

# Revolution 1917

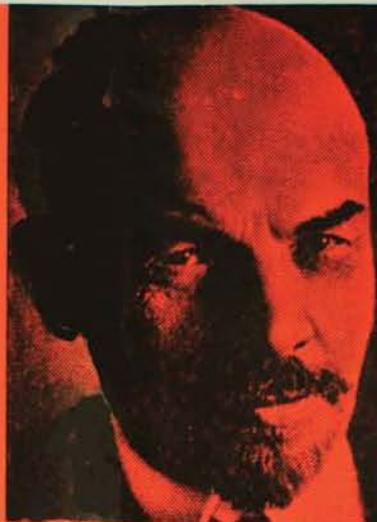
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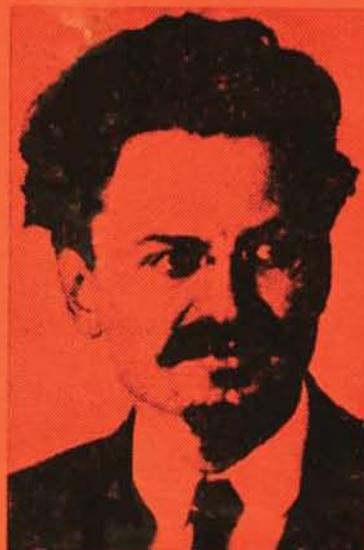
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LENIN



TROTSKY

# *Fourth International*

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NOVEMBER 1967 VOLUME 4 NUMBER 3 PRICE: FOUR SHILLINGS

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**Special  
Fiftieth  
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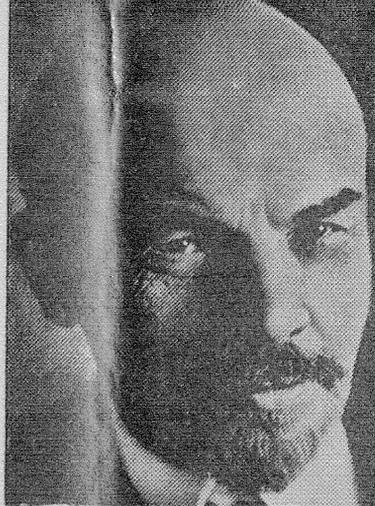
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## A Journal of International Marxism

Published by the International Committee  
of the Fourth International

186a Clapham High Street, London S.W.4

Editors: Tom Kemp, Cliff Slaughter

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	CONTENTS	Page
<b>Editorial</b>		69
<b>The Russian Revolution and the British Working Class</b>		72
<i>by Alan Clinton and George Myers</i>		
<b>Lenin and the Imperialist War of 1914-1918</b>		81
<i>by Cliff Slaughter</i>		
<b>Trotsky's struggle against Bureaucracy</b>		88
<i>by Tom Kemp</i>		
<b>The Economic Policies of the Left Opposition</b>		96
<i>by Geoff Pilling</i>		
<b>Conflicts in the Bolshevik Party—1917</b>		101
<i>by Robert Black and John Crawford</i>		
<b>Book Reviews</b>		107

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*Erratum: the correct title of the book reviewed on page 111  
is Soviet and East European Agriculture and  
not Soviet Agronomy.*

# Editorial

FIFTY YEARS AGO, the October Revolution in Russia took place, the first great act in the new epoch of world proletarian revolution. To celebrate this fiftieth anniversary means to carry forward the revolutionary tasks of the proletariat in the epoch. Revolutionary victories in the advanced capitalist countries are the true fulfilment of the promise of October 1917. Only the preparation of such victories can serve to defend the gains already made by the USSR on the foundations of October. It is for this reason that the Social Democrats of all kinds and the Stalinists are incapable of commemorating the October Revolution.

Far from being the representatives of the revolutionary tradition, they are its would-be grave-diggers. It was the Social Democrats of Germany who manned the state offices of that country to drown in blood the German Revolution of 1918-1919. It was the Stalinists who led the proletariat into the defeats of the 1920s and 1930s, from the British General Strike of 1926, through Hitler's accession to power in 1933 to the defeat of the Spanish revolution. These counter-revolutionary agents in the ranks of the workers' movement, representing the surrender to capitalism of the Second and Third Internationals, were later the main instrument of capitalist stabilization after the Second World War. Backed by the secret diplomacy of Stalin, they took their place in bourgeois governments or supported them, in both the 'democratic' and the 'defeated' capitalist nations.

It was on the basis of this 'post-war settlement' that the Cold War was built, and the gigantic war machine of the imperialist USA and its allies turned first against the USSR and now against China. Every assistance given to the imperialists in this way prepares for a future war by the imperialists to restore capitalism in the USSR, Eastern Europe and China. Ever since October 1917 it has been a primary duty of socialists to defend the Soviet Union. But that duty has been deliberately twisted into a justification of class-collaboration, behind the programme of co-opera-

tion with 'peace-loving' capitalist politicians to protect the USSR from war. In fact, the duty of defending the USSR can be executed only through the methods of revolutionary class struggle.

Before the formal dissolution of the Third International by Stalin in 1943, Trotsky and his comrades founded the Fourth International (1938), grouping together all those communists who stood for defence of the gains of October by the extension of the proletarian revolution. Only the Fourth International today, in the shape of the national sections of the International Committee, can carry out a veritable commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution.

Still today in the USSR there is available no true account of the Revolution of 1917, and no full history of the Civil War. There is a reason for this curtain to be drawn: all the talk of 'liberalization' since 1956 cannot wipe out the fact that the ruling bureaucracy in the Soviet Union established its domination only by carrying through the most ruthless blood-purge of the Bolshevik generation of October. The GPU's assassination of Trotsky in August 1940 completed the systematic physical destruction of every vestige of Bolshevik opposition in Russia unleashed by Stalin after the Kirov assassination in 1934.

Many individuals were impelled towards Trotskyism by their revulsion against Stalinist tyranny, and sooner or later left the movement because they discovered in practice that this was not its real basis at all. The Fourth International was and remains the continuation of the Russian Revolution and of the early Communist International. For this reason the liquidation of its leadership, while it was a crippling blow, could not deal death to the International. It is the proletarian revolution which gives life to the Fourth International: all the past gains of Marxism in the struggle for the revolution, and all the fighting strength of the international working class today.

It is often argued, as by the late Isaac Deutscher, that the Fourth International, founded

on a tiny numerical basis, in a period of defeat and prostration of the international working class, was historically misconceived. A comparison is drawn with the conditions of mass working-class upsurge which followed the First World War and Russian Revolution and nurtured the early Third International.

Such criticism betrays a complete failure to understand the tasks of revolutionaries in our time. Before Lenin and his followers founded the Third International the First World War had intervened, bringing about the collapse of the Second International and the disillusionment of millions in the socialist movement. In 1938 Trotsky predicted with great accuracy the outlines of World War II, and undertook the foundation of the Fourth International as the most vital preparation for the defeats and betrayals which Stalinism would inevitably bring. It was a great victory for conscious revolutionary preparation. All those who opposed Trotsky's move, still arguing that the Third International and its parties would be reformed, were helpless before the dissolution of the Third International in 1943 and the bureaucratic police measures of the Stalinists in every national party.

In every sense, only the Fourth International can carry forward the work of the October Revolution. Stalin's basic revision of Marxism, the idea of 'Socialism in One Country', was a reflection of the narrow interests of the Soviet bureaucracy leaning on the most conservative layers of the population of the USSR in the 1920s. It is a theory which obstructs the development of revolutionary working-class consciousness, and makes impossible a Marxist understanding of the Russian Revolution, without which the next vital stage in the world socialist revolution will be further delayed.

The forces which clashed in October 1917 were contingents of the main protagonists in this world revolution. Imperial Russia found itself torn asunder by a concentration of the contradictions of modern imperialism, superimposed on the 'Asiatic' backwardness of the Tsarist autocracy and the remnants of serfdom. Only the Marxists who grasped this international process as the essence of the Russian Revolution could prepare for October. When Stalin set out to destroy this theoretical heritage, in his campaign against Trotsky and the theory of Permanent Revolution, he began the disintegration of any revolutionary strategy in the parties of the Comintern.

Once this general outlook of Stalinism is accepted, the Soviet Union becomes an 'example'

of the construction of socialism, to be compared formally with 'different roads to socialism' in other countries. This is of course the exact counterpart of the bourgeois version of the Russian Revolution as a refutation of Marxism. Drawing attention to the abuses of Stalinism, they claim to 'prove' that socialism will not work. At the same time, the outbreak of the socialist revolution in a backward country is taken as proof of the falsity of Marx's theory that socialism is born out of the highest achievements of industrial capitalism.

These are not dry arguments confined to books and party documents, but reflect the clash of great historical forces. The heroic Russian working class stepped out first to defeat its own bourgeoisie. Its victory will be completed only on the arena of world revolution, as was perfectly well understood by Lenin, Trotsky and every other leading Communist in October 1917.

The defeats of the German proletariat, because of the absence of a Bolshevik leadership, between 1918 and 1923 were the main factor in leading to the isolation of the young Soviet Union in economic conditions where the bureaucracy usurped the political power of the working class. The series of international defeats for the working class which followed were accompanied in the USSR by a seemingly unending drama of mass enthusiasm followed by the bloodiest repressions, of revolutionary elation followed by the anguish of these same revolutionaries when confronted by the sight of the Communist banner being dragged in the mud by the Thermidorian butchers of Stalin.

Many Communists gave way to Stalin, or could not find the strength to continue the revolutionary struggle, and it was perhaps the greatest historical achievement of this century to carry through the fight for proletarian internationalism and the building of new revolutionary parties. This is why Trotsky rightly said that his political work in exile in the 1930s was the most important of his life, even more important than his part in the October Revolution and the leadership of the Red Army.

In this statement, Trotsky expressed the essence of the lessons of October 1917. It was the conscious leadership given to the Russian proletariat by the Bolshevik Party which assured the victory. All the historical 'dilemmas' of the Russian Revolution's subsequent fate, the stock-in-trade of respectable commentators, all the unfulfilled hopes of generations, will be resolved and fulfilled through the unity of theory and practice in con-

tinuing this work of building revolutionary parties.

The workers of the advanced capitalist countries, having suffered no decisive defeats for decades, are now moving on to the political scene, at a time when not only capitalism but also the bureaucratic workers' parties are in mortal crisis. Capitalism must try to resolve its problems by concentrating all solutions at the level of state power, and thus forces upon the working class this very problem. The labour movement of every capitalist country is being inexorably pressed towards the battle to resolve that crisis of leadership upon which the future of humanity depends. The nature of Bolshevik leadership is the greatest asset handed to the international proletariat by the October Revolution. Upon the building of such leaderships depends the defence of the USSR itself, with all its massive advances in technology and production.

Out of Stalinism can come no solution to the problems of the future of the proletarian revolution. Trotsky was absolutely right to insist that Stalinism was the major counter-revolutionary force in the world. Impressionists in politics were convinced by the exclusion of capitalism from Eastern Europe and China in 1945-1949 that this would end the 'isolation' of the USSR and 'unwind the reel of history' back to true communism. On the contrary, it brought an intensification of the contradictions of 'socialism in one country'. First the 1953-1956 uprisings in East Germany, Poland and Hungary, and then the Sino-Soviet split, showed that the Stalinist bureaucracy preferred to perpetrate its domination even at the expense of military suppression of the proletariat and the opening of the door to imperialism.

The socialist revolution differs from all other revolutions in history. It does not replace one type of class oppression and exploitation by another. It is the revolution of the majority, the working class, carried out to bring into being a classless society. More than any previous revolution, it requires conscious understanding of its own objective conditions, and revolutionary preparation on this basis. For this reason, the next step in the proletarian revolution can be prepared

and led only by those who have fought for Marxism and to defend the gains of the proletariat against every enemy inside and outside the workers' movement. Only the banner of the Fourth International can claim this title.

The International Youth Assembly, convened in England in August 1967 by the Young Socialists (Britain) and *Révoltes* (France) and attended by 800 delegates from 12 different countries, was a truly fitting commemoration of the October Revolution. Here were the first contingents of a generation of revolutionary youth which is now grasping Marxism, in opposition to Social Democracy and Stalinism, as the only effective weapon in their struggle against imperialism. Here was the answer to the miserable sceptics who opposed the foundation and building of the Fourth International. It was only those who fought for the programme of Lenin and Trotsky who could bring together these hundreds of revolutionary youth.

The mass forces which they will mobilize in preparation for the International Conference of Revolutionary Youth will build on the basis of the Programme of the Fourth International. The revolutionary parties of the Fourth International will find an inexhaustible supply of proletarian cadres from this radicalized youth. Here is the carrying forward of October! The disintegration of Stalinism and of Social Democracy will not be permitted to throw the working class on to the mercy of the imperialists. Instead, there will be new Octobers. And the workers of Russia will be among the most prominent and most valiant in this next stage. They will rally behind a new party, based on the programme of Lenin and Trotsky, in political revolution against the reactionary Kremlin bureaucracy, in order to take their place beside the vanguard of the working class in every country.

*Long Live the October Revolution of 1917!*

*Long Live the World Socialist Revolution!*

*Long Live the Fourth International!*

# The

'At the present moment in history . . . it is the Russian model that reveals to all countries something—and something highly significant—of their near and inevitable future.'

Lenin in 1920<sup>1</sup>

# Russian Revolution

# and

'I remember so well what happened when the Russian Revolution occurred. I remember the miners when they heard that the Tsarist tyranny had been overthrown, rushing to meet one another in the streets with tears streaming down their cheeks, shaking hands and saying: "At last it has happened" . . . the revolution of 1917 came to the working class of Great Britain not as a disaster, but as one of the most emancipating events in the history of mankind.'

Aneurin Bevan in 1951<sup>2</sup>

# British Working Class — two episodes

by Alan Clinton and George Myers

THE OVERTHROW of reactionary Tsardom in Russia, the seizure of power by the proletariat and the setting up of the first Soviet Socialist Republic showed the working class of the world, and especially its revolutionary vanguard, that workers' power could be taken, and kept. It thus altered the nature and perspective of workers' struggle everywhere. The effect of the Revolution in 1917 was literally world-shattering, and in Britain, as in other countries, the working class and the revolutionary movement underwent complex changes in organization, theories and methods of struggle. The theoretical development of the revolutionary groups, the response of the bureaucracy and other aspects of the many-sided impact of the Revolution require separate treatment in subsequent articles. Here two particularly important episodes in the history of the British working class in the post-revolutionary years have been selected for attention.

Lenin described the soviets as amongst the greatest contributions made by the Russian Revolution to the international working class. From the Paris Commune of 1871 to the Hungarian rising of 1956, all-inclusive local workers' committees have been a vital weapon in the proletarian struggle to defend its conditions, and to overthrow the capitalist order. In Britain such workers' committees never reached the advanced

stage of development attained elsewhere. However, on two occasions at least in the period 1917-1920 workers' committees did spring up in Britain. The Councils of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates in 1917 and the Councils of Action in 1920 were inseparably linked with the defence of the Russian Revolution by thousands and millions of British workers. It was a real proletarian internationalism which brought into existence institutions which could have heralded the beginning of a British revolution.

The complex reasons for the failure of revolutionary possibilities in Britain in this period to mature can be seen in these events. The craven betrayals of the right wing in supporting their 'own' bourgeoisie in 1914, in joining the government and in surrendering trade-union rights are well known. The first Imperialist War could only have been carried on with the compliance of the Hendersons and the Thomases. Less often realized is the role of the centrists, such as MacDonald and Smillie, who talked of opposition to the war, but co-operated in the Government's schemes for enlistment, and for the direction and control of labour. These men were in at the beginning of

1 In *Left Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder* (Collected Works, London, 1966, Vol. 31), p. 22.

2 Labour Party, *Report of the Fiftieth Annual Conference* (1951), p. 121.

every revolutionary development to smother it and hand it over to the bourgeoisie. The role of the revolutionaries, and especially of the British Socialist Party (BSP) was of central importance but of limited impact. Their theoretical backwardness, their idealist attitude to workers' struggles, their failure to fight for their own leadership, these meant they could not bring forward to a higher plane the revolutionary possibilities that existed in the period.

### From February to October 1917

As soon as the February revolution broke out there were demonstrations and meetings of support in Britain. The first demonstration took place on March 24, within days of the news arriving. 7,000 people attended a meeting at the Memorial Hall, Mile End Road, sponsored by Russian refugee groups with the support of the BSP, and the Women's Socialist Federation (WSF). 'During the whole meeting again and again outbursts of boundless enthusiasm filled the immense hall with unending applause and shouts.' The meeting also indicated its views on the further development of the revolution when it 'expressed its conviction that those who have at heart the cause of the workers and of all the labouring masses in Russia must rally around the Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Delegates for the successful achievement of the work of the revolution in the Republic of Russia'.<sup>3</sup>

There were many more meetings in the weeks that followed. For instance, over the weekend of March 31 to April 1 over 20,000 people expressed their solidarity with the revolution in meetings at the Albert Hall.<sup>4</sup> On May Day 70,000 demonstrators in Glasgow called for 'the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a co-operative commonwealth as the only solution to poverty and unemployment'. Thousands in Manchester cheered and applauded Robert Williams, leader of the Transport Workers' Federation, when he said that 'revolutions like charity begin at home'. In Liverpool 150 Russian sailors headed the demonstration and received a tumultuous reception at the meeting afterwards. In London nearly 50,000 marched in solidarity with the revolution, against conscription, for votes for all and for an immediate peace.<sup>5</sup>

Early in May a Convention was summoned at Leeds to commemorate the revolution. This was called by the United Socialist Council, a body formed in 1913 by the BSP and the Independent Labour Party (ILP) after they had failed to amalgamate on the instructions of the International

Socialist Bureau. On May 11 it issued a leaflet entitled *Follow Russia*, which described the purpose of the Conference as 'to ascertain and pronounce upon the opinions of the working class of this country regarding the developments which have taken place, and are taking place in Russia', so that these events would receive 'sympathetic response' making possible 'a real international peace based upon working class solidarity'.<sup>6</sup>

When the convention assembled on June 3 there were 1,150 delegates and 2,000 visitors.<sup>7</sup> Motions were passed saluting the Russian Revolution, calling for 'a peace without annexations or indemnities', and demanding a complete restoration of civil liberties 'in accord with the democracy of Russia'. The mood of the Conference can be judged from this quotation from the report, issued later by the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates, of Robert Williams' speech: 'We want to break the influence of the industrial and political labour "machine"—(cheers)—and this Convention is our attempt so to do. . . . We are competent to speak in the name of our own class, and damn the Constitution. (Loud cheers.) . . . If you are really sincere in sending greetings to Russia I say to you: "Go thou and do likewise" (cheers).' Philip Snowden was rather put off by this enthusiasm. 'I had repeatedly to appeal to the delegates against applause as tending to waste of time', he said afterwards.<sup>8</sup>

The most significant event of the conference was the passing of a resolution which called upon the trades councils, trade unions and political bodies represented 'at once to support in every town, urban, and rural district, Councils of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates for initiating and co-ordinating of working-class activity in support of the policies set out in the foregoing resolution (i.e. on civil liberties) and to work strenuously for a peace made by the peoples of the countries and for the complete political and economic emancipation of international labour'. These Councils were to defend trade unionism, fight war profiteering, and cater for the interests of soldiers and their dependents. Finally, it was agreed that 'the

3 *Woman's Dreadnaught*, March 31, 1917; *The Herald*, March 31, 1917.

4 *Labour Leader*, April 5, 1917; *The Herald*, April 7, 1917; R. Postgate, *Life of George Lansbury* (1951), pp. 165-9.

5 *Labour Leader*, May 10, 1917.

6 P. Snowden, *An Autobiography* (1934), Volume I, pp. 449-52.

7 Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates, *What Happened at Leeds* (1917); J. T. Murphy, *Labour's Big Three* (1948), p. 47.

8 P. Snowden, *op. cit.*, p. 445.



**Philip Snowden**  
*Socialism through  
parliament and  
no other way.*

Convenors of this Conference be appointed a provisional committee, whose duties shall be to assist the formation of local Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils and generally to give effect to the policy determined by this conference.'

The failure of the Convention to produce many concrete results has often been asserted. We hope to show, however, that the conference was not devoid of results. The reasons for the failure to achieve more were present at the Convention itself. The proceedings were dominated by the ILP. The ILP represented the basic political section of the Labour Party in the period before its re-organisation in 1918. Because of its verbal opposition to the policies of the right wing, the ILP attracted into its ranks many working class militants. The leadership of the party had, however, no intention of leading any struggle against the right wing. Whilst willing to indulge in left speeches at Leeds men such as MacDonald, Henderson and Snowden were capable only of being servants to the right wing. Snowden, who spoke at Leeds for 'a peace without annexations or indemnities' and supported all the other resolutions, explained later his real hostility to what had happened. 'It may be, I do not rule it out of theoretical consideration, that Workers' and Soldiers' Councils or Soviets may come to Britain but I am for Socialism coming through parliament and no other way.'<sup>9</sup> It is not just a matter, as Pabloite Ken Coates argues, 'that the Parliamentarians were caught off balance'.<sup>10</sup> They fulfilled a definite role in riding the tiger only to kill it. As early as July 5 the ILP leaders warned against the danger that local councils might become rival organizations to the ILP branches rather than means of co-operating between existing political groups<sup>11</sup> This was despite such statements as that of Tom Quelch, a member of the Provisional Committee, who said that 'some of the older bodies . . . would be nervous lest their functions are being infringed upon—and no effort must be spared to convince them that the Workmen's and Soldiers'

Councils are bodies whose purpose it is to strengthen and coalesce all other working-class organizations'.<sup>12</sup>

The Provisional Committee arranged a series of regional conferences in late July and early August. Amongst the functions of these was the establishment of Local Workers' and Soldiers' Councils to campaign on the policies of the Convention.<sup>13</sup> Included in the 441 delegates to the London Regional Conference were 18 from Trade Union Executives, 41 from Trades Councils, 162 from Trade Union branches and three from Local Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. The Conference was broken up by a collection of army officers from Canada and Australia, who said they were acting under orders from their superiors, with the aid of all those 'patriots' who could be enlisted from the local public houses. This caused 'the worst riot London has seen for years' according to one eyewitness, a riot which was carried on with no interference from the 200 policemen present. The South Wales Conference in Swansea on the same day with 125 Trade Union Branch Delegates and 26 from Trade Councils met with a similar fate, as did the Newcastle meeting.<sup>14</sup> The Glasgow Conference, planned for August 11, at which E. C. Fairchild, of the BSP, and Ramsay MacDonald of the ILP were to speak, was banned by the Secretary of State for Scotland on August 10 because 'grave disorder' was expected. Within 24 hours the Glasgow Trades Council organized a protest demonstration of more than 5,000.<sup>15</sup> The Conferences planned for Birmingham and Leeds were also banned by the Home Secretary.<sup>16</sup> Conferences were, however, held in other cities. In Portsmouth a meeting was addressed by Mrs. Despard, and at Bristol 100 organizations were represented including seven Trades Councils and 37 Trade Union branches. Further meetings were held in Leicester, in Norwich, where 10,000 workers were represented, and in Manchester, where the 226 delegates scotched the efforts of

9 J. T. Murphy, *New Horizons* (1941), p. 62.

10 See his introduction to *What Happened at Leeds in Archives in Trade Union History and Theory*, Series I, No. 4, p. iii.

11 Editorial in *Labour Leader*.

12 *The Call*, June 21, 1917.

13 *Labour Leader*, July 12, 1917.

14 *Ibid.*, August 9, 1917; *The Times*, July 30, 1917; *Western Mail*, July 30, 1917; *Parliamentary Debates—House of Commons* (5) XCVI, cols. 1784-8, 1790-2.

15 *The Times*, August 10 and 14, 1917; *Labour Leader*, August 16, 1917.

16 *The Times*, July 16 and 23, and August 22, 1917.

another group of army officers to break up the meeting.<sup>17</sup>

From the regional conferences a national committee was elected, and a list of objects drawn up which emphasized the policies already agreed. It set forward the aims of the Council as: 'The consolidation of the efforts of all working class organizations to obtain an ever-increasing share in the wealth produced by the labour of hand and brain together with control over industry.'<sup>18</sup> After mid-August the Councils were ignored by the ILP, and the Labour Party leaders actively opposed them. On July 18 the Labour Party National Executive stated that 'it has nothing to do with the Leeds Convention, and that in our opinion no local organization affiliated to the Party ought to convene Conferences which are not in harmony with the general policy of the Party as laid down at its Annual Conferences.'<sup>19</sup>

Against this, the BSP campaigned vigorously for the decisions of Leeds. Before the Convention itself, the Party set out a correct perspective for its work: 'After the Leeds Conference . . . comes the task of setting the whole working-class movement deliberately and determinedly on the path so splendidly laid down by our Russian comrades . . . the workers . . . will gladly co-operate in forming the Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils but the initiatory work, the organizing and the leading must be done by the Social-Democrats. . . . (The Councils) will soon become strong enough to dominate the towns and districts and determine their future.' However, the BSP's failure to understand the role of the centrist leaders of the ILP meant that it never analysed or fought against them. At the end of the year Willie Gallagher, a member of the BSP, voiced the bemusement of the party at the limited results of the Convention. 'When the Leeds Conference was convened', he wrote, 'great hopes were held of the work to be accomplished by the committees set up all over the country. Unfortunately this very promising organization has apparently expended all its vitality in the issuing of a few political manifestos.'<sup>20</sup> Despite this failure to understand what had happened, the events of the Leeds Convention helped the development of the BSP away from a position where it had sought amalgamation with the ILP towards one of opposition to centrism and opportunism.

The Leeds Convention also gave enormous impetus to the shop stewards movement. Many of the leading shop stewards were at Leeds, including Gallagher and MacManus from the Clyde, Murphy from Sheffield and Peet from Manchester.

They reacted to the establishment of Soviets with enthusiasm. They identified them, however, with their own syndicalist perspectives, reflecting the view of the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) that the Soviets were 'in the nature of the Clyde Workers' Committee'.<sup>21</sup> Unlike such sectional workers' committees, however, the Soviets were all-inclusive class organizations. Despite this lack of understanding it was clear that the shop stewards movement gained much encouragement from the Russian example and through it decided to set up a national movement. As J. T. Murphy later expressed it, the shop stewards 'felt their kinship with soviets'.<sup>22</sup>

Two months after the Leeds Convention the shop stewards made their first attempt to establish a national organization at their conference in Manchester. The constitution they established, however, reflected the anti-leadership theories prevalent in the movement and gave no executive powers to any of its ruling committees.<sup>23</sup> The impact of Leeds nevertheless produced an important change in the shop stewards movement. Its support for the soviets rapidly developed towards an identification with Bolshevism and the effect of the October revolution was to lay the basis for the movement to become the industrial wing of the Communist Party.

## The October Revolution

The October revolution provided at the same time an inspiration and an object lesson for British revolutionaries. A leading figure in working-class struggles of the period later described their hopes and fears: 'How we watched and waited in those days for every scrap of news from the East! Would the Bolsheviks hold power? Lenin: Trotsky; Could they hold on?'<sup>24</sup>

Only the sectarian, syndicalist-orientated SLP at first understood the decisively different nature of October. Within a month they said 'The Russian revolution has so far meant the defeat of the middle class and the triumph of the workers'. The SLP was, however, over-enthusiastic in identifying itself with the Bolsheviks. 'The theories as put into operation by the Russian Maximalists (i.e. Bolsheviks) are similar to those advocated by the

17 *Labour Leader*, August 9 and 16, 1917.

18 *The Call*, October 4 and 25, 1917.

19 *Leeds Citizen*, July 27, 1917.

20 *The Call*, May 31 and December 28, 1917.

21 *The Socialist*, April 1917.

22 J. T. Murphy, *Preparing for Power* (1934), p. 152.

23 Wal Hannington, *Industrial History in Wartime* (1940), pp. 105-6.

24 J. T. Murphy *New Horizons*, p. 68.



**Maxim Litvinov**  
*A rousing reception for the  
Bolshevik emissary from  
Labour delegation in  
January 1918*

international Socialist Labour Party.<sup>25</sup> The BSP, in the period before the October revolution, was closely following the course of events in Russia. As early as the beginning of October they called for the Soviets to take power because 'the Soviets is the only body that can rally the people of Russia in the defence of the revolution'. Thus, the BSP saw the October revolution as a necessary development. Within a week of the revolution its paper said: 'The expected has happened, Kerensky and the provisional council have been overthrown and the Soviet has taken control of Petrograd.'<sup>26</sup> The BSP's enthusiastic support for the revolution was soon to drive a wedge between them and their erstwhile allies in the ILP.

As news of the actions of the Bolshevik government arrived—in particular the publication of the secret treaties and the call for peace negotiations—more and more workers rallied in support of the revolution. At a meeting during the Labour Party Conference in January 1918 delegates gave a rousing reception to the Bolshevik emissary Litvinov, the *Red Flag* was enthusiastically sung and there were cheers for the Russian Revolution and for Trotsky. On January 27 a massive pro-Bolshevik demonstration was mounted in Glasgow.<sup>27</sup> While all this was happening the ILP leaders refused to comment on the course of the revolution. Only in February did they express any reaction, and their enthusiasm was somewhat muted.<sup>28</sup> After this, members of the ILP sympathetic to the Bolsheviks had to wage an increasingly bitter struggle against the leadership.

## The War of Intervention

From mid-1918 to the end of 1919 Britain saw numerous mass class actions and many isolated revolts of revolutionary potential. In the months when the BSP, SLP and other organizations were going through their tortuous negotiations to form the Communist Party, the militancy of the British working class was at a high peak. At the same

time, British armies were leading an imperialist offensive against the new workers' state. Opposition to this intervention, in which the revolutionary groups played an essential role, is one of the most glorious chapters in the internationalist history of the British working class.

In 1918, with big strikes threatening in every industry, Mrs. Webb, arch-Fabian and later admirer of Stalinist Russia, wrote: 'The leaders of the labour are distinctly uneasy about the spirit of revolt among the rank and file, which openly proclaims its sympathy with the lurid doings of Petrograd.'<sup>29</sup> At the same time, growing unrest in the army and in the police force was causing increasing concern to the authorities who thought that the rank and file committees being set up amongst policemen and soldiers represented 'a determined effort to emulate the Russian Bolsheviks in this country'.<sup>30</sup>

In August of 1918 there were extensive police strikes in many cities, and again in the following July in Liverpool combined with large scale rioting. In the summer of 1918 lower-deck committees were elected in south-coast naval bases and there was news of riots at base camps and the shooting of military policemen.<sup>31</sup> In November of 1918 a revolt at Shoreham in Sussex involved over 1,000 men. 'Antagonism to officers' is listed as one of the major causes of revolts which broke out in Folkestone on January 3, 1919.<sup>32</sup> Ten thousand soldiers marched into Folkestone and put up pickets to prevent troops from being demobilized. At the same time it was said that 'everywhere the feeling is the same: "the war is over, we won't fight in Russia and we mean to go home"'.<sup>33</sup> Further mutinies against conditions at Valdelure and elsewhere in Northern France resulted in the camps being taken over and being run by the men, who forced the officers to come and go only with the authorization of permits signed by the camp committees. At Vendroux, the whole of an ordnance corps group went on strike until

25 *The Socialist*, January and February 1918.

26 *The Call*, October 4 and November 15, 1917.

27 *Labour Leader*, January 24 and 31, 1918.

28 *Ibid.*, February 7, 1918. An article on March 7 entitled *The ILP and the Bolsheviks* is hostile to the Soviet government, largely on a pacifist basis.

29 B. Webb, *Diaries 1917-24*, (1952), p. 106.

30 *Davidson Papers*, January 10, 1918: quoted in R. K. Middlemas, *The Clydesiders* (1965), p. 89.

31 A. Hutt, *Post-War History of the British Working Class* (1937), p. 13.

32 T. H. Wintringham, *Mutiny* (1936), pp. 305-328 gives an account of many of these events.

33 *The Herald*, January 11, 1919.

two of their number who had been arrested were released.<sup>34</sup> At Shoreham, in March, a further outbreak involved 2,000 unarmed troops marching into Brighton to the cheers of the populace.<sup>35</sup> In January the War Office sent out a circular to all Commanding Officers asking them whether the troops under their command would be willing to break strikes or to fight in Russia, and also whether there was any sign of trade union organization or rank and file committees amongst the troops. The government was clearly worried.<sup>36</sup>

This unrest in the army was often consciously linked with the struggles of the working class in Britain. It was the failure to materialize of 'the expected general strike which had begun on the Clyde' in January 1919 which was 'largely responsible' for the failure to extend the Valdelure soldiers' strike.<sup>37</sup> A leading participant in the engineering strikes themselves later said that 'a rising was expected. A rising should have taken place. The workers were ready and able to effect it: the leadership never thought of it'.<sup>38</sup>

It was in January that the coal miners decided to campaign for nationalization and improved conditions and in February the transport workers put in for a big wage rise. The November national railway strike was one of the most bitterly fought class battles the country had ever seen, in many aspects foreshadowing the General Strike of 1926.

While all this was happening the struggle against imperialist intervention in the Soviet Union was rallying thousands of British workers to the defence of the Russian Revolution. At this high point of militant struggle it was said that there was 'no single issue that that has ever within living memory so amazingly moved the imagination and heart of the working class as the intervention in Russia'.<sup>39</sup> As soon as the intervention began in the middle of 1918 the ILP echoed the protests of the Bolsheviks. They did so only while dissociating themselves from the revolution itself. Ramsay MacDonald took to advising the employers that 'intervention . . . even from a capitalist point of view . . . is bad'.<sup>40</sup> The BSP on the other hand called for the end of intervention on the grounds that 'the cause of the social revolution in Russia is the cause of the workers of the world'. By November, the BSP was centring its campaign inside the Labour Party on opposition to intervention. It issued an appeal to the Labour Party Conference which began 'Long Live the Socialist Republic! No Intervention Anywhere!'<sup>41</sup> By December even the Labour Party had issued a manifesto calling for the withdrawal of allied troops, but the parliamentary party did nothing

about it until the following July.

During 1919, the revolutionary groups were actively involved in the struggle against intervention. On January 18, in the week when Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg were murdered, a conference mainly organized by the shop stewards in London set up a national 'Hands Off Russia' committee. The five hundred delegates represented 350 organizations including 48 from trade union branches and district committees, and leading figures from the shop steward movement and all the main revolutionary groups. Motions were passed at the conference during the day and at a mass meeting in the evening calling for strikes and other sympathetic action to defeat not simply intervention in Russia but also the blockade of Germany.<sup>42</sup> Mass meetings were held in early February at the Albert Hall and the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, which passed identical motions asserting that 'intervention must be ended' and 'that the working class must see this demand enforced by the unrestricted use of their political and industrial power'. Further efforts to co-ordinate the national movement were made at a Manchester meeting in June, and in September Harry Pollitt became national organizer. On October 26 the BSP was mainly responsible for the establishment of a London organization. On November 7 the national body was set up again 'representing the united forces of the political and industrial working class movement without distinction of opinions or tendencies'.<sup>43</sup> By the end of the year the 'Hands Off Russia' movement was running campaigns in every major city every night of the week. These were usually addressed by Lieutenant-Colonel Malone, Liberal MP, recent visitor to Russia and recruit to the BSP, or by Principal Goode who had also been to Soviet Russia. These meetings were continued during 1920, and other activities of the campaign included the circulation of union branches and the leafleting of factories and dock gates.

34 B. G. A. Connell, *From Monk to Busman* (1935), pp. 80-2.

35 R. Groves and A. Hodge, *The Long Week End* (1940), pp. 25-6.

36 W. Crook, *The General Strike* (1931), p. 240-3.

37 T. H. Wintringham, op. cit., p. 328.

38 W. Gallagher, *Revolt on the Clyde* (1936), p. 234.

39 *The Call*, December 11, 1919.

40 *Labour Leader*, July 11 and August 1, 1918.

41 *The Call*, November 14, 1918.

42 *The Call* and *Workers' Dreadnaught* during 1919 and 1920 make clear the extensiveness of the campaign. See also Harry Pollitt, *Serving My Time* (1940), ch. 6.

43 A. Hutt, op. cit., p. 36.



**Harry Pollitt**  
*Made National  
Organizer in  
September 1919*

During 1919 these campaigns began to bear fruit. British sailors refused to sail to Russia from Rosyth, Invergordon, Portsmouth and a number of other ports. At Rosyth, dockers had supplied SLP pamphlets to the men who brought their cruiser back to port rather than go to Russia. These sailors had to be demobilized as a result.<sup>44</sup> In March the Miners' Federation of Great Britain called for the withdrawal of British troops.<sup>45</sup> On April 16 this demand was taken up by the Triple Alliance, though opposed by the TUC. At the Labour Party Conference in early June the national executive was instructed to consult with the TUC leaders 'with a view to effective action being taken to enforce these demands (i.e. the ending of intervention) by the unreserved use of their political power'.<sup>46</sup> Only the revolutionary groups fought to carry out these policies. On Sunday July 20 there were international demonstrations against intervention. A joint leaflet issued by the BSP, the SLP, the WSF and the South Wales Socialist Society called for support of the Sunday demonstration and the workers to 'Down Tools on Monday July 31st!' This call was disowned by the Labour Party leaders, but received some response, notably from London dockers.<sup>47</sup> By September the TUC Conference condemned its Parliamentary Committee for failing to support the direct action policies of the Triple Alliance earlier in the year. These developments in the working-class movement forced Churchill to promise to withdraw troops by the end of the year, a promise which was never carried out. Because of the failure of the Labour leaders to extend the campaign Lloyd George could assert by the end of 1919 that 'there is no basis for peace with Russia'.<sup>48</sup> Labour's re-

cord had indeed been, as Snowden was forced to admit, 'a sordid story of apathy and indifference'.<sup>49</sup>

### The Polish war and the 'Jolly George'

It was in the spring of 1920, when the war against Poland began, that the issue became further inflamed. It was clear to everyone that 'the Marionettes are in Warsaw but the strings are pulled from London and Paris'.<sup>50</sup> At first 'Labour' protest in parliament lacked fire'.<sup>51</sup> But, on May 10 'two years of tremendously hard and unremitting work on the part of a devoted band of comrades in London', mainly members of the WSF, bore fruit when dockers refused to load a cargo marked 'HMS Munitions for Poland' on to the *Jolly George* at the East India Dock.<sup>52</sup> This action transformed the situation.

In the weeks that followed the BSP turned its campaign against intervention towards the TUC and the Labour Party. Opposition to the Polish intervention was described as 'Labour's Acid Test' and the party helped to organize a national appeal to the TUC and the Labour Party for strikes against the intervention, signed by, amongst others, Robert Smillie, President of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, and Alex Gossip, General Secretary of the Furniture Trades Association.<sup>53</sup> At the Labour Party annual conference in July BSP members campaigned for a general strike against intervention. Ernest Bevin, however, persuaded the delegates to pass a purely formal motion on the subject.

Very soon, however, events were to take a more serious turn when the British army threatened to intervene in defence of the beleaguered Poles. This produced the famous telegram from Henderson to every local Labour Party: 'Extremely menacing possibility extension Polish Russian war. Strongly urge local parties organize citizen demonstrations against intervention and supply men and munitions to Poland. Demand peace negotiations immediate raising blockade, resumption trade relations. Send resolutions Premier

44 T. H. Wintringham, op. cit., p. 36.

45 S. R. Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution* (1956), pp. 71-2.

46 Labour Party, *Annual Conference Report* (1919), p. 156.

47 *Workers' Dreadnaught*, July 19 and 26, 1919.

48 S. R. Graubard, op. cit., pp. 81 and 87.

49 *Labour Leader*, November 13, 1919.

50 *Daily Herald*, April 30, 1920.

51 S. R. Graubard, op. cit., p. 93.

52 Pollitt, op. cit., pp. 111-8.

53 *The Call*, May 20 and June 10, 1920.

and Press. Deputize local MPs.<sup>54</sup> On Saturday and Sunday, August 7 and 8 there were demonstrations in every part of the country. The *Daily Herald* on August 9 and 10 mentions about 70 meetings run by local Labour Parties and Communist Party branches, as well as many resolutions from union branches and executives. On the 9th there was a special conference of the TUC and Labour Party which called for 'the whole industrial power of the organized workers' to be used against the war, and set up a national Council of Action which included Clynes from the right, Purcell from the left and many others. On the 10th the Council saw the Prime Minister, who made no verbal concessions, but was later to give no help to the Poles. A call was issued on the same day for local Councils of Action to be set up. On Friday 13 at a national meeting of the Council of Action there were 1,044 delegates from 689 trade unions and 355 labour parties and trades councils. Men who had done nothing to oppose the war in 1914 now felt that they could exonerate themselves by making statements as extreme as possible, and doing as little as they could. Jimmy Thomas, whose respect for the constitution bordered on religious mania, said that unconstitutional measures were necessary because 'the disease is so desperate and dangerous that it is only desperate and dangerous methods that can provide a remedy'. The conference passed a motion calling for the withdrawal of British troops from the war, for the recognition of the Soviet Union and authorizing the Council of Action 'to call for any and every form of withdrawal of labour which circumstances may require to give effect to the foregoing policy'.<sup>55</sup> In the weeks that followed a national campaign was initiated where 350 councils were set up, usually accompanied by big meetings, millions of leaflets calling for peace with Russia were printed and distributed, and national demonstrations were run on August 27 and October 17.<sup>56</sup>

It seems most likely that this had little effect on the Government's policy, since they probably had little intention of helping the Poles anyway. The fact is they did not do so.<sup>57</sup> Winston Churchill, however, thought that the 'violent agitation' of the Labour movement 'under Communist influence and guidance' forced Lloyd George to tell the Poles that 'the British Government could not take any action against Russia' even if the Poles were defeated.<sup>58</sup> These assertions are, however, of less interest than the developments in the working class associated with the Council of Action.

Lenin, in a speech delivered some weeks later,

said that 'the entire British Bourgeois Press declared that the Council of Action meant soviets. It did not call itself by that name but actually that is what it was. It was the same kind of dual power as we had under Kerensky from March 1917 onwards'.<sup>59</sup> No one was clearer about this than the right-wing leaders of the Council of Action themselves. On August 17 the National Council of Action issued a leaflet to the local councils under the militant title *Form Your Councils of Action*, but which went on 'care should be exercised as to the functions of the Local Councils. They are not in any way to usurp the powers of the Trade Unions' Executives, especially so far as withdrawal of labour is concerned, but are to act as centres of information'. The national leadership boldly declared in October that 'there appears no likelihood of [peace with Russia] being secured by direct action', and refused local requests to extend the campaign to other issues such as the demand for Irish independence by claiming that 'the Council's mandate is strictly limited'.<sup>60</sup> Josiah Wedgewood, a recent convert from Liberalism and a member of the National Council, was clear about the Council's need for restraint: 'It has the necessary unanimity which ensures moderation . . . unanimity is not often achieved in action. Its power will be measured by its ability to avoid action'.<sup>61</sup>

Such leaders could not, however, prevent local initiatives of all kinds. After the Hyde Park demonstration of August 8 for instance 'a crowd of about 4,000 assembled on the Edgware Road . . . blocking the thoroughfare. Police were called in to restore order, red flags were waved and there were cries of "Hands off Russia!", "We don't want any war!", "Down with organized force!", "Three cheers for Sinn Fein!". As a result four arrests were made'.<sup>62</sup> Other local initiatives were

54 W. & Z. Coates, *A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations* (1943), p. 42.

55 Council of Action, *Report of the Special Conference on Labour and the Russo-Polish War* (1920).

56 F. Bramley, J. Middleton and H. Lindsay, *Report of the Council of Action* (October 18, 1920), pp. 6-7.

57 See S. R. Graubard, op. cit., pp. 111-4 for a discussion of this point.

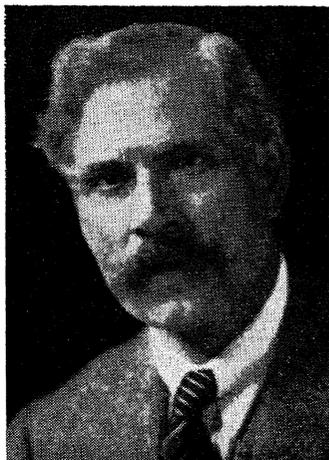
58 W. Churchill, *The World Crisis: the Aftermath* (1929), p. 269.

59 V. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 31 (London, 1966), p. 308.

60 F. Bramley, et al., op. cit., pp. 8 & 7.

61 Article entitled *The Council of Action: Triumph for Labour Unanimity in Review of Reviews*, September-October 1920, p. 170.

62 *Willesden Chronicle*, August 13, 1920.



**Ramsay Macdonald**  
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of a more organized nature though they varied with the circumstances. There were councils of action in London, Manchester, Birmingham and other cities. In Sheffield, the Council of Action was set up on August 15 and included the General Executive of the Trades and Labour Council, local shop steward convenors, union district committee members and two representatives from the Co-operative Societies. Later the Council was calling for its activities to be extended to the questions of Ireland, unemployment and trade with Russia. The Council continued in existence until the following February.<sup>63</sup> In Merthyr Tydfil every organized worker was represented on the Central Council of Action, which had a complicated network of committees to deal with such matters as transport, propaganda and finance. This organization was set up at a special meeting at the end of August when its role was outlined. 'Trade Unions . . . function only in time of industrial peace.' When there is a crisis in industry then 'the normal functions of trade unions are over, and there is no machinery to take up the problems in a systematized way, preserve order and carry on the administrative work that is necessary then.'<sup>64</sup> This was precisely the role the Councils of Action were to play during the General Strike in 1926.

The revolutionaries, though to some extent aware of the possibilities existing in the situation, did little to seize the initiative. The WSF, by now calling itself the Communist Party (British Section of the Third International) made the correct propaganda point but did little to act on it. 'It now rests with the rank and file to see that these councils do not become dead bodies, but that they infuse them with life and energy so that they are really Revolutionary Councils, which will

work for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a Communist Commonwealth. The mere setting up of Councils is not enough. They must be permeated with the Communist spirit, and to that end, all communists should endeavour to be represented on them.'<sup>65</sup> Some members of the month-old Communist Party of Great Britain, just formed from the BSP and sections of the SLP, tried to act on this advice, but they clearly thought their membership of the local Councils was a right to be expected, rather than a privilege to be won.<sup>66</sup> A year later a leading member of the Communist Party explained how it was that little had been achieved: 'The Central Council . . . maintained its hold on the situation. This was not a result of any brilliant measures on their part, but simply because no effort was prepared which would lead to their removal as the crisis developed. Had a vigorous criticism of their policy been maintained, had the idea of a new leadership representing the local councils of action been steadily forwarded, the possibility of securing new leadership would have been advanced enormously, and its main effect would have been to force the central authority to a more vigorous policy.'<sup>67</sup> It was the political immaturity of the British Marxists which made them unable to seize the initiative at his high point in the militancy and internationalism of the working class.

In 1917 and in 1920, when soviets were begun in Britain, they could only have been developed through a struggle against centrism and the rapidly expanding bureaucracy. On these two occasions the defence of the Russian Revolution was an important event in the development of the working class and the revolutionary movement. In the future it could have led either to an appreciation of the gains which were being defended or to the mechanical defence of all things Russian later characteristic of the Stalinized Communist Party of Great Britain. A British October revolution will be carried forward only by those who can defend the gains of the last October revolution, and can carry out that struggle against centrism and betrayal so lacking fifty years ago in Britain.

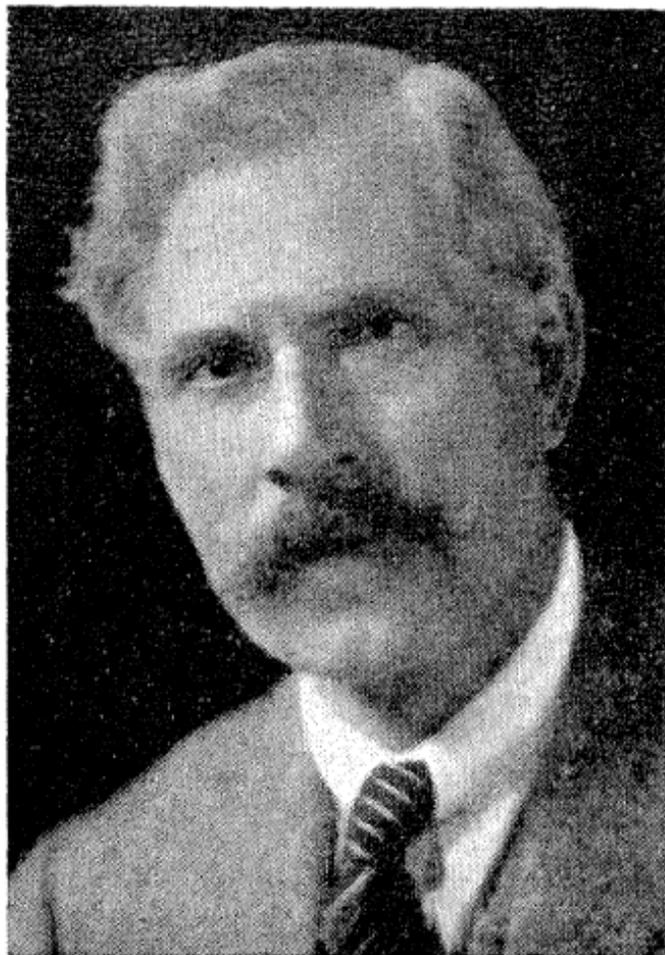
63 Sheffield Federated Trades and Labour Council *Executive Minutes* for August 15 and 17 and September 14, 1920, and January 14 and February 1, 1920.

64 W. Paul, *Communism and Society* (1922), p. 174-5. *The Pioneer* (Merthyr Tydfil), September 4 and 18, 1920.

65 *Workers' Dreadnaught*, August 21, 1920.

66 *The Communist*, August 26, 1920.

67 Article entitled *On Leading the Masses* in *The Communist Review*, February 1922, p. 271.



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# Lenin and the Imperialist War of 1914-1918

By  
**Cliff Slaughter**

THE STRATEGY and tactics of the Bolshevik Party between the February and October Revolutions of 1917 constitute the most valuable political capital of the proletarian revolutionary movement. It was only through an intense internal struggle on theoretical and programmatic questions that the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, achieved the party unity and discipline necessary to organize the successful insurrection of October. During these vital months, Trotsky joined the Bolsheviks, informally in May and openly in July, after years of hesitation during which he was strongly criticized by Lenin for refusing to break with the opportunists of the 'Organization Committee'. After Trotsky joined the Party, Lenin said, there was 'no better Bolshevik'.

Between 1914 and 1917, i.e. between the open desertion of almost the whole leadership of international Social Democracy to the imperialists after August 4, 1914 and the October Revolution of 1917, Lenin found himself in a very tiny minority in the socialist movement on a number of basic questions. Inevitably, one of these was the problem of the attitude of Marxists to the imperialist war and how to mobilize the working class in wartime conditions. In celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the October Revolution, it will be useful to indicate once again the main lines of Lenin's position, since still today the tasks of revolutionaries include as a vital necessity the struggle against pacifism and for truly revolutionary methods of struggle against the war plans of the imperialists. This has become even more necessary because of the 'peaceful co-existence' line of the Kremlin bureaucracy and its followers, who place 'peace' (i.e. the preservation of the bureaucracy's privileges) above the class struggle. When Trotskyists fight today as the only real defenders of the socialized property relations in the USSR, Eastern Europe and China, they can do so only by combining this defence with the most implacable struggle against the bureaucracy and its policies.

Earlier articles in *Labour Review*<sup>1</sup> and *Fourth International*<sup>2</sup> have recalled in detail the principled positions of Lenin against the 'peace' and 'disarmament' slogans which were separated from the programme of proletarian revolution. Lenin bitterly attacked those who appealed to the masses primarily on the immediate question of peace

- 1 B. Pearce, 'Lenin and Trotsky on Pacifism and Defeatism', in *Labour Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1.
- 2 M. Varga, 'The Consequences of Peaceful Co-existence', in *Fourth International*, Vol. 1, No. 1.

because they separated the struggle against war from the proletarian revolution.

This, he said, perpetuated the illusion that a democratic peace was possible without revolutions, instead of what was most vital, the mobilization of the workers in each country *against their own ruling class*. In other words, the peace slogan in practice worked *against* the only force which could ensure peace: new revolutions prepared through the struggle for political independence of the working class. Thus Lenin wrote:

The main distinguishing feature of *both* these forms of prevailing opportunism (the open opportunists like Scheidemann, Plekhanov, Legien, Hyndman, etc., and the 'masked' opportunists like Kautsky and Martov) is that the concrete questions of the *connection between the present war and revolution, and other concrete questions of revolution*, are hushed up, concealed, or treated with an eye to police prohibitions. . . . The main defect of the disarmament demand is its evasion of all the concrete questions of revolution. Or do the advocates of disarmament stand for an altogether new kind of revolution, unarmed revolution?<sup>3</sup>

The basic slogan of Lenin, and of the Bolshevik Party, from the onset of the war, was 'the conversion of the present imperialist war into a civil war' as 'the only correct proletarian slogan. . . . However difficult that transformation may seem at any given moment, socialists will never relinquish systematic, persistent and undeviating preparatory work in this direction now that war has become a fact'.<sup>4</sup>

Day after day, from the outbreak of war until the February 1917 Revolution, Lenin wrote articles, letters and pamphlets insisting on this preparation for civil war, the only activity worthy of Marxists, *against* the repetition of phrases. Further, he never ceased to emphasize that 'peace' agitation carried on apart from activity to expose the opportunists of all kinds was a fraud. If the fight against war could be won only through 'a series of new revolutions' then it was a prime necessity to fight for a new, revolutionary leadership against the opportunists who were *part* of the bourgeois war-machine. Time and again Lenin outlined the series of tasks which Marxists must undertake if they were to fight effectively against the imperialist war, and his slogan of 'revolutionary defeatism' was always put forward in the context of these tasks:

The following should be indicated as the first steps towards converting the present imperialist war into a civil war: (1) an absolute refusal to vote for war credits, and resignation from bourgeois governments; (2) a complete break with the policy of a class truce (*bloc national, Burgfrieden*); (3) formation of an underground organization wherever

the governments and the bourgeoisie abolish constitutional liberties by introducing martial law; (4) support for fraternization between soldiers of the belligerent nations, in the trenches and on battlefields in general; (5) support for every kind of revolutionary mass action by the proletariat in general.<sup>5</sup>

From this standpoint, for example, Lenin, while reserving the highest praise for Liebknecht, Luxemburg and the revolutionary left in Germany, criticized their work:

A very great defect in revolutionary Marxism in Germany as a whole is its lack of a compact illegal organization that would systematically pursue its own line and educate the masses in the spirit of the new tasks; such an organization would also have to take a definite stand on opportunism and Kautskyism.<sup>6</sup>

Lenin refers in the last phrase of this quotation to his major criticism of Rosa Luxemburg's brilliant and famous 'Junius pamphlet': that it failed to explain the connection between social-chauvinism and opportunism and did not include a thorough critique of opportunism of all kinds as an essential part of its exposure of the imperialist character of the war and the tasks of Marxists in fighting their 'own' bourgeoisie in every country. Throughout the war Lenin hammered away at this point: only those who broke completely from and denounced opportunism could work consistently on a revolutionary line against war.

And it was precisely on *this* point that Lenin crossed swords with Trotsky in relation to questions of war, pacifism and 'revolutionary defeatism'. Brian Pearce, in his article 'Lenin and Trotsky on Pacifism and Defeatism'<sup>7</sup>, has dealt in detail with the differences between the two great revolutionaries on this question. He undertook the necessary task of replying to the systematic and unprincipled attempts of the Stalinists to exaggerate every difference between Lenin and Trotsky before 1917, attempts in which they strove to 'prove' that Lenin was always 'right' and Trotsky 'wrong'. In answering the Stalinists, Brian Pearce first put the record straight on the actual

3 Lenin, 'The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution' (September, 1916) in *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p. 84.

4 'The War and Russian Social Democracy', statement of the Central Committee of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, drafted by Lenin, September, 1914. In *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 34.

5 Lenin, 'The Conference of the RSDLP Groups Abroad', February, 1915, *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 161.

6 Lenin, 'The Junius Pamphlet', July, 1916. *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, p. 307.

7 Pearce, op. cit.

statements of Trotsky and particularly Lenin, and from this drew a number of tentative conclusions. These were: (a) that towards the end of 1916 Lenin ceased using the formula of 'wishing for the defeat of one's own bourgeoisie', because he learned through experience the correctness of Trotsky's warnings about its 'negative' emphasis; and (b) that, whereas Trotsky came round to Lenin's viewpoint on organizational questions and a break with the opportunists, Lenin came round to Trotsky's viewpoint on 'questions of the tactics and slogans of the fight against war, as on the "permanent revolution" approach to Russia's politics'.

We have already seen that for Lenin the 'war question', 'defeatism' and relations with the opportunists were inseparable. If we go through the writings of Lenin on these matters from 1914 to 1917, then we shall correct what I believe to be a wrong emphasis in Pearce's article. Instead, we shall see that what Lenin defended in his 'defeatism' thesis was precisely intransigence against the opportunists, and direction of the revolutionary vanguard to independent work in the proletariat. That Lenin also stopped on a number of occasions to correct the non-Marxist conclusions of Pyatakov and other Bolsheviks who concluded that all 'peace' programmes were non-revolutionary does not detract one whit from Lenin's consistent line on this question.

In October 1914, as contrasted with German Social-Democracy and with almost the whole of the Socialist International, the Bolshevik Central Committee took a stand against the imperialist war and against its 'own' bourgeoisie. Its manifesto stated: '... from the standpoint of the working class and of the labouring masses of all the peoples of Russia, the lesser evil would be the defeat of the Tsarist monarchy'. Pearce quotes this passage, together with the reservation uttered by some of Lenin's comrades that it was open to the misinterpretation of desiring a victory for German imperialism. He goes on to quote Lenin's letter to Shlyapnikov (October 17, 1914): 'Tsarism is a hundred times worse than Kaiserism', and concludes 'Lenin's defeatism is here advanced, it will be observed, as something special for Russia, not as an international line'.<sup>8</sup>

This is precisely what Lenin's critics, including Trotsky, found fault with in Lenin's slogan, maintaining that it negated internationalism. But Lenin more than once stated his reasons for his emphasis on the reactionary character of Tsarism and the 'lesser evil' of its defeat: the particularly reactionary character of Tsarism must be exposed and

emphasised as a *special* responsibility of the Russian Marxists; and for socialists in Germany, or Britain, precisely the 'opposite', a denunciation of their *own* imperialism in particular, was necessary. Thus Lenin wrote, in late August or September 1914:

*Everywhere* there is the bourgeoisie and the imperialists, everywhere the ignoble preparations for carnage; if Russian Tsarism is particularly infamous and barbarous (and more reactionary than all the rest), then German imperialism too is monarchist: its aims are feudal and dynastic, and its gross bourgeoisie are less free than the French. The Russian Social-Democrats were right in saying that *to them* the defeat of Tsarism was the lesser evil, for *their* immediate enemy was, first and foremost, *Great-Russian* chauvinism, but that in each country the socialists (who are no opportunists) ought to see their main enemy in their "own" ("home-made") chauvinism.<sup>9</sup> (Emphasis in original.)

Lenin certainly considered Tsarism to be particularly infamous and barbarous, because of the particular combination in Russia of imperialism with medieval backwardness and autocracy, but he makes it particularly clear in this passage that his defeatism after 1914 was derived specifically from the imperialist character of the war, and would operate in similar fashion for the socialists of any imperialist country in relation to their 'own' bourgeoisie. Thus, the German socialists must be *prevented* from using the particularly reactionary character of Tsarism to excuse their capitulation to the German bourgeoisie. Rather they should have emphasised the reactionary features of German imperialism. In case there should still be any doubt, we may quote a letter written by Lenin between October 29 and November 8, 1914, not to an individual but to the journals *Vorwärts* and *Wiener-Zeitung*:

Some days ago, *Vorwärts* published a brief item regarding the paper I read in Zurich on the subject of war and socialism and conveying an entirely false impression of that paper. The impression is created that I limited myself to a polemic against Tsarism. In actual fact, however, as one who is convinced that it is the duty of the socialists of every country to wage an unrelenting struggle against chauvinism and patriotism of their own country (and not only of the enemy), I vehemently attacked Tsarism, and, in that connection, I spoke of freedom for the Ukraine.<sup>10</sup>

Lenin insisted on the slogan of defeat for one's own bourgeoisie and attacked those who rejected

8 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

9 Lenin, 'The European War and International Socialism' in *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, pp. 22-3.

10 Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 42.

it, because he regarded it as the test of real preparation for revolution and civil war, as against phrase-mongering about peace. He explained many times that real preparation of mass revolutionary action must imply facilitating the military defeat of the bourgeoisie in one's 'own' country, and since this latter possibility was held up by the opportunists as an argument against revolution, Lenin insisted on an open avowal of 'wishing for the defeat' of one's own bourgeoisie. If you do not 'wish for their defeat', he argued, then you either are for 'defence of the fatherland' (open social-chauvinism and opportunism) or you assert 'neither victory nor defeat'. But the latter formulation would be a capitulation to the claim of the bourgeoisie that it is only fighting to repel an aggressor. David, foremost among the German social chauvinists, for example, said that he was 'not for war, but against defeat'!

It was only one step away from this to 'oppose' the war, while rejecting the formula of revolutionary defeatism. The bourgeoisie is at war; a military reverse or defeat for the bourgeoisie creates favourable situations for the revolutionary proletariat; an advance for the revolutionary proletariat must weaken the bourgeoisie against its military enemy. Without revolutionary defeatism, explicitly and boldly stated, there could be no consistent and undeviating pursuit of the revolutionary path or rejection of pacifist phrase-mongering.

Lenin explained several times that the condemnation of the imperialist aims and reactionary character of an *enemy* capitalist power was the stock-in-trade not only of many social-chauvinists but even of bourgeois-liberal publicists, and that to lay the stress here was actually to contribute to the international political requirements of the imperialists. (In the Second World War, the Stalinists of Britain and France, as well as the USSR, in the period of the Hitler-Stalin pact, found it possible to write at length about the evils of British and French imperialism, though not of German imperialism, and after June 1941 just as easy to turn their 'talents' exclusively against the German, Italian and Japanese varieties!)

Brian Pearce characterizes the differences between Lenin and Trotsky in 1914 on this question in the following way:

In the opening phases of the war, Lenin and Trotsky thus placed the emphasis differently—Lenin upon the need to prevent any illusions arising about the possibility of peace without revolution, Trotsky upon the need to find transitional

demands which would enable the revolutionaries to link themselves with the broad movement of opposition to the war.<sup>11</sup>

This interpretation is based on Trotsky's claim that the peace slogan, 'linked with a programme for a democratic peace settlement', as Pearce puts it, was 'the surest way by which Social Democracy can isolate militarist reaction in Europe'. (Trotsky: *The War and the International*, 1914.) Here we have a difference which is not just a matter of emphasis. Was there a 'broad movement of opposition to the war' in 1914? On the contrary, while Lenin insisted on a programme directed to the deepest *needs* of the masses, he recognized as readily as anyone else that a chauvinist wave engulfed the masses in the first months of the war, a process helped on by the opportunists of the Second International. Lenin was concerned with the correct programme for the revolutionary Marxist vanguard. Arguments about 'not alienating the broad movement' were really arguments for not breaking with those who *talked* peace but would not take the only real road to peace, that of proletarian revolution and 'turning the imperialist war into civil war'. The term 'transitional demands' as used by Brian Pearce is confusing in this context.

Once we have established the actual nature of the differences between Lenin and Trotsky in 1914 (not one of emphasis on transitional demands or the prevention of illusions, but one of revolutionary preparation and break with the opportunists) we must approach differently Brian Pearce's conclusion that perhaps Lenin eventually came round to Trotsky's point of view.

In a series of statements throughout the period up to the February revolution of 1917, Lenin remained adamant that the socialists of any given imperialist country must openly state the inevitable conclusions of their rejection of any class truce, i.e. that this involved taking advantage of the military difficulties of the class enemy and also contributing to those military difficulties by political mass work; revolutionary activity during the imperialist war therefore meant actively desiring the defeat of one's 'own' bourgeoisie. This was what Lenin meant by revolutionary defeatism, and insofar as these things were not made explicit, then Lenin considered that deception of the masses was involved. His formula continued to meet with criticism, despite the explanations we have quoted.

As we have seen, it is possible to quote state-

11 Pearce, op. cit., p. 29.

ments written by Lenin on behalf of the Russian Party and for the Russian Party press, which seem to indicate that this 'defeatism' was partly or even largely a special question for Tsarist Russia, whose victory in the war would be the worst outcome internationally. This is presumably why Trotsky in 1915 called Lenin's 'wishing for the defeat of one's own bourgeoisie' as the 'lesser evil', 'an uncalled-for and absolutely unjustifiable concession to the political methodology of social patriotism. . . .' For example, Lenin's formulation in the resolution of the RSDLP Conference of groups abroad (March 1915) reads as follows:

In each country, the struggle against a government that is waging an imperialist war should not falter at the possibility of that country's defeat as a result of revolutionary propaganda. The defeat of the government's army weakens the government, promotes the liberation of the nationalities it oppresses, and facilitates civil war against the ruling classes.

This holds particularly true in respect of Russia. A victory for Russia will bring in its train a strengthening of reaction, both throughout the world and within the country, and will be accompanied by the complete enslavement of the peoples living in areas already seized. In view of this, we consider the defeat of Russia the lesser evil in all conditions.<sup>12</sup>

When objections were raised to this formulation, among them the one quoted above from Trotsky, Lenin scoffed at them; they amounted, in his opinion, to nothing more than the 'simple' point that if one side were defeated, say Russia, then the other would win, say Germany, so that wishing for the defeat of one bourgeoisie meant effectively desiring the victory of another. Now, said Lenin, is this not just what the bourgeoisie says to the proletariat? Who is cringing to the 'political methodology of social patriotism'!? Lenin suggests the forceful example of the Paris Commune of 1871:

France was defeated by Germany but the workers were defeated by Bismark and Thiers!<sup>13</sup>

It was in order to clarify this point that the original resolution had, said Lenin, 'made it clear that in *all* imperialist countries the proletariat must now desire the defeat of its own government'. In each country the socialist movement must concentrate its fire against the reactionary character of the war aims of its own ruling class, and this Lenin deliberately chose to do in all statements as a Russian Marxist to the Russian people and the Russian movement.

This question was lucidly explained in Lenin's pamphlet, *Socialism and War*:

A revolutionary class cannot but wish for the

defeat of its government in a reactionary war, and cannot fail to see that the latter's military reverses facilitate its overthrow. Only a bourgeois who believes that a war started by governments must necessarily end as a war between governments, and wants it to end as such, can regard as 'ridiculous' and 'absurd' the idea that the socialists of *all* the belligerent countries should express their wish that *all* their 'own governments should be defeated. On the contrary, it is a statement of this kind that would be in keeping with the innermost thoughts of every class-conscious worker, and be in line with our activities for the conversion of the imperialist war into a civil war.<sup>14</sup>

This pamphlet was written immediately before the Zimmerwald Conference of socialist internationalists held on September 5-8, 1915. The fact that Lenin had not altered his position is upheld also by the publication in the same covers of all the previous resolutions of the Bolsheviks, together with explanatory notes. Lenin concluded from that Conference that, despite the incompleteness of its final manifesto, its existence and its political stand confirmed that the Bolsheviks had taken a correct position in 1914, even though they had appeared completely isolated. Later in the same month, Lenin made a striking explanation of the connection between this correct line on the war and the proletarian revolution internationally and in Russia. The formula, 'Turn the imperialist war into civil war', began to take on flesh and blood. Defeats for the Tsarist armies and the growth of a strike movement in the towns of Russia pushed the bourgeois parties to form an opposition bloc in the Duma, and this was met by the dissolution of that body. Lenin explained that this turn of events looked like a repetition of 1905-1906, when in response to military defeat and a revolutionary crisis, the liberal bourgeoisie put forward a programme of reforms. But the analogy was misleading:

There is, however, actually a vast difference, *viz.*, that this war has involved all Europe, all the most advanced countries with mass and powerful socialist movements. The imperialist war has *linked up* the Russian revolutionary crisis, which stems from a bourgeois-democratic revolution, with the growing crisis of the proletarian socialist revolution in the West. The link is so direct that no individual solution of revolutionary problems is possible in any single country—the Russian bourgeois-democratic revolution is now not only a prologue to, but an indivisible part of, the socialist revolution in the West.

In 1905, it was the proletariat's task to consum-

12 Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 163.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 276.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 315.

mate the bourgeois revolution in Russia so as to kindle the proletarian revolution in the West. In 1915, the second part of this task has acquired an urgency that puts it on a level with the first party. A new political division has arisen in Russia on the basis of new, higher, more developed and more complex international relations. This new division is between the chauvinist revolutionaries, who desire revolution so as to defeat Germany, and the proletarian internationalist revolutionaries, who desire a revolution in Russia for the sake of the proletarian revolution in the West, and simultaneously with that revolution. This new division is, in essence, one between the urban and the rural petty-bourgeoisie in Russia, and the socialist proletariat.<sup>15</sup>

These petty-bourgeois tendencies, said Lenin, trailed in the wake of the bourgeoisie, wishing to achieve their class aims 'through a victory over Tsarism and over Germany, but without a victory over capitalism'. Here we see Lenin hammering out precise political preparation for the situation after February 1917, struggling to break the socialist proletariat and its leadership from those who desired 'a victory over Tsarism and over Germany, but without a victory over capitalism'. The development of the revolutionary crisis in fact sharpened up Lenin's insistence on revolutionary defeatism as he understood it, rather than pushing him in the direction of Trotsky's earlier formulations on the struggle for peace, even though the movement of events was richly confirming Trotsky's prognoses contained in the theory of permanent revolution. Those prognoses, as Trotsky himself recognized, would have been nothing more than brilliant interpretations but for the building and preparation of the Bolshevik Party, which Trotsky joined in 1917, to actually carry through the strategy of the permanent revolution. Lenin's emphasis on the war question was an essential element in the building of that Party and its struggle against opportunism and centrism. It is in this way that the differences between Lenin and Trotsky should be understood.

Lenin's deeper understanding of the tasks of the proletariat in the Russian Revolution was thus a development, and a deepening through experience, of his revolutionary defeatism:

. . . in the face of the revolutionary crisis in Russia, which is being accelerated by defeat—and this is what the motley opponents of "defeatism" are afraid to admit—. . .

And again:

The lessons of the war are compelling even our opponents to recognize in practice both the stand of 'defeatism' and the necessity of issuing . . . the slogan of 'a revolt in the rear' of the German

militarists, in other words, the slogan of a civil war. The lessons of the war, it appears, are knocking into their heads that which we have been insisting on since the very outset of the war. The defeat of Russia has proved the lesser evil, for it has tremendously enhanced the revolutionary crisis and has aroused millions, tens and hundreds of millions. Moreover, in conditions of an imperialist war, a revolutionary crisis in Russia could not but lead people's thoughts to the only salvation for the people—the idea of 'a revolt in the rear' of the German army, i.e. the idea of civil war in all the belligerent countries.

Life teaches. Life is *advancing*, through the defeat of Russia and, toward a revolution in Russia and, through that revolution and in connection with it, towards a civil war in Europe. Life has taken this direction. And, drawing fresh strength from these lessons of life, which has justified its position, the party of the revolutionary proletariat of Russia will, with ever greater energy, follow the path it has chosen.<sup>16</sup>

On a number of occasions between the aftermath of Zimmerwald and the autumn of 1916, i.e. until only three or four months before the February revolution in Russia, after which Lenin's tactics on the war question were entirely subordinated to the strategy of advancing from 'dual power' to workers' power, Lenin reaffirmed the necessity for the proletariat in every country to 'wish for the defeat of "its" government . . .' Brian Pearce writes about 'the disappearance of "defeatism" from Lenin's writings' after this time, but if this is taken to imply that Lenin changed his line it must be rejected. The swift development of the revolutionary situation certainly turned Lenin to devote his writings more and more to the changes in the international situation and its effect on the masses, whereas in the earlier years he had turned almost the whole of his attention to the split in world socialism and the need for the revolutionary vanguard to differentiate itself irrevocably from the social-chauvinists. As he had explained at an earlier stage, 'The slogans of the workers' class-conscious vanguard are one thing, while the spontaneous demands of the masses are something quite different.'<sup>17</sup>

Through 1916 and early 1917 he became particularly concerned to expose the 'peace' plans of the bourgeoisie, as various sections of the ruling

15 Lenin, 'The Defeat of Russia and the Revolutionary Crisis' (written in the second half of September 1915). *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 379.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 382.

17 'The Question of Peace' (July-August 1915) in *Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p. 292.

classes in the belligerent countries sought ways of ending the war to their own advantage and in order to reduce the risk of successful proletarian revolution. But this does not by any means imply that Lenin came to the conclusion that the criticisms by Trotsky and others of his 'defeatist' slogans had been justified. Quite the contrary. In the first of his famous *Letters From Afar* (March 7, 1917) Lenin summed up his earlier clashes with critics in the light of the new situation:

Those who, grovelling to the bourgeoisie or simply lacking backbone, howled and wailed about 'defeatism', are now faced by the fact of the historical connection between the defeat of the most backward and barbarous Tsarist monarchy and the *beginning* of the revolutionary conflagration.<sup>18</sup>

In this statement, after the February revolution, there is no change as compared with Lenin's conclusions immediately after Zimmerwald, in Autumn 1915. It must therefore be concluded—and it is a conclusion of great importance to Marxists—that Lenin maintained a thoroughly consistent and principled position on the question of imperialist war and revolutionary defeatism from the beginning until the end of the First World War. Against this we have only the fact to which Brian Pearce draws attention: that for some three or four months before the February Revolution, in the twelve articles and various letters of Lenin concerned with the war, none mentions the 'wish-defeat' formula. It would have been out of character with all of Lenin's work for a shift in his political position to take place without any explanation and there is no statement of his for the period which contradicts his earlier formulations in any way. Furthermore, we have his own statements in *Letters From Afar*, already quoted, which is clearly directed against the 'lesser evil' thesis, and does not simply defend 'defeatism' in general, as might be implied from the 1918 speech quoted by Pearce, referring to the 'defeatism' of the Bolsheviks before February. After the February Revolution the dangers of 'reactionary defeatism' (i.e. moves by the ruling classes to hand victory to the German imperialists, in order to defeat the Revolution) faced the Bolsheviks with the task of popularizing a programme of peace through the exclusive channel of the proletarian struggle for power in the Soviets. The fight against the Provisional Government had to be combined with the defeat of the plots of the ruling classes to combine with the German imperialists to suppress the workers and peasants of Russia, just as the representative of the French 'fatherland' in 1871, Thiers, combined with the 'enemy' Bismarck to bloodily suppress

the Paris Commune. Brian Pearce has adequately summarized, with appropriate quotations, the way in which Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks stood for a holding of the front while making urgent preparations for the transfer of power to the proletariat in the Soviets, supported by the peasantry.<sup>19</sup>

The ability of the Bolshevik Party to organize the struggle in the Soviets between February and October 1917, was not something that fell from the skies. Until August 4, 1914, Lenin himself had not yet recognized the extent of the fundamental split which had come in the world socialist movement. The chauvinism of the opportunists, and the veiled chauvinism of the centrists like Kautsky, had to be surgically cut out of the Marxist movement. Lenin's positions on the war question were an absolutely indispensable part of this operation, and only those in Russia whose policies had been guided by 'the wish for defeat of their own bourgeoisie' could organize the revolutionary proletariat of Petrograd and Moscow, when the day came of Russia's military defeat actually sparking off the Revolution. The building of the revolutionary party and the international is a constant struggle against the pressure of the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie, which on every political question of importance finds an echo in one or another section of the movement. It was the success of Lenin in building the kind of Party which could develop Marxism in struggle against such pressures that Trotsky recognized and accepted in joining the Bolsheviks in 1917. In the epoch of imperialism there is no other road to the proletarian revolution, in 1967 as in 1917.<sup>20</sup>

18 *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p. 301.

19 Pearce, op. cit., pp. 35-38.

20 Further work on certain aspects of these problems is important for Marxists and the following lines may be indicated:

(i) the writings of Trotsky on war and defeatism, and particularly his post-1917 references to the differences with Lenin, which should be brought together;

(ii) the particularly reactionary character of Tsarist Russia, first in the time of Marx, when he considered a war against it by the European capitalist powers a progressive step, to be supported by socialists, then, in the transitional period preceding the first imperialist war, when despite this, it was no longer possible for socialists to side with their own bourgeoisie in waging a war against Tsarism;

(iii) the connection between Lenin's revolutionary defeatism and his increasing emphasis, during the war, upon the self-determination of nations;

(iv) the propaganda and agitational material of the Bolsheviks in Russia through all the phases of the imperialist war.



# Trotsky's Struggle Against Bureaucracy

By Tom Kemp

IT IS APPROPRIATE, in celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the first workers' state, to examine the reasons for its bureaucratic degeneration and the efforts of one of its founders, Leon Trotsky, to prevent it. It is necessary, at the same time, to emphasize that the present rulers of the Soviet Union are not the legitimate representatives of the victorious working class but a usurping caste which attained its position by destroying the Bolshevik Party through a long, bitter and violent struggle. Although not able to destroy the basic conquests of the October Revolution, the nationalized property relations which made possible the development of a planned

economy, Stalin and his clique were able to ride roughshod over the organs of working class power which the Revolution had established. The successors to this clique retain power to this day, worried men sitting on a volcano as an increasingly powerful and self-conscious working class presses for its rights. For over a decade now the political revolution which they fear has assumed a more definite form, heralded by the Workers' Councils established during the Hungarian Revolution. Now more than ever Trotsky's struggle appears not as the wasted efforts of a defeated man but as the link between the victorious Bolsheviks of 1917 and the tasks of the working class in 1967.

It is necessary first to recall that no serious Marxist in 1917 expected that the revolution could, or would, remain confined to Russia. At least by comparison with other European countries, Russia was poor and backward and, although the Revolution of 1917 was spearheaded by a highly concentrated industrial proletariat, the great bulk of the population was composed of a poverty-stricken and largely illiterate peasantry. It was

assumed, therefore, by Lenin and the other Bolshevik leaders that the Russian Revolution could only be part of an international revolution which would rapidly spread into the more advanced areas of Europe and North America.<sup>1</sup> Thus it was

<sup>1</sup> Many quotations could be given to illustrate the point. Lenin made his position very clear, on the eve of leaving for Russia in April, 1917, in his *Farewell Letter to the Swiss Workers*.



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a priority task to re-establish the international links severed by the war and to expose before the working class the betrayals of the leaders of the Second International. The call for the Third International was thus a revolutionary act which paralleled in importance the taking of power in Russia. Nothing was further from the minds of Lenin and Trotsky than a narrow, national view of the tasks which faced them.

The failure of the revolutions in Central and Western Europe and the ebbing tide of class struggle which became clear after the events of 1923 in Germany, combined with the ability of the Soviet government to crush the counter-revolution and armies of intervention, thus created a wholly unique and unforeseen situation. A working-class party had maintained power in a vast but relatively backward country whose economy had been disrupted and devastated:

many years of war and civil war had imposed great hardships on the population and created conditions of general penury with near or actual famine over large areas. At the same time, the capitalist governments did their best to isolate and destroy the new regime by political and economic means when they had failed to do so by armed force. This combination of circumstances could not fail to have profound effects on the ruling party and created the conditions for the appearance of trends which, if not consciously exposed and rooted out, could only destroy it. These trends were discerned and warned against by Lenin in the last years of his life, but it was left to Trotsky to demonstrate and explain their existence before the Communist Party and the Communist International, to show the malignant consequences which they were having for the movement and to call for a fight against those personalities and policies in which they were represented.

## II

Under the best of conditions there lies before a revolutionary socialist regime an enormous task of remaking society and changing the people who compose it: which means combating all the vestiges of capitalism embodied in institutions but also embedded in men's minds. In the case of Russia after 1917 this task was made especially formidable by the circumstances already referred to. The revolutionaries, in many ways, had not only to prepare the way for socialism, they had also to carry out tasks which in more advanced countries had been performed by the bourgeoisie. For example, the predominance of peasant agriculture was reflected in a generally low cultural and educational level in the population. Moreover, while the Bolsheviks had enabled the peasants to take over the estates of the nobility they still had to face the problem of how to obtain from the peasants the grain and other foodstuffs required to feed the cities. As long as agriculture remained in the hands of small peasant cultivators there was a tendency for capitalist relations to arise spontaneously in the villages. And this was aggravated by the prevailing scarcity of all sorts of goods and the drastic reduction of industrial production. In short, these economic difficulties, coupled with the conditions of war and civil war, greatly enhanced the role of administration and thus the power of officials. While officials of lower rank were often drawn from the pre-existing administration of Tsardom many party members had inevitably been drawn into it. Just as the run

down of industry and the needs of the Red Army had drawn off many of the most class-conscious workers, so the state apparatus, and, indeed, the growth of the Communist Party itself, operated in the same way.

The officials of the party and the state appointed in the early years included many who were late adherents to Bolshevism, those who had joined the bandwagon when the success of the revolution had been assured: careerism and opportunism were therefore prevalent. But under the circumstances of the time there was a tendency for the communists of long standing also to use their positions to bolster their power or prestige or to lapse into a routine view of their duties, seeking a little peace and quiet after the years of upheaval and civil war. Such tendencies were to be expected and it was clearly the duty of the party leadership to recognize and wage a struggle against them.

After the warnings given by Lenin at various times it was Trotsky who raised the alarm in a letter to the Central Committee dated December 8, 1923. In this letter Trotsky drew attention to the growing power of the party apparatus and its growing use to stifle criticism, kill initiative and act as a brake upon the revolutionary enthusiasm of the youth. He also demanded, in line with all the best traditions of Bolshevism and of Marxism, the maintenance of the right of the individual party member to form his own opinion and to defend it inside the party. The Bolshevik Party had not been, as some like to suggest, a

monolithic instrument in the hands of a few leaders. Rather had it always seethed with discussion, permitting differences as long as they did not prevent the making of firm decisions binding on minorities. What Trotsky attacked then and later was not *centralism*, which he recognized as indispensable for a revolutionary party both when fighting for power and after its attainment. What he opposed was that centralism which had petrified into bureaucratism and routine because it was above criticism and merely operated an administrative machine: 'Leadership takes on a purely organizational character and frequently degenerates into order-giving and meddling.'

It is necessary to study all the articles and letters which are collected in the book entitled

*The New Course* to estimate Trotsky's thought at this time. But it is also essential to place them firmly in their time, that is to say 1923, and not to read them solely in the light of what happened subsequently with the appearance of Stalin as the master of the party. Already, however, Trotsky points out that what he calls *bureaucratism* had definite social roots in the conditions prevailing in Russia. But the value of his work lies principally in what it says about the nature of the party and the standards which it should maintain. Trotsky had not, as yet, any need to discuss 'the bureaucracy' as a social stratum because it had not yet emerged as a definite force. Nor did he yet suggest that the party could be strangled by such a development.<sup>2</sup>

### III

At the same time Trotsky had to parry the attacks which were already being made upon his political past and current policy which were shortly to be rolled together and designated 'Trotskyism'. 'Bureaucratism of the apparatus is precisely one of the principal sources of factionalism', Trotsky had warned. How soon was his warning to be justified! After Lenin's death in January, 1924 Stalin used his post as General Secretary to install his own factional supporters and allies in positions of power throughout the party and the state apparatus by every form of administrative abuse. To consolidate itself the Stalin faction threw itself against their main conscious opponent, Trotsky himself, who on one issue after another defended the traditions and policies of Marxism against the new school of revisionists. The axis of the new revision was Stalin's theory of 'Socialism in One Country' propounded in 1924: a precise confirmation of the Marxist theory of ideology, so much did the new teaching suit the needs of the new bureaucracy which was arising. Just as the original revisionism, that of Bernstein, had been taken up by the apparatus men of the German Social Democratic Party to cover their reformist practice, so now did Stalin require a theoretical justification for his own practice.

In the second half of the twenties, then, the internal party struggle passed through its decisive phase. All the great issues raised by the events in Germany, the Chinese Revolution, the British General Strike, as well as by the course of development in the Soviet Union itself, especially the economic questions, were debated before the CPSU and, indeed, the whole International.<sup>3</sup> The formation of the Left Opposition as a result of

the alliance with Zinoviev, Kamenev and their followers, and the drawing up of its platform, were the concrete expression of the struggle against the bureaucracy at this stage. The emphasis is therefore upon political questions, not upon the nature of the bureaucracy; Trotsky's later analysis naturally grew out of the experience acquired during these years. Moreover, his diagnosis of what was happening in the Soviet party and state, and his tactics, changed as the situation developed.

No more than anyone else engaged in these events did Trotsky possess any miraculous gift of foresight but he quickly and readily grasped the changes in the situation, which he subjected to constant review. The present-day historian is apt, in his superior wisdom, to nod over some of Trotsky's actions or statements, claiming that he should have done this or that and not what he actually did. These is no point here in entering into a detailed examination of Trotsky's tactics, but a general point can be made. For Trotsky there was nothing inevitable about the destruction of the Bolshevik Party, the degeneration of the Soviet State and the victory of the Stalinist bureaucracy. At every stage there was always the possibility that if the struggle was maintained there would be a break in the situation either because of some development in Russia or through the revolutionary success of the proletariat in some other part

2 The documents referred to in this paragraph are available in *The New Course*, New Park Publications (London, 1956).

3 See, e.g., *Critique of the Draft Programme, The Third International After Lenin, The Stalin School of Falsification* and other writings and speeches of Trotsky of this period.

of the world. And in Trotsky's lifetime this was confirmed by the events in France and especially in Spain even after the victory of Hitler. The tide of defeats for the working class might have been arrested not on one but on a number of occasions after the Left Opposition began its struggles.

There is no reason, then, to look back and see the defeat of the Left Opposition as a foregone conclusion and Trotsky's efforts in the last decade of exile as hopeless. Indeed, Trotsky waged his struggle with unquenchable revolutionary optimism

It should be emphasised that until 1933 the Left Opposition was committed to an inner-party struggle based on the premise that the party, the Comintern and the Russian state could be reformed. This perspective corresponded to the stage of development reached by Stalinism at this time. While seeking to protect its positions, consolidating its hold on these organs by every trick in the book and covering its position by a campaign of vilification and falsification, the Stalin leadership was not yet openly counter-revolutionary. The conspicuous political failures which attended its policies in China, Britain and elsewhere were not deliberately intended. They did, of course, flow directly from the theory of 'Socialism in One Country' and the line laid down in the Comintern Programme of 1928. And that theory represented a necessity for the bureaucracy. The consequences, however, were independent of its

because he understood that beneath the apparent omnipotence of the bureaucracy, and its representative Stalin, lay fundamental weaknesses which arose from the contradictions of its position. It is this fundamental point which the open or shame-faced apologists for Stalinism, those who grant it some historical validity or see Trotsky as the advocate of a lost cause, doomed by history, completely fail to understand. This failure is linked up, in turn, with their acceptance of the phenomenon of bureaucracy or a misunderstanding of its nature.

#### IV

will; they had the result of underlining the isolation and danger of the Soviet regime and thus the bureaucracy opposed all the more vehemently the Platform of the Left Opposition. Under Stalin's direction, therefore, it slid with increasing speed towards a complete break with Bolshevism, extending its control over the party, driving out the oppositionists and finally exterminating them physically.

Trotsky struggled for a number of years through his exile in Alma Ata and then in Turkey and France to redress the international communist movement, to bring it back to the Leninist road. Even when his supporters had been expelled from the Communist Parties they did not form new parties but re-grouped still as an opposition faction, albeit one which was obliged to have a separate existence. Through this period, which extends from 1928 to 1933, Trotsky's struggle was based on the continued possibility of redeeming the Communist Parties by an appeal to the healthy elements within them. It was, moreover, as an opposition faction that Trotsky developed the tactical positions of the time. But both during the struggle in Russia and after his exile his position was always complicated by his desire to conserve the party and not to provide ammunition for those who wished to destroy it for their own reasons and were enemies of centralism—something quite different from bureaucratism, as he had pointed out in 1923. At the same time it was necessary to deal with those, mostly ultra-lefts, who took the defeats suffered by the opposition and the policies pursued by Stalin to signify that the Soviet Union had become a new form of exploiting society. For Trotsky the fact that the means of production remained in the hands of the Soviet state, that the land was nationalized and the monopoly of foreign trade



Trotsky, his wife Natalia, and his son Leon Sedov in exile, Alma Ata, 1929.

4 See *The Platform of the Left Opposition*, New Park Publications (London 1963)



*Trotsky, his wife Natalia, and his son Leon Sedov in exile, Alma Ata, 1929.*



### Trotskyist Opposition leaders of 1928

Seated l. to r.: Ischenko, I. N. Smirnov, L. D. Trotsky,  
I. T. Smilga, Alsky.  
Standing l. to r.: Man'nelson, Rafail, Sokrat,  
B. M. Eltsin, Maliuta, V. A. Ter-Vaganyan.

Seated l. to r.: L. P. Serebriakov, K. B. Radek, L. D.  
Trotsky, M. S. Boguslavsky, E. A. Preobrazhensky.  
Standing l. to r.: G. C. Rakovsky, Y. N. Drobnis,  
A. A. G. Beloborodov, L. S. Sosnovsky.

remained in force meant that the basic social and economic conquests of the October Revolution had been preserved. It was, therefore, of first importance to defend these gains both against the bourgeoisie and against the Stalin faction, which was incapable of defending them by its own policies. In the polemics against the German ultra-left Urbahns Trotsky's characterization of the development of bureaucracy in the Soviet Union began to take on a more definite form and was to provide the basis for the more fully worked out approach to be found in *The Revolution Betrayed* and *In Defence of Marxism*.<sup>5</sup>

It should be born in mind, however, that at this stage Trotsky still regarded Stalinism as a centrist trend and the reform of the Communist Parties as possible. Care has therefore to be taken in transposing the tactical positions which Trotsky took up at this time to a later period when the Stalinist bureaucracy had become completely counter-revolutionary and the need for a political revolution became an essential part of his programme.<sup>6</sup>

The years of Trotsky's exile in Turkey saw the Opposition inside Russia hounded and destroyed at the same time as Stalin's adoption of a policy of rapid industrialization and forced collectivization disoriented many of his followers. It also saw the rise of Nazism in Germany and the imposition of a policy on the Communist Party by Stalin which led to the crushing defeat of the working class which Trotsky had tried to avert in a series of brilliant pamphlets and articles. In the first weeks after Hitler had taken power Trotsky be-

lieved that the Communists and Socialists could rally the working class for a struggle which could lead the way for the overthrow of capitalism. Within a short time, however, the decisive nature of the defeat, and thus the deep guilt of the Stalinists, became apparent. The destruction of the great organizations of the most advanced proletariat in Europe after their defeat without a struggle posed the need for a deep re-thinking of the position of the Left Opposition. The policy pursued in the previous years could not long be persisted in. The counter-revolutionary character of the Stalinist bureaucracy had now been revealed. It had consciously and deliberately prevented the German communists from waging an effective fight against fascism. It had now come to fear the extension of revolution to other countries at the same time as its position as a ruling caste in the USSR had become consolidated.

5 For reasons of space an examination of the retrospective analysis of the rise of the bureaucracy and the degeneration of the Soviet state made by Trotsky has not been made in this article. Readers will find *The Revolution Betrayed* the most accessible source; see also Trotsky's *Stalin*.

6 For instance, Pabloite revisionism found its theoretical justification, as far as it had any, in Trotsky's position at this time. It was significant, therefore, that when the Pabloites began to publish Trotsky's writings in French the first volume consisted predominantly of material from this period. Although they have subsequently published Trotsky's articles on Germany and Spain and *The Revolution Betrayed* they have still not published the documents relating to this change of line and its application to the bureaucracy and to the political revolution.

## V

To make the shift to a new policy was no easy matter. As an American supporter of the time put it: 'when one's memory turns to the month of March, 1933, it cannot be denied that the new policy was a surprise to the members of the Left Opposition. The daily activity of each of the sections was centred exclusively around the Communist Party; and to develop a new line, even if it were only for one of our sections, was to break with a tradition of ten years' standing. The great authority of Trotsky made it possible to bring about the change in line rapidly and with cohesion. Without him the lessons of the events in Germany would have surely been learned in our ranks, but after how many months of discussion?'<sup>7</sup>

This then was a pivotal date. The lessons of the German disaster made it imperative, firstly, to set out to build new parties and consequently a new international. Secondly, it meant abandoning the policy of reform in relation to the organs controlled by the bureaucracy and raising the demand for a new revolution, a political revolution, in the Soviet Union. Much of the old theoretical analysis and programme became inadequate as it stood, though a good deal could be incorporated into the fuller analysis which now had to be made of the processes at work in the Soviet Union and in the international communist movement. The urgency of these tasks was emphasized by the realization that the triumph of Hitler raised the threat of yet more defeats for the working class, especially in Europe, and would be followed inevitably by a war on the Soviet Union which the bourgeoisie of the other capitalist states would support or perhaps join. On the theoretical front, meanwhile, much confusion had been caused by the German *debâcle* and the events in the Soviet Union. This, in turn, reflected what Trotsky was later to make the starting point of his call for the Fourth International: the crisis of leadership in the working-class movement. The crisis of Social Democracy associated with the rise of bureaucracy in the old leadership was now paralleled by the crisis of Stalinism in the parties of the Third International. In the wake of this new situation, compounded of the apostasy of the reformists and the bankruptcy of the self-styled revolutionaries of the Third International, centrist trends affiliated to neither enjoyed a brief heyday. Attracted for a time to the Left Opposition, few of those associated with the centrists proved able to make a clear break with reformism or Stalinism and support the call for a new international in

deeds as well as words.

In the main, therefore, the sections of the future Fourth International had to be assembled slowly, piece by piece, from a few dissident Communist Party members, the best of the centrists, youth repelled by the old leaderships, intellectuals attracted to Trotsky often on a basis of personal esteem. In few cases was there available an experienced cadre with roots in the working class; in most no more than a few individuals to translate and circulate Trotsky's writings and begin from scratch, against the hostility of Social Democrats and Stalinists, the difficult and lengthy process of building new parties. Very definitely, then, Trotsky's followers—he preferred the term 'co-thinkers'—were swimming against the current. Very little in the objective situation favoured their efforts, however real the need for new parties was. The old leaderships remained strongly entrenched with large and well-financed organizations at their command and the traditional loyalty of the working class to fall back upon even in times of defeat and betrayal. Workers were naturally reluctant to try new leaders whom they did not know, who lacked experience and who were frequently of petty-bourgeois origin. Moreover, the anti-Trotskyist campaign was both virulent and telling, coupled as it was with the subtle appeals of the Popular Front.

It is not difficult, therefore, to explain why the progress of the Trotskyist movement during the 1930s was slow and difficult. There could be no 'spontaneous' resolution of the crisis of leadership, nor was the movement, as it gathered shape, free from the weaknesses which flowed from its social composition and from the theoretical confusion which prevailed outside its ranks. Pressures came from various sources: from petty bourgeois public opinion alarmed by the course of events in the Soviet Union and from the Communist Parties which, in a number of countries, grew rapidly in size and prestige at the end of the thirties.

Trotsky's last years were devoted to a many-sided struggle against the bureaucracy. Practically, this meant building the national sections of the new international movement as the legitimate continuators of Leninism and Bolshevism and finally launching the Fourth International itself. Closely associated with this went the constant

<sup>7</sup> Anne Vincent, *How the Fourth International Was Conceived*, Fourth International (USA), Vol. 5, No. 8, August, 1944.

development of theory both as straightforward analysis and as polemic. It was necessary to examine and explain the course of events in the Soviet Union: how had the bureaucracy arisen? Why had it succeeded? What was its social

nature? What position should revolutionaries adopt towards it? In answering questions such as these Trotsky worked out a position which, substantially, remains that of Trotskyism, of the Fourth International, to this day.

## VI

In defining the nature of the Soviet state Trotsky insisted upon its revolutionary origins and on the preservation of the essential conquests of October. From this derived the basic position of defence of the Soviet Union as an unconditional duty. At the same time, the political rule of the working class had been usurped by the bureaucratic caste which took over the Party and the State, with Stalin as its representative, in the 1920s and had then moved on to a counter-revolutionary path. This process was designated by Trotsky as one of 'degeneration' and the Soviet Union was consequently defined as a degenerated workers' state. By this he meant that no new property relations had taken the place of those established by the successful revolution of 1917 but that the rise of the bureaucracy represented a parasitic growth on the healthy base of nationalized property and the planned economy. Only the overthrow of this bureaucracy could guarantee the workers' state against the restoration of bourgeois rule; but its fate would clearly be decided as part of the international class struggle. Required in Russia, therefore, was a political revolution carried out by the working class to enter into the full heritage of October. Trotsky vigorously opposed all those who argued that the bureaucracy had become a class ruling over a new form of exploiting society. He refused to accept that it had a legitimate claim to rule based upon a given set of property relations, as such a view implied. On the other hand, from 1933, he had definitely abandoned any possibility that the bureaucracy could reform itself and would be re-absorbed into revolutionary organs of working-class power. His call for a political revolution was addressed to the working class, not a plea to the bureaucracy to return to Lenin. The whole history and nature of the bureaucracy made any such outcome inconceivable: having destroyed the Bolshevik Party and wiped out all those faithful to its traditions, the bureaucracy had drawn a veritable river of blood between itself and the true heirs of Bolshevism who would arise in Russia.

In this fiftieth year of the Russian Revolution, twenty seven years after the assassination of Leon Trotsky by one of the bureaucracy's agents, the

significance of his struggle becomes more apparent than ever. The events since the death of Stalin have revealed the growing crisis of the bureaucracy and shown in outline the shape of the political revolution to come. The disastrous political consequences of the policies of Stalin and his successors are now being brought home more forcefully than at any previous time. The Communist Parties have assumed the role of peaceable proponents of social reform and co-existence with capitalism ever ready to do a deal with bourgeois politicians when it suits the interests of the Soviet Union. By and large they do not have to be told to act in this way, their social base in their own countries provides sufficient pressure for such policies. The more openly counter-revolutionary policies of the Communist Parties, the compromises with capitalism and the restorationist tendencies in the countries ruled by the bureaucracy and the declining credibility of the reformist bureaucracy in its Western European strongholds provide all the confirmation which one could wish for the Transitional Programme which Trotsky drew up for the Founding Conference of the Fourth International in 1938.

It is fitting, therefore, to conclude this brief survey of Trotsky's struggle against the Stalinist degeneration with an extract from that document which retains all its validity today.

The Soviet Union emerged from the October Revolution as a workers' state. State ownership of the means of production, a necessary pre-requisite to socialist development, opened up the possibility of rapid growth of the productive forces. But the apparatus of the workers' state underwent a complete degeneration at the same time: it was transformed from a weapon of the working class into a weapon of bureaucratic violence against the working class and more and more a weapon for the sabotage of the country's economy. The bureaucratization of a backward and isolated workers' state and the transformation of the bureaucracy into an all-powerful privileged caste constitutes the most convincing refutation—not only theoretically but this time practically—of the theory of socialism in one country.

The USSR thus embodies terrific contradictions. But it still remains a *degenerated workers' state*. Such is still the social diagnosis. The political prog-

nosis has an alternative character: either the bureaucracy, becoming ever more an organ of the world bourgeoisie in the workers' state, will overthrow the new forms of property and plunge the country back into capitalism; or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the way to socialism.<sup>8</sup>

Fifty years after October, the question of whether the Soviet Union will move backward to capitalism or some unique form of exploiting society or forward to socialism still remains to be decided.<sup>9</sup> The vast changes which have taken place since Trotsky's death have not decided the question. The betrayals of the bureaucracy, despite what is thought in Peking, have not led to the restoration of bourgeois rule;<sup>10</sup> if it had there would be not much to celebrate or to anticipate on this fiftieth anniversary, only an episode of no greater current political importance than the Paris Commune. In fact, of course, the option of the political revolution not only remains open but has been made more real by the crisis of the bureaucracy and the growing confidence of the striking confirmation of Trotsky's prognosis and a

harbinger of the shape of things to come. It deserves, therefore, to be firmly linked with the commemoration of the Bolshevik victory of 1917. working class in the USSR and Eastern Europe. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was both a

8 *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (Socialist Labour League, London), pp. 43-4.

9 See Trotsky's definition in *The Revolution Betrayed*, pp. 254-6.

10 Thus, according to an article in *The Peking Review*, No. 27, June 9, 1967, p. 23: 'In the Soviet Union, the first socialist state in the world, set up by Lenin, the dictatorship of the proletariat has today become the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, capitalism has been restored and the socialist state has changed colour.' This has allegedly been the result of what the writer calls 'an historical retrogression' (unwinding the film of reformism backwards, Trotsky would have said) in which 'the bourgeoisie has effected counter-revolutionary restoration through its agents'. A long line of ultra-lefts and other critics of the bureaucracy have—like the Yugoslavs in their time—argued similarly. But what about the role of the working class? And the Marxist-Leninist theory of the state and revolution?

# THE AGE OF PERMANENT REVOLUTION

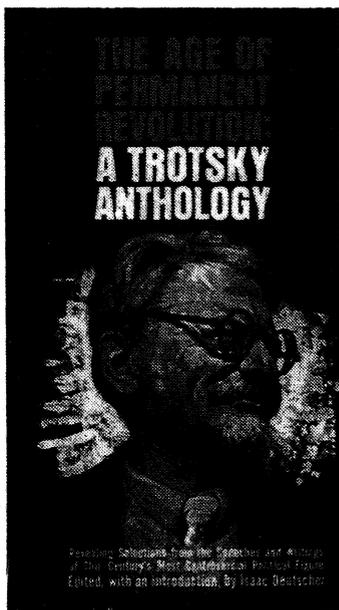
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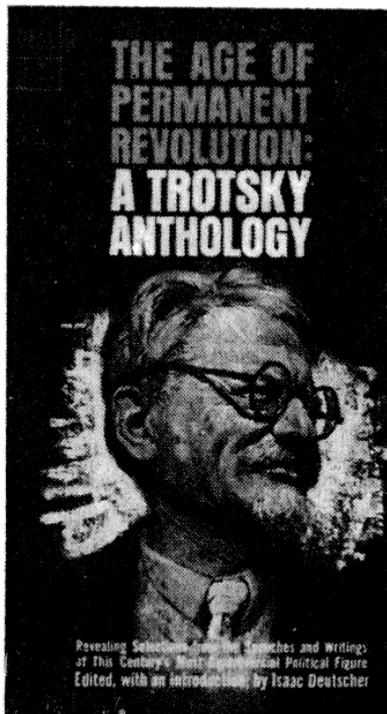
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Eugenii A. Preobrazhensky

# The Economic Policies of the Left Opposition

by Geoff Pilling

MANY ECONOMISTS AND other writers are agreed that the present Soviet economy, despite all its 'progress' since 1917, faces many serious and deep-seated problems which are no nearer to solution than they were 50 years ago. These problems of an isolated Soviet economy take many forms, not least of all a tendency operating throughout all the recent plans for the rate of growth of the social product to slow down. Despite its rapid advances in certain fields, the Soviet Union lags seriously behind the capitalist West in many key areas of the economy, producing distortion and unbalance between the various branches of industry and especially in the relations between industry and agriculture.

These problems are not the result of 'accident' or 'chance'. They stem essentially from the isolation of the Soviet economy and its separation from the international division of labour and trade as well as distortions arising from the planning system, which, while resting on a nationalized property base, is under the control of a parasitic bureaucracy and not of the working class as a whole.

The 1920s witnessed a fierce debate inside Russia which was intimately linked with many of these questions. The discussion centred on the problem of how and under what national and international conditions industrialization could take place in a country which, from an economic and cultural point of view, fell considerably behind the levels achieved in the leading metropolitan

countries. In particular, acute problems were created by the existence of a massive and conservative peasantry constituting over 80 per cent of the total population.

It was with these problems that members of the Left Opposition, centred around Trotsky, among whom Preobrazhensky was prominent, grappled from the mid-1920s onwards—coming into sharper and sharper conflict with the leaders of the Party and in particular with Stalin. But the dispute between the leadership and the Left Opposition was never a purely economic debate. It was part of a more general struggle against the emergence of a conservative and parasitic bureaucracy in Party and State.

In order to set the controversies of the period in correct perspective it is necessary briefly to trace in outline the main stages in the evolution of Soviet economic policy in the years after 1917. The enormous problems which confronted the successful revolution after 1917—the backwardness of the economy, the predominance of the peasantry, the havoc created by the First World War, etc.—were enormously intensified as a result of the Civil War which the Bolsheviks were forced to wage in order to preserve the revolution from its external and internal enemies. During the period of the Civil War and its immediate aftermath the whole of economic life had to be geared and organized to meet the needs of the front and the armaments industries. All efforts had to be concentrated on supplying the war industries and

keeping the city population alive.

This period—the period of War Communism—had disastrous consequences for the long term productive power and capacity of the economy, which by 1921 had fallen to one fifth of its pre-war capacity. This phase of economic policy, involving as it did the systematic regimentation of production at the expense of immediate consumption, was of course forced upon the leaders of the revolution. But it is also necessary to stress that it was a policy which was based upon the firm assumption, later to be abandoned by Stalin and his supporters, that socialism could be established in the Soviet Union only with the assistance, in terms of skilled manpower, technical knowledge and equipment, of a socialist Europe.

It was in response to the great problems which resulted from the period of War Communism that a strategic and temporary retreat had to be made. The retreat took the form of the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in March 1921. The basic aim of NEP was to use the forces of the market on a limited and controlled basis as a means of re-establishing relations between the town and the countryside. Industry was to supply the rural areas with the necessary goods at such prices as would allow the State to dispense with forcible collection of the products of peasant labour, as was the case under War Communism. Secondly it was a policy designed to raise production by bringing into play all the under-utilized plant and equipment which had existed during the period of the Civil War. In purely economic terms the policy met with considerable success. By 1926 industrial production was back to its pre-war level and had expanded five-fold in the period since 1921.

Even from the economic point of view there were limits to the results which could be achieved through this turn in economic policy. Once all the spare industrial capacity had been brought into play, the only increase in the social product possible was one achieved through additional amounts of investment, that is by means of accumulation.

From the political point of view, the adoption and retention of NEP involved not merely limitations but positive dangers. NEP had represented a necessary concession to the forces of the market and of capitalism. Lenin, in arguing for the need to make these retreats, was also very conscious of the dangers involved. On the one hand the development of the forces of production which was made possible through NEP gave greater strength and homogeneity to the working



**Bukharin**

*Argued that savings of the richer peasants would provide for increased investment.*

class. On the other hand the forces of capitalism, hostile to the revolution, were also strengthened. As Lenin said, the struggle would be a bitter one between the forces of Soviet and capitalist power.

Such dangers began to emerge with great clarity in the period after Lenin's death in 1924. The dangers centred upon reinforcement—in the countryside—of the layer of rich peasants, the kulaks, who increasingly represented a threat to the stability of the regime. As the villages recovered after 1921 so the differences within the peasantry became more clearly revealed. The power of the richest strata of peasants began to grow more rapidly than did agriculture as a whole. The policies of the Government actually tended to encourage these developments. Taxes increasingly fell upon the poorer peasant and the kulak was able, by monopolizing the supply of grain, to bring the poorest layers of peasant under his domination. Bukharin, the theoretician of the ruling group in the bureaucracy at this time, actually invited the peasant to 'Get Rich', which was, in effect, an invitation to the kulak to enrich himself.

Such dangers began to emerge with great clarity to the rich in the countryside involved yet further concessions. In 1925, after increasing demands from the kulak, the hiring of labour power and the leasing of land were legalized and sections of the ruling bureaucracy, and in particular Stalin, at this time hinted at the possibility of the denationalization of the land, which, as Lenin had insisted, was one of the cornerstones of the socialist base of the economy which had been established after 1917. Such moves greatly increased the power of the rich and reactionary peasants in the countryside and slowed up the rate of industrialization.

What the economic policy of Stalin and his co-thinkers amounted to—during this period at least—was an acceptance of a rate of industrialization which was determined not by the industrial

## **Bukharin**

*Argued that savings of the richer peasants would provide for increased investment.*



sector of the economy but by the countryside. It was a policy which took no account of the international relationships of Soviet and world economy and the place of this economy in the world division of trade and labour.

It was in the face of the rapidly mounting dangers represented by the emergence of the rich kulak as a member of a cohesive social force ranged against the Government, allied to the defeat of the 1926 General Strike in Britain and the massacre of the Chinese Revolution in 1927—itself the result of the direct policy imposed by Stalin on the Chinese Communists—that the bureaucracy began to take fright and made a dramatic turn in its industrial and agricultural policies after 1928. From accusing the Left Opposition of attempting to 'smash the worker-peasant alliance' of 'underestimating the peasantry' and of proposing to take a 'leap in the dark' the Stalin faction swung to a position of ultra-leftism in relation to the peasantry. From a conservative, ultra-cautious policy which, in Bukharin's famous phrase, involved the achievement of socialism on the 'back of a peasant nag', the official policy swung to one of rapid industrialization, with an overwhelming concentration placed upon heavy industry, and a policy in the countryside which involved forced collectivization and the liquidation of the kulak. In the late 1920s only one per cent of the land was collectivized, after five years over 20 per cent was to be organized in the collective farms. After presenting extremely conservative targets for industrial growth in the first draft of the Five Year Plan—targets which were sharply criticized by the Left Opposition—the final version of the Plan involved the target of a growth rate of over 30 per cent per annum. Such a wild left swing in policy, carried through in an empirical and blind manner and with no preparation and adopted in response to the enormous contradictions resulting from the earlier right-wing mistakes itself met with disastrous consequences.

The forced collectivization of agriculture, the 'liquidation of the kulak' and the breakneck development of heavy industry combined to produce conditions of civil war inside the Soviet Union which almost brought about the collapse of the regime and with it the restoration of capitalism. The revolt in the countryside against Stalin's policies brought such damage to Soviet agriculture, in the form of crop burning, the destruction of equipment and the slaughter of millions of animals that its effects are still felt today over 30 years later.

The struggle against these wild zigzags in economic policy and for a consistent policy in relation to agriculture and industry was carried out by the Left Opposition throughout the 1920s after Lenin's untimely death in 1924. The leading economist of the Left was of course Preobrazhensky, who outlined his views on the building of socialism in a backward country in his celebrated work *The New Economics* published in 1926, although many of its ideas had been worked out in the years before 1926. Preobrazhensky was at this stage a member of the Left Opposition and close collaborator of Trotsky's. As such his work is based (often implicitly, it is true) on the premise that the Soviet economy was part of the international economy and that in the long run it would not be possible to establish socialism in the Soviet Union on any viable basis in isolation from this world economy. On the other hand Preobrazhensky did address himself to the problems presented by a situation where, because of the temporary set-backs to the international struggle of the working class, the Soviet Union found itself in an isolated position.

Preobrazhensky started in his work from the fundamental proposition that the future stability of the Soviet economy could only be assured given the systematic development of industry. Preobrazhensky was concerned to show that industry could make only limited advances within the confines of the old techniques. NEP had in many ways brought forth all the possibilities for development inherent in the old industrial structure and technique. Only the application of new techniques, requiring a vast increase in investment, could lead to any systematic development of the productive forces.

The Revolution had in fact increased the potential demand for industrial products on the part of the peasantry, who retained a considerably larger part of their product in the NEP period than under the Tsarist regime. A significant increase in industrial output would be required to satisfy these demands (and thus increased exchange between the agrarian sector and the towns upon which their food supply depended). In addition there were the needs of the urban working class for consumer goods and the need to furnish the Soviet state with the military equipment to defend it against the threat of attack from the West. In short, there had to be a big increase in investment in industry; the question was how could the resources be found to build the new factories, steel mills and power stations which these involved.

Preobrazhensky, along with the members of the Left Opposition, was convinced that these resources could not come from the industrial sector of the economy alone. Only given a transfer of resources from the countryside to the town could resources be marshalled and organized on a sufficient scale to accomplish the tasks outlined above. In addition, without a correct orientation to the countryside a grave social and political crisis would develop. Preobrazhensky was in fact amongst the first to warn about the dangers which NEP involved of the fostering of a rich layer of peasants who would be hostile to the regime. Throughout the 1920s it was the Left Opposition who warned about the differentiation which was occurring in the countryside and urged a more vigorous policy of industrialization and collectivization. In response to this challenge Bukharin, the most extreme representative of the right and supporter of fundamental and permanent concessions to the peasant, was forced, at various times in the controversy, to argue that no differentiation was in fact occurring among the peasantry, that the term 'kulak' was losing all meaning and finally that the peasantry could, under certain circumstances, become the major revolutionary force in world history.

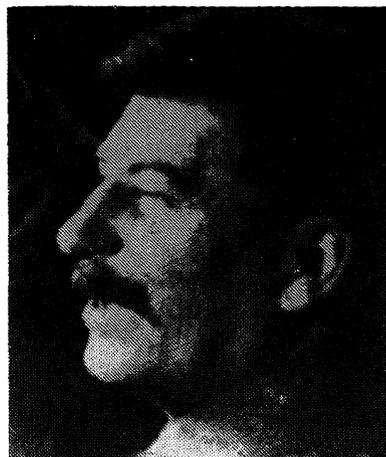
In opposition to this policy of appeasement of the kulak Preobrazhensky argued for a policy which, through a conscious price policy, would effect a significant shift in resources from the countryside to the town. It was here that he introduced his celebrated Law of Socialist Accumulation. Just as the development of capitalism had involved the expropriation of the peasantry—a necessary process in the monopolization of the means of production as capital in the hands of the urban capitalist class—so the development of Soviet industry involved also a transfer of resources from agriculture to industry. He was quick to point out, however, that this process could in no way be carried out in the violent manner which had characterized the emergence of capitalism. In addition, given the rapid expansion of the whole social product which would be possible under a system of planned economy, there was no reason to suppose that such a policy would mean an absolute decline in the standard of living in the countryside. Preobrazhensky was of the opinion that such a transfer of resources would best be effected through a system of price differentials which would keep up the price of industrial products at the expense of agricultural prices. This, from a political point of view, was less dangerous and would involve fewer adminis-

trative complications than would a direct tax upon the peasantry. Such an economic policy as that proposed by Preobrazhensky involved a suspension, or rather distortion, of the working of the law of value. Indeed he often spoke in terms of the 'struggle' between the law of value and the law of socialist accumulation.

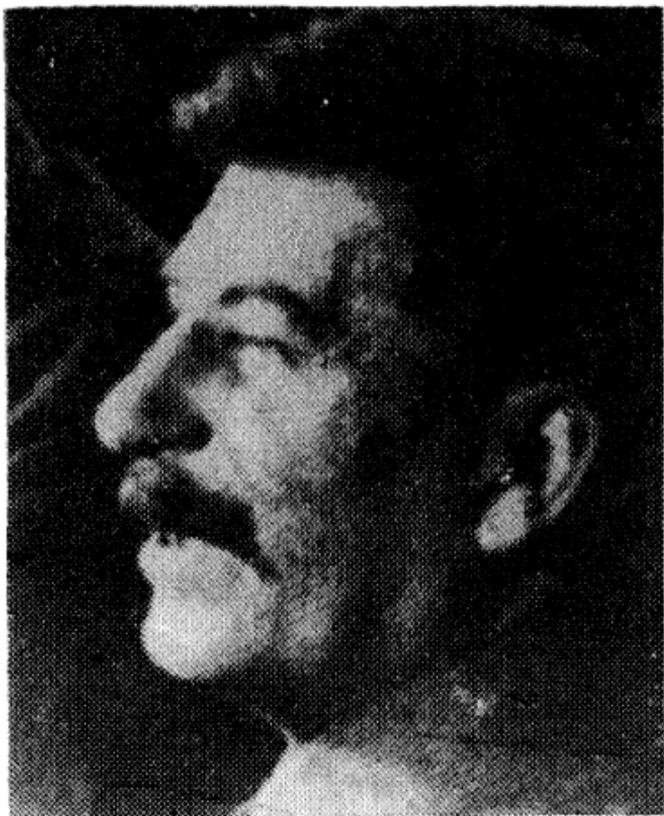
Whatever its particular weaknesses, which are not in any case our main concern at this stage, Preobrazhensky's work did provide a consistent and positive statement of the problems involved. As he justifiably remarked about Bukharin, the case of the right wing was invariably cast in polemical form with no positive statement of position. Bukharin's reply, which became increasingly frenzied and devoid of scientific consideration as the faction fight inside the Party intensified, consisted, in the main, of a series of assertions to the effect that growing prosperity of the peasantry was necessary to provide an enlarged market for goods from the towns and it was out of the savings of the richer peasants that funds would be provided for increased investment. At least he was wholly consistent in his position if not wholly logical. Even at the time of Stalin's dramatic turn to the left in economic policy after 1928 he persisted in his right wing views and in the face of greater and greater dangers from the kulaks urged a policy of increased concessions.

Stalin was in no way so consistent. From 1924 until the adoption of the First Five Year Plan he tended to avoid the theoretical discussions about the problems facing the economy. He confined himself either to a few sweeping and empty generalizations on the one hand or to comments

**Stalin**  
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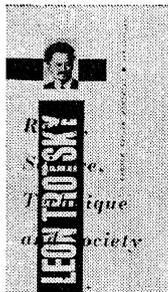
on isolated questions on the other. But there is no doubt where his political position lay. As he said at the 14th Party Congress in 1925 'We are, and we shall be, for Bukharin'. He was however astute enough to dissociate himself from Bukharin's 'Get Rich' slogan.

One final point must be stressed. The struggle between the ruling faction of the Party and the Left Opposition in the days after Lenin's death on the question of industrialization was not of course a purely 'economic' debate. It was an aspect of the struggle against the degeneration of the revolution and for a restoration of the traditions of Bolshevism.

The economic policy advocated by Stalin and his supporters was a reflection of their policy of 'socialism in one country', first advanced in 1924. Thus even when Stalin began to carry out a policy of industrialization and collectivization this in no way represented his 'conversion' to the political position of the Left Opposition. Many members of the Opposition did see the 'turn' to Stalin in this light, including Preobrazhensky himself, who made his peace with Stalin, although soon afterwards he began to have grave doubts about the ruthless manner in which Stalin's policy was being carried out. It was not merely a question that Stalin's programme of industrialization was carried through at a breakneck speed which threatened the whole future of the revolution. More important than this: as we have said, it was undertaken in a blind empirical manner in response to the growing capitalist threat at home and abroad. It was born out of a fear and panic

at the consequences of the right-wing policy which had been persisted with in the years 1924-1928. By 1934/1935 this policy was to give way to an equally sharp turn to the right, again carried out empirically. The differences on economic questions were symptomatic of the difference on all political questions. Whereas Stalin and his followers increasingly saw the revolution as an isolated national event which had to be preserved at all costs (along with the privileges of an increasingly powerful bureaucracy) through a policy of peace with the forces of international capitalism, the Left Opposition, following faithfully the traditions of Lenin and of Bolshevism, conceived of 1917 as only the opening of a series of uninterrupted revolutions against capitalism internationally. Their attitude to the questions of the Soviet economy was part of this world perspective. Thus while they paid specific attention to the problems of economic development in a backward, peasant dominated country in which, for example, Preobrazhensky was able to make some remarkable advances in the conceptions and techniques of political economy far beyond anything achieved either by his opponents or by bourgeois economists of the period—they continued, as an Opposition, to see these as part of the whole imperialist epoch. The epoch was one dominated by war and revolution in which the decisive battles would be fought against capitalism in its main centres; Europe and North America. It is only from this point of view that the economics of Trotsky or his co-thinkers have any meaning either for the 1920s or for today.

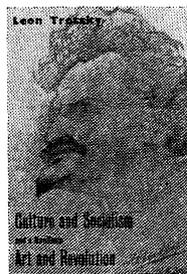
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# Conflicts in the Bolshevik Party-1917

By Robert Black and John Crawford.

BOTH BOURGEOIS AND STALINIST historians have falsified the history of the October Revolution. In the case of the Stalinists, this falsification is especially motivated by the political need to protect the bureaucracy from all enquiries into its counter-revolutionary origins. But also involved is the genuine inability of those who betrayed the October Revolution to understand the revolutionary process and the methods of its leaders.

Bourgeois historians, however sophisticated their manners of presentation, basically regard revolution as an unwarranted interference in the orderly progress of history. Clearly, such disasters as the revolutionary disruption of this smooth process can only be explained in terms of the plottings of agitators, inspired by a spirit of evil.

On the other hand, the Stalinists begin from the absolute legitimacy of the Revolution, but idealize it through abstract, essentially bureaucratic categories. The inner contradictions and unevenness of its development are smothered and finally lost in a crude attempt to force Bolshevism and the working class into the mould of the mythical 'monolithic party'. As with their opposite numbers in the bourgeois camp, their idealist method obliterates the complexities and nuances in the dynamic relationship between the various layers of the masses, the revolutionary party and its leadership.

The crudest expression in the bourgeois camp of these methods can be seen in the many recent biographies of Lenin, which alternate sections denigrating his 'low cunning' with proofs of his hopeless, even child-like, idealism.

For the Stalinists, on the other hand, the Bolshevik Party was always monolithically correct. Recent tarnishing of Stalin's halo has of necessity been accompanied by a still more religious idealization of the role and political character of Lenin.

The real meaning of October can only be grasped by those who fight for the continuation of the Russian Revolution. Only they can fully understand the possibility of intervention in history by the working class as a consciously organized force, acting independently of capitalism and its bureaucratic agencies.

A revolution brings forward in concentrated form all the contradictions in the old society.

What was a subject class, exploited and oppressed, excluded from cultural and especially political life, is propelled forward towards the seizure of power. The rapid shifts and explosions in the mood of millions of people during a revolutionary period cannot be explained except in terms of *objective* forces and conflicts.

'The swift change of mass views and moods in an epoch of revolution', says Trotsky, 'thus derive, not from the flexibility and mobility of man's mind, but just from the opposite, from its conservatism. The chronic lag of ideas and relations behind new objective conditions, right up to the moment when the latter crash over people in the form of a catastrophe, is what creates in a period of revolution that leaping movement of ideas and passions which seems to the police mind a mere result of the activities of "demagogues".' (Preface to *History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 18.)

When the objective needs of society clash on this scale with the established ideas in men's heads, those who fight for the leadership of the revolutionary class concentrate in themselves all these contradictions. Marxist theory and organization are aimed at bringing these contradictions to the level of consciousness. Without the fight for this awareness, there can be no preparation for the inevitable shifts that take place inside the revolutionary class, and thus, no leadership to guide it to victory.

Bolshevism was the fight to break through abstract, bourgeois, forms of thought on the basis of the revolutionary potential of the *international* working class. This preparation for revolution could only take place in the overcoming of all the problems encountered in the building of a centralized, disciplined, revolutionary organization, in the construction of a party which fights for the independent action of the working class. Only in the subordination of individual wills to this task can partial, short-term adaptations to the existing social order be exposed in contrast with a general, all-sided understanding of the world.

1917 demonstrated for all time that proletarian revolution could take place only with the development of this *world* outlook, in all its richness, based on the entire historical experience of the

international working class. Clearly, says Lenin, 'absolute centralization and the strict discipline of the proletariat are the fundamental conditions for victory over the bourgeoisie. . . . But far from enough thought has been given to the question as to what it means and under what conditions it is possible. . . . Russia achieved Marxism, the only correct revolutionary theory, virtually through *suffering*, by half a century of unprecedented torment and sacrifice, of unprecedented heroism, incredible energy, devoted searching, study, testing in practice, disappointments, checking and comparison with European experience.' (Lenin, *Left Wing Communism*.)

By painting over or personalizing the conflicts within the Bolshevik Party during as well as before 1917, idealist historians evade all the real questions posed by the October Revolution. What the Marxist must analyse as objective, historical contradictions are presented purely as the product of subjective error or the accidents of individual psychology.

In the period between February and the end of October, the Bolshevik Party was convulsed by a series of crises within its leadership. Lenin deliberately provoked the sharpest possible struggle within the Party precisely in order to bring to the surface all the Social-Democratic illusions which stood between the Bolshevik Party and the overthrow of Russian capitalism.

Lenin's offensive against the right wing of the Party, led in March by Kamenev, Stalin and Muranov from the editorial board of *Pravda*, had deeper implications than a struggle for a strategic turn within the Russian Revolution. Unlike practically all the leading Bolsheviks, not to speak of the left wing in the old International, Lenin had from 1914 based his entire political thinking on the necessity of building a new, communist international. Lenin directed his fire in this first period of his return from exile, not only against leading Bolsheviks who worked for a compromise with the Provisional Government, but also against any trend towards unity with the Zimmerwaldist 'Centre'. The Zimmerwald swamp of pacifism and unprincipled manoeuvres was seen by many 'Old Bolsheviks' as an inviting road back to the womb of the Second International.

Lenin saw more clearly than anyone else in April 1917 that the one-sided, unthinking assimilation of certain tactical turns and organizational forms from the past history of the Bolshevik faction had become a receptacle for alien class forces within the Party. These alien pressures were forced all the way to the surface only when

the Party was faced with the necessity of making bold changes in its strategy. 'Old Bolshevism', in this context, was the vehicle for all the conservatism and inertia within the class and the Party, given the finished form of slavish adherence to past, and often outmoded, formulae and slogans.

Kamenev's insistence on limiting the Party to agitation for the 'democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasantry', advocated since 1905 by Bolshevism, epitomized this backward-looking tendency within the Party that swamped the leading cadres in early 1917. In *this* respect, Lenin moved towards the programmatic position of Trotsky and the 'Permanent Revolution' and *against* the entire leadership of his own party, with all its illusions in the 'fortifying' role of the Provisional Government and scepticism concerning the ripeness of Russia for socialist revolution.

Lenin was able to project this new perspective for the Party only by digging down beneath the democratic illusions of the masses to the realities of the imperialist war—a war that for the Russian workers and peasants could be ended only by the overthrow of that same Provisional Government in which the vast majority of them still believed.

Kamenev and his supporters, though employing Bolshevik terminology of former periods, reflected a petty-bourgeois pressure upon the working class. Lenin relentlessly laid bare the political, class content of their adherence to the formulae of 1905. He showed that it involved nothing less than capitulation to Menshevism in Russia, and internationally, to Zimmerwald and thence to the Kautskyite 'Centre'.

Lenin's political audacity lay in his ability to launch attacks on this theoretical inertia within the Party in line with organic developments within the working class and its allies. But, though on many occasions threatening to 'go to the sailors', Lenin could never simply by-pass the Party and its leading cadres. With all their weaknesses, the Bolshevik leaders embodied the priceless political experience of a whole epoch of international class struggle. By unflinchingly battling against every tendency to conservatism, that experience became harnessed to the further development of the Party, the training of new generations of fighters and the penetration of deeper layers of the masses.

Stalinist historians present Lenin's campaign for the 'April Theses' as being victorious within a few weeks of his return. In reality, the change of front by many of the party leaders around the axis of 'All power to the Soviets' was little more than an adaptation to the authority of Lenin with-

**V. I. Lenin**  
*delivers his 'April Theses'*  
*to the Soviets*



in the Party, combined with the deepening radicalization of the masses, after the imperialist designs of the Provisional Government were revealed. Adjusting to this shift to the left, 'Old Bolshevism' still shied away from the actual task of preparing the overthrow of the Provisional Government. While the Soviets remained under the control of the Menshevik and Social-Revolutionary Compromisers, the most conservative of Bolshevics could agitate for these new organs of workers' rule to take the whole power from the Provisional Government, confident that no such transfer of power could possibly take place.

For Lenin, however, the content and not the form of Soviet power was decisive. Only Soviets *with a Bolshevik majority* could be real organs of the dictatorship of the working class. Soviets dominated by the right wing served only as a means of transferring the power back to the old ruling class. The role of the Compromisers was to provide the ruling classes with the necessary breathing space to regroup their shattered forces and prepare for the complete destruction of the Soviets, and, with them, dual power.

Seizing once again on the *form* of this slogan, 'Old Bolshevism' re-asserted itself in a new guise of orthodoxy. The crisis provoked by the July Days, in which the balance of 'dual power' established in the first days of the Revolution was shifted sharply to the right by clashes in Petrograd between workers and sailors and detachments of the extreme right, proved that a new relationship between the masses and the right

wing leaders of the Soviets was emerging. The spontaneous July rising, held back by the Bolsheviks, took place against the leaders of the Petrograd Soviet.

The new adaptations with the Bolshevik leadership were forced out into the open by this dramatic turn, this change from a peaceful to a violent tempo of development in the class struggle. Lenin had developed the slogan 'All power to the Soviets', to draw the Party closer to the masses now organized around the Soviets. In giving their support to the Menshevik and Social Revolutionaries in the Soviets, these layers unconsciously allowed the power to be handed by these treacherous leaders to the old ruling class.

This particular slogan could only be put forward by the Bolsheviks while the ruling class and its state machine remained paralysed and partially shattered by the February upheaval. Transfer of power to the working class and poorest sections of the peasantry through a series of shifts within the Soviets was only a political possibility while the forces of reaction remained in this demoralized state, and therefore dependent on collaboration with the Soviet right wing.

The 'July Days' marked the end of this period. Dual power had not disappeared after July 5, but any talk of transfer of power to the existing Soviets became dangerous without the actual preparation of the working class for a violent overthrow of the old order. Throughout Russia, the Soviet leaders after July 5 went over from



**V. I. Lenin**

*delivers his 'April Theses'  
to the Soviets*

compromise to active collaboration with the ruling class against the working class and its Bolshevik leadership.

In this situation, Lenin declared, 'the slogan calling for the transfer of state power to the Soviets . . . would be deceiving the people; it would be fostering in them the delusion that even now it is enough for the Soviets to want to take power, to pass such a decision, for power to be theirs. . . .' (*Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 185.) The real power was now in the hands of the military cadets (the 'Junkers') and reactionary Cossack troops. The Soviet leaders were mere puppets. Their violent overthrow by the masses was the only way to power. But that demanded that the Bolsheviks capture the majority in the Soviets. Until that had been accomplished, the Soviets would serve as a pillar of the Provisional Government of Kerensky. 'Soviets may appear in this new revolution, and indeed, are bound to, but *not* the present Soviets, not organs collaborating with the bourgeoisie. . . .' (*Ibid.*, p. 189.)

Lenin had to fight hard for this strategy against those in the Party who stuck rigidly to the old slogan, turning it into an empty abstraction divorced from the new content of the class struggle after the 'July Days'. Constitutional illusions thus once more hid behind Bolshevik formulae.

By September, Lenin can see the development of this 'second revolution'. The Bolsheviks have won the leadership of decisive sections of the working class and the armed forces. Now begins the fiercest struggle of all, in which the contents of all previous faction fights are concentrated and raised to a new level: *the fight for the insurrection itself*.

From hiding, Lenin has to wage war against tendencies in the Party which try to avoid or postpone the issue of power. He denounces the participation of the Bolsheviks in the so-called 'Democratic Conference'. This had been called by the Soviet right wing in an attempt to resolve the issue of state power in favour of the ruling class.

'The Bolsheviks should have walked out of the meeting. . . . They should not have allowed themselves to be kept busy with obvious nonsense for the obvious purpose of deceiving the people. . . . The Party failed to keep pace with the incredibly fast tempo of history.' (*Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 48.)

Was Lenin's rebuke immediately taken to heart by the entire party? Far from it. When the so-called Pre-Parliament was constituted, the proposal of Trotsky to boycott it was defeated! Once more, it was an 'Old Bolshevik' formula which was in-

voked to justify this vote. Behind this error lay a whole history of struggle within the Bolshevik faction for a correct approach to work within parliamentary bodies. While the 1905 revolution was in its period of upswing, Lenin insisted that the Bolshevik faction boycott the Duma, established by the Tsar in the constitution proclaimed on October 17, 1905. The elections to the First Duma took place next spring, during a period of colossal revolutionary upheaval, in which a turn by the working class towards parliamentarianism could only have acted as a brake on this vast movement.

Boycottism in 1905-1906 was a correct tactic. But with the revolution losing its impetus, to maintain the tactic of boycott was also to sustain the dangerous, adventurist illusion that the revolution was still on the upswing. Boycottism in 1907, when the elections to the Second and Third Dumas took place, went hand in hand with sectarianism and a tactic that would isolate the Bolshevik faction from the experiences through which the masses were passing. Positions gained in even the most reactionary of Dumas could become vantage points for propaganda work during the period when the working class was gathering its strength for a fresh assault on the ruling class. Ultra-lefts such as Bogdanov, in turning boycottism into a principle, represented an idealist tendency within the Party, against which Lenin fought with all his strength in the period of reaction.

But in September 1917 participation in the Pre-Parliament meant turning away from the revolutionary aspirations of the masses. 'We must boycott the Pre-Parliament', writes Lenin. 'We must go out into the Soviets . . . go out into the trade unions, go out in general to the masses.'

Only after two weeks of debate at the meeting of the Party faction in the Pre-Parliament was the boycott finally agreed. Trotsky's speech at the first session announced the withdrawal of the Bolsheviks. The turn had been made only just in time.

Throughout the month of October, Lenin carried on his war against the Party right wing. Basing himself on the international prospects for the revolution and the shifts to the left inside the working class, he fights to break the last ties which still bind the Party to the old social order.

Continually he demands that the Central Committee make concrete plans for the seizure of power. Further, he actually prepares to act independently of the Committee, in particular in his 'conspiratorial' letter to Smilga of September 27.

(Collected Works, Vol. 26, p. 69.)

The culminating battle of this *internal* war was the struggle against Zinoviev and Kamenev. These, the closest of Lenin's comrades, had been throughout the firmest opponents of insurrection. In his 'Letter to Comrades' of October 17, Lenin takes up every one of their arguments against insurrection and mercilessly strips them down to their class foundations.

Despite Stalinist attempts to distort reality, these two were not isolated in their fight against Lenin's line. After their letter in the non-Party press, opposing the insurrection, Lenin had unequivocally demanded the expulsion of Zinoviev and Kamenev from the Party as 'strike-breakers'. But at that time, Lenin did not know that Zinoviev had sent another letter to *Pravda*, which had appeared with a sympathetic editorial comment: 'The question may be regarded as settled (*sic!*). The harsh tone of Comrade Lenin's article does not alter the fact that basically we still share the same views.' The author of these evasive lines was Joseph Stalin!

The 'strike-breakers' were not expelled: Lenin's proposal received not one supporter. Stalin spoke against even accepting Kamenev's resignation from the CC. When Kamenev's removal from the Committee was eventually approved, Stalin offered to resign from the editorship of *Pravda*.

These upheavals within the top leadership of the Party took place only *three days* before the victorious insurrection! How was this possible? 'The high temper of the Bolshevik Party expressed itself, not in an absence of disagreements, waverings and even quakings, but in the fact that in

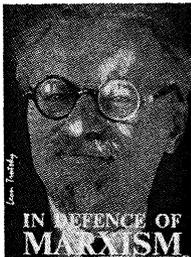
the most difficult circumstances it gathered itself in good season by means of inner crises, and made good its opportunity to interfere decisively in the course of events.' (Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 1016.)

The victory of the working class, and the building of a Marxist party without which that victory is impossible, are processes of acute struggle, whose protagonists are not finished products, but themselves contradictory and incomplete. The struggle for Bolshevism did not end in October 1917, any more than it ended in 1905, 1907 or April 1917. Bolshevism after October 1917 sought to break through the barriers to world revolution erected by the traitors of the Second International, building the Third, Communist International. The rise of Stalinism and the growth of bureaucracy posed yet more problems for Bolshevism, which were answered only by the development of the Left Opposition and the establishment of the Fourth International by Leon Trotsky.

The spread of the October Revolution to the advanced, metropolitan countries must meet with even greater obstacles in the Labour movements moulded by imperialism than the Russian revolutionaries faced. The fight for the Bolshevik party in such countries, which is the decisive question of our time, will therefore involve even deeper conflicts.

On the other hand, the great power of the workers' movement and the immense heritage of the fight of Lenin and Trotsky can enable the Marxists to carry through all these coming battles to a successful conclusion.

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# Books

## Stalin's role in history

Staline by Jean-Jacques Marie  
Editions du Seuil, Paris

WHETHER THE 'revelations' which Svetlana has to make about her father's life will be worth the millions of dollars which capitalist publishers are willing to pay for them is to be doubted. At least they know that there is a ready market for information about the man who dominated Russia for a generation but for whose personality and political life little direct evidence is available.

In Russia itself Stalin has been all but removed from the history of the past half century. After years of adulation as a demi-god in which surgeons, engineers, explorers and poets attributed their achievements to his genius his successors have done their best to erase even the memory of his name. The account which they give of their own past has no better foundation in fact than the histories which flourished in Stalin's day.

One day, no doubt, the archives will be opened and much which is now obscure or known only by hearsay will be illuminated by a flood of fresh light. Until then what can be written about Stalin is bound to retain a provisional character as Jean-Jacques Marie, author of a new popular biography, so far only available in French, points out.

His book provides, within a short compass, an excellent introduction to the Stalin era. It reviews the main lines of Stalin's political life.

From a background of peasants and artisans not long released from serfdom, the future Stalin completed his formal education in a seminary for orthodox priests before becoming a devoted revolutionary. No doubt the seminary gave Stalin his liturgical style; otherwise he preferred action to literature. What he wrote was usually required for a specific purpose. While in deportation he wrote little and there were other periods of his life when he neither wrote nor spoke in public for weeks or months on end although the supreme ruler of a vast country.

Returning from exile after the February revolution Stalin found himself one of the editors of *Pravda*, the central Bolshevik newspaper, and thus for determining its line towards the Provisional Government. As is once again admitted in Soviet historical writing, Stalin was responsible for *Pravda's* conditional support of the Provisional Government and for cutting, or not inserting, Lenin's articles which advocated absolutely no support for the new regime.

Stalin did, however, rally to Lenin, only to take up an ambiguous position once again on the eve of October. These political mistakes of Stalin were, of course, shared by other Bolsheviks and were part of a drift of the party leadership only arrested and reversed by the firmness of Lenin. The point in insisting upon them is to refute the legend of Stalin's role in 1917 which was

put forward in the struggle against the Left Opposition in the 1920s and was then regarded as historical truth.

What was important, biographically speaking, was Stalin's position in the party apparatus: an organiser who listened and talked little, who made sure that meetings were held and conferences arranged, who found the men who filled the jobs which had to be done.

The rise of Stalin was associated, in the first place, with the growing role of the party apparatus in the early years of the Revolution. His political standpoint is assessed by Marie as maintenance of the Soviet state and readiness to sacrifice the cause of international socialism to it.

At the end of the civil war the economy was in ruins, famine stalked the land while the revolution had not been carried into Central and Western Europe. Hence the enhanced role of the party and state apparatus, the emphasis on discipline which found expression in the prohibition of factions at the Tenth Party Congress, the need for a breathing space which took the form of the New Economic Policy. As an efficient organiser who carefully kept free of factional commitments and to whom no one attributed the desire to become the master of the Party, Stalin was nominated its General Secretary.

It was from this mainly technical post that Stalin built up a cadre personally loyal to himself consisting largely of younger Bolsheviks who had joined the party since 1917. Stalin's handling of the nationalities question roused Lenin, by this time a sick man, to vigorous opposition and this, together with his rudeness to Krupskaya, earned him the famous reference in Lenin's Testa-

ment—for so long denounced by the Stalinists as a forgery.

Meanwhile, with the death of Lenin, Stalin strove to create the legend of the faithful disciple. In doing so he distorted and reformed Lenin's thoughts and added something of his own, the theory of 'socialism in one country'. With this theory Stalin launched into struggle with those who remained faithful to the Bolshevik tradition of internationalism and defeated them. 'Stalin triumphed', writes Marie, 'because he incarnated a privileged caste which emerged with the reflux of the revolutionary wave.' The isolation and backwardness of Russia operated in the same direction. Stalin added to the body of his supporters many who had fought against the revolution, allied himself first with one group in the party then another.

Stalin's strength undoubtedly derived from his handling of the apparatus of the party, an apparatus which he built up and shaped to his needs. He used this apparatus to attract and reward supporters, no matter from whence they came, and to discredit and chastise his opponents. In his hands, the Bolshevik Party, which had carried through the first successful working class revolution, was itself destroyed and turned into an organ of power for the privileged caste which Stalin personified.

What happened in the twenties, therefore, was not the outcome of Bolshevism but the result of its destruction. Was this destruction, and the triumph of Stalin inevitable? This is the conclusion which emerges from Deutscher's much lengthier and more detailed biography. Marie does not explicitly reject this determinism, although a reader of his book will not, as with Deutscher, come away with the feeling that history was like that and could not have been otherwise.

The intensity of the opposition which his policy and methods generated drove Stalin to use the power at his command more brutally and vengefully. The upheavals in a country in which, amid great hardships, a modern industry was being created and the sloth of ages overcome, provided the background, and for the apologists the explanation,

for the veritable terror unleashed in the 1930s. Stalin's violent turn towards industrialization convinced even many of the Opposition that there was no alternative but to rally to his side. The enforced collectivization, carried through at immense human cost, saddled Soviet agriculture with a legacy which it has still not thrown off.

There is, then, a legend that Stalin's way alone could have carried through the transformation of Russian economy; that while the terror may have ended by getting out of control only the heavy hand could have driven the peasant into the factory and realized the increases in production of the five-year plans. Again, while Marie does not deal with this specifically, it seems to follow from his treatment that such a legend is false. One would have liked to have seen, however, perhaps less repetition of old points made against Stalin (sometimes dependent on the evidence of witnesses such as Krivitsky, Barmine or Djilas which can hardly be checked from other sources) and more attention given to refuting the still pervasive apologetics for Stalin which are present in some circles.

In fact it can be shown that the Stalinist bureaucracy, far from being necessary to carry through the industrialization of Russia, acted as a drag on the productive forces, prejudiced the security of the country by its foreign policy and weakened it militarily. The costs of 'socialism in one country', besides including the betrayal of the world working class, were extremely heavy for Russia. Stalin's heirs today have still not been able to throw off the weight of this history. What, after all, is their shamefaced repudiation of Stalin based upon? Chiefly upon the period, from the assassination of Kirov (now assumed to have been engineered by Stalin himself), in which Stalin made himself master of the bureaucracy by an arbitrary reign of terror. As Marie puts it, 'From the assassination of Kirov, the incarnation escaped from the control of its creators and the threatened bureaucrats sang his glory because they could not do anything else and because his policy was theirs, although carried out without them and

often against them'.

By this time, indeed, the last vestiges of Bolshevism were stamped out. Its most notable representatives perished in the purges or were sent to the camps. Symbolically the Society of Old Bolsheviks was dissolved—it spent too much time referring to deportations under the Tsar. Even while the purges reached their height the Stalin Constitution, with its formal concessions to liberal democracy, was proclaimed. The Third International, now a docile instrument of Stalin, adopted the policy of coalitions with bourgeois parties known as the Popular Front.

The turn to the Popular Front followed a series of defeats for the working class of which the coming to power of Hitler was the most catastrophic. The responsibility of Stalin for these defeats was heavy; in a political biography more attention should be given to them. More could be said about the connection between the policy of 'socialism in one country' and the counter-revolutionary role which the bureaucracy played. But at what stage did Stalin contribute to the defeats of the communists of other countries by mistaken policies and when by a cynical desire to preserve his rule in Russia at all costs? The biographer has to avoid thinking of Stalin in the 1920s in the light of his later crimes and betrayals.

With the purges and trials of the 1930s the pathological traits in Stalin's character appeared more markedly, but in the manner rather than in the purpose of his policies. Essentially these years saw the final destruction of Bolshevism and the stamping out of all opposition and criticism. Among his victims were many foreign communists who had taken refuge in the Soviet Union including at least twenty-three members of the Communist International; no dictator liquidated so many loyal communists.

As Trotsky had warned before Hitler took power, a victory for German Nazism would inevitably mean an attack upon the Soviet Union. Stalin, having contributed by the policies he imposed upon the German communists to this victory, refused to face up to this. For a

number of years he sought allies among the bourgeois governments, seeking, as Marie says, 'to alleviate by diplomatic manoeuvres the consequences of his internal policy and of the policy of the Popular Front in Spain and France'. Then came the advances to Germany—with whom the line had always been kept open—and the non-aggression pact of August 1939. By its nature the understanding between Hitler and Stalin could only be short-lived, but it was accompanied by statements and gestures which testified yet again to Stalin's contempt for the international communist movement now completely under his control.

When the war came inadequate preparations had been made. Stalin himself seems to have lapsed, in the early weeks, into panic and despair, though in the nature of things little can be known definitely about this phase. However, the resistance of the Red Army and Soviet workers and peasants to the invader re-awoke his powers of leadership. Perhaps memories of the battles of the civil war stirred again. If they did they acted in a peculiar way. Stalin's whole emphasis in the conduct of the war was upon its patriotic and national character and to prevent it becoming a revolutionary war. This found expression in many ways: in the appeals to Russian nationalism and the Churches, in the evocation of Tsarist heroes and in the policies adopted towards the resistance movements in Europe.

What role Stalin played in the military operations is again difficult to say with certainty. Belittled by Khrushchev, who displayed him planning battles on a globe, and now generally criticized for his role in July 1941, some war memoirs still depict him in a favourable light. Concentrating so much power in his hands, as well as having at his disposal much detailed information not available to his generals, he was obviously indispensable for the conduct of the war. Was his role, as Marie says, 'very negative'? Assuming the rule of the bureaucracy they could not do without him in fighting a national patriotic war. If they attribute errors to him now which proved costly in lives they only do

so to diminish their own responsibility.

Stalin's indispensability to the bureaucracy was shown still more clearly in his relations with Churchill and Roosevelt and in the imposition of a policy of national union on the Communist Parties. Above all there was to be no revolutionary aftermath to the war if Stalin could avoid it. The Communist International was dissolved in 1943. The following year the carve up of Europe was decided with Churchill which amongst other enormities left the Greek resistance to be dealt with by the British forces. The division of the world into spheres of influence became the basis of the policy towards the capitalist powers of Stalin as the representative of the bureaucracy: this remains its policy at the present time. Such a policy, by its whole nature and aim, was not a fulfilment of Lenin's internationalism but its antithesis. It corresponded exactly to the needs of the bureaucracy which yearned for the peaceful consolidation of its rule without adventures and without revolutions abroad.

The final years of Stalin's life, even more than the rest, and despite the 'revelations' of Khrushchev, remain shrouded in mystery. He appeared little in public, he spoke rarely and wrote little. This was a time of great social tensions, acerbated still more by the falling apart of the Grand Alliance and the opening of the Cold War. In this period of hardship and penury, of police terror and the stamping out of all dissident voices the Stalin cult flourished as never before. The bureaucracy, in its turn, was obliged to put up with the caprices of the old dictator even when he struck arbitrarily in their own ranks. With Stalin controlling the machinery of the party and the state, having power of life and death over themselves, the bureaucracy was obliged to appear as the most strident devotees of his cult. But in doing so they built up within themselves a tremendous resentment, a bitter hatred for the man whose boots they licked and whose dirty work they had to perform.

Meanwhile the arm of Stalin ex-

tended into the 'peoples democracies' with a series of frame-up trials staged against leaders feared capable of following Tito's path of independence. Few communists questioned these trials or the stream of abuse poured out on Tito. Was not Stalin the great and infallible guide, the genial leader of all humanity? On his seventieth birthday an immense and unparalleled volume of adulation was showered on Stalin throughout the world communist movement. It is almost unbelievable that the subject of so many learned articles ('Stalin as an Economist', 'Stalin and Science', 'Stalin and Culture', etc.) is now, in the same press, or by the same writers, scarcely mentioned even in passing. For the bureaucracy and its apologists today Stalin has not passed into history, he has passed out of it. His monuments have been torn down and his body removed from the place it was laid beside Lenin's. History is re-written so that he does not appear in episodes in which he played a leading part. Publication of his Collected Works stopped and quotations from them no longer appear in works on every subject from surgery to semantics. In this way the Soviet bureaucracy shamefacedly tries to conceal its own origin and record. Clearly it is not a tenable position. If the older generations want to forget, the new generations will demand imperatively to know.

The question of Stalin thus remains posed. It cannot be resolved, as the Communist Parties try to do, by simply erasing him from history. Nor is the Chinese way, which stops the clock in 1953, any more successful. Stalin set his stamp on a whole era in the history of the working class movement, an era which is not yet at an end. The resolution of the crisis of leadership means, amongst other things, settling accounts with Stalinism. This new biography by Jean-Jacques Marie, readable and informative as it is, can, despite its inadequacies on some points, make a contribution to this task. As an introduction to the large and often heavy literature of the subject, or as a refresher course for the initiated, it is a very useful volume.

# Philip Snowden

by Colin Cross

Barrie and Radcliffe, London, 1966

Price 50 shillings

THERE is nothing particularly new or exciting in this biography of the politician best known to history as the Chancellor in the first two Labour Governments. Mr Cross found no new papers or documents to throw light on his subject but he has brought together what can be known about the external facts of his life and political career. He is as sparing with his praise as he is with his blame; he underlines some obvious weaknesses, such as Snowden's addiction to the purest financial orthodoxy, but presumably accepts many of the political assumptions which he made.

Snowden's career extended from the pioneering days of the Independent Labour Party to the formation of the National Government after the crisis of 1931. It summed up the progression of a certain type of reformism which begins with the most pure-blooded declarations of belief in 'socialism' and ends up by cutting unemployment pay in the interests of the bankers. In a different language and style the labour politicians of today, be they ever so left, follow the same path.

Snowden's background was authentically working class and he achieved and retained wide popular support in the industrial North. His contact with the workers was probably closer than that of most of his successors. He had campaigned tirelessly for what he thought to be the cause of 'socialism' when it offered no prospect of a successful career. He joined the ILP a year or so after its foundation and became one of its most prominent figures. His background gave him a feeling for the working class: but he thought always in terms of self-improvement and reform, not of struggle. He remained deeply suspicious of trade unionism. It was, on the other hand, typical that he should devote

as much campaigning to the cause of temperance as he did to that of the ILP at some stages in his career. The Yorkshire working class, moreover, was moving from liberalism. Throughout his career he retained a deep belief in the economic doctrines of nineteenth century liberalism: free trade, the gold standard and balanced budgets in the Gladstonian tradition. His last notable political act was a broadcast on behalf the Liberal Party the election of 1935.

His 'socialism' was of the propagandist, quasi-religious variety which was the keynote of the ILP. He excelled at depicting a vision of the new society which was to replace the ugly reality of life in the drab towns of the industrial North. He brought recruits to the ILP in the same way that Billy Graham brings them to God. One of his most popular pamphlets was entitled 'The Christ that is to be'. As Cross puts it:

At the end of a long, inspiring speech, he would drop his voice and gently urge his listeners to play their part in the great cause. He would call on those who wished to join the party to walk to the front of the hall and sign the membership form. One by one they would come forward while perhaps, the choir and the rest of the audience sang 'The Red Flag'. The technique became famous throughout the movement as 'Philip's come to Jesus'. Branch secretaries, eager for recruits, would appeal to him: 'Now then, Philip, don't forget the "Come to Jesus".'

On the strength of his propaganda activities Snowden won a national reputation and became one of the leaders of the ILP in its heyday. Yet he was clearly and explicitly a reformist, a parliamentary socialist. It was natural, therefore, that he

should seek public office. In this his fundamental liberalism held him in good stead, for while he bitterly opposed those, like Macdonald, who wanted an alliance with the Liberal Party his parliamentary platform was one which appealed distinctly to advanced liberals. In fact, it was with the help of Liberal votes that he first secured election to Parliament. He consciously sought, too, to make the Labour Party respectable in the eyes of the middle class and strongly opposed the Marxist and syndicalist tendencies in the movement. His emphasis was always on gradualism: he seemed sincerely to believe, at least before 1914, that the owners of capitalist industry could be persuaded to surrender their property voluntarily for their own good and that of society. That is really what his socialism amounted to.

Of course, there was nothing peculiar about Snowden in this. In many ways he stood on the left of the Labour Party and, as Cross points out, his writings, as well as his speeches, were a formative influence in the shaping of future Labour Party policy. The First World War found him, typically, embarked upon an extensive overseas speaking tour (with his intolerable wife, Ethel) on behalf of . . . temperance. He did not return to England until February 1915, when he took up an anti-war stand, although, as his biographer points out, he 'had no apparent hesitation about accepting work within the war-time machinery of government—work indirectly relating to the efficiency of the war effort and of munitions production'.

It was in the period from 1915 to 1920 when, responding to the shift in the working class, Snowden moved furthest to the left, in words. He campaigned against the war and conscription in a moderate way and was chairman of the Leeds Convention of June 1917. The Bolshevik revolution forced him to declare himself—against the use of violence by the oppressed and exploited and, later, against the affiliation of the ILP to the Communist International in 1920. His wife visited Russia and returned a confirmed anti-Bolshevik (after attending the Nuremberg rally

1937 she reported finding Hitler man whose secret lies 'in his selflessness and sincerity . . . I was so impressed by his sincerity that I could not hesitate to accept his word').

From 1920 the prospect of office moved closer. Snowden, who had lost his seat in the coupon election of 1918 returned to Parliament in 1922 on the Labour Party front bench. In 1924 he became the first Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, with just time enough to produce one budget which showed his free trade and financial orthodoxy. It was the next Labour Government which revealed the full extent of the contradiction between his 'full-blooded socialism' and the willingness to accept the needs of the capitalists as paramount in the day-to-day tasks of manning the government. A full discussion of the 1931 crisis and Snowden's role in it cannot be attempted here. The kind of policy which Snowden had helped to create for the Labour Party really made the debacle inevitable and the MPs who denounced Macdonald, Snowden and Thomas as traitors were every bit as respon-

sible as they were for the betrayals which began in 1929 and had already been foreshadowed in 1924.

Snowden's financial policy represented the last fling of the old orthodoxy which had served British capitalism so well before 1914. To meet the problems created by the World Economic Depression while clinging to free trade, the gold standard and a balanced budget (Snowden's budget, even in 1930, included a large sum towards reducing the national debt) was to play King Canute. Harsh realities forced the changes which economic 'thinking' was then to endorse. Meanwhile, having accepted the conditions imposed by the US bankers, Snowden became Chancellor in the National Government and, by stringent economies and increases in taxation—wildly applauded by the Conservatives and Liberals—claimed to have restored international confidence in the pound sterling. All the same, the crisis continued and the abandonment of the gold standard and the devaluation of the pound became inevitable.

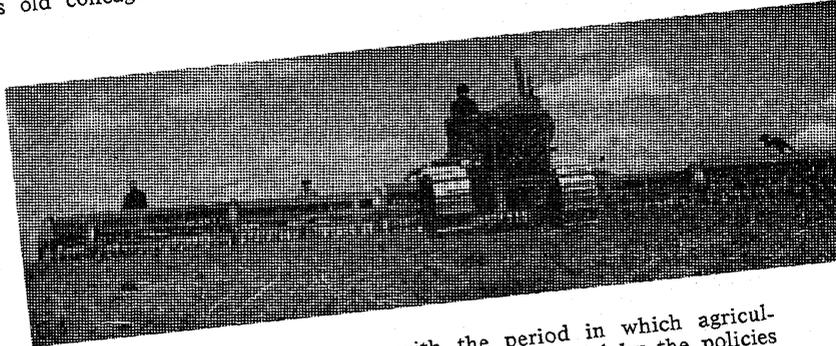
Snowden then proceeded to turn on his old colleagues the invective

for which he was famous. To justify his own position he had to wipe out the memory of his own past and destroy his old party. Hence the election cry of 'Bolshevism Run Mad' and the charge that a Labour government would be a threat to deposits in the Post Office Savings Bank. Snowden himself did not stand for re-election. Made a peer he continued for a time to be a member of the National Government as Lord Privy Seal, but policy was moving in a direction which clashed with his most cherished ideas of financial policy and the final break came over protection and Imperial Preference.

There was, at least, a certain consistency in Snowden's position. Having relegated socialism to some earthly hereafter, he accepted the practical task of making capitalism work. Of course, the methods which he employed now appear to be not merely outmoded but lunatic. His successors in the Labour Government differ from Snowden principally in the means which they use to make capitalism work and the fact that, so far, they have not had to take the road of party coalitions.

## Soviet Agronomy

Edited by Jerzy F. Karcz  
Cambridge University Press, 1967  
Price 80 shillings



WHILE EXPERTS IN THE capitalist countries often find it possible to speak with admiration, or even with alarm, of Soviet accomplishments in industrial technology, science and education, a different note is perceptible in the treatment of agriculture. The general consensus is that agriculture has remained in the grip of a deep crisis of which forced collectivization was the beginning. That does not prevent careful and detailed attention being paid to the agrarian sector in both

the USSR and Eastern Europe since it has a bearing on the general economic, not to speak of the military, strength of these countries. From a propaganda point of view, moreover, the continuing difficulties of agriculture are of great material value.

This book consists of conference reports on both the general and some of the specialized aspects of Soviet and East European agriculture by a number of the leading Western experts. It deals principally

with the period in which agriculture was dominated by the policies of Khrushchev, that is to say from 1953 to 1964.

Necessarily work on these topics in the West is carried out to some extent in the dark. Soviet statistics have admittedly been inaccurate in the past and in some respects, including grain yields, continued to leave much to be desired under Khrushchev. The quantitative basis for some of these studies, depending to a considerable extent upon

estimates, is therefore subject to wide margins of error.

For socialists the experience of agriculture in these countries is of great interest, principally as an object lesson in how not to deal with the agrarian question in a peasant country. Stalin's enforced collectivization not only physically liquidated large sections of the peasantry, but the antagonism which it generated led to wholesale slaughter of farm animals and a reduction in crop output which was to last for a generation. The bureaucratic methods imposed on the collective farms, while providing, in a crude way, the food and industrial crops needed to carry forward rapid industrialization, at the same time gave rise to acute social conflicts. An uneasy compromise was arrived at between collective farm labour in which the peasants had little interest and the private plots cultivated on an individual basis.

When Khrushchev took over direction of agriculture in 1953, unlike Stalin, 'he knew what the score was in the countryside'. He thus not only showed, in a famous report to the Central Committees how serious the agrarian crisis inherited from Stalin was, but he embarked upon a series of expedients intended to bring it under control. The first two chapters are essentially concerned with Khrushchev's policies and why they failed. They included the grouping of the Kholkhos into larger units, the dissolution of the Machine Tractor Stations, the Virgin Lands campaign, the stimulation of the cultivation of maize and other crops and the raising of procurement prices and other attempts to win over the peasantry. He stumped the country in an extraordinary manner, had himself acclaimed as an agricultural expert and made rash promises, such as that to exceed US *per capita* consumption of meat and milk by the early 1960s.

Far from being a brilliant success, Khrushchev's policies had very patchy results. Production did increase, but not to the extent expected and only at tremendous cost in labour and resources and

not without some spectacular failures. By 1963, instead of abundance, famine stalked the land again and large quantities of grain had to be bought on the world market. Khrushchev was pushed aside and Brezhnev made a report on agriculture which summed up his failure and proposed new measures to cope with the crisis.

Why did Khrushchev's measures fail? For some the whole trouble lay with collectivization itself and in a number of the East European countries, as in Poland, dealt with in the last chapter, it was simply abandoned. In the Soviet Union such a radical reversal of policy was out of the question. The bureaucracy therefore sought to find some way out within the existing structure by improving output. The contributors to this volume show in particular cases the shortcomings of the measures taken. The Virgin Lands made a big contribution to grain supplies but only at tremendous cost and by pushing cultivation into areas subject to climatic hazards. The drive for maize production, while reasonable in some regions, was made a panacea for all ills and the acreage has now dropped back to something like its pre-Khrushchev level. The important crop-rotation question was bedevilled, as was livestock rearing, by the pseudo-science to which the bureaucracy was prone because it offered quick results. Thus Stalin consulted Lysenko much as former despots consulted astrologers and the theories about soil developed by Williams were preferred to the findings of competent soil chemists.

More fundamental, as is brought out, for example, in the chapter on sugar beet production, was the way in which agriculture was dependent upon development in other parts of the economy. Although having an enormous acreage under sugar beet Soviet sugar production was below that in countries which cultivated a smaller amount of beet. Shortcomings in storage and in transport resulted in big losses in sugar content between the field and the factory. Likewise, an all-round increase in agricultural productivity could not take place without more

and better machinery, improved servicing of equipment, chemical aids such as fertilizers and pesticides in larger amounts, increased investment in farm buildings, drainage, water supply and irrigation. But commitment of resources on the scale necessary in all these spheres was out of the question: Soviet industry was feeling the pressure from too many directions

At the level of human relations the split between the collective farm and party bureaucracy and the peasantry was wide and remains so. The peasants have won some material concessions: higher incomes, pensions and welfare benefits nearer those of the urban workers. But, according to Nove, the peasant is still a second class citizen, he remains sceptical and many of the problems of the farms arise simply from his failure to cooperate willingly with a discipline which seems to him to be imposed from outside and above. Labour productivity is higher on the private plots (worked to a large extent by women) and a substantial proportion of the produce required to feed the city population—eggs, vegetables, fruit—continues to come from this source. But, if other economic goals are to be attained and strains placed upon the balance of payments by the purchase of foreign grain alleviated there will need to be a big increase in the coming years in labour productivity.

In the agrarian sector the bureaucracy continues to be in the pincers grip of remorseless economic restraints on the one hand and peasants and urban consumers on the other who demand results in terms of higher incomes and more and better goods on which to spend them. The contributors to this volume are, of course, hostile critics, though their hostility is of varying degrees; some are comprehensive as far as the problems of the bureaucracy are concerned, some are comprehensive of the outlook of the peasants. The Marxist analysis of the present situation and the prospects of Soviet agriculture still has to be made, but the views of these Western experts have a certain value and should not be overlooked.

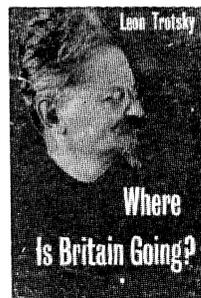
# Essential Marxist Reading

## The New Course By Leon Trotsky

A collection of articles written in 1923 during the lull before the great storm of persecution which was later to overwhelm Russian Bolshevism. Here Trotsky, analyses the incipient stages of the degeneration of the Communist Party, uncovers its causes and proposes measures for combating its further decline. He here analyses the party in a historical, that is dialectical way, the relationships between generations, social strata, groups, factional formations, tradition and the multitude of factors that go to make a revolutionary party. 111 pages, 3/6

Most timely reading for British socialists, this book places the development of British politics in correct historic perspective. Here Trotsky, writing on the eve of the General Strike of 1926, employs his great revolutionary experience to analyse and explain the ideological and moral concepts of the ruling classes and their servants in the Labour bureaucracy.

136 pages, 7/6



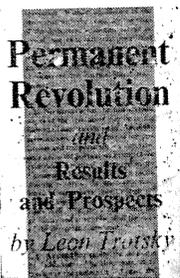
## The Draft Programme of the Communist International by Leon Trotsky

This is part of the author's criticism of the draft programme submitted by the Executive Committee of the Third (Communist) International to the 6th Congress of the Comintern which was held in July 1928. The manuscript of that criticism was written by Trotsky during his exile in Alma-Ata (Central Asia). It was sent to the Congress in Moscow together with an appeal for reinstatement into the party from which he had been expelled a few months before by the Stalinist faction in 1927. Stalin and his supporters had invented the theory of 'Socialism in one country', which was made party policy in 1925 and converted into an article of faith to be defended by the world institutions of Stalinism. It is this theory which Trotsky criticises in these pages.

64 pages, 1/-

This document is a landmark in the development of 20th century Marxism. It sums up the experience of an entire period of struggle against the Soviet bureaucracy. This Platform also represents the highest point in the fortunes of the Joint Opposition (Trotskyist-Zinovievite) to Stalin. It is the programme of the last of the Bolshevik-Leninists who insisted that they remained communists despite all the persecution, jailings, violence and slander inflicted on them. But this document also represents a watershed—the end of one phase and the beginning of another—in the evolution of Trotskyist politics.

112 pages, 5/-



This is a polemic against Radek in 1928. Trotsky examines the arguments against his pre-war theory of the permanent revolution (as expounded in *Results and Prospects*) and takes up the history of his differences with Lenin before 1917, of which Stalin and his henchmen made so much. Trotsky shows that it was Lenin's criticisms of his attitude to the centralised Marxist party, which he afterwards understood and accepted, that kept them apart, and not their differences on the permanent revolution.

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