

The FI & The USSR

Theses Of The Fourth International

Publishers' Note

The following resolution adopted at the first preparatory conference for the Fourth International expresses succinctly, in theses form, the attitude of Trotskyists towards the Soviet Union.

Twenty years have passed since the resolution was adopted. One would wish that the document were today only of historical importance. Unfortunately, however, very little of its criticism of the empty boast of the "final and irrevocable" triumph of socialism in the Soviet Union has been rendered invalid by the tremendous material advance of the last two decades.

Considered point by point, the theses indicate how far the USSR has yet to go on the road to socialism.

Socialism, by the classic Marxist test, is achieved only to the measure that the state has begun to wither away. In the USSR this process has not even begun. The internecine strife of the bureaucrats should not blind us to the fact of the existence of a vast highly centralised state apparatus. On the contrary, that struggle is to decide which group of bureaucrats is to control the state apparatus.

It is necessary to emphasise only two more of the basic arguments outlined in the theses:

"The working class of the USSR has been robbed of the last possibility of a legal reformation of the state.....for the further development of socialism a political revolution has become inevitable....." (Thesis 15). The recent armed suppression of mass unrest in the Soviet Bloc provides ample confirmation of this analysis.

Perhaps the most important consideration is that the struggle between capitalism and socialism—"two irreconcilable systems"—"will be decided 'finally and irrevocably' only on the world arena." (Thesis 1). The extension of the non-capitalist sector to include the East European states and the vast expanse of China should not make us lose sight of the existence of a powerful and extensive capitalist sector.

Lanka Samasamaja Publications

THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL AND THE SOVIET UNION

*(Theses adopted at the First International Conference
for the Fourth International held at Geneva,
July 29, 30, 31, 1936.)*

1. The decision of the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern*, according to which socialism in the Soviet Union has "finally and irrevocably" triumphed — regardless of the low level of labour productivity as compared with the advanced capitalist countries and independent of the course of development of all the rest of the world — is a crude and dangerous lie. The reference to the fact that the Soviet Union covers "one-sixth of the earth's surface" is all the less decisive in this question by virtue of the fact that only 8.5% of humanity has settled upon this area. It continues to be a question of the struggle between two irreconcilable systems — socialism and capitalism. This struggle has not been decided and cannot be decided within the boundaries of the USSR. It will be decided "finally and irrevocably" only on the world arena.
2. The principal mass of the means of production of the industry of the Soviet Union has grown tremendously and remains in the hands of the state; in the field of agriculture — in the hands of the kolkhozes,** which stand between the state and private property. But not even *state* property is as yet *socialist* property, for the latter has as its premise the withering away of the state as the guardian of property, the mitigation of inequality and the gradual dissolution of the property concept even in the morals and customs of society. The real development of the Soviet Union in the recent years has followed a directly opposite road. Inequality grows and, together with it, state coercion. Given favourable domestic and international conditions, the transition is possible from the present state property to socialism; given unfavourable conditions, however, a reversion to capitalism is also possible.
3. Every workers' state, in the first period, will, in the interest of raising the productive forces, retain the system of work-wages, or as Marx puts it, "the bourgeois norms of distribution". The question is, however, decided by the general direction of development. Were the advanced countries to

*In August 1935, the last.—Ed.

**Collective farms.

be drawn into the revolution, and were the social wealth to grow rapidly, then inequality would have to diminish speedily and the state would have nothing more to "guard". Given the isolation and backwardness of the Soviet land, the bourgeois norms of distribution took on a crude and meretricious character (enormous differentiation of work-wages, bonuses, titles, orders and more of the same) and engendered retrograde tendencies which imperil the very system of state property.

4. Low productivity, with high capital investments, with tremendous military expenditures and the enormous wastefulness of the uncontrolled apparatus, signifies the continuous salient lack of the most important objects of personal consumption for the masses of the population. The economic successes which are much too modest for a significant material and cultural elevation of the whole people, are already proving adequate for the emergence of a broad, privileged stratum. The social antagonisms have not been mitigated in the course of the second Five Year Plan, but enormously accentuated. *Inequality is growing with seven league strides*. The hymns of praise to the "happy life" are sung only by the summits, while the lower strata continue in enforced silence.

5. Playing upon the manifold social antagonisms (town and country, mental and physical labour, individual farms, kolkhozes and tiny private farms of the kolkhoz members, Stakhanov people and the rest of the working masses), *the Soviet bureaucracy has acquired an actual independence from the toilers*. Like every bureaucracy, it regulates the antagonisms in the interests of the stronger, of the better provided, of the privileged. Like every bureaucracy, it levies, toward the end, a significant portion of the national income for itself and thereby becomes the most privileged of all the privileged strata.

6. By its conditions of personal existence, Soviet society already now presents an *enormous hierarchy*: from a *Bezprizorny**, a prostitute, a slum proletarian — to the ruling "ten thousand" who lead the life of western European magnates of capital. In contradiction to the contentions of the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, socialism has not yet triumphed; neither in the objective economic conditions of the USSR (the criterion of the productivity of labour) nor in the consciousness of the producing masses (the criterion of personal consumption).

7. It remains a fact of decisive significance, however, that all the social relationships of the USSR, the privileges of the

* Vagabond child

Soviet aristocracy included, base themselves in the long run on state and kolkhoz property, acquired by the expropriation of the bourgeoisie which, in distinction from capitalist property, opens up the possibility of the growth of industry and agriculture. The historical gulf dug up by the October Revolution still continues to separate the *Soviet state planned economy from the capitalist 'statism'*, which signifies state intervention for the purpose of saving private property and 'regulates' the absolute economic system by *putting the brakes on* the development of the productive forces and *lowering the standard of living of the people*. The identification of the Soviet economy with the Fascist (Italy, Germany), which occurs so frequently among the liberal economists, is a fruit of ignorance or of unscrupulousness. The victory of the Bonapartist bureaucracy of the USSR over the proletarian vanguard is by no means equivalent to the victory of the capitalist counter-revolution, although the former blazes the trail for the latter.

8. To assert (like the anarchists and all sorts of ultra-leftists), that the Soviet Union deserves, on the part of the revolutionary proletariat, the same attitude as do the imperialist states, is to assert that it is a matter of indifference to the working class whether the state industry and the collective agriculture of the Soviet Union is to be preserved and further developed, or economy is to be flung back into the conditions of decomposition and, by means of a civil war, to Fascist capitalism. Such an attitude is worthy of the disappointed idealist "friends" of the Soviet Union, that is, of the dilettantes and political windbags of the liberal and anarchistic type but by no means of Marxian revolutionists who never leave out of consideration the *basic factor of history: the development of production*.

9. As has been said, the social stratification of Soviet society is developing mainly in the field of distribution and only partially, above all in agriculture, in the field of production. But distribution is not separated by an impenetrable wall from production. By deliberately stimulating the appetite of individuals and groups and enhancing it to the point where it becomes unbridled, the bureaucracy directly discredits the idea of social property. The growth of economic privileges engenders among the masses a justified doubt *as to whom, in the long run, the whole system will actually serve*. The "bourgeois norms of distribution", which have already far exceeded the permissible limit, finally threatens to blow up the social discipline of planned economy and therewith also state and kolkhoz property.

10. The possible routes to the restoration of the bourgeois system are revealed with particular clarity in the question of the family. Since the bureaucracy, as a consequence of the

low material and cultural level of the country as well as consequent upon the throttling of the initiative of the masses, has not succeeded in fulfilling the task of social maintenance and upbringing, it has begun to *re-establish and to re-glorify the petty-bourgeois family*, including its narrow private economy — that fostering soil of all species of social idiocy. But the family raises with particular sharpness the question of the right of inheritance. The bureaucracy itself, which endeavours to base itself politically upon the conservative family, feels its own domination to be effective and incomplete, for it is not in a position to bequeath its material privileges to its successors. The question of *the right of inheritance* leads, however, to the question of the further extension of the bounds of *private property*. This is one of the possible channels of the restoration of capitalism. In all the fields of social life, the bureaucracy imperils everything that is progressive in the Soviet system. Instead of the guardian of "socialist property" it becomes its grave digger.

11. The political significance of the *new constitution* of the USSR is in direct contradiction to its official interpretation. The "Stalin constitution" is no step forward "from socialism to the communist society", as the official authorities brazenly assert, but it is on the contrary a step backward from the dictatorship of the proletariat to a bourgeois political regime.

The development of the socialist society should find, in the political field, its expression in the withering away of the state. The degree of this withering away is the surest measure of the successes of socialist development. The beginning of the withering away of the state should be the complete liquidation of the bureaucracy lifting itself above society. In actual fact, however, the new constitution raises exactly the opposite process of development to a law. Nor can it be otherwise. The growth of privileges requires a gendarme for their supervision.

12. *State coercion* is not attenuated, according to the new constitution, but on the contrary it acquires an exceptionally concentrated, open and cynical character. The Soviets are destroyed. The local and central, i. e., the "*municipal*" and "*parliamentary*" institutions, built up on the basis of the plebiscitary system, have nothing in common with the Soviets as the fighting organizations of the toiling masses. Besides, they have been deprived in advance of all genuine significance. The new constitution officially and publicly unites the power and the control over all fields of economic and cultural life in the hands of the Stalinist "party", which is independent both of the people and of its own members and which represents *a political machine of the ruling caste*.

13. In passing, the constitution liquidates *de jure* the ruling position of the proletariat in the state, a position which, *de facto*, has long ago been liquidated. Henceforth, it is declared, the dictatorship is "classless" and "popular" which, from the Marxian standpoint, is pure nonsense. The dictatorship of the "people" over itself should have signified the dissolution of the state into society, i. e., the death of the state. In reality, *the new constitution seals the dictatorship of the privileged strata of soviet society over the producing masses*, thereby making the peaceful withering away of the state an impossibility and opens for the bureaucracy "legal" roads for the economic counter-revolution, i. e., the restoration of capitalism by means of a "cold stroke", a possibility which the bureaucracy directly prepares by its deception of the "victory of socialism". It is our task to call upon the working class to oppose its own force to the pressure of the bureaucracy—for the defence of the great conquests of October.

14. In direct contradiction to the official lie, the new constitution not only does not extend soviet "democracy" but on the contrary confirms its total strangulation. By every one of its paragraphs it proclaims that the present masters of the situation will not voluntarily relinquish their positions to the people. The aristocratic and absolutist character of the new constitution is clearly expressed in the new crusade announced on the day of its publication—the crusade for the "extermination of the enemies of the people, the Trotskyist spawn and monsters" (*Pravda*, June 5, 1936). The bureaucracy is getting clearly aware of whence the mortal danger threatens it and it directs the Bonapartist terror against the representatives of the proletarian vanguard.

15. *The working class of the USSR has been robbed of the last possibility of a legal reformation of the state. The struggle against the bureaucracy necessarily becomes a revolutionary struggle.* True to the traditions of Marxism, the Fourth International *decisively rejects individual terror*, as it does all other means of political adventurism. The bureaucracy can be smashed only by means of the goal-conscious movement of the masses against the usurpers, parasites and oppressors. If a *social* counter-revolution, i. e., the overthrow of state ownership of the means of production and of the land as well as the re-establishment of private property, is necessary for the return of the USSR to capitalism, then for the further development of socialism a *political revolution* has become inevitable, i. e., violent overthrow of the political rule of the degenerated bureaucracy while maintaining the property relations established by the October Revolution. The proletarian vanguard of the USSR, basing itself upon the toiling masses of

the whole country and upon the revolutionary movement of the whole world, will have to batter down the bureaucracy by force, restore Soviet democracy, eliminate the enormous privileges and assure a genuine advance to socialist equality.

16. In the question of war, as in all other questions, the parties of the Fourth International do not permit themselves to be guided by formalistic and idealistic considerations and sympathies, but only by the Marxian criterion. If, for example, they support Abyssinia, despite the slavery that still prevails there and despite the barbaric political regime, it is, in the first place, because an independent national state represents a progressive historical stage for a pre-capitalist country and, secondly, because the defeat of Italy would signify the beginning of the collapse of the obsolescent capitalist society.

The proletarian vanguard of the entire world will support the USSR in war, in spite of the parasitic bureaucracy and of the uncrowned Negus in the Kremlin, because the social regime of the USSR despite all its deformations and ulcers, represents an enormous historical step forward in comparison with putrefied capitalism. The defeat of an imperialist land in the new war will lead not only to the collapse of its state form but also of its capitalist foundation, and consequently will also replace private by state property. The defeat of the Soviet Union would not only signify the collapse of the Soviet bureaucracy but also the replacement of the state and collective property by capitalist chaos. The choice of the political line under these conditions is ineluctable.

The resolute and intrepid support of the USSR by the world proletarian vanguard in a war does not, however, signify that the proletariat should become the imperialist allies of the USSR. "The proletariat of a capitalist country which is allied with the USSR, fully and entirely retains its *impeccable hostility toward the imperialist government of its own country.*" (*The Fourth International and War*, Theses of the International Secretariat of the International Communist League, Bolshevik-Leninists, point 44). "Impeccable proletarian opposition to the imperialist ally of the USSR must develop on the terrain of a class policy at home, on the one side, and on the other, of the imperialist aims of a given government, of the perfidious character of its 'alliance', of its speculations of a bourgeois stroke of state in the USSR, etc. The policy of the proletarian party in an imperialist country "allied" as well as foe, must consequently aim at the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the seizure of power. It is only on this road that a genuine alliance can be made with the USSR and the first workers' state be saved from going under." (Ibid, point 45).

17. The fears of the "ultra-leftists" that the victory of the USSR may lead to the further consolidation of the positions of the Bonapartist bureaucracy, arise out of the false conception of the international relationships as well as the internal development of the USSR. The imperialists of all the camps will not reconcile themselves with the Soviet Union until private property in the means of production has been re-established. Whatever the grouping of states may be at the beginning of the war, imperialists will, in the course of the war, know how to come to an understanding and to a re-grouping among themselves always at the expense of the USSR. *The USSR will be able to emerge from a war without a defeat only under one condition, and that is if it is assisted by the revolution in the West or in the East.* But the international revolution, the only way of saving the USSR, will at the same time signify the death-blow for the Soviet bureaucracy.

18. *Is the USSR a Workers' State?* The USSR is a state which bases itself upon the property relationships created by the October Revolution and which is administered by a labour bureaucracy in the interests of a new privileged stratum. The Soviet Union can be called a Workers' State approximately in the same sense—despite the vast difference in scale—in which a trade union, led and betrayed by opportunists, i. e., by agents of capital, can be called a workers' organization. Just as revolutionists defend every trade union, even the most thoroughly reformist, from the class enemy, combatting intransigently the treacherous leaders at the same time, so the parties of the Fourth International defend the USSR against the blows of imperialism without for a single moment giving up the struggle against the reactionary Stalinist apparatus. In war, in peace, they guard their full freedom of criticism of the ruling Soviet caste and the full freedom of struggle against their agreements with the imperialists at the expense of the USSR and the international revolution.