
TWENTY YEARS OF SOVIET POWER*

THE TRIUMPH OF DEMOCRACY THROUGH SOCIALISM

BY EARL BROWDER

*“Capitalism generally and imperialism especially transform democracy into an illusion, while at the same time capitalism gives birth to democratic aspirations among the masses; it creates democratic institutions; it sharpens the antagonism between imperialism, which denies democracy, and the masses, who strive for democracy.”***

NOVEMBER 7 marks the twentieth anniversary of the rise of a new type of state, Soviet power, which began the building of a new type of society, socialism.

This event marked a new turning point in the history of mankind. It has made necessary for the whole world a re-evaluation of old values, a re-examination of all problems, a re-alignment of previous social groupings, a redirection of the course of human affairs.

It is my purpose today to examine the achievements of twenty years of Soviet power in relation particularly to the problems of North American democracy, to the problems of the people of the United States and Canada.

A few preliminary observations will be of value by way of comparing the

* An address to the Eighth Dominion Convention of the Communist Party of Canada, at Toronto, October 10, 1937.

** Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. XXX, p. 259, Russian edition.

geographical and historical influences in the two great regions under examination.

RUSSIA AND NORTH AMERICA

The territory known until 1917 as the Empire of the Tsar of Russia closely approximates in extent, in climatic conditions and in richness of natural resources, our own North American continent. Its population is about 20 to 25 per cent greater. With such close similarity of the basic natural factors, however, these two areas have gone through sharply different historical developments. Both came under the impact of the rising capitalist system of Western Europe during approximately the same period, but with different results, due to a different inheritance from the pre-capitalist era.

Russia came into the world-community and world-market that was brought into being by capitalism, with the heavy inheritance of a feudal system of economy and society rooted in centuries of slow development, a system with a highly developed superstructure of government, of state power. In contrast, North America was only beginning to be conquered by an immigration from Europe composed, in its great majority, of people

in rebellion against the oppressions of the combined decaying-feudalist and early-capitalist influences of their homelands; the political superstructure imported with them had scanty roots on this continent, was maintained only by force from abroad, and was consequently soon shattered by the forces of democracy that grew rapidly under the influence of a capitalist economy at work on almost virgin soil.

In the years 1776 to 1787, the United States won its independence as a nation, and fashioned a stable state power, within which the only serious obstacle to unfettered capitalist development was the compromise with slavery; this bourgeois-democratic revolution was completed, in its most essential aspects, by the Civil War of 1861-65, and the consequent abolition of slavery. Canada won essentially the same level of historical development in the struggle of 1837.

In the tsarist empire, however, the enemy was much more stubborn and powerful. Although the same democratic forces were at work there, they could not break through; they were defeated again and again. The development of capitalism sapped and undermined the foundations of the old order; but at each period of crisis the feudal autocracy emerged triumphant through a combination of extreme repression, concessions and foreign alliances. The result for Russia was an extremely backward and distorted economic development, and the almost complete postponement of the democratic revolution until the twentieth century, when it merged with the socialist revolution.

Thus it was, in brief, that these

two great sections of humanity, Russia and North America, so similarly equipped in natural resources and population, came to the world crisis of 1914-1918 at the opposite poles of economic and political development. Russia was the most backward in every important respect; North America was the most advanced. Russia emerged from the World War with an economy shattered and prostrate, racked by famine; its old political superstructure broken and scattered to the four winds; its new infant system, Soviet power, fighting against a hostile world with its back to the wall, and spoken of deprecatingly even by its friends as an "experiment." North America emerged from the World War with an enormously strengthened economy, the world's banker, holding the debts of the other powers, and with, at least for a time, predominant prestige and influence in world politics.

What a contrast this was! Every philistine, every shallow thinker and vulgarian, could and did tell the world that North America was the promised land, that it had found the way to "permanent prosperity," that with the "American system" poverty was being abolished and the millennium ushered in. Henry Ford and the belt-line system of mass production were the new God. And with God in his heaven, all was right with the capitalist world. As for that curious and disreputable "experiment," Soviet Russia, everyone knew that it was prostrate and starving. Lenin was announcing the New Economic Policy and offering concessions to foreign capitalists; soon Russia would be safely back in the capitalist family, as the

poor relation, tending the kitchen and doing the dirty work. Herbert Hoover contemptuously sent over the American Relief Administration, with some superfluous war-stores of wheat, expecting the 140,000,000 Russians to follow this wisp of straw obediently back into the capitalist harness. For all sensible people, the issue was settled: North America owned and led the world! Soviet Russia was a starving beggar at the doorstep! Such was the appearance in the early 1920's.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE WITH THE INHERITANCE?

Today we call for an accounting of what has been done with this inheritance by North America, which inherited half the world's wealth and its leadership, and by Soviet Russia, which inherited ruin and starvation. The day of reckoning is here. To deal with the results of this reckoning, we are tempted to turn to some of the old Hebrew prophets, who celebrated the humiliation of the mighty and exaltation of the humble. Only the passionate words of an Isaiah could celebrate worthily the emergence of that "hungry beggar" of the 1920's as the "proud builder," who not only restored completely his ruined inheritance, but multiplied it five times over in the past ten years; or find scorn bitter enough to describe how the proud and mighty have squandered their inheritance and cast their people into the desolation of unemployment, labor camps, a declining standard of living and the threat of fascist destruction of civilization.

We are not of the line of Isaiah, however, who saw only the wrath of God in the humiliation of the proud

and powerful. We find material causes for this confusion of the mighty, and turn to science for our explanations. If we cannot equal the brilliant imagery of the prophets, perhaps we can compensate the loss by a deeper understanding of the dialectical paradoxes of our history.

Until the World War, North America had stood in the vanguard of world progress, politically and economically. Politically, it was the "purest" example of bourgeois democracy, that is, it had the least carry-over of feudal and semi-feudal remnants, and the broadest distribution of democratic rights. This it was which removed the fetters from production, gave full sweep to the development of capitalism. But it was the full development of capitalism which undermined the economic basis of democracy, and at the same time set a sharp limit to economic expansion and brought on the crisis.

American democracy arose upon the basis of the widespread distribution among the population of the productive economy of the country, privately owned and individually operated, chiefly the individual farm and the craftsman's tools. This economic basis of democracy for a long time reproduced itself, through the expansion of the original sparse settlements on the Atlantic seaboard over the continent to the Pacific, on the basis of free or cheap lands. With the disappearance of the frontier, this process was halted. At the same time, approximately, North America together with the capitalist nations of Europe entered the era of modern imperialism, of the predominance of finance capital, of monopoly, in its

economic life. This was the period of rapid concentration and centralization of capital, the pyramiding of great trusts, the feverish search for new markets, fields of capital investment, and sources of raw materials; the division of the entire world among the great powers—and the consequent rivalries and antagonisms that resulted in the imperialist World War.

American democracy, based upon individual private property, had made possible this unexampled expansion, which projected the United States as the chief world power. But this expansion had simultaneously wiped out the economic foundation of the democracy which gave it birth. Individual private property in the nation's economy became more and more concentrated and centralized in the hands of a constantly smaller group of families, constituting the privileged class, the upper and decisive stratum of the ruling class. Agriculture, which felt this process least sharply in terms of production, was completely overshadowed by the growth of industry and the cities, but even the individual farm producer fell into the clutches of finance capital through mortgages, usury and market monopolies. Individual craftsmen almost disappeared, replaced by the great armies of propertyless wage-workers in mass production, in which thousands and even tens of thousands became cogs in a single big productive mechanism under a single impersonal corporate direction. Production was socialized—while ownership remained private but confined to a smaller and smaller group which, through economic power, became the decisive

rulers behind the mask of a popular democracy. Political democracy was reduced largely to what Anatole France described as "the equal right of rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges."

The World War, which brought America to full realization of this process, thus gave it the illusion of grandeur and power precisely at the time when it had prepared the general breakdown of the whole capitalist system. The tremendous productive economy could not, under the laws of capitalism, operate except under the stimulus of a constantly increasing mass of profits; these accumulated in the hands of a small class which, already exhausted in the search for new forms of wasteful consumption, could use these enormous funds only for further capital investment for further profits, or for war to conquer new fields of investment. Economic paralysis, or war, became the Hobson's choice facing a society not prepared to break the bounds of capitalism and pass over to a socialist system.

Thus it was that in 1929 and since, the old Hebrew prophet's curse against the proud and mighty was visited upon North America in the hour of her apparent triumph. America's "sin," which brought this vengeance upon her, was not, however, that of blasphemy against the ancient prophet's Yahveh; it was the "sin" of having permitted the fruits of bourgeois democracy to destroy its foundation, of allowing control of the people's economy to pass out of the hands of the people.

During this same period of the humiliation of once proud America,

the starving beggar, as our arrogant American capitalists considered Soviet Russia, emerged as the most rapidly progressing land in all fields—economically, politically, culturally—ever recorded in the history of mankind. Surrounded by a hostile world, with nothing other than its natural resources *and its superior system of social organization*, the Soviet Union restored its wrecked economy, proceeded to multiply its wealth production to thirteen times that of the early 1920's, and more than four times that of 1929, advanced from last place in Europe to first, and is now engaged in a race to catch up with and surpass the United States. The rate of growth of Soviet economy is five or six times that of the United States in its period of most rapid expansion.

In the period when the American standard of living fell on the average by 50 per cent, the standard of living in the Soviet Union was raised by 400 per cent. While America was throwing 13,000,000 workers onto the streets, unemployed, of whom seven or eight million are still dependent upon the relief dole, the Soviet Union was not only abolishing all unemployment, but doubling the size of the industrial working class by absorbing peasants into the factories. While American agriculture was saved from destruction only by gigantic subsidies, paying for the curtailment and destruction of crops and cattle, Soviet agriculture had been reorganized on a collective, socialist basis and doubled its production, with an increase of living standards in the countryside of immeasurable proportions—bringing a life of culture and security to the agrarian population for the

first time in human history.

Above all, at a moment when democracy and culture are destroyed in half of Europe by the barbarian hordes of fascism; when they fight for their life in the rest of Europe; when China, the greatest country of Asia, fights against odds for its very existence, when democracy is under fire and threatened even in North America—at this moment Russia, so recently the synonym of backwardness, steps forward with its new Constitution, shaped under the guiding hand of Stalin, a constitution which is a new high mark in the achievement of democracy, such as in the past only a few great spirits could dream of, but which now comes to life in the everyday activities of 170,000,000 people.

The Constitution of the United States was for generations the most democratic in the world. But compare it with that of the Soviet Union.

The U.S. Constitution tolerated for generations the disfranchisement of the great majority of the population; for eighty years it confirmed slavery for one-tenth of the population; its grant of suffrage to the Negroes is still largely unrealized today; for over 130 years it excluded half the population, the women, from suffrage; citizenship rights begin only at the age of twenty-one years.

The Soviet Constitution provides universal adult suffrage, the only exception being those adjudged by a court as insane or guilty of a major crime against the state; the right to vote begins at eighteen years.

The U.S. Constitution provides unproportional representation; in the Senate, without which no law can be adopted, the four or five million

voters of the twenty-four smallest states. have equal power with the 35,000,000 voters of the 24 largest states. Within the states, unproportional representation is so common that it is reduced to a system with a special name, "Gerrymandering."

The Soviet Constitution provides for absolutely proportional representation, with one representative in the highest council for each 300,000 voters, and for the lower Provincial Councils one for each smaller bloc of voters in proportion. The equal representation in the Council of Nationalities, regardless of population, guards the special interests of the different nationalities in the Union, without the possibility of a minority veto over the majority.

The U.S. Constitution establishes a judiciary which in practice has become the supreme power, which is appointed for life, which is irremovable, and which is responsible at no time to the people or to their representatives.

The Soviet Constitution provides for the direct election, by the people, of all government officials, without exception and including the judiciary, for a limited number of years and with the right of recall.

The U.S. Constitution, in the Amendments constituting the Bill of Rights, denies to the national government the power to pass any laws limiting the civil rights of the people, the most important being the rights of free speech, press and assembly. But it does not prohibit the states from making such limitations, and the struggle for civil rights is thus merely transferred to the states, where in fact they are in many cases limited; while

in general, the realization of the Bill of Rights, insofar as this involves economic factors, is left entirely at the mercy of the capitalist ownership of the economy. The livelihood of the citizens, without which no rights have any meaning whatever, does not come within the scope of the U.S. Constitution at all.

The Soviet Constitution has as its very heart the specific guarantee of work at a living wage for every citizen, vacations with pay, free education, and adequate leisure. The working day is limited to seven hours, with six hours for dangerous occupations. The rights of free speech, press and assembly are guaranteed by putting at the disposal of the Soviet citizens, through their organizations, all the meeting halls, public buildings, the radio, printing press and paper, the supply of which is constantly being increased. The foundation for all these guarantees is the possession of the entire national economy by the people, and its operation for their common benefit, which is made permanent in the Constitution.

THE ECONOMIC FOUNDATION OF DEMOCRACY

Democracy, the control of state power by the people, acting on the principle of majority rule and the delegation of power to representatives periodically chosen by election, can be historically developed only upon the foundation of an appropriate economic system.

That democracy which developed with capitalism, and which, in its purest forms, gave capitalism its highest development, was originally based upon the widespread distribution of

ownership in the basic economy of the country, which was an economy of individual production, chiefly agricultural.

With the growth of commodity production, exchange, the market, division of labor, the accumulation of capital, and finally the rise of machinery and mechanical power, and gigantic production units—as production took on more and more socialized forms—there took place the simultaneous process of divorcing the small owner from his property. This takes place through the normal operation of capitalist economy, accelerated always by state policy, and often by extra-legal fraud and violence. By varied and sundry means, the full development of capitalism always and necessarily means the creation of a small privileged owning class, monopoly capitalists, set over against a large wage-working class which has no ownership whatever in the means of production, and which comprises in North America the vast majority of the population.

Democracy in North America has thus been almost completely deprived of its original economic foundation. To the degree that democracy still lives under this developed capitalism, therefore, it must find for itself a new economic foundation. This is no longer possible in the form of individual ownership. All possibility of that has been destroyed beyond recall by machinery and mechanical power, making necessary large-scale mass production.

The illusion, fostered for a time by capitalist propaganda, of a democratization of capital by widespread corporate-stock ownership, was given its

final death-blow by the last crisis. The only new forms by which democracy has achieved a very fragmentary and precarious economic foundation under modern capitalism, have been socialized forms—militant trade unionism, especially in its industrial form, and governmental intervention in economy under the influence of the democratic aspirations and demands.

The struggle for these new forms brings about a realignment of forces within the democracy—with the capitalists, their agents and dupes on the one side, fighting for maintenance and increase of their profits, and the producing masses on the other side, fighting for a better life at the expense of capitalist profits. This is the process that has brought the present chaos in the traditional political life of the United States and Canada.

For a time the monopoly capitalists are able to keep this struggle of the masses under their control, within certain limits, by trickery, fraud and force, by keeping the toiling masses divided and fighting one another instead of their common enemy. But finally, when all these resources fail them, when they see the masses uniting at last against them, upon a program of social betterment at the expense of the capitalists—then the capitalists begin to destroy the democracy which in the past served them so well, but which now threatens to escape their control. They turn to fascism, the open, brutal and bloody dictatorship of finance capital, exercised by turning loose upon society the criminal underworld and declassed elements, organized and controlled by their enormous wealth, and the terrorist destruction of the organizations of the

people. They destroy democracy—always under the pretext that democracy is threatened with destruction at the hands of Communism, of Marxism, of Bolshevism. It is an infallible sign of the rise of fascism when, as in the United States today, such moderate democrats as President Roosevelt and John L. Lewis, who openly proclaim their allegiance to capitalism, are denounced by the Tories as "Communists."

Democracy today is destroyed in much of the capitalist world. It is fighting for its life in the remainder. It can survive under capitalism only to the degree to which there are successfully carried out such programs as those of John L. Lewis and the Committee for Industrial Organization and the economic reforms and the peace program of President Roosevelt. It will always be in danger of destruction so long as the national economy is owned and controlled by a small plutocratic capitalist class. The only final guarantee for democracy is the transfer of ownership of the national economy from the hands of the small capitalist class into the hands of the whole people, that is, through socialism.

That is the main lesson to be drawn by us today, in the North American countries, from an examination of the achievements of twenty years of Soviet power in the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union has been able, in a world where elsewhere democracy is on the defensive or destroyed, to make a great new democratic advance, precisely because it has taken both economic and political power out of the hands of the enemies of the people,

precisely because it has given to democracy a full and complete economic foundation, one which will endure, which will not be undermined and disappear as did the individual private property. Every advance of science in the Soviet Union, every increase in production and productivity, strengthens Soviet democracy and strengthens its economic foundation.

The Soviet Union has shown the way to the final and complete guarantee of democracy, and for its fullest development. And such a democracy is unconquerable.

SOCIALISM AND THE PEOPLE'S FRONT

From all that has been said, it follows that the central political task of the day is to organize the working class, and around it the majority of the people, to fight for a better life, to obtain a measure of economic power, and to defend democracy against the attacks of the capitalists who are turning to fascism.

Such a majority of the toiling masses, organized to defend democracy and defeat fascism, will learn, through their experience and our teachings, that the full transition to socialism is the only final solution of our problems, the only final outcome of the struggle.

The struggle for realizing socialism is, however, not the beginning of this process, but rather its outcome. Especially in the United States and Canada, economically ripe for socialism, the masses are not politically prepared. To make the immediate transition to socialism the question of the day would merely serve to split off the small minority of those who stand for socialism from the masses; to leave

these masses, without our unifying and organizing influence, open to all the splitting and disruptive influences of the bourgeoisie; and thus to facilitate the coming to power of fascism and the destruction of democracy.

The People's Front against reaction, fascism and war—that is the central task of the day. That is what all sincere democrats who resist fascism must also want, whether they agree with our socialist program or not. We can completely agree with such non-socialist democrats upon the united defense of democracy under capitalism. We never had, and never will have, a program of trying to force socialism upon an unwilling majority of the people. Within the People's Front for democracy and peace, we grant the full right of the non-socialists to propagandize us on the possibility of solving our problems under capitalism; in every effort to improve conditions under capitalism we will give our fullest energies for success, thus giving them the most favorable conditions possible for their program. At the same time, we ask for ourselves the freedom of educational work to explain our understanding of the laws of social development, of why we think socialism is necessary and finally inevitable. We are sure that before long life itself will convince the majority that we are correct.

This is the true relation of the People's Front to socialism. This is quite different from the distorted view, the opportunist sectarianism, of such Socialists as Norman Thomas in the U.S., and some Commonwealth Federation leaders in Canada. These people, under the influence of Trotskyism, see in the People's Front an

obstacle to or an enemy of socialism, instead of the precondition for the least painful transition to socialism, which it really is. Their position only reflects their shallow understanding of socialism, and of the laws of social development in general. They have the illusion, on the one hand, that by placing their "socialism" *against* the people's unity to resist fascism, they will thereby *force* these people to come over to socialism as the only alternative, however unwilling they may be. On the other hand, they have so little faith in their ability to *convince* the majority, by the simple compulsion of logic and experience, that they are afraid to join in a larger mass movement with a goal short of socialism, for fear of getting lost in the movement; they have no faith in themselves. In cutting loose from their old style of opportunist Socialism, they got lost and fell into the trap of Trotskyism, which began as opportunism disguised in Left phrases and is now fully developed fascism with the same mask.

Trotskyism is treachery reduced to a science. Defeated and driven out everywhere it shows its face openly, Trotskyism now works in a hidden manner, especially making use of confused liberals and Socialists like John Dewey and Norman Thomas, who have lost their bearings in the chaos of capitalist disintegration. In the struggle against this poisonous and wrecking influence, as in every other phase of the struggle for progress, workers and other progressives can learn much from the experience of the Soviet Union.

In putting into effect the new Stalin Constitution the Soviet Union has re-

leased the full forces of its vibrant democracy to cleanse its house of all the lingering anti-democratic and anti-socialist remnants that have hung on from the past and that have developed through the degeneration of weak elements. At the same moment the forces of world fascism, preparing for their supreme effort of war to conquer the world, made a big drive through their Trotskyite allies, fully to mobilize their spies and wreckers whom they recruited from among these rotten elements. The results of the clash between these two forces within the Soviet Union have not brought much comfort to Hitler, Mussolini, or the Japanese militarists. With its house cleaned, the Soviet Union is driving ahead with its socialist construction, is completing its military defenses, and is holding out the hand of cooperation to all the democratic and peace-loving peoples of the world for organizing world peace.

The Soviet Union has defeated all its enemies, internal and external, and has successfully constructed its new socialist society, because it was guided by the genius of the greatest

teachers of history, Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. It will defeat all its enemies in the future.

The People's Front will be successfully formed and will defeat fascism, because its conception was in the same scientific understanding of the laws of history.

With the defeat of fascism in its warlike aggressions, the peoples of Italy, Germany and Japan, losing their fear of a terrorism that lives only by constant victories, will turn upon and destroy the nightmare monster that today disturbs the sleep of all the world.

With fascism wiped off the face of the earth, with the glorious achievements of the Soviet Union as an example, the rest of the world will find the transition to socialism relatively rapid and painless.

These are the main thoughts that arise from an examination of twenty years of Soviet power, of the triumphant emergence of the new society, which is showing the road for the entire world, which today stands as the most reliable protector of democracy and peace.