

Trotsky "Changes His Mind"

by Herbert Zam

In a series of interviews which Leon Trotsky has recently given to the press, he has "changed his mind a little" on a few big questions. But in the typical Stalin-Trotsky manner, he not only denies having changed his mind in any way whatsoever, but insists that the views he expresses now are those which he has always held. Certainly no one can object to any changes of mind by Trotsky, particularly when many of the new views are far more correct than the old ones. After all, even Trotsky can, on occasion, be right. What is objectionable is the method of changing views—not a frank statement rejecting the previous view and affirming a new one (which is the Leninist method) but an insistence that there has been no change of opinion whatsoever. A glance at some of the points will make the issue clear.

The Five-Year Plan

Several months ago, after a long period of silence, Trotsky came out in favor of the Five-Year plan, approving it and predicting its successful fulfillment. Now Trotsky has gone one step further and maintains that the Five-Year plan was borrowed from him by Stalin, that he was always for it, and he was in fact persecuted for advocating it. Trotsky forgets a few little things. He forgets that when the Five-Year plan was adopted, he was opposed to it, in principle and in detail, condemning it as a product of the "right wing" (at that time, it was still admitted that the "right wingers" Rykov and Bukharin, had had something to do with the authorship of the Five-Year plan). He issued a counter-plan

("Economic Theses of the Left Opposition") which the Communist Party rejected, whereupon Trotsky predicted utter failure for the Five-Year plan, and roundly condemned it.

As late as March, 1930, Trotsky wrote as follows of the general conceptions upon which the Five-Year Plan was based (Preface to American Edition of "Permanent Revolution"):

"... the general historical criterion by which the Party and State leadership directs the development of industry as planned economy assumes decisive significance. Here two principle variants are possible: (a) the course ... towards the economic entrenchment of the proletarian dictatorship in one country until further victories of the international proletarian revolution (the viewpoint of the Left Opposition); (b) the course towards the construction of an isolated national socialist economy and at that in the shortest historical time (the present official viewpoint).

"These are two distinct, and in the final analysis, directly opposed theoretical conceptions of socialism. Out of these flow basically different strategy and tactics."

"To gain economic independence speedily with the aid of the fastest possible tempos of industrialization and collectivization!—this is the transformation that has taken place in the economic policy of national socialism in the past two years. Crawling was replaced all along the line by adventurism."

Here we see Trotsky's attitude toward the general conceptions underlying the Five-Year Plan, as well as

his estimate of the first two years of its operation. It can hardly be said that the proper pride of the "author" in his work is shown in this enthusiastic praise. If Trotsky has changed his mind, well and good! But let him state so definitely and frankly. And let him furthermore declare whether he still maintains the same general conception as described in the above quotations, on the basis of which he should not under any circumstances be for the Five-Year Plan.

And Thermidor

In line with his change of mind regarding the economic questions, Trotsky modifies a "little" his ideas on Thermidor. The retreat from complete Thermidor is very welcome. But again it is covered behind a sheet of hypocrisy. "I have never, at any time said that the present stage of the revolution was 'Thermidorian'". No? How about the "Kerensky film rolled backwards"? How about the characterization that Stalin is Kerensky "upside down"? And what about the oft-repeated thesis in "My Life" that Trotsky's enemies came into power on the wave of "reaction against the October Revolution"? No, it is difficult to believe even the changes of mind when they are accompanied by such dishonesty. If Trotsky honestly declared: "I no longer believe in this and that . . ." it would be a sign that he is moving in the right direction, but so long as he insists: "I never believed . . ." we know it is just the old Trotsky game.

America and Europe

With regard to America, Trotsky returns once more to his previously abandoned theory of America conquering Europe. "I think as a result of the present crisis the predominance of America over European capitalism will grow still more pronounced." True, he foresees growing contradictions in American imperialism, but thru the importation, so to speak, of European ills into healthy America. And then he joins Stalin in attacking the American Communist Opposition as "exceptionalists"! He utterly fails to see that the result of the present situation will make it not easier, but more difficult, for American imperialism to conquer Europe. The antagonisms among the imperialist powers are sharpening, and the resistance to American imperialism is growing. The very assistance which American imperialism gave to sick European capitalism is rebounding against it with redoubled force. The rising tariff walls, the campaign for the cancellation of war debts and reparations, the realignment of forces on the European continent and in Asia, are all indications of a general trend directly contrary to Trotsky's predictions. But isolated at Prinkipo, he cannot see them, just as Japan's anti-Soviet Union drive is also invisible to him.

The Labor Party Question

To American Trotskyites, the biggest shock will undoubtedly be Trotsky's sudden conversion to the idea of a Labor party, for which he sees stormy development. Trotsky was a pioneer in the struggle against the Labor party idea, as early as 1924

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25. He stormed and raved against it. He was opposed to the Communists having anything to do with it. When the American Trotskyites, after having freed themselves from the Foster group factional prison, came out in favor of a Labor party in the United States, Trotsky quickly convinced them to change their minds. But now Trotsky has gone to an extreme in his advocacy of the inevitability of a Labor party. He declares:

"The emergence of a Labor party is inevitable. It may begin to grow with an 'American tempo', leading to the liquidation of one of the two old parties, just as the Liberals have disappeared in England."

All we can say to this is that we hope Trotsky's prediction comes true. We have advocated a Labor party as a means of promoting the class-consciousness of the working class, and we have not changed our minds regarding the question. But it is to be hoped that Trotsky will not again change his mind if this hoped-for rapid development does not take place.

had time to become Liberal-Republican instead of Liberal-Monarchistic (will this be for long?) will conduct a policy of manoeuvring between the monarchy and the revolution. The revolutionary bourgeois democracy represented by Sun Yat-sen is correctly seeking a path to the "resuscitation" of China in developing the greatest independence, determination and boldness of the peasant masses, in the way of political and agrarian reforms.

Finally, in accordance with how the number of Shanghais grow in China, so also will the Chinese proletariat grow. It will probably form some kind of Chinese Social-Democratic Labor party, which, while criticizing the petty bourgeois utopias and the reactionary views of Sun Yat-sen, will be sure to select with care, to preserve and develop the revolutionary-democratic nucleus of his political and agrarian program.

Lenin And The Chinese Revolution

THE REVOLUTION IN CHINA

by V. I. Lenin

(Continued from the last issue)

What is the origin and significance of these tendencies?

Chinese democracy could not overthrow the old order in China and win a republic without a tremendous spiritual and revolutionary élan of the masses. Such an élan presupposes and engenders the sincerest sympathy for the position of the toiling masses, and the most fervent hate for their oppressors and exploiters. And in Europe and America from which the advanced Chinese, in fact all Chinese who have experienced this élan, have culled their ideas of emancipation, the next thing on the program is already liberation from the bourgeoisie, i.e., Socialism. Hence the inevitable sympathy of the Chinese democrats for Socialism, hence their subjective Socialism.

They are subjectively Socialists, because they are against the oppression and exploitation of the masses. But the objective conditions of China, of this backward, agrarian, semi-feudal country, urgently confront the 400 millions of the Chinese people with only one definite historically-peculiar form of this oppression and of this exploitation, namely feudalism. Feudalism is based on the prevalence of agrarian life and of primitive economy; the origin of the feudal exploitation of the Chinese peasant was his attachment to the land in one form or another; the political expressions of this exploitation were the feudal landowners, all together and each one separately, with the Emperor as head of the system.

And the result is that from the subjectively-Socialistic ideas and programs of a Chinese democrat, in reality we get a program "of change of all bloody foundations" only of "real estate", a program for the abolition only of feudal exploitation.

Therein lies the substance of Sun Yat-sen's Populist conceptions, of his progressive, militant, revolutionary program of bourgeois-democratic agrarian transformation and of his supposed Socialist theory.

This theory, if we regard it from the doctrinaire point of view, is the theory of a petty bourgeois "Socialist," of a Socialist reactionary. This is so, because the chimera that China can "avert" capitalism, that in China the "social-revolution" is easier because of her backwardness, etc., is quite reactionary. And Sun Yat-sen with inimitable, one might say maiden naivete, himself smashes to atoms his reactionary Populist theory, recognizing what life makes one recognize, namely: that "China is on the eve of a gigantic industrial (i.e., capitalist) development," that in China "commerce (i.e., capitalism) is expanding in tremendous dimensions, that "in 50 years time we will have many Shanghais" i.e., a huge number of centres of capitalist wealth and of proletarian need and poverty.

But the question naturally arises—does Sun Yat-sen defend, on the basis of his reactionary economic theory, a really reactionary agrarian program? That indeed is the whole gist of the question, the most interesting point before which plumed and castrated Liberal quasi-Marxism often pulls up short.

That is just the point; he does not defend such an agrarian program on this basis. That is just what comprises the dialectics of social relations in China—the fact that the

Chinese democrats, sincerely sympathizing with Socialism in Europe, have turned it into a reactionary theory and on the basis of this reactionary theory of "averting" capitalism, they conduct a purely capitalist, maximum-capitalist agrarian program.

What does the "economic revolution", about which Sun Yat-sen speaks so fervently and confusedly at the commencement of the article, really amount to?

It amounts to the transfer of rents to the State, i.e., the nationalization of land by means of a kind of single tax after the spirit of Henry George. There is absolutely nothing else real in the "economic revolution" proposed and preached by Sun Yat-sen.

The difference between the value of the land in an out-of-the-way peasant farm and in Shanghai is a difference in the dimensions of the rent. To make the "increase in value" of land become the "property of the people" means transferring rents, i.e., property on land to the State, or in other words, means nationalizing the land.

Is such a reform possible within the framework of capitalism? It is not only possible, but it represents the purest most highly consistent and ideologically perfected capitalism. Marx pointed this out in the "Poverty of Philosophy", proved it in detail in the third volume of "Capital" and particularly clearly developed it in the polemic with Rodbertus in "Theories of Surplus Value."

Nationalization of the land provides the possibility of abolishing absolute rent, leaving only differential rent. According to the teachings of Marx, nationalization means the most thorough removal of mediaeval monopolies and mediaeval relations from agriculture, the greatest freedom of commercial operations with the land, the greatest facility for adapting agriculture to the market. It is an irony of history that the Populist movement, in the name of a "struggle" against capital in agriculture, conducts an agrarian program, the complete realization of which would mean the most rapid development of capitalism in agriculture.

What economic necessity, in one of the most backward peasant countries of Asia, has caused the diffusion of the most advanced bourgeois-democratic land programs? It was the necessity for destroying feudalism in all its forms and manifestations.

The more China lagged behind Europe and Japan, so much the more was it threatened with dissection and national disintegration. China could only be "restored" by the heroism of the revolutionary masses of the people, capable of forming a Chinese Republic in the political sphere, and able to ensure in the agrarian sphere, the most rapid capitalistic progress by means of nationalizing the land.

As to whether this will succeed and to what degree, is another question. Various countries have brought into force varying degrees of political and agrarian democracy during their bourgeois revolution, and, moreover, in the most variegated combinations. In China it is the international situation and the correlation of social forces that will decide matters. The Emperor will probably unite the feudal landowners, the bureaucracy, the Chinese clergy, and prepare a restoration. Yuan Shi-kai, representative of a bourgeoisie which has hardly