

LEON TROTSKY

*Stalinism
and
Bolshevism*

**CONCERNING THE HISTORICAL
AND THEORETICAL ROOTS OF
THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL**

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INTRODUCTION

Leon Trotsky's essay is a permanent contribution to the literature of revolutionary Marxism. It is more than general in its scope; it is also of the highest contemporary significance, particularly for the revolutionary party of the American working class which is in the process of formation. To form a proletarian party in our day without relationship to the past, is to create a passing political curio, without roots or future. The new revolutionary party must know what heritage it is basing itself on and what traditions it will carry forward. Those American revolutionists who have long ago broken with reactionary Stalinism and are now completing that stage in their evolution which was marked by the struggle inside the Socialist Party, have already clearly indicated their course: they base themselves on the heritage of Marx and the traditions of Bolshevism.

The Communist International has long ago abandoned both the heritage and the traditions, and is now the fiercest protagonist within the labor movement of the monstrous fraud known as bourgeois democracy and the most brutally aggressive guardian, as the tragedy of the Spanish revolution shows, of capitalist private property. It is largely the degeneration of the Stalinist movement, emerging as it did from the Bolshevik party of Lenin, that has given a semblance of weightiness to the arguments of all those who have sought to identify Marxism, Leninism and "Trotskyism" with Stalinism.

The now irreparable split in the American Socialist Party, produced by the mass expulsions of its left wing members, has been accompanied by various "theoretical" dissertations which aim to apologize for the reformist

splitters but which result in a revelation of the theoretical sterility and unscrupulousness of their authors. The most zealous of these attorneys-at-law for the right wing is the editor of the *Socialist Call*, who has emptied more than one ink bottle in an effort to prove that the Trotskyists are not at all different from the Stalinists and that both currents are incompatible with what he calls "a united revolutionary party, rejecting sectarianism and reformism". An examination of his position will serve to illustrate the timeliness and forcefulness of Trotsky's defense of Marxism and Bolshevism—to illustrate it in connection with the struggle which the American Marxists are conducting at this very moment.

"Not for their *views*, but for their *acts* against the party, were the Trotskyites thrown out," writes the apologist for the right wing, and promptly proceeds to explain what *views* the Trotskyists were really expelled for. We give an extended quotation:

"The lasting fact is that the Trotskyites were unable to remain in the American Socialist Party, as they have been unable to remain in all the other revolutionary, but non-Trotskyite organizations in the world.

"The Stalinists acclaim that it is the counter-revolutionary program of the Trotskyites that has caused this. Scarcely! The Trotsky program is less counter-revolutionary [!!] than that of the Stalinists.

"What lies beneath the split in the S. P. is not that which separates the Trotskyites from the Stalinists but that which unites them.

"The Trotskyites, like the Stalinists, have that sectarian approach to politics which causes them to idolize all those who agree with their narrow program at any given moment and to cast into the nether depths of 'counter-revolution' all those who disagree with them.

"The Trotskyites refuse to be in a party with those who are not 'consistent revolutionists'. And all those who are not Trotskyites are not such 'consistent revolutionists'...

“The consequences of this policy are, prior to a working class revolution, splits and splits; and after a successful revolution, as in Russia, bureaucratic suppression.

“The sectarian notion that all those without the perfect line are conscious or unconscious counter-revolutionaries, ‘Trotsky-Fascists’ or ‘Spanish assassins’, must ultimately lead to the institution of a bureaucratic régime by such a sectarian group in power.

“Trotskyism and Stalinism, arch-enemies in program, are nevertheless children born of one womb.” (*Socialist Call*, Sept. 11, 1937).

As can be seen, every sentence a flawless pearl, and sometimes two.

The “lasting fact” is that the Marxists have been unable to remain in the “other revolutionary, but non-Trotskyite” organizations. Concretely, they could not remain in the Socialist Party of Léon Blum for the simple reason that the People’s Front bureaucracy inside the party used its apparatus-control to expel them for their revolutionary views. Nor could they be admitted into the P.O.U.M. in Spain because—incorrigible sectarians—they were against the disastrous policy of supporting the People’s Front and of entering a bourgeois government instead of fighting for such sectarian notions as workers’ power. Nor could they remain in the Norman Thomas party because they not only repeated the arguments of the *Call* editor that support of La Guardia was a betrayal of socialism, but they actively fought the betrayers and as a result were expelled. Blum and Thomas could not ask for a better advocate against the criticisms of the left wing than this spokesman for a “united revolutionary party”!

It seems, moreover, that our “approach” is wrong because... it leads to splits prior to the revolution. It would have been better if our theorist of “Trotskyism-equals-Stalinism” had remembered the proverb that it is imprudent to speak of a rope in the house of the hanged. Is it not a fact that before the unmentionable virus of

“Trotskyism” entered the body of the S.P., that Party passed through three splits, carried out in such a demoralizing way that they resulted neither in numerical growth or consolidation, nor in political clarification? And is it not also a fact that the Centrists in the Socialist Party, who have had but one audible war-cry—“Unity at all costs!”—have followed a policy which has left only a broken shell of the old Socialist Party?

More than sixty years ago, Engels reminded us: “We must not let ourselves be influenced by all this noise for unity. The greatest artisans of discord are those who have this word most often on their lips, as at this moment the Bakuninists of the Jurasian Switzerland, the artisans of all the splits, that do not stop the clamor for unity. These fanatics of unity are either narrow spirits who would mix all and make of it a shapeless dough, which when no longer stirred will bring out still more sharply the differences that now find themselves in the same pot—in Germany we have a very fine example of these people who preach the reconciliation of the workers with the middle class)—or they are the people who consciously or unconsciously want to deviate from this movement. That is why the greatest sectarians, the greatest braggarts and fakers demand at certain moments with the greatest violence, Unity. In our existence, nobody has done us greater harm, nobody has shown us greater falseness than these braggarts of Unity.”

The final count in the indictment against the Marxists is that their policy leads to bureaucratism “after a successful revolution”. Indeed! But we look in vain through all the anaemic theoretical elucubrations of the eminent editor (and all his co-thinkers) for an explanation of how it was possible for “sectarians” and systematic “splitters” to bring about a successful revolution. Their very failure to deal with this decisive point is refutation enough of the author’s puerile identification of Bolshevism with Stalinism. Bolshevism—the doctrine and movement through which Lenin continued

the work of Marx and Engels, as Trotsky is continuing it today—made possible the building of a powerful proletarian party, and the achievement of a “successful revolution” under difficult conditions. Stalinism has not merely made possible, but rather inevitable, the decomposition of the proletarian parties and the accumulation of defeats and catastrophes for the international working class. In this, it has only joined hands with the world social democracy—of all shadings and varieties, including the Centrist species incoherently defended by the editor of the *Call*. If there were nothing else, these two historical facts would be enough to demonstrate the irreconcilability of Bolshevism (or “Trotskyism” as it is now called) with Stalinism, as well as to contrast the positive contribution of the one to the negative contribution of the other.

The Thomases and Tylers not only cannot achieve a “successful revolution”, but cannot even build a substantial proletarian party. They are indeed responsible for the disintegration of the Socialist Party, as Tyler seemed to know only a few weeks before he wrote the editorial from which we have quoted. In the *Socialist Review* of September 1937, he wrote:

“The ‘right wing’ of the party is really a right wing. In a showdown it acts along the lines of a Popular Front. This group may, in part, object to a People’s Front in Europe or in the abstract; but in the concrete in the City of New York, it is pro-People’s Front in practice. Its social root is the new layer of trade union petty bureaucrats in the party. . . . Their immediate tactic in the party is to decapitate and break the back of the irreconcilable anti-Popular Frontists within the party. This is to be carried through by a mass expulsion of the Trotskyites—‘the more, the merrier’—followed by a removal of all left wingers from positions of party importance.

“The right wing understands perfectly well that such a move would tear the party to pieces, would leave it weak and emasculated, would leave a New York organ-

ization, plus the municipal socialists of Milwaukee, with a Massachusetts satellite, and that's all."

A flawless prediction! The only point of importance omitted in it was that, not the Popular Front right wing, but Tyler and his associates, would appear at the National Executive Committee that followed immediately as the main prosecutors against the left wingers and as the authors of the decree that expelled them *en masse*. The Centrist seer of Unity became the instrument of the right wing's campaign of disaster. The responsibility for "tearing the party to pieces", for "leaving it weak and emasculated", rests entirely on the shoulders of the theoreticians of "Trotskyism-equals-Stalinism". The "lasting fact", to use Tyler's expression, is that the Centrists joined hands with those whom they denounced as People's Fronters and betrayers, to split the party by expelling the revolutionists.

But if the Thomas-Tyler party is torn to shreds and has been left weak and emasculated, the left wing is not. Robust and self-confident, the revolutionary Marxists stand on the granite foundations of principle laid by the great masons of the scientific socialist movement. Even in the moments of the greatest difficulty, of reaction, they remain inspired by their principles, and, unlike the muddleheads and dilletantes, do not abandon them in the pursuit of those will-o'-the-wisp "revelations" of "New Truths" which, upon examination, prove to be warmed-over ashes from the cozy fireside of reformism, class collaboration, and social-patriotism. The foundations for the new party of the Fourth International in this country, which is sure of its growth and its victory, cannot but be the rock of Marxism, of Bolshevism, cleared of the rubbish left by Stalinism and social democracy. The great value of the essay that follows is that it facilitates the job of building cleanly and solidly on that rock.

New York, September 20, 1937.

M. S.

STALINISM and BOLSHEVISM

Reactionary epochs like ours not only disintegrate and weaken the working class and its vanguard but also lower the general ideological level of the movement and throw political thinking back to stages long since passed through. In these conditions the task of the vanguard is above all not to let itself be carried along by the backward flow: it must swim against the current. If an unfavorable relation of forces prevents it from holding the positions that it has won, it must at least retain its ideological positions, because in them is expressed the dearly-paid experience of the past. Fools will consider this policy "sectarian". Actually it is the only means of preparing for a new tremendous surge forward with the coming historical tide.

THE REACTION AGAINST MARXISM AND BOLSHEVISM

Great political defeats inevitably provoke a reconsideration of values, generally occurring in two directions. On the one hand the true vanguard, enriched by the experience of defeat, defends with tooth and nail the heritage of revolutionary thought and on this basis attempts to educate new cadres for the mass struggle to come. On the other hand the routinists, centrists and dilettantes, frightened by defeat, do their best to destroy the authority of revolutionary tradition and go backward in their search for a "New Word."

One could indicate a great many examples of ideological reaction, most often taking the form of prostra-

tion. All the literature of the Second and Third Internationals, as well as of their satellites of the London Bureau, consists essentially of such examples. Not a suggestion of Marxist analysis. Not a single serious attempt to explain the causes of defeat. About the future, not one fresh word. Nothing but clichés, conformity, lies, and above all solicitude for their own bureaucratic self-preservation. It is enough to smell ten lines from some Hilferding or Otto Bauer to know this rottenness. The theoreticians of the Comintern are not even worth mentioning. The famous Dimitroff is as ignorant and commonplace as a shop-keeper over a mug of beer. The minds of these people are too lazy to renounce Marxism: they prostitute it. But it is not they that interest us now. Let us turn to the "innovators".

The former Austrian communist, Willi Schlamm, has devoted a small book to the Moscow trials, under the expressive title, "The Dictatorship of the Lie". Schlamm is a gifted journalist, chiefly interested in current affairs. His criticism of the Moscow frame-up, and his exposure of the psychological mechanism of the "voluntary confessions", are excellent. However he does not confine himself to this: he wants to create a new theory of socialism which would insure us against defeats and frame-ups in the future. But since Schlamm is by no means a theoretician and is apparently not well acquainted with the history of the development of socialism, he returns entirely to pre-Marxian socialism, and notably to its German, that is to its most backward, sentimental and mawkish variety. Schlamm renounces dialectics and the class struggle, not to mention the dictatorship of the proletariat. The problem of transforming society is reduced for him to the realization of certain "eternal" moral truths with which he would imbue mankind, even under capitalism. Willi Schlamm's attempt to save socialism by the insertion of the moral gland is greeted with both joy and pride in Kerensky's review "Novaya Rossia" (an old provincial Russian review now

published in Paris) : as the editors justifiably conclude, Schlamm has arrived at the principles of true Russian socialism, which a long time ago opposed the holy precepts of faith, hope and charity to the austerity and harshness of the class struggle. The "novel" doctrine of the Russian "Social Revolutionaries" represents, in its "theoretical" premises, only a return to the socialism of pre-March (1848!) Germany. However, it would be unfair to demand a more intimate knowledge of the history of ideas from Kerensky than from Schlamm. Far more important is the fact that Kerensky, who is in solidarity with Schlamm was, while head of the government, the instigator of persecutions against the Bolsheviki as agents of the German general staff: organized, that is, the same frame-ups against which Schlamm now mobilizes his motheaten metaphysical absolutes.

The psychological mechanism of the ideological reaction of Schlamm and his like, is not at all complicated. For a while these people took part in a political movement that swore by the class struggle and appealed, in word if not in thought, to dialectical materialism. In both Austria and Germany the affair ended in a catastrophe. Schlamm draws a wholesale conclusion: this is the result of dialectics and the class struggle! And since the choice of revelations is limited by historical experience and... by personal knowledge, our reformer in his search for the Word falls on a bundle of old rags which he valiantly opposes not only to Bolshevism but to Marxism as well.

At first glance Schlamm's brand of ideological reaction seems too primitive (from Marx... to Kerensky!) to pause over. But actually it is very instructive: precisely in its primitiveness it represents the common denominator of all other forms of reaction, particularly of those expressed by wholesale denunciation of Bolshevism.

“BACK TO MARXISM” ?

Marxism found its highest historical expression in Bolshevism. Under the banner of Bolshevism the first victory of the proletariat was achieved and the first workers' state established. Nothing can erase these facts from history. But since the October Revolution has led in the present stage to the triumph of the bureaucracy, with its system of repression, plunder, and falsification—to the “dictatorship of the lie”, to use Schlamm's happy expression—many formalistic and superficial minds leap to a summary conclusion: one cannot struggle against Stalinism without renouncing Bolshevism. Schlamm, as we already know, goes farther: Bolshevism, which degenerated into Stalinism, itself grew out of Marxism; consequently one cannot fight Stalinism while remaining on the foundation of Marxism. There are others, less consistent but more numerous, who say on the contrary: “We must return from Bolshevism to Marxism.” How? To *what* Marxism? Before Marxism became “bankrupt” in the form of Bolshevism it had already broken down in the form of Social Democracy. Does the slogan “Back to Marxism” then mean a leap over the periods of the Second and Third Internationals... to the First International? But it too broke down in its time. Thus in the last analysis it is a question of returning... to the complete works of Marx and Engels. One can accomplish this heroic leap without leaving one's study and even without taking off one's slippers. But how are we to go from our classics (Marx died in 1883, Engels in 1895) to the tasks of our own time, omitting several decades of theoretical and political struggles, among them Bolshevism and the October Revolution? None of those who propose to renounce Bolshevism as an historically “bankrupt” tendency has indicated any other course. So the question is reduced to the simple advice to study “Capital”. We can hardly object. But the Bolshevists, too, studied “Capital” and not with their eyes closed. This did not

however prevent the degeneration of the Soviet state and the staging of the Moscow trials. So what is to be done?

IS BOLSHEVISM RESPONSIBLE FOR STALINISM?

Is it true that Stalinism represents the legitimate product of Bolshevism, as all reactionaries maintain, as Stalin himself avows, as the Mensheviks, the anarchists, and certain left doctrinaires considering themselves Marxist, believe? "We have always predicted this," they say. "Having started with the prohibition of the other socialist parties, the repression of the anarchists, and the setting up of the Bolshevik dictatorship in the soviets, the October Revolution could only end in the dictatorship of the bureaucracy. Stalin is the continuation and also the bankruptcy of Leninism."

The flaw in this reasoning begins in the tacit identification of Bolshevism, October Revolution and Soviet Union. The historical process of the struggle of hostile forces is replaced by the evolution of Bolshevism in a vacuum. Bolshevism, however, is only a political tendency, closely fused with the working class but not identical with it. And aside from the working class there exist in the Soviet Union a hundred million peasants, various nationalities, and a heritage of oppression, misery and ignorance. The state built up by the Bolsheviks reflects not only the thought and will of Bolshevism but also the cultural level of the country, the social composition of the population, the pressure of a barbaric past and no less barbaric world imperialism. To represent the process of degeneration of the Soviet state as the evolution of pure Bolshevism is to ignore social reality in the name of only one of its elements, isolated by pure logic. One has only to call this elementary mistake by its real name to do away with every trace of it.

Bolshevism, at any rate, never identified itself either with the October Revolution or with the Soviet state that

issued from it. Bolshevism considered itself as one of the factors of history, the "conscious" factor—a very important but not the decisive one. We never sinned in historical subjectivism. We saw the decisive factor—on the existing basis of productive forces—in the class struggle, not only on a national but on an international scale.

When the Bolsheviks made concessions to the peasant tendency to private ownership, set up strict rules for membership in the party, purged the party of alien elements, prohibited other parties, introduced the N.E.P., granted enterprises as concessions, or concluded diplomatic agreements with imperialist governments, they were drawing partial conclusions from the basic fact that had been theoretically clear to them from the beginning: that the conquest of power, however important it may be in itself, by no means transforms the party into a sovereign ruler of the historical process. Having taken over the state, the party is able, certainly, to influence the development of society with a power inaccessible to it before; but in return it submits itself to a ten times greater influence from all other elements of society. It can, by the direct attack of hostile forces, be thrown out of power. Given a more dragging tempo of development, it can degenerate internally while maintaining itself in power. It is precisely this dialectic of the historical process that is not understood by those sectarian logicians who try to find in the decay of the Stalinist bureaucracy an annihilating argument against Bolshevism.

In essence these gentlemen say: the revolutionary party that contains in itself no guarantee against its own degeneration is bad. By such a criterion Bolshevism is naturally condemned: it has no talisman. But the criterion itself is wrong. Scientific thinking demands a concrete analysis: how and why did the party degenerate? No one but the Bolsheviks themselves have up to the present time given such an analysis. To do this they had no need to break with Bolshevism. On the contrary,

they found in its arsenal all they needed for the clarification of its fate. They drew this conclusion: certainly Stalinism "grew out" of Bolshevism, not logically, however, but dialectically; not as a revolutionary affirmation but as a Thermidorian negation. It is by no means the same.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PROGNOSIS OF BOLSHEVISM

The Bolsheviks, however, did not have to wait for the Moscow trials to explain the reasons for the disintegration of the governing party of the U.S.S.R. Long ago they foresaw and spoke of the theoretical possibility of this development. Let us remember the prognosis of the Bolsheviks, not only on the eve of the October Revolution but years before. The specific alignment of forces in the national and international field can enable the proletariat to seize power first in a backward country such as Russia. But the same alignment of forces proves beforehand that *without a more or less rapid victory of the proletariat in the advanced countries* the workers' government in Russia will not survive. Left to itself the Soviet regime must either fall or degenerate. More exactly: it will first degenerate and then fall. I myself have written about this more than once, beginning in 1905. In my "History of the Russian Revolution" (cf. "Appendix" to the last volume: "Socialism in One Country") are collected all the statements on this question made by the Bolshevik leaders from 1917 until 1923. They all lead to one conclusion: without a revolution in the West, Bolshevism will be liquidated either by internal counter-revolution or by external intervention, or by a combination of both. Lenin stressed again and again that the bureaucratization of the Soviet regime was not a technical or organizational question, but the potential beginning of the degeneration of the workers' state.

At the Eleventh Party Congress in March, 1923, Lenin spoke of the support offered to Soviet Russia at the time

of the N. E. P. by certain bourgeois politicians, particularly the liberal professor Ustrialov. "I am for the support of the Soviet power in Russia," said Ustrialov, although he was a Cadet, a bourgeois, a supporter of intervention—"because on its present course it is sliding back into an ordinary bourgeois power." Lenin prefers the cynical voice of the enemy to "sugary communistic babble." Soberly and harshly he warns the party of the danger: "What Ustrialov says is possible, one must say it openly. History knows transformations of all kinds; it is absolutely trivial in politics to put one's faith in conviction, devotion, and other excellent moral qualities. A small number of people have excellent moral qualities. The historical outcome is decided by gigantic masses who, if they are not pleased with this small number of people, will treat them none too politely." In a word, the party is not the only factor of development and on a larger historical scale is not the decisive one.

"One nation conquers another," continued Lenin at the same congress, the last in which he participated... "This is quite simple and understandable to everyone. But what of the culture of these nations? That is not so simple. If the conquering nation has a higher culture than the defeated, it imposes its culture on the latter, but if the contrary is true then the defeated nation imposes its culture on the conqueror. Did not something like this occur in the capital of the R.S.F.S.R. and was it not in this way that 4,700 communists (almost a whole division and all of them the best) were submitted to an alien culture?" This was said in the beginning of 1923, and not for the first time. History is not made by a few people, even "the best"; and not only that: these "best" can degenerate in the spirit of an alien, that is a bourgeois culture. Not only can the Soviet state abandon the way of socialism, but the Bolshevik party can, under unfavorable historic conditions, lose its Bolshevism.

From the clear understanding of this danger issued the Left Opposition, definitely formed in 1923. Record-

ing day by day the symptoms of degeneration, it tried to oppose to the growing Thermidor the conscious will of the proletarian vanguard. However, this subjective factor proved to be insufficient. The "gigantic masses" which, according to Lenin, decide the outcome of the struggle, became tired of internal privations and of waiting too long for the world revolution. The mood of the masses declined. The bureaucracy won the upper hand. It cowed the revolutionary vanguard, trampled upon Marxism, prostituted the Bolshevik party. Stalinism conquered. In the form of the Left Opposition, Bolshevism broke with the Soviet bureaucracy and its Comintern. This was the real course of development.

To be sure, in a formal sense Stalinism did issue from Bolshevism. Even today the Moscow bureaucracy continues to call itself the Bolshevik party. It is simply using the old label of Bolshevism the better to fool the masses. So much the more pitiful are those theoreticians who take the shell for the kernel and the appearance for the reality. In the identification of Bolshevism and Stalinism they render the best possible service to the Thermidorians and precisely thereby play a clearly reactionary role.

In view of the elimination of all other parties from the political field the antagonistic interests and tendencies of the various strata of the population must, to a greater or less degree, find their expression in the governing party. To the extent that the political center of gravity has shifted from the proletarian vanguard to the bureaucracy, the party has changed in its social structure as well as in its ideology. Owing to the impetuous course of development, it has suffered in the last fifteen years a far more radical degeneration than did the social democracy in half a century. The present purge draws between Bolshevism and Stalinism not simply a bloody line but a whole river of blood. The annihilation of all the old generation of Bolsheviks, an important part of the middle generation which participated

in the civil war, and that part of the youth which took seriously the Bolshevik traditions, shows not only a political but a thoroughly physical incompatibility between Bolshevism and Stalinism. How can this be ignored?

STALINISM AND "STATE SOCIALISM"

The anarchists, for their part, try to see in Stalinism the organic product not only of Bolshevism and Marxism but of "State socialism" in general. They are willing to replace Bakunin's patriarchal "federation of free communes" by the more modern federation of free Soviets. But, as formerly, they are against centralized state power. In fact: one branch of "state" Marxism, social democracy, after coming to power became an open agent of capitalism. The other gave birth to a new privileged caste. It is obvious that the source of the evil lies in the state. From a wide historical viewpoint, there is a grain of truth in this reasoning. The state as an apparatus of constraint is undoubtedly a source of political and moral infection. This also applies, as experience has shown, to the workers' state. Consequently it can be said that Stalinism is a product of a condition of society in which society was still unable to tear itself out of the strait-jacket of the state. But this situation, containing nothing for the evaluation of Bolshevism or Marxism, characterizes only the general cultural level of mankind, and above all—the relation of forces between proletariat and bourgeoisie. Having agreed with the anarchists that the state, even the workers' state, is the offspring of class barbarism and that real human history will begin with the abolition of the state, we have still before us in full force the question: what ways and methods will lead, *ultimately*, to the abolition of the state? Recent experience proves that they are certainly not the methods of anarchism.

The leaders of the C. N. T., the only important anar-

chist organization in the world, became, in the critical hour, bourgeois ministers. They explained their open betrayal of the theory of anarchism by the pressure of "exceptional circumstances." But did not the leaders of German social democracy invoke, in their time, the same excuse? Naturally, civil war is not a peaceful and ordinary but an "exceptional circumstance." Every serious revolutionary organization, however, prepares precisely for "exceptional circumstances." The experience of Spain has shown once again that the state can be "denied" in booklets published in "normal circumstances" by permission of the bourgeois state, but that the conditions of revolution leave no room for "denial" of the state; they demand, on the contrary, the conquest of the state. We have not the slightest intention of blaming the anarchists for not having liquidated the state by a mere stroke of the pen. A revolutionary party, even after having seized power (of which the anarchist leaders were incapable in spite of the heroism of the anarchist workers) is still by no means the sovereign ruler of society. But we do severely blame the anarchist theory, which seemed to be wholly suitable for times of peace, but which had to be dropped rapidly as soon as the "exceptional circumstances" of the... revolution had begun. In the old days there were certain generals—and probably are now—who considered that the most harmful thing for an army was war. In the same class are those revolutionaries who claim that their doctrine is destroyed by revolution.

Marxists are wholly in agreement with the anarchists in regard to the final goal: the liquidation of the state. Marxists are "state-ist" only to the extent that one cannot achieve the liquidation of the state simply by ignoring it. The experience of Stalinism does not refute the teaching of Marxism but confirms it by inversion. The revolutionary doctrine which teaches the proletariat to orientate itself correctly in situations and to profit actively by them, contains of course no automatic guaran-

tee of victory. But victory is possible only through the application of this doctrine. Moreover, the victory must not be thought of as a single event. It must be considered in the perspective of an historic epoch. The first workers' state—on a lower economic basis and surrounded by imperialism—was transformed into the gendarmerie of Stalinism. But genuine Bolshevism launched a life and death struggle against that gendarmerie. To maintain itself, Stalinism is now forced to conduct a direct *civil war* against Bolshevism, under the name of "Trotskyism", not only in the U. S. S. R. but also in Spain. The old Bolshevik party is dead but Bolshevism is raising its head everywhere.

To deduce Stalinism from Bolshevism or from Marxism is the same as to deduce, in a larger sense, counter-revolution from revolution. Liberal-conservative and later reformist thinking has always been characterized by this clichè. Due to the class structure of society, revolutions have always produced counter-revolutions. Does this not indicate, asks the logician, that there is some inner flaw in the revolutionary method? However, neither the liberals nor the reformists have succeeded, as yet, in inventing a more "economical" method. But if it is not easy to rationalize the living historic process, it is not at all difficult to give a rational interpretation of the alternation of its waves, and thus by pure logic to deduce Stalinism from "state socialism", fascism from Marxism, reaction from revolution, in a word, the antithesis from the thesis. In this domain as in many others anarchist thought is the prisoner of liberal rationalism. Real revolutionary thinking is not possible without dialectics.

THE POLITICAL "SINS" OF BOLSHEVISM AS THE SOURCE OF STALINISM

The arguments of the rationalists assume at times, at least in their outer form, a more concrete character.

They do not deduce Stalinism from Bolshevism as a whole but from its political sins.* The Bolshevik—according to Gorter, Pannekoek, certain German “spartakists” and others—replaced the dictatorship of the proletariat with the dictatorship of the party; Stalin replaced the dictatorship of the party with the dictatorship of the bureaucracy. The Bolsheviks destroyed all parties but their own; Stalin strangled the Bolshevik party in the interest of a Bonapartist clique. The Bolsheviks made compromises with the bourgeoisie; Stalin became its ally and support. The Bolsheviks preached the necessity of participation in the old trade unions and in the bourgeois parliament; Stalin made friends with the trade union bureaucracy and bourgeois democracy. One can make such comparisons at will. For all their apparent effectiveness they are entirely empty.

The proletariat can take power only through its vanguard. In itself the necessity for state power arises from an insufficient cultural level of the masses and their heterogeneity. In the revolutionary vanguard, organized in a party, is crystallized the aspiration of the masses to obtain their freedom. Without the confidence of the class in the vanguard, without support of the vanguard by the class, there can be no talk of the conquest of power. In this sense the proletarian revolution and dictatorship are the work of the whole class, but only under the leadership of the vanguard. The Soviets are only the organized form of the tie between the vanguard and the class. A revolutionary content can be given to this form only by the party. This is proved by

* One of the outstanding representatives of this type of thinking is the French author of the book on Stalin, B. Souvarine. The factual and documentary side of Souvarine's work is the product of long and conscientious research. However, the historical philosophy of the author is striking in its vulgarity. To explain all subsequent historical mishaps he seeks the inner flaws of Bolshevism. The influence of the real conditions of the historical process on Bolshevism are non-existent for him. Even Taine with his theory of “milieu” is closer to Marx than Souvarine.

the positive experience of the October Revolution and by the negative experience of other countries (Germany, Austria, finally Spain). No one has either shown in practice or tried to explain articulately on paper how the proletariat can seize power without the political leadership of a party that knows what it wants. The fact that this party subordinates the Soviets politically to its leaders, has, in itself, abolished the Soviet system no more than the domination of the conservative majority has abolished the British parliamentary system.

As far as the *prohibition* of the other Soviet parties is concerned, it did not flow from any "theory" of Bolshevism but was a measure of defence of the dictatorship in a backward and devastated country, surrounded by enemies on all sides. For the Bolsheviks it was clear from the beginning that this measure, later completed by the prohibition of factions inside the governing party itself, signaled a tremendous danger. However, the root of the danger lay not in the doctrine or in the tactics but in the material weakness of the dictatorship, in the difficulties of its internal and international situation. If the revolution had triumphed, even if only in Germany, the need of prohibiting the other Soviet parties would immediately have fallen away. It is absolutely indisputable that the domination of a single party served as the juridical point of departure for the Stalinist totalitarian system. But the reason for this development lies neither in Bolshevism nor in the prohibition of other parties as a temporary war measure, but in the number of defeats of the proletariat in Europe and Asia.

The same applies to the struggle with anarchism. In the heroic epoch of the revolution the Bolsheviks went hand in hand with the genuinely revolutionary anarchists. Many of them were drawn into the ranks of the party. The author of these lines discussed with Lenin more than once the possibility of allotting to the anarchists certain territories where, with the consent of the local population, they would carry out their stateless ex-

periment. But civil war, blockade, and hunger left no room for such plans. The Kronstadt insurrection? But the revolutionary government naturally could not "present" to the insurrectionary sailors the fortress which protected the capital only because the reactionary peasant-soldier rebellion was joined by a few doubtful anarchists. A concrete historical analysis of the events leaves not the slightest room for the legends, built up on ignorance and sentimentality, concerning Kronstadt, Makhno and other episodes of the revolution.

There remains only the fact that the Bolsheviks from the beginning applied not only conviction but also compulsion, often to a most brutal degree. It is also indisputable that later the bureaucracy which grew out of the revolution monopolized the system of compulsion for its own use. Every stage of development, even such catastrophic stages as revolution and counter-revolution, flows from the preceding stage, is rooted in it and takes on some of its features. Liberals, including the Webbs, have always maintained that the Bolshevik dictatorship was only a new version of Czarism. They close their eyes to such "details" as the abolition of the monarchy and the nobility, the handing over of the land to the peasants, the expropriation of capital, the introduction of planned economy, atheist education, etc. In the same way liberal-anarchist thought closes its eyes to the fact that the Bolshevik revolution, with all its repressions, meant an upheaval of social relations in the interest of the masses, whereas the Stalinist thermidorian upheaval accompanies the transformation of Soviet society in the interest of a privileged minority. It is clear that in the identification of Stalinism with Bolshevism there is not a trace of socialist criteria.

QUESTIONS OF THEORY

One of the most outstanding features of Bolshevism has been its severe, exacting, even quarrelsome attitude toward questions of doctrine. The twenty-seven volumes

of Lenin's works will remain forever an example of the highest theoretical conscientiousness. Without this fundamental quality Bolshevism would never have fulfilled its historic role. In this regard Stalinism, coarse, ignorant and thoroughly empiric, lies at the opposite pole.

The Opposition declared more than ten years ago in its program: "Since Lenin's death a whole set of new theories has been created, whose only purpose is to justify the backsliding of the Stalinists from the path of the international proletarian revolution." Only a few days ago an American writer, Liston M. Oak, who has participated in the Spanish Revolution, wrote: "The Stalinists in fact are today the foremost revisionists of Marx and Lenin—Bernstein did not dare to go half as far as Stalin in revising Marx." This is absolutely true. One must add only that Bernstein actually felt certain theoretical needs: he tried conscientiously to establish the relationship between the reformist practices of social democracy and its program. The Stalinist bureaucracy, however, not only has nothing in common with Marxism but is in general foreign to any doctrine or system whatsoever. Its "ideology" is thoroughly permeated with police subjectivism, its practice is the empiricism of crude violence. In keeping with its essential interests the caste of usurpers is hostile to any theory: it can give an account of its social role neither to itself nor to anyone else. Stalin revises Marx and Lenin not with the theoretician's pen but with the heel of the G. P. U.

QUESTION OF MORALS

Complaints of the "immorality" of Bolshevism come particularly from those boastful nonentities whose cheap masks were torn away by Bolshevism. In petty-bourgeois, intellectual, democratic, "socialist", literary, parliamentary and other circles, conventional values prevail, or a conventional language to cover their lack of values. This large and motley society for mutual protection—

“live and let live”—cannot bear the touch of the Marxist lancet on its sensitive skin. The theoreticians, writers and moralists, hesitating between different camps, thought and continue to think that the Bolsheviks maliciously exaggerate differences, are incapable of “loyal” collaboration and by their “intrigues” disrupt the unity of the workers’ movement. Moreover, the sensitive and squeamish centrist has always thought that the Bolsheviks were “calumniating” him—simply because they carried through to the end for him his half-developed thoughts: he himself was never able to. But the fact remains that only that precious quality, an uncompromising attitude toward all quibbling and evasion, can educate a revolutionary party which will not be taken unawares by “exceptional circumstances”.

The moral qualities of every party flow, in the last analysis, from the historical interests that it represents. The moral qualities of Bolshevism, self-renunciation, disinterestedness, audacity and contempt for every kind of tinsel and falsehood—the highest qualities of human nature!—flow from revolutionary intransigence in the service of the oppressed. The Stalinist bureaucracy imitates also in this domain the words and gestures of Bolshevism. But when “intransigence” and “inflexibility” are applied by a police apparatus in the service of a privileged minority they become a source of demoralization and gangsterism. One can feel only contempt for these gentlemen who identify the revolutionary heroism of the Bolsheviks with the bureaucratic cynicism of the Thermidorians.

* * *

Even now, in spite of the dramatic events of the recent period, the average philistine prefers to believe that the struggle between Bolshevism (“Trotskyism”) and Stalinism concerns a clash of personal ambitions, or, at best, a conflict between two “shades” of Bolshev-

ism. The crudest expression of this opinion is given by Norman Thomas, leader of the American Socialist Party: "There is little reason to believe," he writes (*Socialist Review*, Sept. 1937, pag. 6) "that if Trotsky had won (!) instead of Stalin, there would have been an end of intrigue, plots, and the reign of fear in Russia." And this man considers himself . . . a Marxist. One would have the same right to say: "There is little reason to believe that if instead of Pius XI, the Holy See were occupied by Norman I, the Catholic Church would have been transformed into a bulwark of socialism." Thomas fails to understand that it is not a question of a match between Stalin and Trotsky, but of an antagonism between the bureaucracy and the proletariat. To be sure, the governing stratum of the U. S. S. R. is forced even now to adapt itself to the still not wholly liquidated heritage of revolution, while preparing at the same time through direct civil war (bloody "purge"—mass annihilation of the discontented) a change of the social regime. But in Spain the Stalinist clique is already acting openly as a bulwark of the bourgeois order against socialism. The struggle against the Bonapartist bureaucracy is turning before our eyes into class struggle: two worlds, two programs, two moralities. If Thomas thinks that the victory of the socialist proletariat over the infamous caste of oppressors would not politically and morally regenerate the Soviet regime, he proves only that for all his reservations, shufflings and pious sighs he is far nearer to the Stalinist bureaucracy than to the workers.

Like other exposers of Bolshevik "immorality", Thomas has simply not grown up to revolutionary morals.

THE TRADITIONS OF BOLSHEVISM AND THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

The "lefts" who tried to skip Bolshevism in their "return" to Marxism generally confined themselves to

isolated panaceas: boycott of the old trade unions, boycott of parliament, creation of "genuine" soviets. All this could still seem extremely profound in the first heat of the post-war days. But now, in the light of most recent experience, such "infantile diseases" have no longer even the interest of a curiosity. The Dutchmen Gorter and Pannekoik, the German "Spartakists", the Italian Bordigists, showed their independence from Bolshevism only by artificially inflating one of its features and opposing it to the rest. But nothing has remained either in practice or in theory of these "left" tendencies: an indirect but important proof that Bolshevism is the *only* possible form of Marxism for this epoch.

The Bolshevik party has shown in action a combination of the highest revolutionary audacity and political realism. It has established for the first time the only relation between vanguard and class that can assure victory. It has proved by experience that the alliance between the proletariat and the oppressed masses of the rural and urban petty-bourgeoisie is possible only through the political overthrow of the traditional petty-bourgeois parties. The Bolshevik party has shown the entire world how to carry out armed insurrection and the seizure of power. Those who propose the abstraction of soviets to the party dictatorship should understand that only thanks to the Bolshevik leadership were the soviets able to lift themselves out of the mud of reformism and attain the state form of the proletariat. The Bolshevik party achieved in the civil war the correct combination of military art and Marxist politics. Even if the Stalinist bureaucracy should succeed in destroying the economic foundations of the new society, the experience of planned economy under the leadership of the Bolshevik party will have entered history for all time as one of the greatest teachings of mankind. This can be ignored only by bruised and offended sectarians who have turned their backs on the process of history.

But this is not all. The Bolshevik party was able to carry on its magnificent "practical" work only because it illuminated all its steps with theory. Bolshevism did not create this theory: it was furnished by Marxism. But Marxism is the theory of movement, not of stagnation. Only events on a tremendous historical scale could enrich the theory itself. Bolshevism brought an invaluable contribution to Marxism in its analysis of the imperialist epoch as an epoch of wars and revolutions; of bourgeois democracy in the era of decaying capitalism; of the correlation between the general strike and the insurrection; of the role of party, soviets and trade unions in the period of proletarian revolution; in its theory of the soviet state, of the economy of transition, of fascism and Bonapartism in the epoch of capitalist decline; finally in its analysis of the degeneration of the Bolshevik party itself and of the soviet state. Let any other tendency be named that has added anything essential to the conclusions and generalizations of Bolshevism. Theoretically and politically Vandervelde, De Brouckère, Hilferding, Otto Bauer, Léon Blum, Zyromski, not to mention Major Attlee and Norman Thomas, live on the dilapidated left-overs of the past. The degeneration of the Comintern is most crudely expressed by the fact that it has dropped to the theoretical level of the Second International. All the varieties of intermediary groups (Independent Labour Party of Great Britain, P.O.U.M. and their like) adapt every week new haphazard fragments of Marx and Lenin to their current needs. They can teach the workers nothing.

Only the founders of the Fourth International, who have made their own the whole tradition of Marx and Lenin, take a serious attitude toward theory. Philistines may jeer that twenty years after the October victory the revolutionaries are again thrown back to modest propagandist preparation. The big capitalists are, in this question as in many others, far more penetrating than the petty-bourgeois who imagine themselves "socialists"

or "communists". It is no accident that the subject of the Fourth International does not leave the columns of the world press. The burning historical need for revolutionary leadership promises to the Fourth International an exceptionally rapid tempo of growth. The greatest guarantee of its further success lies in the fact that it has not arisen away from the large historic road, but is an organic outgrowth of Bolshevism.

August 29, 1937.

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