually spread to the factory workers as unsaleable goods piled up. An additional factor contributing to the economic and social crisis of 1923 was the uncertain real value of money wages which fluctuated due to currency manipulation. Associated with this were defaults in wage payment. The total effect was a wave of strikes in the summer of 1923.22

The planning controversy can be looked at as a cause of the split, either economic or political or a bit of both. It can be related immediately to the state of heavy industry and the argument about
finance for industry; more especially it involved the debate about the organisation of Gosplan — the state planning commission. Planning was considered part of socialism and the Bolsheviks argued about its application to Russia. Various arrangements which were made had implications for the development of a planned economy. In February 1921 the government set up Gosplan. In August Trotsky, who had been increasingly occupied with economic questions since the end of the civil war, put forward a plan for an autonomous Gosplan with large powers. At first Lenin resisted Trotsky, especially his proposals that Gosplan should have legislative powers and that a deputy president of the council of commissars should become president of Gosplan. Then at the end of December 1922, when Lenin was becoming increasingly concerned about several problems about which, while recuperating from illness, he had had second thoughts, he suggested meeting Trotsky’s proposals half way. However, Trotsky had no other supporters in the Politburo and the reform of Gosplan was shelved. At the twelfth Party congress in April 1923 both Trotsky’s report and the resolution presented bore clear signs of an uneasy truce on fundamental issues of economic policy.23

7 The Politburo elected 2 June 1924 after the 13th party congress had seven members: Kamenev, Trotsky, Stalin, Zinoviev, Rykov, Tomsky and Bukarin; of this group, by December 1930, when Rykov was expelled from the Politburo, only Stalin remained. Leonard Shapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (London, 1962), pp. 606-7.
8 Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, vol i, p.11.
9 Ibid., pp.16-18.
12 Ibid., pp. 179-80.
14 Quoted, ibid., p. 46.
18 Carr, *The Interregnum*, pp. 59-84.
20. Ibid., pp. 3-17.
22 Ibid., pp. 68-78.
23 Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. ii, pp. 370-80. Stalin appears to have played little part in this controversy except for a letter he wrote to Lenin in March 1921 in which he supported Lenin’s attachment to GOELRO and called for “practical men,” a “practical outlook” and a “practical start” J. V. Stalin, *Works*, vol. 5, pp. 50-1.