Lenin and the "Old Bolshevik" Group

By CHARLES RAPPAPORT

(Charles Rappaport is a distinguished Marxist scholar, a veteran of the French and Russian labor movements. His article on Lenin appeared in a recent issue of this paper. Other articles dealing with similar subjects will appear in subsequent issues.
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LENIN occupied a position of intellectual and moral preeminence in the Soviet Union and abroad. With superhuman patience, he built over a period of years a party in his own image—a party with discipline and centralized authority, with a revolutionary Marxist program, a party waging constant war on opportunism whether from the right or from the left. His years of exile abroad spent in discussions and polemics, he succeeded ultimately in creating a homogenous Bolshevik party and ridding it of all heterogenous elements. The Bolshevik party was formed thru a selection of the most active revolutionary elements not thru persuasion and threats but as a result of conviction and voluntary discipline.

Stalin, on the other hand, unknown to the working masses of Russia and abroad, enjoyed a purely local authority in the Tiflis region and even that was rather doubtful. His authority was based not his intelligence or his knowledge but on his daring exploits and adventures in procuring money for the party. Lenin became the intellectual master first of a chosen circle and then of the great masses; he finally emerged as political dictator as a result of circumstances—the Russian revolution of 1917—and of his own keen political insight and mature decisions in October of that year. Stalin's character was and is marked primarily by unlimited audacity, lack of scruple and the shrewdness of a bandit chief who is in the habit of ambushing and destroying his enemies. He has made use of these peculiar abilities of his in order to rid himself of Lenin's co-workers and friends who had helped to make the Russian revolution.

Of Lenin's co-workers I met two abroad—namely, Kamenev and Zinoviev. Kamenev was a good-natured person, fairly well-informed and possessed of a keen political sense. To a certain extent, he was independent of Lenin. He often found Lenin too exacting and too intolerant of those who were not of one mind with him. And Lenin, in his turn, complained to me that Kamenev was too "literary," that is, not an organization man. To some extent, this explains why Kamenev and Zinoviev vacillated in those decisive days of October. Lenin was forced to fight them and treat them as "deserters" but this incident lasted only a few days and Lenin never reproached them afterwards for having doubted the wisdom of his moves. The situation then was so difficult, so infintely complicated, that such vacillations were to be expected.

But during all those years of preparation for the revolution and during the years of the revolution itself, these men contributed greatly to the cause of the revolutionary movement. Both Kamenev and Zinoviev were excellent agitators and very good writers, Zinoviev particularly could talk for hours without boring his hearers, always finding a ready ear amongst the working masses. Both literally devoted their lives to the revolution.

The assassination of these men by Stalin was surely a dreadful counter-revolutionary crime. I am convinced that, whatever their disagreements with Stalin may have been, Kamenev and Zinoviev were determined to serve the revolution even under the leadership of Stalin—tho, of course, they may have desired in their hearts the latter's fall or a change in party policy. Such was their right, for had not Lenin himself, just before his death, denounced Stalin as a man whose character was marked by disloyalty and brutality and as unfit to be general secretary of the party?

Lenin would never have succeeded in building the Bolshevik party without the aid of Zinoviev, Kamenev and men like them.

Despite their hesitation in October 1917, Lenin placed both of them in the highest positions in the party and the Soviet government. Zinoviev became the first president of the Communist (Third) International formed by Lenin in the Spring of 1917. Kamenev was head of the Moscow Soviet and Zinoviev of the Leningrad Soviet; both were members of the Politburo of the party.

I am well aware that Zinoviev, in particular, had many grave personal faults and that he often employed objectionable methods in factional struggle. But Stalin should be the last one to set himself up as a judge of these faults and to destroy his victims for them.

By assassinating these two Bolsheviks and dishonoring their memories thru "confessions" wrung from them by I know not what means, Stalin has delivered a smashing blow to the prestige of the Russian revolution.