
Who Are the Traitors?

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by Leon Trotsky

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The Socialist Revolutionary Party at present occupies the center of attention, but quite differently than at the time of the February Revolution. It often happens in history that some party or other, some man or other, is at first obscured from view, is forgotten for some time and then is again remembered. The Socialist Revolutionary Party succeeded in a few months, one might say in a few weeks, in getting into power over the whole of Russia — so it seemed at least — and afterwards lost its influence just as quickly and faded into insignificance. The approaching trial affords us the opportunity of reviewing the strange fate of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. This explains the interest it arouses; it is produced by the necessity for understanding and arriving at certain conclusions.

I will only touch on one side of the question here, which it seems to me has not received sufficient attention in our press and which is nevertheless of great importance: the position which the humbler sections of the party, the rank and file, its minor officials respectively held or now hold in the party.

At the beginning of the present century Plekhanov called the Socialist Revolutionaries, “Socialist Reactionaries.” This was appropriate in so far as it described the petty bourgeois, reactionary components of its world outlook, which threat-



ened to convert the party into a tool of bourgeois counterrevolution and did in fact so transform it. As soon as the petty bourgeoisie separates itself from the proletariat it always inevitably becomes a tool of the bourgeoisie. In the struggle against Tsarism and feudalism the party played a revolutionary role. It aroused the peasants, it stirred large groups of young students to political activity, it assembled around its standards considerable groups of workers who were not

yet either materially or mentally separated from the village and who considered the revolution not from the proletarian class point of view, but from the amorphous point of view of the “toiler.” The terrorists went into the fight and gave their lives in exchange for the lives of Tsarist dignitaries. We criticized this method for we were of the opinion

that the Sazonovs† and the Kalievs‡ would have been more useful to the cause of the revolution if they had combined their energy with the energy of the working masses instead of increasing their individual force by the explosive force of dynamite. But our work among the masses, our criticism, and our interpretation of terror converted these terrorist acts into external incentives for the revolutionary activity of the masses. It often happened at demonstrations that the most self-sacrificing Marxist workers went hand in hand with the self-sacrificing “Narodnik” workers in order to oppose the Tsarist police and Cossacks by armed force. Later on these met in the wastes of Siberia, on the way to prison and exile. Among the humbler sections of the party there were always excellent, determined, and self-sacrificing elements to be found, in spite of the theoretical vagueness of their ideas.

Already at that time a chasm was beginning to separate the young Petrograd textile worker belonging to the Socialist Revolutionary Party, who at any moment was prepared to sacrifice his life for the cause of the working class, from the intellectuals of the Avksentiev type,§ from the Heidelberg and other students, philosophers, Kantians, Nietzscheans, who at that time differed in no way from the petty bourgeois radicals of France, except for their greater illusions and their inferior culture. At that time it was clear to the Marxists how widely these two groups would diverge from each other; the workers who had not freed themselves yet from the influence of the “Narodnik” ideology and the future parliamentarians and political job-hunters who for the moment were in no hurry to surrender their Socialist phraseology.

In consequent of the war and the revolution

the dissolution of the Socialist Revolutionary Party was enormously accelerated. The complete political and moral decay of the upper sections of the party was accelerated by the fact that the great events compelled clear and exact answers and did not permit of vacillation. Thus we see Chernov at Zimmerwald unexpectedly adhering to the Extreme Left, thus renouncing the ideal of the “National Party,” and later on sitting in a bourgeois cabinet and recommending the July offensive, hand in hand with the Entente countries. This monstrous zigzag course of the leader of the party already foreshadowed its approaching final eclipse.

A great quantity of trained energy, however, still existed in the party. The heroic past of the party (its sacrifices, the death sentences, Siberian hard labor, deportations) kept, as a result of our backward social conditions (the peasant majority!), the honest, subjectively revolutionary party of the rank and file of the party under the party banner at a time when the stultified upper circles of the party had become perfectly ripe for open official flunkeyism to imperialism and counter-revolution. All the trifling of the Central Committee with the members of the fighting organizations, from the political and moral aspect, took place at the time of the transition period; the rank and file seriously accepted the slogans of the party, proceeded in the old direction and kept on courageously to the end. They were prepared to kill, to sacrifice their lives against other lives. Their subjective motives were revolutionary. They were only behind the times, they did not see the enormous change that had taken place in the whole world situation. The upper circles saw this. They knew all too well that the terrorist campaign against the Soviets was financed from the same

†- The member of the SR Party E.S. Sazonov assassinated Minister of Internal Affairs V.K. Plehve by throwing a bomb under his carriage in July of 1904.

‡- The SR Ivan P. Kaliev assassinated Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich Romanov by bomb in February of 1905.

§- N.D. Avksentiev (1878-1943) was one of the leaders of the Right Wing of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. He supported the war from 1914, was a member of the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, and served as Interior Minister of the Provisional Government in July-August 1917. He emigrated in 1918 and died in the United States.

monetary sources which but yesterday financed Nikolai II against us and against the Socialist Revolutionaries. The upper circles of the party could not be ignorant of this. They did not act merely under the influence of their traditions and of inertia. They speculated upon gaining advantages; they were, therefore, carrying on a diplomatic game with themselves, with history, with the imperialist Allies, and above all with their own party and the rank and file. The Chernovs and the Avksentievs profited by the heroism of the Sazonovs and the Kaliaevs, and placed the honest and self-sacrificing members of the organization at the disposal of Noulens and Lockhart. When these members of the fighting organization grasped the significance of the historical events in the new world situation, when they became convinced that they were throwing their bombs at the behest of the French Embassy and the Romanian Embassy, they shrank back from their own deeds. The more determined and self-sacrificing they had previously been in their fight against the Bolsheviks with the methods which the Socialist Revolutionaries learned during the time of suppression, the greater now was their indignation and resentment.

Some of them hesitated longer than others, some went abroad, some placed their lives at the disposal of the Workers' Republic and carried out the most dangerous tasks on the front in the Civil War. Some are still wavering. With a sort of un-failing instinct, however, the bourgeois press of the whole world denounced the stand taken by Semënov and Konopleva with the cry of "Renegades." At the time of the blockade of Soviet

Russia it came to the final opinion that the Socialist Revolutionaries, of whom it previously had known nothing, were only the Left Wing of the anti-Soviet front or a transmitting fighting mechanism for the terrorist measures ordered from Paris and London. And then one suddenly met with a revolt, a direct stroke of treachery on the part of this Left Wing! A betrayal of the cause which at present unites Chernov with Poincaré. The spiritual revolt of Semënov, Konopleva, and others against the Central Committee of the party and against the real masters working behind the scenes of this Central Committee, against the Socialist Revolutionary Party in its present attitude, is in reality the immediate consequence of all that the past of the Socialist Revolutionary Party has to show in revolutionary spirit and in heroism. There is only one clear answer to the great and simple question: which and what cause were all the Socialist Revolutionaries serving who were killed in terrorist duels and in street battles, or who died in Siberian hard labor and exile; the cause which is espoused by the Chernovs together with the Noulens, the Poincarés, and the Lloyd Georges, or the cause of the Russia of the Workers and Peasants which, as Genoa demonstrated, is fighting alone against the raging imperialists bloodhounds! Those Socialist Revolutionaries who have stood up against the corrupt clique which is still attempting to profit by the revolutionary traditions of the party can declare with a calm conscience that they are the trustees of all that the past of the Socialist Revolutionary Party has to show in heroism and greatness during the time of suppression and illegal work.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport.

Trotsky portrait from a Postcard published by International Workers' Aid for Hunger Relief in Soviet Russia, circa 1922. Copy in the Tim Davenport collection.

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