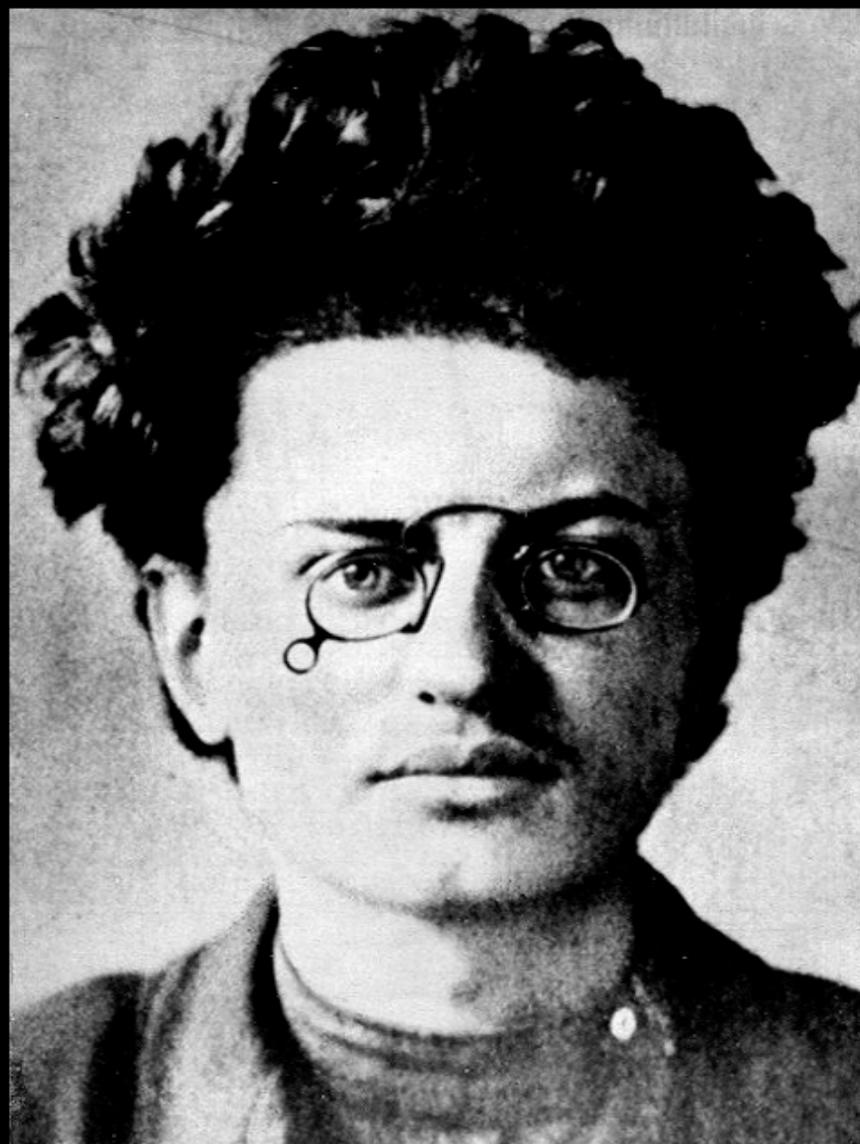


# TROTSKY



Vol. 1  
Towards October  
1879-1917

**Tony Cliff**

**Trotsky: Towards October  
1879-1917**

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Tony Cliff  
20 April 1990

Tony Cliff wrote many books. These include the classic *State Capitalism in Russia* (1974) and two previous political biographies: *Rosa Luxemburg* (1959) and *Lenin* (in three volumes 1975-79). He is also the co-author of *The Labour Party: A Marxist History* (1988).

## Preface

IN WRITING a political biography of Leon Trotsky one has first of all to evaluate two previous biographies: Trotsky's autobiography *My Life*, and Isaac Deutscher's trilogy. [1] Both appear to the present writer to be unsatisfactory.

First, Trotsky's autobiography. Written as a document in the faction fight with Stalin, when the latter tried to describe Trotsky as an inveterate enemy of Lenin, *My Life* plays down the differences between Trotsky and Lenin. It undervalues Trotsky's tremendous contributions where he differed from Lenin, notably downgrading Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. This theory was a unique contribution to Marxist thinking, no one at the time, not even Lenin, going as far as to maintain that Russia would be the first country in the world to have a socialist revolution and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. All other Marxists believed that only industrially advanced Western Europe was ripe for the socialist revolution; Russia was heading towards a bourgeois revolution that would free the country from Tsarism and the legacy of feudalism and transform it into a modern capitalist country.

Trotsky's contributions as organiser of the October insurrection and the Red Army are also played down. It is very unusual for an autobiography to underestimate the contribution of the author. The other side of this coin is the belittling of Trotsky's mistakes in his opposition to Lenin's ideas on the nature of the revolutionary party during the long period from 1903 to 1917. (In other writings Trotsky was emphatic in criticising his own position on the question of the party).

Furthermore, the autobiography ends with Trotsky's exile from Russia in February 1929. A very significant chapter, possibly the most significant, of Trotsky's political activity is completely missing. On 25 March 1935 Trotsky wrote in his diary:

Had I not been present in 1917 in Petersburg, the October Revolution would still have taken place – on the condition that Lenin was present and in command. If neither Lenin nor I had been present in Petersburg, there would have been no October Revolution: the leadership of the Bolshevik Party would have prevented it from occurring – of this I have not the slightest doubt! If Lenin had not been in Petersburg, I doubt whether I could have managed to conquer the resistance of the Bolshevik leaders ... But I repeat, granted the presence of Lenin the October Revolution would have been victorious anyway ....

Thus I cannot speak of the 'indispensability' of my own work, even about the period from 1917 to 1921. But now my work is 'indispensable' in the full sense of the word. There is no arrogance in this claim at all. The collapse of the two Internationals has posed a problem which none of the leaders of these Internationals is at all equipped to solve. The vicissitudes of my personal fate have confronted me with this problem and armed me with important experience in dealing with it. There is now no one except me to carry out the mission of arming a new generation with the revolutionary method over the heads of the leaders of the Second and Third International. [2]

In the years 1923-1940, when Trotsky was out of power, his contributions to the development of proletarian revolutionary strategy and tactics were stupendous, particularly after he was exiled. From a remote Turkish island, from a hiding place in the French Alps, from a Norwegian village, and finally from a suburb of Mexico City, Trotsky's mind never ceased to embrace the international working-class struggle. Reading his writings on China, one has the impression that the author lived and struggled in Shanghai. His writings on Germany,

France, Spain, Britain leave similar impressions. And throughout he had to contend with the fact that the Trotskyist groups in all these countries were tiny, made up of young, inexperienced people, and very isolated. Trotsky's great genius, his vivid, realistic imagination, the grand sweep of his vision, make this chapter of his life one of the richest.

One of the most difficult problems was the question of the economic, political and cultural changes and struggles that faced a workers' state in a backward country surrounded by much more advanced capitalist enemies. The experience of the Paris Commune was fleeting; now for the first time in world history a workers' state was established over a whole country. Marxist theory arises out of practice; it generalises the past experience of humanity. While Trotsky fought consistently, relentlessly, against the degeneration of the revolution, against the rising Stalinist bureaucracy, the experience he had to rely on was very small, and it is not to be wondered at that his predictions about the future development of the Stalinist regime were not confirmed by events. No prognosis is ever confirmed in totality, especially when a very new phenomenon is dealt with.

Trotsky's devotion to the revolutionary cause stood the test of the most tragic events: Stalin's persecution and slander surpassed anything that had ever happened in history. His first wife was sent to a Stalinist labour camp, two of his four children were murdered by Stalinist agents, one died from consumption while her husband languished in Stalin's prison and the fourth committed suicide; of his seven grandchildren only one, as far as we know, survived in freedom.

In terms of the immediate impact of his work, Trotsky's years out of power were quite arid. But in the long-term historical development of the revolutionary socialist movement, in terms of keeping the Marxist tradition alive, this chapter was of crucial importance.

What about Deutscher's biography of Trotsky, the trilogy *The Prophet Armed*, *The Prophet Unarmed* and *The Prophet Outcast*?

These books are of a high standard. Deutscher's careful and exhaustive collation of sources and documents, together with his

majestic style, lend great significance to his writings. Unfortunately, however, the spirit that dominates the trilogy is in complete opposition to that of its subject. For Trotsky the heart of Marxism is the self-activity of the working class; his relentless opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy derived from that cardinal principle. He accused Stalin of betraying the Russian revolution and being the gravedigger of the international revolution. Hence the Russian proletariat has to make a new revolution to get rid of the stranglehold of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Trotsky's concept of socialism is that of socialism from below; Deutscher's of socialism from above.

Deutscher has a fatalistic concept of Stalin's rise, seeing him as the necessary offspring of the revolution.

In his book *Stalin* [3], Deutscher explains that 'the broad scheme', which brought about the metamorphosis of triumphant Bolshevism into Stalinism, has 'been common to all great revolutions so far' (and from his arguments would seem to be common to all popular revolutions in the future.) In the first phase of these revolutions:

The revolutionary party is still marching in step with the majority of the nation. It is acutely conscious of its unity with the people and of a profound harmony between its own objectives and the people's wishes and desires. [4]

This phase lasts little longer than the Civil War. By its end the revolutionary party faces an exhausted people; a reaction sets in.

The anti-climax of the revolution is there. The leaders are unable to keep their early promises. They have destroyed the old order ... [5]

In order to safeguard the achievements of the revolution, the party now has to muzzle the people.

The party of the revolution knows no retreat; it has been driven to its present pass largely through obeying the will of that same people by which it is now deserted. It will go on doing what it

considers to be its duty, without paying much heed to the voice of the people. In the end it will muzzle and stifle that voice. [6]

The rulers find justification for themselves in the conviction that whatever they do will ultimately serve the interests of the broad mass of the nation; and indeed they do, on the whole, use their power to consolidate most of the economic and social conquests of the revolution. [7]

Lenin and Trotsky, says Deutscher, led inevitably to Stalin. Deutscher claims to have

... traced the thread of unconscious historic continuity which led from Stalin's hesitant and shamefaced essays in revolution by conquest to the revolutions contrived by Stalin the conqueror. A similar subtle thread connects Trotsky's domestic policy of these years with the later practices of his antagonist. Both Trotsky and Lenin appear, each in a different field, as Stalin's unwitting inspirers and prompters. Both were driven by circumstances beyond their control and by their own illusions ... [8]

One of the 'illusions' Lenin and Trotsky suffered from, according to Deutscher, was belief in the possibility of spreading the revolution westwards. If Lenin and Trotsky 'had taken a sober view of the international revolution' they might have foreseen that in the course of decades their example would not be imitated [in any other country] ... [9]

Stalin's scepticism regarding the revolutionary temper of the European working classes has so far seemed better justified than Trotsky's confidence. [10]

It is implicit in Deutscher's work that the Trotskyists in the Russian revolution, like the Levellers in the English and the Hébertists in the French, are the 'utopians' who imperil the revolution, its conquests and its future. Deutscher argues that it was futile for the Trotskyists in Russia to oppose Stalin. He puts it very neatly: 'It was true that the capitulators to Stalin committed political

suicide; but so also did those who refused to capitulate.’ [11] So Trotsky’s opposition to Stalin was futile! In fact, fighting instead of capitulating to Stalin prepared the ground for the victorious struggles of future generations.

In Deutscher’s view, Stalinism was the legitimate child of the revolution. All revolutions have their utopian extremists who do not understand that the revolution cannot satisfy the demands of the masses it has inspired. The significance of the quotation from Machiavelli which stands at the head of *The Prophet Armed* is now clear. The prophet must be armed, so that when the people no longer believe in the revolution, he can ‘make them believe by force.’ According to Deutscher, Stalinism not only protects the achievements of the revolution, but also deepens and enlarges them:

In 1929, five years after Lenin’s death, Soviet Russia embarked upon her second revolution, which was directed solely and exclusively by Stalin. In its scope and immediate impact upon the life of some 160 million people the second revolution was even more sweeping and radical than the first. [12]

Stalin ... remained the guardian and the trustee of the revolution. [13]

These words about ‘the revolution’ referred to the forced collectivisation that cost the lives of millions of peasants, and the labour camps with their millions of inmates.

Deutscher argues against Trotsky’s characterisation of Stalin as counter-revolutionary. [14] In fact, he argues that at the end of the Second World War the revolution spread to many countries, taking in hundreds of millions of people.

To Eastern Europe revolution was to be brought, in the main, ‘from above and not from outside’ – by conquest and occupation; while in China it was to rise not as a proletarian democracy, spreading from the cities to the country, but as a

gigantic jacquerie conquering the cities from the country and only subsequently passing from the 'bourgeois democratic' to the socialist phase. [15]

In fact, says Deutscher, Mao's rise was the final victory of Trotskyism:

This, the 'Chinese October' was, in a sense, yet another of Trotsky's posthumous triumphs. [16]

The fact that Stalin and Mao slandered, persecuted and murdered the Trotskyists is of minor significance: both Stalin and Mao are the heirs of Trotsky. Accepting the international revolutionary role of the Russian state leads Deutscher to the conclusion that the Cold War power struggle is the main, or perhaps only, arena of struggle between socialism and capitalism. For the foreseeable future 'the class struggle, suppressed at the level on which it had been traditionally waged, would be fought at a different level and in different forms, as rivalry between power blocs and as cold war. [17]

As the rulers of both the United States and Russia possess nuclear weapons while the workers have none, then if one followed through Deutscher's logic, one would conclude that the workers are irrelevant to the class struggle. And indeed, whenever workers come into conflict with the Stalinist bureaucracy, Deutscher supported the latter against the former. He opposed all the popular uprisings in Eastern Europe: 16-17 June 1953 in East Germany, October 1956 in Poland and Hungary. Disapproving of the 1953 demonstration of building workers in East Berlin against a decree to increase their production norms, and the workers' stone-throwing at the Russian tanks which bloodily suppressed the rising, Deutscher said:

Their action had unfortunate consequences in Moscow. It compromised the man who stood for reforms and conciliation. It gave fresh vigour to the diehards of Stalinism and other irreconcilables. [18]

The workers should wait patiently and passively for reform from above!

The workers' risings in Poland and Hungary in 1956 were declared to be counter-revolutionary acts trying 'unwittingly to put the clock back'. [19] He cheered the Russian tanks which smashed the workers' uprising:

Eastern Europe (Hungary, Poland, and East Germany) ... found itself almost on the brink of bourgeois restoration at the end of the Stalin era; and only Soviet armed power (or its threat) stopped it there. [20]

Trotsky was engaged in a life and death struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy. The essence of Deutscher's writing is conciliation between Trotskyism and Stalinism. There is no common spirit between the biographer and his subject. Trotsky is active, dynamic, revolutionary; for him the principle of workers' democracy, of the struggle against all bureaucracy, of rank-and-file mass action against privilege, is crucial. It is the reaffirmation of the essentials of Marxism (magnificently adapted to our time in Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution). The central theme of his life and struggle to the bitter end was that socialism can be achieved only by the workers, not for them.

For Deutscher the masses play a passive, secondary, if not a nuisance role, threatening the achievement of the revolution. He has thrown out the kernel of Trotskyism and kept merely the husk. Any affinity to Trotskyism is only extrinsic and verbal – the spirit of the revolutionary fighter is completely missing. Trotsky could well have said of him: 'I have sown dragon's teeth, and harvested fleas'.

The present biography is written by a disciple of Trotsky of over half a century's duration. I am more convinced today of the correctness of his ideas than ever before. Their general thrust, above all the theory of the permanent revolution, has stood the test of time. His revolutionary struggle for the international communist revolution, his opposition to Social Democracy and Stalinism, have been completely justified by historical events. If with hindsight one

can find instances of Trotsky faltering, this is a privilege that can be gained only by standing on the shoulders of this giant revolutionary. Where Trotsky's strength was accompanied by weaknesses, such as his serious error in rejecting Lenin's concept of the party over a long period, this biography will not try to cover up the mistakes; it will do its best to avoid hagiography.

Trotsky himself was very honest about his mistakes. The sharpest criticism of his attitude to the question of the party before 1917 was his own. To quote just one of his statements:

Without the Bolshevik Party the October revolution could not have been carried through or consolidated. Thus, the only truly revolutionary work was the work that helped this party take shape and grow stronger. In relation to this main road all other revolutionary work remained off to the side, lacking any inner guarantee of success or dependability, and in many cases was directly detrimental to the main revolutionary work of that time. In this sense Lenin was right when he said that the conciliationist position [which was Trotsky's own position], by giving protection and cover to Menshevism, often transformed revolutionary slogans, perspectives, etc., into mere phrases...

[Once I understood this] Lenin's position come through to me with full force. What had seemed to me to be 'splitterism', 'disruption', etc, now appeared as a salutary and incomparably farsighted struggle for the revolutionary independence of the proletarian party. [21]

In the present biography there will be much praise and quite a lot of criticism of Trotsky's views during the four decades of his political activity. Trotsky was far too great a revolutionary to need protection from any criticism. I hope both that the criticism is not blunted, and that the presentation of Trotsky's thought and actions have not been distorted by the criticism.

Because of the brilliance of Trotsky's writing, its richness, depth, sharpness, colour, poetry, I will use his own words as much as

possible to describe both his actions and ideas. This is especially fitting when we come to deal with the 1905 and 1917 revolutions. No other revolution was fortunate enough to have as its brilliant historian a person who was also one of its supreme leaders. In 1905 Trotsky was the leader and inspirer of the first workers' council (soviet) in world history. In 1917 he was the organiser of the insurrection. The present book may 'suffer from a plethora of quotations, but in truth I found great difficulty in having to omit many others that cried out for inclusion.

Trotsky's whole being, his mind, his will, his energy, were directed towards the future. As a young man of twenty-one he wrote:

*Dum spiro, spero!* As long as I breathe I hope – as long as I breathe I shall fight for the future, that radiant future in which man, strong and beautiful, will become master of the spontaneous stream of his history and will direct it towards the boundless horizon of beauty, joy and happiness ... *Dum spiro, spero!* [22]

A short time before his assassination, in his testament, Trotsky repeated his optimism for the future:

My faith in the Communist future of mankind is not less ardent, indeed it is firmer today than it was in the days of my youth ... I can see the bright green strip of grass beneath the wall and the clear blue sky above the wall, and sunlight everywhere. Life is beautiful. Let the future generations cleanse it of all evil, oppression, and violence, and enjoy it to the full. [23]

## Notes

1. Leon Trotsky, *My Life* (New York 1960); Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed* (London 1955), *The Prophet Unarmed* (London 1959), *The Prophet Outcast* (London 1963).

2. Trotsky, *Diary in Exile* (London 1958), pages 53-54.

3. Deutscher, *Stalin* (London 1949).
4. Deutscher, *Stalin*, page 174.
5. Deutscher, *Stalin*, page 174.
6. Deutscher, *Stalin*, page 175.
7. Deutscher, *Stalin*, page 176.
8. Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, page 515.
9. Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, page 293.
10. Deutscher, *Heretics and Renegades* (London 1955), page 89.
11. Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, page 45.
12. Deutscher, *Stalin*, page 294.
13. Deutscher, *Stalin*, pages 360-1.
14. Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, page 461.
15. Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, pages 257-8.
16. Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, page 520.
17. Deutscher, *The Prophet Outcast*, page 32.
18. *News Chronicle* (London), 13 July 1953.
19. Deutscher, in *Universities and Left Review*, volume 1, number 1, page 10.
20. Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, page 462.
21. Trotsky, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-25* (New York 1980), pages 265-6.
22. Trotsky, *Sochineniia* (Moscow), volume 20, page 78.
23. S. Lovell (editor), *Leon Trotsky speaks* (New York 1972), page 312.

# 1. Youth

ON 26 OCTOBER 1879 (or 7 November according to the Western calendar) [1\*] a boy was born into the family of a rich Jewish farmer, David Leontievich Bronstein. The child was named after his grandfather, Lev or Leon. By a trick of fate the date on which the boy was born was the very same on which 38 years later, as Leon Trotsky, he was to lead the Bolshevik insurrection in Petrograd.

Lyova (the diminutive of Lev) spent his first nine years on the farm at Yanovka in the province of Kherson in the Ukraine. The farm was 25 kilometres from the nearest post office and more than 35 from the nearest railroad.

It was a long way again to the Government offices, to the stores and to a civic centre, and still farther to the world with its great events. Life at Yanovka was regulated entirely by the rhythm of the toil on the farm. Nothing else mattered, nothing but the price of grain in the world market. We never saw any magazines or newspapers in the country in those days. [1]

He was seven when his parents sent him to a *kheder*, a private Jewish religious school at Gromolky, a Jewish-German colony a couple of miles away from Yanovka. Here he was taught to read the Bible and translate it from Hebrew into Russian. The curriculum also included some reading in Russian and arithmetic. Knowing no Yiddish, Lev could neither understand the teacher nor get on with his schoolmates. Despite the obstacles, he did learn to read and write Russian. However, being very unhappy at school, he was taken away a few months later. On his return to Yanovka he tirelessly

copied verses and prose passages from books at hand, and even wrote some verse himself.

In the autumn of 1888 Lyova was sent to Odessa, the Black Sea harbour town, to stay with his mother's nephew, Moissey Philipovich Schpentzer, so as to be able to study at the St Paul's *Realschule*. No Greek or Latin was taught there, but a good grounding was given in science, mathematics and modern languages – German and French. The teaching was done in Russian.

Lyova stayed in Odessa until 1896. An incident occurred at the *Realschule* that is worth recording. It showed his urge to fight injustice and his readiness to lead his peers. The French teacher again and again picked on the German pupils. One day he was especially vicious towards one German boy, Bakker. The pupils, with Lyova at their head, decided to organise a 'concert' for the teacher. To give a concert meant to accompany the steps of the teacher when he left the classroom with a howling sound made with a closed mouth, so that one could not tell who was actually doing it. When the school authorities took measures to discipline the troublemakers, panic reigned in the classroom. The majority of the boys closed ranks and said nothing, some of those punished told tales, accusing Bronstein of being the ringleader, and Lyova was expelled from the school. Some three decades later he summed up this experience:

Such, one might say, was the first political test I underwent. These were the groups that resulted from that episode: the tale-bearers and the envious at one pole, the frank, courageous boys at the other, and the neutral, vacillating mass in the middle. These three groups never quite disappeared even during the years that followed. I met them again and again in my life, in the most varied circumstances. [2]

*Realschule* normally had seven forms, but St Paul's had only six; so Lev had to attend a similar school in Nikolaev in order to matriculate. The year at Nikolaev was a turning point in Lev's life. He was lodging with a family whose sons had already been influenced by socialist ideas, and they introduced him to a circle of socialists. With one

exception – Alexandra Sokolovskaya, Lev’s future wife – these were Narodniks. The Narodniks saw the peasants, not the industrial workers – the proletariat, as the agents of revolution and the future society.

During the 1880s and early 1890s the revolutionary movement was at a very low ebb. The assassination of Alexander II in 1881 by the Populists of *Narodnaya Volya* did not lead to a nationwide upheaval as they had expected. It did lead, however, to the death of *Narodnaya Volya*. A new awakening began in the mid-1890s, this time very much influenced by Russian Marxists, by Social Democrats.

The first generation of Russian Social Democracy, headed by Plekhanov, started its propaganda activity at the beginning of the 1880s. The numbers involved were in single figures, later in tens. The second generation, led by Lenin (fourteen years younger than Plekhanov), entered the political arena at the beginning of the 1890s. Now the Social Democrats reached the hundreds. The third generation, of people some ten years younger than Lenin, joined the ranks at the turn of the century. To that generation, now numbering thousands, belonged Trotsky, as well as Stalin, Zinoviev, Kamenev and other future Bolshevik leaders.

In 1896 news reached Nikolaev of the first mass strike in Russian history, which involved 30,000 textile workers and was influenced by the Union of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, recently founded by Lenin, Martov and Potresov. Student movements arose in Moscow and Kiev. In the summer, at Christmas and at Easter, dozens of students came to Nikolaev, bringing tales of the upheavals. Some of them had been expelled from the universities. In February 1897 a woman student, Vetrova, burnt herself to death in St Petersburg’s Peter and Paul Fortress. This caused disturbances in university cities; arrests and banishment became more frequent. Lev came into contact with several former Narodnik exiles who were under police surveillance. Through his co-lodgers he met a Franz Shvigovsky, a Czech gardener who rented an orchard on the outskirts of the town. In his hut he held a small

discussion group for radical students and working men. As Trotsky remembers:

He was the first working-man I had known who subscribed to newspapers, read German, knew the classics, and participated freely in the arguments between the Marxists and the populists. His one-room cabin in the garden was the meeting-place for visiting students, former exiles and the local youths. One could obtain a forbidden book through Shvigovsky. The conversations of the exiles were punctuated with the names of the populists, Zhelyabov, Perovskaya, Figner, who were treated not as legendary heroes but as real people with whom the older friends of these exiles – if not they themselves – were familiar. I had a feeling that I was joining a great chain as a tiny link. [3]

### **Revolutionary Agitator and Organiser**

The members of the Shvigovsky circle called themselves Narodniks. Only Alexandra Lvovna Sokolovskaya, herself the daughter of a Narodnik, was a Marxist. When Lev joined he found himself in the midst of a fierce controversy. He was pressed to make a choice, and at once labelled himself a Narodnik. A few months later, however, he became a Marxist. The transition from Populism to Marxism was quite common: Plekhanov, Lenin and others started as Populists and then turned Marxist – the working class was so young and the appeal of Populism so strong. The personal influence of Alexandra must also have been great, as Lev soon after married her.

To be able to do active propaganda work, Lev adopted the pseudonym Lvov. He and a student friend decided to make the acquaintance of workers. The first one they met up with was a socialist, an electrician called Ivan Andreyevich Mukhin, who made a big impression on young Lev. Many years later Trotsky remembers: Mukhin explained very graphically how he described to other workers the meaning of the socialist revolution:

'It's very simple. I put a bean on the table and say, "This is the Tsar." Around it, I place more beans. "These are ministers, bishops, generals, and over there the gentry and merchants. And in this other heap, the plain people." Now, I ask, "Where is the Tsar?" They point to the centre. "Where are the ministers?" They point to those around. Just as I have told them, they answer. Now, wait,' and at this point Mukhin completely closed his left eye and paused. 'Then I scramble all the beans together,' he went on. 'I say, "Now tell me where is the Tsar? the Ministers?" And they answer me, "Who can tell? You can't spot them now" ... "Just what I say. You can't spot them now". And so I say, "All beans should be scrambled".'

I was so thrilled at this story that I was all in a sweat. This was the real thing, whereas we had only been guessing and waiting and subtilising ... Mukhin's navy-beans, destroying the mechanics of the class system, were the revolutionary propaganda.

'Only how to scramble them, damn them, that's the problem,' Mukhin said, in a different tone, and looked sternly at me with both eyes. 'That's not navy-beans, is it?' And this time he waited for my answer. [4]

Twenty-three years later Trotsky again met Mukhin, now a leading Bolshevik, at the conference of the Ukrainian Communist Party in Kharkov.

In 1897 the number of workers in Nikolaev factories numbered 8,000. The Shvigovsky circle now started to agitate amongst them:

The workers streamed toward us as if they had been waiting for this. They all brought friends; some come with their wives, and a few older men joined the groups with their sons. We never sought them out; they looked for us. Young and inexperienced leaders that we were, we were soon overwhelmed by the movement we had started. Every word of ours met with a

response. As many as twenty and twenty-five or more of the workers gathered at our secret readings and discussions, held in houses, in the woods, or on the river. The predominating element was composed of highly skilled workers who earned fairly good wages. They already had an eight-hour day. [5]

The organisation circulated leaflets and a sheet called *Nashe Delo* (*Our Cause*). Each edition was printed in 200 copies. The leaflets dealt with conditions in the factories and shipyards and abuses by employers and officials. Trotsky wrote later:

The amazing effectiveness of our work fairly intoxicated us. From revolutionary tales, we knew that the workers won over by propaganda were usually to be counted in single numbers. A revolutionary who converted two or three men to socialism thought he had done a good piece of work, whereas, with us, the number of workers who joined or wanted to join the groups seemed practically unlimited. The only shortage was in the matter of instructors and in literature ...

I wrote proclamations and articles, and printed them all out in longhand for the hectograph. At that time we didn't even know of the existence of typewriters. I printed the letters with the utmost care, considering it a point of honour to make them clear enough so that even the less literate could read our proclamations without any trouble. It took me about two hours to a page. Sometimes I didn't even unbend my back for a week, cutting my work short only for meetings and study in the groups. But what a satisfied feeling I had when I received the information from milis and workshops that the workers read voraciously the mysterious sheets printed in purple ink, passing them about from hand to hand as they discussed them! [6]

The proclamations Lev wrote were simple and persuasive. They dealt concretely with some event that had just taken place in the factory, and that the workers were talking about:

‘You all know about the recent visit to the shipyards of the captain of the port, Fedotov, and you are all doubtless aroused by the ugly conduct of the rude old man; because a few of the workmen did not bow to the captain they were on the order of “his excellency” immediately listed for discharge ...’

Thus he opens a conversation with the workers in the shipyards.

An engineer in the employ of the bosses has called a meeting to denounce one of his proclamations, and he makes that the occasion of another conversation:

‘Neyman climbed up to the top storey of the electric- dynamo shop, assembled the workers and made a speech in which there were more lies than words. It was not Neyman but his salary that made the speech. “You are a mere handful,” cried the salary of Neyman, “and you dare to revolt against a terrible power!” Ask Neyman, comrades, whether he reads the papers and knows what is happening in this world. Does he know that 46,000 workers in St Petersburg alone, by means of two strikes, compelled that same terrible power to give them the law of July 2nd concerning the length of the working day? ... “You will suffer in prison,” said this engineer, “and your wives and children will die of hunger and cold.” You understand how he is worried about your welfare? About you and about your wives and children? Answer Neyman, who knows no other joy but a fat meal and a luxurious dwelling, that there is a joy both higher and more glorious – a struggle for the great cause of freedom and justice.’ [Z]

Trotsky himself remembers:

If it had been possible for any one to look at all this with a ‘sober’ eye, at this group of young people scurrying about in the half-darkness around a miserable hectograph, what a sorry, fantastic thing it would have seemed to imagine that they could,

in this way, overthrow a mighty state that was centuries old! And yet this sorry fantasy became a reality within a single generation; and only eight years separated those nights from 1905, and not quite twenty from 1917. [8]

The group managed to produce three issues of *Nashe Delo*. Its organisation was called The South Russian Workers' Union, and intended to include workers from other towns. It was made up of eight or nine circles, including over 200 workers. This was very impressive, as the number of workers in the town was not more than 10,000.

As the Shvigovsky circle was made up largely of people who called themselves Narodniks, while a minority of them were Marxists, the propaganda of the South Russian Workers' Union avoided political issues, and limited itself to bread and butter issues. Like many other groups in Russia at the time, it could be labelled 'economist'. (As we shall see, at the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1903, the Nikolaev delegate supported the 'economist' paper *Rabocheye Delo*).

It was in this period of his life that Lev identified himself completely with the working class and the revolution. His first wife, Alexandra Sokolovskaya, years later told Max Eastman:

He can be very tender and sympathetic, and he can be very assertive and arrogant; but in one thing he never changes – that is his devotion to the revolution. In all my revolutionary experience I have never met any other person so completely consecrated. [9]

### **In Prison and Siberia**

On 28 January 1898 there were mass arrests in Nikolaev. Altogether more than 200 people were taken, among them Lev. Nikolaev's prison was the first out of some twenty he was destined to be incarcerated in. From here he was transferred to the prison at Kherson, where he

was kept for several months. Then he was transferred to a prison in Odessa, in which he was to remain a year and a half, until the end of 1899. Practically throughout he was kept in solitary confinement. He used the time to improve his knowledge of languages. The prison library contained only religious literature and Church periodicals. So he read the Bible in German, French, English and Italian. It was during this period in prison that he made great strides in understanding Marxist historical materialism. He was greatly helped in this by the writings of the Italian Marxist Antonio Labriola, which arrived in the prison in a French translation. But to assimilate the theory, Lev needed to involve himself in independent research, so for several months he studied the history of freemasonry. He writes:

As the prison rules demanded that a prisoner give up his old exercise-book when he was given a new one, I got for my studies on freemasonry an exercise-book with a thousand numbered pages, and entered in it, in tiny characters, excerpts from many books, interspersed with my own reflections on freemasonry, as well as on the materialist conception of history. This took up the better part of a year. I edited each chapter carefully, copied it into a note-book which had been smuggled in to me, and then sent that out to friends in other cells to read. For contriving this, we had a complicated system which we called the 'telephone'. The person for whom the package was intended – that is, if his cell was not too far away – would attach a weight to a piece of string, and then, holding his hand as far as he could out of the window, would swing the weight in a circle. As previously arranged through tapping, I would stick my broom out so that the weight could swing around it. Then I would draw the broom in and tie the manuscript to the string. When the person to whom I wanted to send it was too far away, we managed it by a series of stages, which of course made things more complicated.

... I did not absorb historical materialism at once, dogmatically. The dialectic method revealed itself to me for the first time not

as abstract definitions but as a living spring which I had found in the historical process as I tried to understand it. [10]

At the end of the second year in prison, a verdict was reached in the case of the South Russian Workers' Union was announced: the four principal defendants received an administrative verdict – a verdict without trial – to be exiled to Eastern Siberia for four years. After the verdict the prisoners were kept in the Moscow transfer prison for six months.

Then for the first time I heard of Lenin, and studied his book on the development of Russian capitalism, which had just appeared, from cover to cover. [11]

During his spell in the Moscow prison Lev married Alexandra Sokolovskaya. They had two daughters in Siberia.

Lev stayed two years in Siberia. There he started a prolific correspondence in *Vostochnoye obozreniye* (*The Eastern Review*), an Irkutsk newspaper, using the pseudonym of Antid Oto. He wrote on public issues and also on literature. [12] He wrote essays on Russian classics: on Andreev, Belinsky, Dobroliubov, Gogol. He dealt with all the revolutionary thinkers: Herzen, Mikhailovsky, and the famous Narodnik author Gleb Uspensky. He wrote about Pushkin and Gorky, on Ibsen, Hauptmann, Nietzsche, de Maupassant, Emile Zola, Arthur Schnitzler and John Ruskin. [13] His catholic interests were astonishing.

In Siberia he gave lectures and wrote leaflets for the newly established Siberian Social Democratic Union. At the second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Party he represented the Siberian Union.

Summer 1901 saw strikes in the factories and big demonstrations in the universities. New Social Democratic organisations mushroomed throughout the country. From 1899 onwards Lenin was arguing again and again that the need was to move away from the fragmented economic struggle in order to build a centralist national political party. These ideas were crucial to establishing *Iskra* in 1900.

Before the first issue of *Iskra* reached Lev in Siberia he wrote an essay widely circulated in mimeographed form which became a source of lively controversy among Social Democrats in Siberia. Parts of this unpublished essay were quoted by Trotsky in an appendix to his Report of the Siberian Delegation to the Second Congress of the RSDRP, in Geneva in 1903. [14] This is especially worth quoting in light of the fact that in 1903 he swung over to denouncing Lenin's centralism:

The starting point of this document is the following: 'We have found ourselves, to use the comparison once more, in the situation of the sorcerers' apprentices who, by repeating complete formulae, aroused an enormous force, and who when it was necessary to dominate it, found themselves completely incapable of it.' There was only one way forward: a common organisation for the whole party, with a central committee at its head.

If one of the local organisations, [the document says], refuses to recognise the full powers of the central committee, the CC will have the strength (NB) and the right not to recognise this organisation. It will cut it off from the revolutionary world by breaking its links with it; it will stop sending it literature and other working material; it will despatch into the field of its activity a team of its own and, having supplied it with all the necessary means for action, declare it to be the local committee. [15]

It is important to quote this as it formulates the idea of party centralism in a way identical to that of Lenin, an idea that was about to become the hallmark of Bolshevism.

## Footnotes

1\*. Dates given in this volume are according to the Julian calendar then operating in Russia; this was twelve days behind the Western

Gregorian calendar in the nineteenth century, and thirteen days behind in the twentieth century.

## Notes

1. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 16.
2. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 72.
3. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 99.
4. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 105.
5. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 106.
6. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 109.
7. Max Eastman, *Leon Trotsky: The Portrait of a Youth* (London 1926), pages 93-4.
8. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 110.
9. Eastman, page 97.
10. Trotsky, *My Life*, pages 121-2.
11. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 123.
12. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 127.
13. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 20, pages 32-40.
14. Trotsky, *Vtoroi Sezd RSDRP: Otchet Sibirskoi Delegatsii*, reprinted in English as *Report of the Siberian Delegation 1903* (London, no date). The RSDRP – the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party – is sometimes referred to by its English initials, RSDLP.
15. Trotsky, *Report of the Siberian Delegation 1903*, page 40.

## 2. Meeting Lenin

AFTER four and a half years of prison and exile Lev longed for a wider field of action than the Siberian colonies. So in summer 1902 he decided to escape. During the great labour movement upsurge that year, Alexandra Sokolovskaya urged him to escape from Siberia and go abroad. She herself could not accompany him or join him later because of her young children, one of whom was only four months old. Lev therefore fled by himself. But the deep affection and political bond between them were to last to the end of their lives. In 1937 Alexandra, now a steadfast opponent of Stalinism, would be arrested and exiled to the far north of Siberia.

Before Lev left Irkutsk his comrades supplied him with a false passport. He had to inscribe the name he would assume hastily, and scribbled that of one of his former gaolers in the Odessa prison – Trotsky. He was then taken to a nearby railway station hidden in a peasant's cart.

He alighted from the train at Samara on the Volga, where *Iskra's* organisation had its Russian headquarters. He was heartily welcomed by Krzhizhanovsky-Kler, a prominent engineer and close friend of Lenin. Trotsky's literary reputation had preceded him, and Krzhizhanovsky-Kler nicknamed him Pero (the Pen) and sent a glowing report on him to *Iskra* headquarters in London. Trotsky was sent to Kharkov, Poltava and Kiev to inspect the groups of Social Democrats. In the meantime he was urged by Lenin to hasten his departure for abroad.

In October 1902 Trotsky arrived in London. Krupskaya remembers:

At about that time we learned from Samara that Bronstein (Trotsky) had arrived there following his escape from Siberia. They said he was a fervent supporter of *Iskra* and produced a very good impression on everybody. 'He is a real young eagle,' wrote the Samara comrades ...

One morning there was a violent knocking at the front door. I knew full well that if the knock was unusual it must be for us, and hurried downstairs to open the door. It was Trotsky, and I led him into our room. Vladimir Ilyich had only just awakened and was still in bed. Leaving them together, I went to see to the cabman and prepare coffee. When I returned I found Vladimir Ilyich still seated on the bed in animated conversation with Trotsky on some rather abstract theme. Both the hearty recommendations of the 'young eagle' and this first conversation made Vladimir Ilyich pay particular attention to the newcomer. He talked with him a great deal and went walks with him.

Vladimir Ilyich questioned him as to his visit to the *Yuzhnyi Rabochy* (*Southern Worker*). He was pleased with the definite manner in which Trotsky formulated the position. He liked the way Trotsky was able immediately to grasp the very substance of the differences between *Yuzhnyi Rabochy* and *Iskra*. [1]

### **Under the Spell of the Veterans**

Krupskaya took Trotsky to a house a few blocks away where Vera Zasulich and Martov lived. It was Zasulich who had, the year before Trotsky's birth, shot at General Trepov, head of the Gendarmerie in Petersburg, in protest against the maltreatment of a political prisoner. She had unwittingly inspired the *Narodnaya Volya* to follow her example. After the jury acquitted her she escaped abroad. Shortly afterwards she became one of the founders of Russian Marxism. To the young Trotsky she was the heroine of a glorious epic. He came to stay under one roof with the living legend of the revolution.

Trotsky writes in his autobiography:

In London, as well as later on in Geneva, I met Zaslulich and Martov much more often than Lenin. Since we lived in the same house in London, and in Geneva usually had our meals in the same restaurants, I was with Martov and Zaslulich several times a day, whereas Lenin led the life of a family man, and every meeting with him, aside from the official meetings, was a small event. The Bohemian habits and tastes which weighed so heavily with Martov were utterly alien to Lenin. He knew that time, be it ever so relative, was the most absolute of gifts. He spent a great deal of time in the library of the British Museum, where he carried on his theoretical studies, and where he usually wrote his newspaper articles. [2]

The fact that Trotsky spent far more time with Zaslulich and Martov than Lenin was probably an element in his taking their side, not Lenin's, in the split in the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1903.

One member of *Iskra's* editorial board was from the first moment very antipathetic towards Trotsky: that was Plekhanov. The two men possessed many similar gifts. Both were brilliant, imaginative writers, both were sharp-witted polemicists, both had a dramatic way of speaking and behaving. But while Trotsky's star was beginning to rise, Plekhanov's was on the decline. Trotsky aptly described Plekhanov's condition:

Plekhanov was already beginning to enter upon a state of decline. His strength was being undermined by the very thing that was giving strength to Lenin – the approach of the revolution. All of Plekhanov's activity took place during the preparatory, theoretical days. He was Mandan propagandist and polemicist-in-chief, but not a revolutionary politician of the proletariat. The nearer the shadow of the revolution crept, the more evident it became that Plekhanov was losing ground. He couldn't help seeing it himself, and that was the cause of his irritability toward the younger men. [3]

On 2 March 1903, four months after Trotsky's arrival, Lenin wrote to Plekhanov:

I am submitting to all members of the Editorial Board a proposal to co-opt 'Pero' as a full member of the Board. (I believe that for co-optation not a majority but a unanimous decision is needed).

We are very much in need of a seventh member both because it would simplify voting (six being an even number) and reinforce the Board.

'Pero' has been writing in every issue for several months now. In general he is working for *Iskra* most energetically, delivering lectures (and with tremendous success), etc.

For our department of topical articles and items he will be not only very useful by quite indispensable.

He is unquestionably a man of more than average ability, convinced, energetic, and promising. And he could do a good deal in the sphere of translation and popular literature ... Possible arguments against: 1) his youth; 2) his early (perhaps) return to Russia; 3) a pen (without quotation marks) with traces of feuilleton style, too pretentious, etc.

... Stylistic shortcomings are not a serious defect. They will be ironed out. At present he accepts 'corrections' in silence (and not too readily). In the Board there will be debates, things will be put to the vote, and the 'instructions' will acquire a more definitive and imperative form. [4]

Martov wrote to Axelrod on 10 March 1903:

Vladimir Ilyich has proposed to us that we admit 'Pero' to the editorial board, with full rights. His literary works reveal indubitable talent, he is quite 'ours' in thought, he has wholly

identified himself with the interests of *Iskra*, and already he wields great influence here thanks to his exceptional oratorical gifts ... He possesses knowledge and works hard to increase it. I endorse Vladimir Ilyich's proposal without reservation. [5]

Axelrod also agreed to Trotsky's join the editorial board of *Iskra*. The only opposition come from Plekhanov.

Lunacharsky relates an anecdote current among the émigrés which, whether true or not, indicated Plekhanov's attitude to Trotsky:

Vera Ivanovna Zasluch, with her usual expansiveness, having met Trotsky, exclaimed in the presence of Plekhanov: 'That young man is undoubtedly a genius'; the story goes that as Plekhanov left the meeting he said to someone: 'I shall never forgive this of Trotsky'. [6]

Lenin became more and more enraged with Plekhanov's opposition to Trotsky's joining the paper's editorial board. As Krupskaya remembers:

Once Vladimir Ilyich returned from an editorial meeting in a terrible rage. 'A damned fine state of affairs,' he said. 'Nobody has enough courage to reply to Plekhanov. Look at Vera Ivanovna! Plekhanov trounces Trotsky, and Vera just says: 'Just like our George. All he does is to shout.' I can't go on like this.' [7]

No sooner had Trotsky arrived in London than Lenin pitted him in debates against venerable Narodnik and anarchist émigrés in Whitechapel. The novice was pleasantly surprised at how easily he beat those veterans.

At that time ... I gave a public lecture in Whitechapel, when I had a passage-at-arms with the patriarch of the Russian émigrés, Tchaikovsky, and with the anarchist Tcherkezov, also a man of advanced years. I was honestly amazed at the infantile arguments with which these worthy elders were trying to crush

Marxism. I returned home, I remember, as if I were walking on air. [8]

After that Trotsky was sent on a lecture tour to Brussels, Liege, some German towns and Paris. The subject of his lectures was the defence of historical materialism against the criticism of the so-called Russian subjective school'. In Paris he met Natalia Sedova and married her. Trotsky's political future was to affect with equal tragedy both Alexandra Sokolovskaya and Natalia Sedova, and the children of both.

### Notes

1. Nadezhda Krupskaya, *Memories of Lenin* (London 1970), pages 59-60.
2. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 146.
3. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 150
4. Vladimir Lenin, *Works* (Moscow), volume 43, pages 110-111.
5. *Pisma P.B. Akselroda i lu.O. Martova* (Berlin 1924), pages 79-80.
6. A.V. Lunacharsky, *Revolutionary Silhouettes* (London 1967), page 59.
7. Krupskaya, page 65.
8. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 145.

## **3. The 1903 Congress**

### **Trotsky and Factional Disputes**

When reading this and the succeeding chapter, the reader should keep in mind the following story that Lenin was fond of quoting. Leo Tolstoy, on seeing a man squatting in the street and gyrating strangely, decided he was looking at a madman. Coming closer, he saw that the man was attending to necessary work – sharpening a knife on a stone. The analogy is with the faction fight inside the RSDRP, the split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, and the continuous squabbling inside the Bolshevik faction itself. These must have looked to an outsider like the gyrations of madmen. In reality, however, they can be decisive to the effectiveness of a revolutionary party's intervention in great historical events. The faction-fighting sharpened the Bolshevik Party, shaped its theory and practice, selected its cadres and steeled them. Alas, in this area, before 1917 Trotsky's ideas and practice proved weak.

Trotsky comes into his own during great historical events. He is at his best as a thinker and actor during the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917. He is brilliant when dealing with the German revolution of 1919-23, the Chinese revolution of 1925-27, the Popular Front in France, the civil war in Spain. His strength also appears when great threats of counter-revolution and reaction face humanity: thus among the best of Trotsky's writings are those of the years, months, weeks and days preceding the victory of Hitler.

Trotsky as an artist of the revolution needed a large canvas and a palette with many rich paints.

Trotsky rose to greatness during the revolution of 1905, when he led masses of workers, led the Petersburg Soviet, and developed his greatest contribution to Marxist theory, the theory of Permanent Revolution. And he was only 26 years old. In the preceding two years he was involved in a faction fight not of his choosing, between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, in which he took the wrong position.

After Rosa Luxemburg's death Lenin quoted about her the old Krylov fable: 'Eagles may at times fly lower than hens. But hens can never rise to the height of eagles.' After listing what he considered her mistakes, Lenin emphasised that Rosa Luxemburg was an eagle. [1] The same judgment could justly be passed on Trotsky. This becomes clear if one contrasts his stand in the factional squabbles in 1903-4 with his soaring to the heights during the 1905 revolution.

It is frustrating, nay, depressing, that in writing the present biography one has to deal – and at length – with the faction fight in the RSDRP, before dealing with the great events of 1905. Unfortunately there is no alternative.

It is not only a question of chronology but also of political honesty. Marx argued that Communists do not lie to the class. If the working class is the subject of history, not its object, then workers have to know the truth, warts and all. Anyhow Trotsky would never have countenanced hypocrisy in his defence. To play down his role in the faction fight in the RSDRP – his opposition to Lenin's irreconcilable split from Menshevism that continued right up to 1917 – would make many of the future events in Trotsky's life inexplicable. The position he took on the nature of the revolutionary party dogged him for years. Above all it blunted his influence in the Russian revolutionary movement, preventing the Bolsheviks paying much attention to his great theoretical contributions prior to 1917.

### **The Beginning of Congress**

Massive efforts were put into the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDRP) in 1903, and much was hoped from it. This was the foundation congress of the party. The former congress of 1898 had been a tiny affair, with only nine delegates, from Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, the journal *Rabochaia Gazeta* and the Jewish socialist organisation the Bund. It had failed to adopt a programme or a paper. Its only achievements were the issue of a manifesto, drafted by Peter Struve (an 'economist' who later became a liberal leader and then a monarchist), the promulgation of the idea of a nationwide party, and the election of a central committee of three. Eight of the nine delegates and two of the three central committee members had been arrested a few days after the end of the conference.

The 1903 Congress, however, took a completely unexpected course. Instead of being a unity congress, it was a congress in which the Russian Marxists split into two separate trends and organisations – the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks.

At the beginning of the Congress things went well for the united leadership of Plekhanov, Lenin, Martov, Axelrod, Zasulich and Potresov. Of the 51 votes, 33, or a clear majority, belonged to adherents of the *Iskra* position. Lenin's careful preparation had helped to make this a certainty. *Iskra's* chief rival, *Rabocheye Delo*, the 'economist' paper, had only three votes, the Jewish Bund had five, and six of the remaining delegates were unaligned. Plekhanov and Lenin called these last 'the swamp', as they sometimes voted with the *Iskra* supporters, sometimes against them. If the 33 *Iskra* supporters stuck together, they could certainly carry the day on every issue.

The first three sessions of the Congress (out of a total of 37) were devoted largely to trivial matters of procedure. The first serious controversy at the congress concerned the Jewish Bund, which demanded autonomy within the party, with the right to elect its own central committee and frame its own policy in matters affecting the Jewish people. It further demanded that the party should recognise the Bund as the sole agency among the Jewish workers. It urged the party to advocate not merely equal rights for Jews, as it had done,

but also the right of Jews to 'cultural autonomy', the right to manage their own cultural affairs and maintain their own schools with teaching in the Yiddish language. Organisationally the Bund was massive compared to the Russian Social Democratic Party. The latter had at most a couple of thousand members while the Bund had more than 20,000.

On behalf of the *Iskra* people, Martov, who had been one of the founders of the Bund, repudiated these demands. He tabled a motion against the Bund; and only Jewish delegates (twelve in number) put their signatures to it. Trotsky was one of the most aggressive speakers against the Bund. He argued that if the party accepted the suggestions of the Bund, it would turn into a loose federation of parties and groups. [2] Trotsky infuriated the delegates of the Bund; they protested vehemently against this speech, and suggested that he deliberately set out to insult the Jews, and appealed to the chairman, Plekhanov, to protect them. When the chairman found Trotsky's remarks unexceptional, the Bundists tabled a motion censuring the chairman. Their position boiled down to an insinuation that Russian party members would not wholeheartedly support Jewish workers.

'The Bund,' Trotsky exclaimed amid a storm of protest, 'is free not to trust the party. But it cannot expect the party to vote no confidence in its own self.' [3] The party as a whole would not remove its right to address Jewish workers without yielding to Jewish separatism. The Bund's demand for 'cultural autonomy' also sprang from separatism. Jews should have the right to have schools in their own language if they so desired, but this should not be part of the national education system. Trotsky moved a motion to this effect, supplementing Martov's general resolution. [4] Both resolutions were carried by an overwhelming majority.

### **Marxism, Jacobinism and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat**

Following the discussion on the Bund, a dispute took place between the *Iskra* people and the 'economists'. The latter's spokesmen,

Martynov and Akimov, upbraided *Iskra* for its dictatorial, 'Jacobin-like' attitude. Trotsky disparaged the 'economists'. He ridiculed the charge of Jacobinism, defended party centralism, stating that the statutes 'represent the organised distrust of the party for all its sections, that is, control over all local, district, national and other organisations.' [5] This speech earned Trotsky the description of 'Lenin's cudgel'. [6] (It was but a short time later that Trotsky used the charge of 'Jacobinism' and 'ultra-centralism' against Lenin! – a charge that he was to repeat for many years.)

Then came the discussion of the party programme, which was the most important item on the agenda. This was introduced by Plekhanov. The main question, about the dictatorship of the proletariat, drew practically solid support from all except the 'economists'; Martynov and Akimov. When the programme was finally adopted, everyone voted for it except Akimov, who abstained.

Akimov attacked the programme for its spirit of party tutelage over the proletariat:

The concepts 'party' and 'proletariat' are set in opposition to each other, the first as an active, causative, collective being, the second as a passive medium on which the party operates. The name of the party is used throughout as subject, in the nominative case, the name of the proletariat as object, in the accusative case. [7]

(A charge of party tutelage over the proletariat became central to Trotsky's criticism of the Bolsheviks after the Second Congress).

How could the endorsement of the dictatorship of the proletariat be reconciled with the demand for a democratic republic? One of the delegates, Posadovsky, asked the Congress whether the party ought to subordinate its future policy to this or that basic democratic principle, as having an absolute value, or 'must all democratic principles be subordinated exclusively to the interests of the party?' Plekhanov gave a clear and decisive answer:

Every democratic principle must be considered not by itself, abstractly, but in relation to that which may be called the fundamental principle of democracy, namely *salus populi suprema lex*. Translated into the language of the revolutionist, this means that the success of the revolution is the highest law. And if the success of the revolution demanded a temporary limitation on the working of this or that democratic principle, then it would be criminal to refrain from such a limitation. As my own personal opinion, I will say that even the principle of universal suffrage must be considered from the point of view of what I have designated the fundamental principle of democracy. It is hypothetically possible that we, the Social Democrats, might speak out against universal suffrage. The bourgeoisie of the Italian republics once deprived persons belonging to the nobility of political rights. The revolutionary proletariat might limit the political rights of the higher classes just as the higher classes once limited *their* political rights. One can judge of the suitability of such measures only on the basis of the rule: *salus revolutiae suprema lex*.

And we must take the same position on the question of the duration of parliaments. If in a burst of revolutionary enthusiasm the people chose a very fine parliament – a kind of *chambre introuvable* – then we would be bound to try to make of it a long parliament; and if the elections turned out unsuccessfully, then we would have to try to disperse it not in two years but if possible in two weeks. [8]

Plekhanov's statement precisely described the actual policies of the Bolsheviks, especially in 1917; he lived bitterly to regret his own words. [1\*]

Martov, who by the time the Congress ended had become Lenin's opponent, did not at this stage disagree with Plekhanov's statement regarding the dictatorship of the proletariat. However his definition was much less extreme. A few weeks later, in a report on the Congress to the League Congress of Russian Social Democrats Abroad, Martov tried to 'defend' Plekhanov by toning down his statement:

These words [Plekhanov's] aroused the indignation of some of the delegates; this could easily have been avoided if Comrade Plekhanov had added that it was of course impossible to imagine so tragic a situation as that of the proletariat, in order to consolidate its victory, should have to trample on such political rights as freedom of the press. (*Plekhanov: 'Merci'*). [9]

Trotsky, who at a later stage in the Congress sided with Martov against Lenin, at this point, in defending the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, missed the harsh reality that the dictatorship has to be directed against the conservative ideas spread among the masses by the old system of society which is still fighting for survival. He rose to the defence of the programme with a paraphrase from the *Communist Manifesto*:

The rule of the working class was inconceivable until the great mass of them were united in desiring it. Then they would be an overwhelming majority. This would not be the dictatorship of a little band of conspirators or a minority party, but of the immense majority in the interests of the immense majority, to prevent counter-revolution. In short, it would represent the victory of true democracy ... The dictatorship of the proletariat will ...be ...the political rule of the organised working class, constituting the majority of the nation. [10]

Later at the congress Trotsky repeated the same idea: 'When the socialists win the majority, then there begins the epoch of the dictatorship of the proletariat.' [11]

This, of course, was not an answer to Akimov's argument, especially for Russia, where the proletariat was a small minority of the population. In this case its dictatorship, while supported by the majority of the proletariat, would still be a dictatorship of a minority.

The programme adopted by the Congress was practically the same as the draft submitted to it. The only differences were the addition of a demand for elected judges, and a few modifications of detail in the demands relating to legislation for the improvement of

working conditions. It is interesting, in the light of what happened after the congress, to note that during the debate on the programme Martynov, one of the 'economist' delegates, delivered a sharp attack on Lenin's pamphlet *What is to be Done?* but got no support at all.

### **Lenin Versus Martov on Party Rules. Trotsky Supports Martov**

It is worth repeating, in the light of later events, that the programme was adopted unanimously, with only one delegate abstaining.

The unity of the *Iskra* supporters appeared less complete by the 16th and 17th sessions of the congress. Several very close votes revealed that a number of the delegates were voting with the Bund or the 'economists' against Lenin and Plekhanov. But these votes were all on small points.

The bombshell of the Congress exploded in the 22nd session, devoted to the party rules. The occasion was the discussion of the draft statutes, which defined membership. Lenin proposed that Article 1 should define a party member as one 'who recognises the party's programme and supports it by material means and by personal participation in one of the party organisations.' Martov proposed an alternative starting off in exactly the same way, but with the final italicised phrase reading 'and by regular personal association under the direction of one of the party organisations.'

Lenin, taking the floor again and again, explained his formulation. He wanted a tightly organised party of revolutionaries:

The party must be only the vanguard, the leader of the vast masses of the working class, the whole (or nearly the whole) of which works 'under the control and direction' of the party organisations, but the whole of which does not and should not belong to a party. [12]

Martov too spoke repeatedly. He was for a broad party. He said:

The more widespread the title of party member the better. We could only rejoice if every striker, every demonstrator, answering for his actions, could proclaim himself a party member. [13]

Axelrod also argued against Lenin's narrow definition of party membership:

Let us take, for example, a professor who regards himself as a Social Democrat and declares himself as such. If we adopt Lenin's formula we shall be throwing overboard a section of those who, even if they cannot be directly admitted to an organisation, are nevertheless party members. [14]

Trotsky took a similar position.

Lenin argued that the party should organise only the vanguard of the proletariat, its most class-conscious element. The party must lead the class. It could not be as broad as the class. He spoke against Trotsky:

He has told us here that if rank after rank of workers were arrested, and all these workers were to declare that they did not belong to our party, our party would be a strange one! Isn't it the other way round? Isn't it Comrade Trotsky's reasoning that is strange? He sees as something sad that which a revolutionary with any experience at all could only rejoice at. If hundreds and thousands of workers who were arrested for taking part in strikes and demonstrations proved not to be members of party organisations, that would only show that our organisations are good, that we are fulfilling our role of keeping a more or less exclusive circle of leaders in secrecy and drawing the widest possible masses into the movement ...

It would be better if ten who do work should not call themselves party members (those who really work don't run after titles!) than that one chatterer should have the right and the opportunity to be a party member ...

... we must not forget that every party member is responsible for the party and that the party is responsible for every one of its members. [15]

Lenin and Trotsky clashed on the issue of the relation between the definition of party membership and the spread of opportunism. Trotsky said:

I do not believe that you can put statutory exorcism on opportunism. I do not give the statutes any sort of mystical interpretation ... Opportunism is produced by many more complex causes than one or another clause in the rules; it is brought about by the relative level of development of bourgeois democracy and the proletariat. [16]

Lenin commented on this statement by Trotsky in his pamphlet *One Step Forward Two Steps Back*. Trotsky, he argued, simply gave a passive description of opportunism instead of wrestling with it:

The point is not that clauses in the rules may produce opportunism, but that with their help a more or a less trenchant weapon against opportunism can be forged. The deeper its causes, the more trenchant should this weapon be. Therefore, to justify a formulation which opens the door to opportunism on the grounds that opportunism has 'deep causes' is tail-ism of the first water. [17]

Plekhanov rallied to Lenin's side:

I have one preconceived idea, but the more I reflect on what has been said, the stronger is my conviction that the truth lies with Lenin ... Intellectuals may hesitate for individualistic reasons to join the party, so much the better, for they are generally opportunists ... For this reason if for no other, the opponents of opportunism should vote for his draft. [18]

The *Iskra* supporters were split and Lenin's proposal was outvoted 28 to 23. Martov's majority included the five Bund delegates and the two 'economists'. These seven gave Martov and his supporters a majority against Lenin sufficient to dominate the congress thereafter.

After this decision regarding Article 1 of the party's statutes, Lenin repeatedly found himself in a minority. In the 23rd to 26th sessions Martov – now constantly opposing Lenin – successfully carried the day on one issue after another. The issues, however, were of quite small significance.

### **Split on the Composition of *Iskra*'s Editorial Board**

Things changed at the 27th session. Lenin regained the majority. In this session the Bund was defeated (by 41 votes to five with five abstentions) in its desire to be the sole organisation of the Jewish workers and to preserve its autonomy in the party. Soon afterwards the five Bund delegates walked out of the congress. Then the two 'economists' also walked out, because the congress decided that the *Iskra* supporters' League of Russian Revolutionary Social Democrats Abroad should be the sole representative of the party abroad. Martov thus lost seven votes at one blow, reducing his support to twenty votes, while Lenin kept his twenty four.

The congress now had to elect the leading bodies of the party. It had already agreed on the central structure. The rules had designated a central committee of three to operate inside Russia and had appointed *Iskra* as the central organ of the party for ideological leadership. Standing over both of them was to be a party council consisting of five members – two appointed by the central committee, two by *Iskra*, and the fifth elected by the congress.

With his majority, Lenin got through his list of candidates for the central committee of three. It was the editorial board of *Iskra* which presented the difficulty since it was generally assumed that the original six would be elected. Four of these – Martov, Potresov, Axelrod and Zasulich – were now opponents of Lenin. Lenin moved an editorial board of only three – Plekhanov, Lenin and Martov. This

question was the one upon which the party split into the Bolsheviks (majority) and the Mensheviks (minority).

Plekhanov, Lenin and Martov were elected editors. Noskov, Krzhizhanovsky and Lengnik, 'Leninists all three', were elected as the central committee. Plekhanov was elected chairman of the party council. The discussion of the membership of the editorial board – whether to re-elect the six existing members, as Martov wished, or the three whom Lenin suggested – went on and on and on, for nine long sessions of the congress. The debate was bitter and acrimonious.

The issue of whether there should be three or six on the editorial board, over which the party split, seemed like a storm in a teacup, a question of personal wrangling too insignificant to split a serious movement. Lenin saw the differences as a conflict between those who accepted the party spirit of appointment of officials on the one hand, and those accustomed to circle attitudes and 'the old boy network', a conflict which had a large personal element. He was not at all sure, at the time, whether this justified a split.

Trotsky, a supporter of the old editorial board of *Iskra*, used such arguments as:

The congress has neither the moral nor the political right to refashion the editorial board ... Let us allow the board to make its own changes in composition, if it finds need for any. This is too delicate a question for the congress to get its hands on. [19]

Lenin's comment was:

Such arguments simply put the whole question on the plane of pity and injured feelings, and were a direct admission of bankruptcy as regards real arguments of principle, real political arguments ... If we adopt this standpoint, which is a philistine and not a party standpoint, we shall at every election have to consider: will not Petrov be offended if Ivanov is elected and not he, will not some member of the organising committee be offended if another member and not he is elected to the central

committee? Where is this going to land us, comrades? If we have gathered here for the purpose of creating a party, and not of indulging in mutual compliments and philistine sentimentality, then we can never agree to such a view. We are about to elect officials, and there can be no talk of lack of confidence in any person not elected: our only consideration should be the interests of the work and a person's suitability for the post to which he is being elected.

He argued against 'the old snug little band who insist on their circle "continuity".' [20]

These people are so accustomed to the bell-jar seclusion of an intimate and snug little circle that they almost fainted as soon as a person spoke up in a free and open arena on his own responsibility ... Intellectualist individualism and the circle mentality had come into conflict with the requirement of open speaking before the party. [21]

When Martov refused to abide by the congress decision regarding the editorial board, announcing 'We are not serfs!', Lenin argued against this 'aristocratic anarchism' and said that they 'must learn to insist that the duties of a party member be fulfilled not only by the rank and file, but by the "people at the top" as well.' [22] Why did Martov and his friends try to deny the actual inefficiency of the old editorial board now removed by the congress? Lenin answers:

The old board of six was so ineffectual that *never once in all its three years* did it meet in full force. That may seem incredible, but it is a fact. *Not one* of the forty-five issues of *Iskra* was made up (in the editorial and technical sense) by anyone but Martov or Lenin. And *never once* was any major theoretical issue raised by anyone but Plekhanov. Axelrod did not work at all (he contributed literally nothing to *Zarya* and only three or four articles to all the forty-five issues of *Iskra*). Zasluch and

Starover [Potresov] only contributed and advised, they never did any actual editorial work. [23]

Explaining his own motives, Lenin stated that, in the forty-five issues of *Iskra*, Martov had contributed 39 articles, Lenin 32, and Plekhanov 24. Zasluch had written only six articles, Axelrod four, and Potresov eight. [24]

The desire to express well-mannered support for the veterans instead of subordinating everything to the needs of the revolution was completely foreign to Lenin. He was far too honest intellectually, too devoted to the cause, to sacrifice the needs of the organisation to his own sentiments. Those who were ready to subordinate the needs of the movement to secondary considerations were later to show themselves to be conciliators, not revolutionaries.

It was far more difficult for Trotsky to be ruthless regarding the veterans. He was some ten years younger than Lenin. Unlike Lenin he had not worked with the veterans over a number of years and become convinced of their weaknesses, nor had he the same confidence in his own contributions. He was still an inexperienced youth – only 23 years of age. As Trotsky remembered years later in his book *On Lenin*:

I came to London like a raw provincial in more senses than one. Not only had I never been abroad, I had never even seen Petersburg! In Moscow, just as in Kiev, I had only been in the transfer prison. [25]

Trotsky Tell in love' with Vera Zasluch, Pavel Axelrod and Lev Deich – the veterans of the movement. (It was only after Zasluch's and Deich's support of the Tsar's war in 1914 and Axelrod's ambivalent attitude towards it that his reverence was shattered.

That Trotsky sided with Martov surprised Lenin. According to Krupskaya Lenin 'least of all thought that Trotsky would waver.' [26]

### **Attitude to the Liberals**

On the last day of the Congress Potresov, supported by Martov, Zasulich, Axelrod and Trotsky moved a resolution on socialist support for the liberals on three conditions. First, that the 'liberal or liberal-democratic trends' should 'clearly and unambiguously declare that in their struggle against the autocratic government they will resolutely side with the Russian Social Democrats'! Secondly that the liberals 'shall not include in the programmes any demands running counter to the interests of the working class or democracy generally, or obscuring their political consciousness'. And thirdly, that they should make universal, equal, secret and direct suffrage the slogan of their struggle. [27] Potresov's resolution was to become a cause of widespread misconceptions in the revolutionary potential of the liberals. It gives a foretaste of Menshevism in 1905 and after.

Lenin commented on this resolution in *One Step Forwards, Two Steps Back*:

... the 'liberal or liberal-democratic trends' shall 'clearly and unambiguously declare that in their struggle against the autocratic government they will resolutely side with the Russian Social Democrats. '...can Comrade Starover [Potresov] possibly think that ... sections of the bourgeoisie ... can "resolutely side with the Social Democrats"? That is absurd, and even if the spokesman of such a trend were to 'declare it clearly and unambiguously' (an absolutely impossible assumption), we, the party of the proletariat, would be obliged not to believe their declarations. To be a liberal and resolutely side with the Social Democrats – the one excludes the other ... [Starover's resolution stating that the liberals] 'shall not include in their programmes any demands running counter to the interests of the working class or democracy generally, or obscuring their political consciousness' ...there never have been, nor can there be, liberal-democratic trends which did not include in their programmes demands running counter to the interests of the working class and obscuring its [the proletariat's] political consciousness. [28]

It is really astonishing that of all people Trotsky, the future author of the theory of permanent revolution, should support Potresov's resolution!

### Footnote

1\*. In the discussion neither Plekhanov nor his opponents distinguished between proletarian democracy and bourgeois democracy – a distinction that is not made until 1917. There are also situations in which the revolution can only be carried forward by Jacobin, undemocratic methods. This becomes a question of life and death (as it was to be in Russia from 1918 onwards), but has inbuilt all sorts of dangers – which one would hope to avoid in a revolution in a more advanced country.

### Notes

1. Lenin, *Works*, volume 33, page 210.
2. *Vtoroi Sezd RSDRP* (Moscow 1959), page 22.
3. *Vtoroi Sezd RSDRP*, pages 71-2.
4. *Vtoroi Sezd RSDRP*, page 198.
5. *Vtoroi Sezd RSDRP*, page 169.
6. Krupskaya, page 70.
7. *Vtoroi Sezd RSDRP*, page 127.
8. *Vtoroi Sezd RSDRP*, page 374.
9. *Protokoly 2-go ocherednogo sezda zagranichnoi ligi russkoi revoliutsionnoi sotsial-demokratii* (Geneva 1904), page 58
10. *Vtoroi Sezd RSDRP*, page 169. 20.
11. *Vtoroi Sezd RSDRP*, page 255. 21.
12. *Vtoroi Sezd RSDRP*, page 276. 22.
13. *Vtoroi Sezd RSDRP*, page 263.
14. *Vtoroi Sezd RSDRP*, page 262.
15. *Vtoroi Sezd RSDRP*, pages 276-7.

16. *Vtoroi Sezd RSDRP*, pages 273-4.
17. Lenin, *Works*, volume 7, pages 273-4.
18. *Vtoroi Sezd RSDRP*, pages 271-2.
19. *Vtoroi Sezd RSDRP*, page 326.
20. Lenin, *Works*, volume 7, page 363.
21. Lenin, *Works*, volume 7, page 286.
22. Lenin, *Works*, volume 7, page 395.
23. Lenin, *Works*, volume 7, page 31.
24. Lenin, *Works*, volume 34, page 195.
25. Trotsky, *On Lenin: Notes towards a biography* (London 1971), page 40.
26. Krupskaya, page 99.
27. *Vtoroi Sezd RSDRP*, page 430.
28. Lenin, *Works*, volume 7, pages 330-1.

## 4. Vigorous assault on Lenin

IN SEPTEMBER 1903 the Menshevik leaders assembled in Geneva to decide their future action. They elected a shadow central committee to carry on the struggle against the Leninist committee. it consisted of Axelrod, Martov, Trotsky, Dan and Potresov. [1] (Except for Trotsky these men were to lead Menshevism to the end.)

The Mensheviks opened an all-out attack on Lenin's 'super centralism'. Martov wrote that a hyper-centralised party was bound to degenerate into a bureaucratic putschist organisation' run by a leader and divorced from the masses. [2] Plekhanov, who broke with Lenin shortly after the Second Congress, went even further. In an article entitled 'Centralism or Bonapartism' he accused Lenin of Bonapartism, his concept of centralism being really that of a Bonaparte. He is 'ready with a light heart to tear away from the party one category of comrades after another as they tear leaf after leaf from an artichoke.' [3] Vera Zasulich went as far as to compare Lenin to Louis XIV. [4]

Trotsky did not lag behind. In fact he outdid Martov, Plekhanov and Zasulich in the harshness of his attack.

### ***Trotsky's Report of the Siberian Delegation***

Almost immediately after the congress Trotsky wrote a report which was a bitter attack on Lenin:

The congress thought that it was doing creative work; it was only destructive, and capriciously destructive. For who could

have supposed that the 'Iskraist' congress would pitilessly crush the editorial board of *Iskra*, that is, of the paper it had just recognised as the central organ of the party? What political astrologer could have foreseen that Comrades Martov and Lenin would intervene in the congress as the leaders of the two enemy factions?

It was like a thunderbolt from the blue. [This was largely] Comrade Lenin's personal responsibility. At the Second Congress of Russian Social Democracy, this man, with all the energy and all the talent typical of him, acted as disorganiser ... Behind Lenin, during the second period of the Congress's work, there was a new compact majority of hard Iskraists', opposed to the soft Iskristis'. We, as delegates of the Siberian Union, were among the soft ones ...we do not think we have blemished our revolutionary record. [5]

The next day, comrades, we buried *Iskra* ... From then on, *Iskra* no longer existed. It could only be referred to in the past tense. [6]

Echoing Martov, Trotsky wrote that Lenin was impelled by a 'yearning for power' (*Wille zur Macht*) which led him to impose upon the party a 'state of siege':

The 'state of siege' on which Lenin insisted with such energy, requires 'full powers'. The practice of organised distrust demands an iron hand. The system of Terror is crowned by a Robespierre. Comrade Lenin reviewed the members of the party in his mind, and reached the conclusion that this iron hand could only be himself. And he was right. The hegemony of social democracy in the struggle for emancipation meant, according to the 'state of siege', the hegemony of Lenin over social democracy. [7] ...

We have suffered a defeat, because fate decreed the victory not of centralism but of ego-centralism. [8]

(Trotsky had forgotten his own words at the congress that the party rules should be 'the organised distrust of the party towards all its sections'.)

Like a modern-day Robespierre, he said:

... Lenin transformed the modest council into an all-powerful Committee of Public Safety, in order to take on himself the role of the Incorruptible. Everything which was in his way had to be swept aside. The perspective of the destruction of the Iskraist' *Montagne* did not stop Comrade Lenin. It was simply a question of establishing, through the intermediary of the council, and without resistance, a 'Republic of Virtue and Terror'. [9]

Like Robespierre, he said, Lenin was preparing the ground for reaction:

A grave danger threatens us at the present time; the inevitable and fast approaching collapse of Leninist 'centralism' ... will ... create disillusionment which may turn out to be fatal, not just for the Robespierres and the islands of centralism, but also for the idea of a single combat organisation in general. It is the 'thermidorians' of socialist opportunism who will then be masters of the situation. [10]

For the first time, Trotsky makes this significant analogy between Lenin and Robespierre, between the Bolsheviks and the Jacobins, to which in years to come and in different circumstances he would return. In a postscript, however, Trotsky added that he did not really intend to compare Lenin to Robespierre; Lenin was 'a caricature of Robespierre'. [11]

### **Trotsky's Estrangement From the Mensheviks**

Shortly after the congress Plekhanov, who had supported Lenin there, changed his mind. He announced that he could not bear to 'fire on his comrades', that 'rather than have a split, it is better to put a bullet in one's brain'. He decided to invite Martov, Axelrod, Zasulich and Potresov to join the editorial board of *Iskra*. Lenin resigned in disgust. The Mensheviks took over *Iskra*. But Plekhanov continued to be very hostile to Trotsky. He demanded of the editorial board that it would never again publish an article by Trotsky. He used as an excuse the fact that Trotsky's attacked him in his *Report of the Siberian Delegation*. Plekhanov threatened to resign, claiming that he found it 'morally repugnant' to be responsible for a journal to which Trotsky contributed.

The Menshevik leadership was in a difficult position. Trotsky had just acted as a leading spokesman for them, while Plekhanov had sided with Lenin. However, it was thanks to Plekhanov that they had taken over *Iskra*. For a time the Menshevik leaders, above all Martov, tried to resist Plekhanov's demand, but they then gave way. And so, in April 1904 Trotsky left the journal. [12]

This estrangement was accompanied by increasing political differences between Trotsky and all the Menshevik leaders. After the congress they showed an increasing inclination, in reaction to Lenin's intransigence, to move rightwards to an alliance with the liberals.

On 8-9 February 1904 war broke out between Russia and Japan. An element in the outbreak was the government's desire to foment war hysteria against revolutionary stirrings. Prime minister Plehve actually said: 'We need a small victorious war to stem the tide of revolution.' [13]

The liberals were very willing to play the Tsarist game. Their immediate reaction was patriotism. Their paper *Osvobozhdenie (Liberation)*, suggested as a slogan: 'Long live the army!' When the Japanese demonstrated their superior fighting ability on both land and sea the liberals' patriotism weakened somewhat, and they became mildly oppositional. This attitude sharpened after the Japanese were victorious at the battle of Liaoyang in July, when it became apparent that the Russians were not going to win the war,

and that the government was clearly in a blind alley. Now the brave leaders of the gentry and the middle classes showed their mettle. *Osvobozhdenie* commented: 'The occupation of Manchuria and the outlet to the sea were economically nonsensical for Russia.' [14] Their attitude towards the war became defeatist. Defeat would weaken the Tsar and make the autocracy amenable to compromise. 'The Japanese,' said a Russian liberal, will not enter the Kremlin, but the Russians will'. [15]

Gaining confidence, the liberals started a campaign, using the local organs of self-government, the Zemstvos, as their platform. There they aired their grievances and planned a national conference of Zemstvo delegates. The conference took place in November, and was followed by banquets of liberal landlords, industrialists, professors, lawyers, doctors, economists, and others. Long-winded speeches were made, plans for constitutional reforms discussed, protests aired. The aim, however, was not to overthrow Tsarism, but to strike a bargain with it.

The Mensheviks were enthusiastic about these banquets. They called on the workers to back the liberals, bolster their courage and avoid extreme action, in case the liberals took fight.

Thus, in November 1904 the editors of *Iskra* sent a letter to all party organisations:

... within the limits of the struggle against absolutism, and particularly in its present phase, our attitude towards the liberal bourgeoisie is defined by the task of imbuing it with more courage and impelling it to join in those demands being put forward by the proletariat led by the Social Democracy. [16]

After making this statement, Axelrod suggested the following campaign tactics: efforts must be made

... to bring the masses into direct contact with the Zemstvo Assembly, to concentrate the demonstration before the actual premises where the Zemstvo assemblymen are in session. Some of the demonstrators penetrate into the session hall, and

at a suitable moment, through the spokesman specially authorised for the purpose, they ask the permission of the assembly to read out a statement on behalf of the workers. If this is not granted, the spokesman enters a loud protest against the refusal of an Assembly which speaks in the name of the people to hear the voice of the people's genuine representatives.

The executive committee must take measures in advance to ensure that the appearance of several thousand workers outside the building where the Zemstvo assemblymen are in session, and of several score or hundred in the building itself, shall not plunge the Zemstvoists into panic fear under the impact of which they might throw themselves under the shameful protection of the police and Cossacks, thus transforming a peaceful demonstration into an ugly fight and brutal battering, distorting its whole meaning. [17]

The spokesman of Menshevism, Martynov, in his pamphlet *Two Dictatorships* (1904), spelled out the reasoning behind this attitude in similar terms:

The coming revolution will be a revolution of the bourgeoisie; and that means that ... it will only, to a greater or lesser extent, secure the rule of all or some of the bourgeois classes ... If this is so, it is clear that the coming revolution can on no account assume political forms against the will of the whole of the bourgeoisie, as the latter will be the master of tomorrow. If so, then to follow the path of simply frightening the majority of the bourgeois elements would mean that the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat could lead to only one result – the restoration of absolutism in its original form.

The revolutionary goal, therefore, lay in 'the more democratic "lower" section of society's compelling the "higher" section to agree to lead the bourgeois revolution to its logical conclusion'. [18]

The Menshevik paper *Iskra* at the time viewed Russian society and the workers' tasks as follows:

When looking at the arena of struggle in Russia, what do we see? Only two powers: Tsarist autocracy and the liberal bourgeoisie, the latter organised and of tremendous specific weight. The working masses are split and can do nothing; as an independent force we do not exist, and therefore our task consists in the support of the second force – the liberal bourgeoisie; we must encourage it, and on no account frighten it by putting forward the independent demands of the proletariat. [19]

### **On Substitutionism**

Astonishingly, until the end of 1904, Trotsky's attitude to the Mensheviks was at best ambivalent. In August 1904 he published a pamphlet of more than a hundred densely printed pages entitled *Our Political Tasks*. It was dedicated to 'my dear teacher, Pavel Borisovich Axelrod' and Trotsky again and again referred to himself as a Menshevik in it. Both this pamphlet and the previous *Report of the Siberian Delegation*, were published under the imprint of the party press, controlled at the time by the Mensheviks. The second pamphlet was even more strident than the first. Trotsky denounces Lenin as 'hideous', 'dissolute', 'demagogic', 'maliciously and morally repugnant', an 'adroit statistician', a 'slovenly attorney', 'maliciously and morally repulsive'. Although at the time Trotsky was in the process of breaking his ties with the Mensheviks, on one question, that of Party structure, he was completely with them.

The pamphlet was to a large extent a polemic against Lenin's *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*. Trotsky accuses Lenin of being heavily involved in rallying the revolutionary intelligentsia into a Marxist orthodoxy while looking down on the workers as passive objects for manipulation. He looks in a new light at the past of

Russian Social Democracy: *Iskra* was not a progressive advance from 'economism'.

The 'economist' period had been one of direct and exclusive struggle for influence over the proletarian masses, a struggle not against other democratic parties, but against the lack of culture of the proletariat itself and against the barbarism of Russian political conditions. The period of *Iskra* was, in its objective political meaning, the period of struggle for influence over the revolutionary intelligentsia. [20]

... The critique of 'economism', and of populist, terrorist and nationalist prejudices, took up the lion's share of *Iskra's* work. *Iskra* ... was not a political but a polemical paper ... In fighting against populism, terrorism and nationalism, *Iskra* showed the intelligentsia the road of struggle for the historic interests of the proletariat. What was directly incumbent upon *Iskra* was not the task of politically delimiting the proletariat, but of clarifying the intelligentsia about the historic interests of this class ...

It did not elaborate the tactical norms of autonomous proletarian politics ...it only showed the revolutionary intelligentsia the need for such autonomous politics. [21]

*Iskra*, he said, manipulated the proletariat:

The proletarian theory of political development cannot substitute for a politically developed proletariat. [22]

Furthermore, Trotsky argues, Lenin's concept of the party was simply a continuation of the old *Iskra* tradition that saw the party as largely 'a technical apparatus for the necessary diffusion of published literature'. Alas,

The apparatus, extremely well adapted to the distribution of revolutionary literature, proved completely unusable in the role of regulator of the living revolutionary energy of the masses. [23]

...Neglect of the tasks of autonomous activity of the proletariat [is] the heritage of the *Iskra* period. [24]

Separated from the workers, Trotsky says, looking down on them, Lenin and his supporters come to conclusions similar to those who argued that workers should be kept out of politics, that politics should be left to the liberals.

The group of 'professional revolutionaries' was not marching at the head of the conscious proletariat, it was acting (in so far as it acted) in the place of the proletariat. [25]

Although it was the antithesis of the 'economists' substitutionism', Trotsky goes on to say, Lenin's position shared with this a similar contempt for the working class. Both assumed that the workers were incapable of political action, were governed by purely immediate needs and a narrow outlook.

The political abdication of the 'economists', like the 'political substitutionism' of the opposites, are [sic] nothing but an attempt by the young Social Democratic Party to 'cheat' history ...

If the 'economists' are disarmed in the face of the enormity of their task, contenting themselves with the humble role of marching at the tail-end of history, the 'politicos' on the other hand, have resolved the problem by trying to transform history into their own tail. [26]

Lenin's aim was the building of an 'orthodox theocracy', which 'thinks for the proletariat, which substitutes itself politically for it.' [27] 'Long live the self-activity of the proletariat! Down with political substitutionism!' wrote Trotsky. [28]

The self-activity of the working class would raise its consciousness to fulfil its historical needs:

Marxism teaches that the interests of the proletariat are determined by the objective conditions of its existence. These interests are so powerful and so inescapable that they finally oblige the proletariat to allow them into the realm of its consciousness, that is, to make the attainment of its objective interests its subjective concern. [29]

Lenin's reliance on political substitutionism, says Trotsky, also affects the internal regime of the party:

In the internal politics of the party these methods lead ... to the party organisation 'substituting' itself for the party, the central committee substituting itself for the party organisation, and finally the dictator substituting himself for the central committee. [30]

What led the 'Iskrist' to substitutionism?

... how is it to be explained that the 'substitutional' method of thought – substituting for the proletariat – practised in the most varied forms ... throughout the whole period of *Iskra*, did not arouse self-criticism in the ranks of the Iskrist' themselves? ... hanging over all *Iskra's* work was the task of fighting for the proletariat, for its principles, for its final goal – in the milieu of the revolutionary intelligentsia. [31]

The answer to substitutionism, he said, is spontaneity:

... the development of bourgeois society leads the proletariat spontaneously to take shape politically; the objective tendencies of this process become clearest in revolutionary, that is Marxist, socialism. [32]

Trotsky completely missed the import of Lenin's *What is to be Done?* He did not grasp the dialectics of the impact of capitalism on working class consciousness.

In Lenin's view, as has been pointed out, capitalism tended to organise the proletariat for the class struggle. However, it also constantly disrupted the unity of the working class, creating centrifugal forces. The daily struggle for immediate economic demands constantly unites sections of the class, but this does not last; quite often, in fact, it prevents the unity of the class as a whole. The dialectical contradiction between the unifying and disruptive tendencies creates the need for a revolutionary party which embraces only a minority, perhaps a very small one, of the working class. Without such an organisation, with its clear ideological demarcation and discipline, the socialists will tail-end the class, with all the variety of views influencing it, with the great majority dominated by the prevailing ideas in society, in other words bourgeois ideas. There is nothing élitist, or substitutionist, in Lenin's view of the revolutionary party.

### **For a Broad Mass Party**

The organisational alternative to Lenin's substitutionism, in Trotsky's eyes, was Axelrod's plan for a 'broadly based party' modelled on the European Social Democratic Parties. The party must include not only the advanced section of the class, but workers with very different levels of consciousness:

... it is clear that our party will always form a series of concentric circles, from the centre outwards, increasing in number but decreasing in level of consciousness. The most conscious and therefore the most revolutionary elements will always be a 'minority' in our party. And this can only be explained by our faith in the fate of the working class as being social revolution, and revolutionary ideas as being those corresponding best to the historical movement of the proletariat. [33]

Compare this with Lenin's formulation:

To argue that we are the party of a class in justification of organisational looseness, in justification of confusing organisation with disorganisation, [is to] forget the distinction between the vanguard and the whole of the masses gravitating towards it, to forget the vanguard's constant duty of raising ever wider sections to its own advanced level, [it] means simply to deceive oneself, to shut one's eyes to the immensity of our tasks, and to narrow down these tasks. [34]

The concept of centralism in *Our Political Tasks* is completely different from what Trotsky argued for at the Second Congress. Now he interpreted centralism to be a system of organisational 'co-ordination' (*soglasovanie*), not really of central leadership: '...the task which we have to carry out at the present decisive moment ... lies in taking all existing elements of organisation and uniting them in systematically centralised work, without dispersal or ...divergence.' [35]

In fighting Lenin's centralism, Trotsky really fought a straw man. He overlooked Lenin's words of 1903, that the party's 'general staff must 'really be backed by the good and conscious will of an army that follows and at the same time directs its general staff.' [36] For Lenin, of course, centralism was a means to overcome sectionalism in the Party and the class, sectionalism being the spontaneous product of capitalism. Capitalism not only unites workers, but also divides them (by locality, industry, sex, race, and so on.)

Trotsky counterposes to Lenin's concept of the party the views of Axelrod:

In the one case we have a party which thinks for the proletariat, which substitutes itself politically for it, and in the other we have a party which politically educates and mobilises the proletariat to exercise rational pressure on the will of all political groups and parties. These two systems give objectively quite different results. [37]

### **Again on Bolshevism and Jacobinism**

At the congress, Trotsky had rejected the charge of Jacobinism when the economists made it against *Iskra*. Now he turned the charge against Lenin. The final chapter of *Our Political Tasks* is entitled 'Jacobinism and Social Democracy'. Trotsky hangs his argument on a quote from *One Step forward, Two Steps Back*: 'A Jacobin who wholly identifies himself with the organisation of the proletariat – a proletariat conscious of its class interest – is a revolutionary Social Democrat. [38]

Trotsky quotes these words of Lenin, and goes on to argue that Lenin did not distinguish between bourgeois revolutionary Jacobins and proletarian Social Democrats. Had Trotsky quoted Lenin's next sentence, his argument would have collapsed. 'A Girondist who sighs after professors and high-school students, who is afraid of the proletariat, and who yearns for the absolute value of democratic demands, is an opportunist'. [39]

Many years later Trotsky poked fun at his 'super wisdom' in arguing against Lenin

... that the French Revolution was a petty bourgeois revolution and ours is a proletarian revolution, that there was no need to return to the past, to the Jacobins, etc. ... There is no need to point out that Lenin had no worse an understanding than we did of the difference between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, between the sans culottes and industrial workers. Nevertheless he was completely right in following the thread of historical continuity from the Jacobins to Bolshevism. [40]

The analogy between the Jacobins and the Girondists on the one hand, and the revolutionary and opportunist wings of international socialism has been used very often. This was not of course to establish an equation between Jacobinism and revolutionary socialism. The analogy aimed to emphasise one thing, and one thing only: that the revolutionary socialists, like the Jacobins, were intransigent, while the opportunists, like the Girondists, took the path of moderation and compromise. Between the proletarian and bourgeois revolutions there are a number of common features. One

has only to read Trotsky's magnificent *History of the Russian Revolution* where again and again he refers to similarities with the French revolution. Many of the methods were similar, although the social content was radically different. It was not Lenin but Trotsky who was often inclined to go too far in using historical analogies, trying to extract from an analogy more than it could give. Lenin never forgot that analogies should be made within the strictest limits of the purposes they fit.

Using the analogy of Lenin and the Jacobins, however, Trotsky continues the assault. The French revolution, because of the limitations of the epoch, could establish only a bourgeois society. Jacobinism – that 'maximum of radicalism of which bourgeois society has been capable' – strove to perpetuate a quasi-egalitarian climax of the revolution which was incompatible with historical development.

The Jacobins were utopians. They set themselves the task of 'founding a republic based on reason and equality'. They wanted an egalitarian republic based on private property; a republic of reason and virtue, in the framework of the exploitation of one class by another. They straddled a gigantic contradiction, and called the blade of the guillotine to their aid.

The Jacobin's dream was undermined by historical development:

History had to halt for the Jacobins to keep power. For every forward movement opposed to each other the various elements supporting them and thus undermined the revolutionary will at the head of which stood the *Montagne*. The Jacobins did not and could not believe that their 'Truth' would gain ground increasingly as time went on. Facts showed that everywhere, from all the crevices of society, come the intriguers, hypocrites, aristocrats and 'moderates'. Those who yesterday were true patriots and real Jacobins today appeared hesitant. To preserve the high point of revolutionary élan by instituting the 'state of siege' and drawing the dividing lines with the guillotine was the

tactic dictated to the Jacobins by their instinct for political preservation ...

The Jacobins' philosophy was extremely idealistic:

They believed in the absolute strength of the Idea, of Truth. 'I know only two parties,' Maximilien Robespierre said in one of his last great speeches, on the 8th *Thermidor*, 'that of good citizens, and that of bad'. Along with absolute faith in the metaphysical idea went total distrust towards real men. Suspicion' was the inevitable method for serving Truth ...

To force reality the Jacobins resorted to terror:

The Jacobins inserted between themselves and moderation only the blade of the guillotine. The logic of the class movement was going against them, and they tried to behead it. It was folly; this was a many-headed hydra, and the heads devoted to the ideals of virtue and truth became increasingly rare. The Jacobins' 'purges' weakened them. The guillotine was only the mechanical instrument of their political suicide, but this suicide was only the fatal way out of a hopeless historical situation. [41]

Lenin's perception of the role of revolutionary Social Democracy, Trotsky argued, was no different from the Jacobins' perception of their role. According to Trotsky, Lenin's Jacobins would not have spared Marx:

There is no doubt that the whole of the international movement of the proletariat would have been accused of moderation before the revolutionary tribunal and Marx's lion-like head would have been the first to fall under the guillotine. [42]

Instead of the dictatorship of the proletariat, he said, what Lenin was striving for was a dictatorship over the proletariat. *Dictatorship Over the Proletariat* is the title of the last section of the final chapter of *Our Political Tasks*. [1\*]

... the dictatorship over the proletariat means not the self-acting of the working class which has taken into its hands the destinies of society, but a 'powerful commanding organisation', ruling over the proletariat, and through it over society, thus securing presumably the transition to socialism. [43]

Trotsky counterposes to Lenin's assumed aspiration to dictatorship over the proletariat a very libertarian' – by which he means idealistic – image of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In this he followed his own description of the proletarian dictatorship at the 1903 Congress. He writes:

The tasks of the new regime will be so complex that they can be solved only through the rivalry of various methods of economic and political reconstruction, by long 'debates', by way of a systematic struggle not only between the socialist and capitalist worlds, but also between many trends inside socialism, trends which will inevitably emerge as soon as the proletarian dictatorship poses tens and hundreds of new unsolved problems. No 'strong authoritative organisation' ... will be able to suppress these trends and controversies ... for it is only too clear that a proletariat capable of exercising its dictatorship over society will not tolerate any dictatorship over itself. [44]

The possibility that 'trends inside socialism' would come to reflect the clash of hostile class interests, and would even lead to a civil war which 'might force the dictatorship of the proletariat to resort to extremely harsh measures, is ignored by Trotsky. Moreover the difficulties facing the dictatorship of the proletariat in a country where the proletariat is a minority of the population – and a small minority at that – are completely overlooked.

There is, however, an important element of truth in Trotsky's writing on substitutionism. The danger of substitutionism is real, and is rooted in the same social, cultural and political conditions that make for the necessity for a revolutionary party and the dictatorship

of the proletariat. As Trotsky himself so clearly explained many years later in the book he was engaged in writing when he was murdered:

Of course, there are dangers of one kind or another in the very process of stringently picking and choosing persons of advanced views and welding them into a tightly centralised organisation. But the roots of such dangers will never be found in the so-called 'principle' of centralism. Rather they should be sought in the lack of homogeneity and the backwardness of the toilers – that is, in the general social conditions which make imperative that very centripetal leadership of the class by its vanguard. [45]

One can avoid substitutionism without falling into the trap of tail-ending, if one leads the working class, relying on its advanced sections, without being so far ahead as to be beyond the horizon of these advanced sections. Lenin's concept of the revolutionary party was of an organisation that leads the workers, not tames or strangles them.

In later years Trotsky was ruthless in his self-criticism of the stand he took in opposition to Lenin on the question of the party. His autobiography offers the following judgment:

My break with Lenin occurred on what might be considered 'moral' or even personal grounds. But this was merely on the surface. At bottom, the separation was of a political nature, and merely expressed itself in the realm of organisational methods. I thought of myself as a centralist, but there is no doubt that at that time I did not fully realise what an intense and imperious centralism the revolutionary party would need to lead millions of people in a war against the old order. [46]

## Footnote

1\*. This subsection has been expurgated from the English edition without any explanation.

### Note

1. *Pisma Akselroda i Martova*, page 1104.
2. Quoted in I Getzler, *Martov: A political biography of a Russian Social Democrat* (Melbourne 1967), page 85.
3. G.V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia*, volume 13 (Petrograd 1923), page 88.
4. See J.L.H. Keep, *The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia* (London 1963), page 141.
5. Trotsky, *Report of the Siberian Delegation*, pages 17-18.
6. Trotsky, *Report of the Siberian Delegation*, page 30.
7. Trotsky, *Report of the Siberian Delegation*, page 28.
8. Trotsky, *Report of the Siberian Delegation*, page 37.
9. Trotsky, *Report of the Siberian Delegation*, page 37.
10. Trotsky, *Report of the Siberian Delegation*, page 38.
11. Trotsky, *Report of the Siberian Delegation*, page 42.
12. *Pisma Akselroda i Martova*, pages 101-4 and 110-11.
13. Quoted in D.J. Dallin, *The Rise of Russia in Asia* (London 1950), page 79.
14. Quoted in Dallin, page 81.
15. Quoted in B. Pares, *A History of Russia* (London 1937), page 428.
16. T. Dan, *The Origins of Bolshevism* (New York 1964), page 297.
17. Quoted in Lenin, *Works*, volume 7, pages 509-10.
18. A. Martynov, *Dve Diktatury* (Geneva 1904), pages 57-8.
19. Quoted in G. Zinoviev, *Istoriia Rossiiskoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii (Bolshevikov)* (Moscow-Petrograd 1923), page 158.
20. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks* (London, no date), page 26.
21. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, pages 28-9.
22. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, page 36.
23. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, page 43.

24. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, page 49.
25. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, page 56.
26. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, pages 75-7.
27. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, pages 51 and 72.
28. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, page 72.
29. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, page 74.
30. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, page 77.
31. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, pages 93-4.
32. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, page 123.
33. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, page 123.
34. Lenin, *One Step Forwards, Two Steps Back*, in *Works*, volume 7, page 261.
35. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, pages 116-7.
36. Lenin, *Works*, volume 7, page 118.
37. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, page 72.
38. Lenin, *Works*, volume 7, page 383.
39. Lenin, *Works*, volume 7, page 383.
40. Trotsky, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition 1926-27* (New York 1980), page 263.
41. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, page 1222-4.
42. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, page 1222-4.
43. Trotsky, *Nashi Politicheskyye Zadachi* (Geneva 1904), page 102.
44. Trotsky, *Nashi Politicheskyye Zadachi*, page 105.
45. Trotsky, *Stalin* (London 1947), page 61.
46. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 162.

## 5. An Explanation of the Break Between Lenin and Trotsky

HOW CAN ONE EXPLAIN why Trotsky persevered for so many years with his disagreement with Lenin? Why was he a conciliator trying to unite the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks? This is particularly surprising in view of his consistent application of Lenin's concept of leadership during 1917, the Civil War and for the rest of his life. We have already referred to his youth at the time of the Second Congress, and the deep impression the veterans – particularly Vera Zasulich and Axelrod – made on him. We have also referred to the impact of personal hostility from Plekhanov – Lenin's ally at the congress. But this cannot explain the years of continuous disagreement with Lenin on the question of the party.

A number of factors were involved.

First, the Bolshevik split from the Mensheviks was not a clear cut and once-for-all affair. The following is a summary of the history of the relationship:

- July-August 1903: official split
- Spring 1905: actual split
- 1906-7: semi-unity
- 1908-9: split
- 1910: semi-unity
- January 1912: final split

Elsewhere I have described Lenin's own hesitations after the Second Congress:

That Lenin himself was not at all clear about the depth of the split and its future significance was clear from his writings at the time. His uncertainty is revealed partly by the fact that the section of his *Collected Works* covering this period contains an unprecedented number of unmailed letters, undelivered statements and articles drafted but not published. Those that did see the light of day indicate that he did not expect a split with the Mensheviks to continue for long, and did not think it was justified to break up the party over 'trilling' issues ...

Six months after the congress he could write:

'the disagreements that divide the two wings at the present time for the most part concern not questions of programme or tactics, but only organisational questions'; 'questions of organisation ... are, of course, less fundamental than questions of tactics, let alone of programme.' [1]

Lenin wavered for months.

It was more than six months [after the Second Congress] before Lenin finally come to the conclusion that the split was justified and necessary. He stopped hesitating and come out firmly with the argument that the split was a reflection of the differences between the proletarian wing and the petty bourgeois intellectualist wing of the party. [2]

Again and again one finds conciliators in the leadership of the Bolshevik faction quite often overwhelming Lenin. The central committee elected at the Second Congress, although all Bolsheviks, opposed Lenin's intransigence towards the Mensheviks. Months of acrimonious correspondence with members of the central committee led Lenin by the summer of 1904 to be to all intents and purposes ousted from the central committee, although formally still a member.

In July 1904 the central committee moved towards a compromise with the Mensheviks. In an announcement published in *Iskra*, it recognised the full authority of the editorial board of the paper made up of five Mensheviks, called on Lenin to rejoin the board, and denounced his agitation for a new, third congress to settle accounts with the Mensheviks. [3]

On the ground also the split was very slow to take place:

In Moscow the formal split did not take place until May 1905. In Siberia and other places the two factions operated within the same organisational structure throughout 1904 and 1905 and continued to do so until the fusion conference held in April- May 1906.

The famous illegal Caucasian printshop, in which Bolshevik sympathies predominated, continued in 1904 to reprint the Menshevik *Iskra* as well as many Menshevik pamphlets. 'Our differences of opinion', writes Yenukidze, 'were absolutely not reflected in our work'. Only after the third Congress of the party, that is, not earlier than the middle of 1905, did the printshop pass into the hands of the Bolshevik Central Committee. [4]

Again in 1910 Lenin began to lose support within the faction, as many leading Bolsheviks supported the call for a united party. The conciliators included several who had been elected as members or candidates of the central committee at the Fifth Congress (1907), notably A.I. Rykov, V.P. Nogin, I.F. Dubrovinsky, S.A. Lozovsky and G.Y. Sokolnikov. Only in January 1912 did Lenin at last triumph over the conciliators. [5]

In many of the Social Democratic organisations in the provinces and workers' centres, including Ekaterinburg, Perm, Tula, Orel, Baku, Kolomna, Yaroslavl, Kiev and Voronezh, the Bolsheviks did not break away from the Mensheviks until the end of May 1917. In others, including Minsk, Tiflis, Nizhni-Novgorod, Omsk, Tomsk, Odessa, Nikolaev, Zlatoust, Kostroma, Sevastopol and Vitebsk, it was June before the split took place. In yet others it was August or

September. Altogether 351 party organisations remained joint Bolshevik-Menshevik until, in many cases, September. In fact in some centres the Bolsheviks separated from the Mensheviks only after the October revolution. [6]

Thus Trotsky did not face a clear choice between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

In addition, the politics of the Mensheviks was not distinctive until after the 1905 revolution. For a long time it was not clear in which direction a majority of the Mensheviks were going to move, as they were largely centrists, vacillating between the revolutionary and reformist trends in the labour movement. So during the 1905 revolution, as we shall see, the Menshevik leadership in Russia, above all Dan and Martynov, came under the influence of Trotsky and the Theory of Permanent Revolution. It needed the period of reaction of 1907-10 for Menshevism to be fully fashioned.

### **Trotsky's Experience of 1905 and Conciliationism**

The experience of the 1905 revolution did not encourage Trotsky to move towards the Bolsheviks. First of all, he himself, without a party organisation, succeeded in having a large influence on events, being the leader of the Petersburg Soviet. As Lunacharsky wrote in his book *Revolutionary Silhouettes*:

I must say that of all the social-democratic leaders of 1905-6 Trotsky undoubtedly showed himself, despite his youth, to be the best prepared. Less than any of them did he bear the stamp of a certain kind of émigré narrowness of outlook which, as I have said, even affected Lenin at that time. Trotsky understood better than all the others what it meant to conduct the political struggle on a broad, national scale. He emerged from the revolution having acquired an enormous degree of popularity, whereas neither Lenin nor Martov had effectively gained any at all. Plekhanov had lost a great deal, thanks to his display of

quasi-Kadet tendencies. Trotsky stood then in the very front rank. [7]

The sectarian and dogmatic attitude of the Petersburg Bolsheviks towards the *Soviets* also did not endear them to Trotsky. To start with, the Petersburg Committee of the Bolsheviks took fight at the emergence of the Soviet, seeing in it an anti-socialist body. Some members wanted it to be boycotted as unnecessary, given the existence of the party, while others advocated that as many Bolsheviks as possible should join and 'explode the Soviet from within' – also on the ground that it was 'unnecessary'. Many years later Trotsky, in a letter of 25 August 1921 to the Bureau of Party History, remembered:

The Petersburg contingent, led by Bogdanov, of the Bolshevik Central Committee, resolutely opposed the creation of an elective non-party workers' organisation. The negative attitude of the Bolshevik summit in Petersburg to the Soviet continued until Comrade Lenin's arrival in Russia. I was present at the meeting of the Bolshevik CC (or Bureau of the CC or Petersburg Bureau of the CC) at which the tactics toward the Soviet were worked out. Bogdanov proposed the following plan: Put before the Soviet, in the name of the Bolshevik faction, the proposal to accept immediately the Social-Democratic programme and the general leadership of the party; [and] if the Soviet decided against it, leave the Soviet ... Bogdanov's 'ultimatum' ('recall') tactics were expressed with perfect clarity even then. All the objections to facing the Soviet with the ultimatum about the programme were judged invalid. The meeting endorsed Bogdanov's plan. A few days later Comrade Anton (Krasikov), in the name of the Bolsheviks, did propose to the Soviet that it accept the party programme and recognise the party's leadership. As far as I remember, the debate was very brief. Khrustalev objected. Krasikov's proposal received hardly any support. But, contrary to Bogdanov's plan, the Bolsheviks did not leave the Soviet. [8]

The fact that the Petersburg Soviet survived for only 50 days, and that it was not put to the test of taking power, failed to highlight the importance of having a party whose members had been hardened in the struggle to lead the Soviet. The proletariat in the 1905 revolution was immature. Its conflict with the bourgeoisie did not have time and space enough to develop far, as in 1917. From February 1917 to June, in the July Days, the Kornilov coup in August, and finally to the October revolution, the differentiation between Bolshevism and Menshevism consistently deepened. In 1905 neither Bolshevism nor Menshevism were sharply demarcated.

### **Trotsky and the Committee-Men**

Trotsky's *Our Political Tasks*, though fundamentally wrong in evaluating Lenin's concept of the party, had an important element of truth. It gave a fairly accurate characterisation of the cast of thought of the 'committee-men' of those days, who had foregone the need to rely on the workers after they found support in the centralist party. I have written elsewhere:

Whereas in the years before the 1905 revolution and during the years of reaction following it, the committee-men had a much higher level of activity and consciousness than even the advanced section of the proletariat, at the time of the revolution itself they lagged behind considerably. [9]

The committee-men did not see the crucial role of the initiative of the masses during the revolution. Instead they exhibited conservative and élitist characteristics, as can be seen from an appeal written by Stalin on the eve of the 1905 revolution, whose climax was: 'Let us stretch out our hands to one another and rally around the party committees. We must not forget for a moment that only the party committees can worthily lead us, only they will light up our road to the "promised land" called the socialist world!' [10] Compare this with the words of Lenin, written on practically the same day in far-off

Geneva: 'Make way for the anger and hatred that have accumulated in your hearts throughout the centuries of exploitation, suffering and grief!'

In 1905 Lenin had to overcome the conservative tendencies of the committee-men. Thus at the Third Congress of the Bolshevik Party in the spring of 1905, Lenin proposed a resolution urging the party to open its gates to workers, who should take a leading role in it. Most of the delegates to the congress were committee-men who were opposed to any move which would tend to weaken their authority over the rank and file. Buttressing themselves with quotations from Lenin's own *What is to be Done?*, they called for 'extreme caution' in admitting workers into the committees and condemned 'playing at democracy'. Lenin's resolution was defeated by twelve votes to nine). [11]

Witnessing the role of the committee-men in 1905, Trotsky was strengthened in his one-sided view of Leninist centralism. As a matter of fact, in subsequent years, the committee-men played a positive, crucial role in the survival of the Bolshevik party. As I wrote elsewhere:

The committee-men were, in a number of ways, people of sterling character. They devoted their lives to the revolutionary movement and put themselves completely at the disposal of the party. They had no life outside the movement. Because they made great sacrifices, they had strong moral authority. They were always in a position to demand sacrifices from rank-and-file workers, because they set such an example themselves. They acquired great self-assurance, through repeatedly having to take on-the-spot decisions under fire. They were on the whole competent, shrewd, energetic and strong-willed; as complete outlaws, they could not otherwise have survived.

The committee-men kept up their unfaltering activity over months and years. One only has to look down the list of delegates at say, the London Fifth Congress (1907) to see a

gallery of people who were the backbone of Bolshevism, who carried on the tradition, the continuity of the party.

During the period of reaction, 1906-10, it was not the committee-men who deserted the party in large numbers; they mostly remained loyal. In the struggle a process of selection of cadres took place, and those who were selected were on the whole the committee-men. Unfortunately, however, self-sacrifice and special abilities do not provide a guarantee against the conservatism of the party machine. Herbert Spencer, the well-known naturalist, wisely observed that every organism is conservative in direct proportion to its perfection. Lenin, who knew how to recruit, train and keep the loyalty of the committee-men, had to oppose their conservatism during the revolution of 1905. [12]

### **Rosa Luxemburg's Opposition to Lenin's Concept of the Party**

Another factor probably weighed heavily with Trotsky in distancing himself from Lenin. All the leaders of the socialist movement outside Russia sided with the Mensheviks. Among these were Karl Kautsky, August Bebel and Rosa Luxemburg. Of especial significance was the stand of Rosa Luxemburg, who was the leader of a party at the time working in Tsarist Poland. To elaborate somewhat on Rosa Luxemburg's position will require a substantial diversion in our story, but because of the great influence of Luxemburg's position on Trotsky, it is unavoidable.

Throughout 1904 Martov, Axelrod, Potresov and Dan solicited their German acquaintances for their views on the Bolshevik-Menshevik dispute. Rosa Luxemburg obliged, producing an article – *Organisational Questions in Russian Social Democracy* – which was published both in *Neue Zeit* and *Iskra*.

Like Trotsky in *Our Political Tasks*, Rosa Luxemburg seized on Lenin's characterisation of Social Democracy as 'Jacobins joined to the proletariat which has become conscious of its class interest':

The fact is that the Social Democracy is not joined to the organisation of the proletariat. It is itself the proletariat. And because of this, Social Democratic centralism ... is the rule of the majority within its own party ...

The tendency is for the directing organs of the socialist party to play a conservative role ... The present tactical policy of the German Social Democracy has won universal esteem because it is supple as well as fair. This is a sign of the fine adaptation of the party ... However, the very perfection of this adaptation is already closing vaster horizons to our party ...

... the only 'subject' which merits today the role of director is the collective 'ego' of the working class. The working class demands the right to make its mistakes and learn in the dialectic of history.

Let us speak plainly. Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee. [13]

Why did Rosa Luxemburg take this position? There are general reasons with which I dealt in my own book on Rosa Luxemburg:

To understand the roots of Rosa Luxemburg's possible underestimation of the role of organisation and possible overestimation of the role of spontaneity, one must look at the situation in which she worked. First of all she had to fight the opportunist leadership of the German Social Democratic Party. This leadership emphasised the factor of organisation out of all proportion, and made little of the spontaneity of the masses. Even where they accepted the possibility of a mass strike, for instance, the reformist leadership reasoned as follows: the conditions in which the mass political strike will be launched and the appropriate time – as, for instance, when the union treasuries were full – would be determined by the party and

trade union leadership alone, and the date fixed by them. It was their task also to determine the aims of the strike, which, according to Bebel, Kautsky, Hilferding, Bernstein and others, were to achieve the franchise or defend parliament. Above all, this precept must remain inviolable: that nothing is done by the workers except by order of the party and its leadership. It was with this idea of the mighty party leadership and the puny masses, that Rosa Luxemburg joined battle. But in doing so she may have bent the stick a little too far.

Another wing of the labour movement with which Rosa Luxemburg had to contend was the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). The PPS was a chauvinistic organisation, its avowed aim the national independence of Poland ... the PPS adopted adventurist activities such as the organisation of terrorist groups and so on. Action was based not on the working class as a whole, but only on the party organisations. Here, too, the social process counted for little, the decision of the leadership for everything. Here, too (in her long struggle against PPS voluntarism) Rosa Luxemburg stressed the factor of spontaneity. [14]

A central argument of Rosa Luxemburg against Lenin was that he transplanted European, German and British (Fabian) models of organisation to Russia.

Besides the general reasons why Rosa Luxemburg adopted a certain position on the organisational question, there was also an immediate, specific reason for her position. J.P. Nettl explains that Rosa Luxemburg 'had a ... score to settle with Lenin on account of the national question'. [15]

'During the Polish negotiations at the second congress, the organisational problem had not been an issue,' writes Nettl. [16] What was crucial was the inclusion of the right of national self-determination in the RSDRP programme. Rosa Luxemburg and her Polish party, the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL), became more and more obsessive with its

unremitting opposition to self-determination; and this was the real cause of Rosa Luxemburg's attack on Lenin.

The July 1903 number of *Iskra* carried an article by Lenin on the national question. He asserted once again the need for the RSDRP to support self-determination for oppressed nations, including the Poles. Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogisches reacted violently. The delegates of the SDKPiL to the 1903 Congress were summarily instructed to tell the Russians forthwith that in view of the *Iskra* article the negotiations

... now hung by a thread ... It is very advisable that you tell the Russians that following this article the moral value of joining the Russians [as a weapon against the PPS] practically disappears and it was only the moral aspect that interested us in the first place. If they are not willing to alter paragraph 7 [of the statutes, which embodied the right to self-determination emphasised in the *Iskra* article] we will have to break off the [intended] affiliation. Tell Zasluch that after the *Iskra* article I [Rosa] am not in the least bit interested in affiliation and that I have advised that no further concessions be made. [17]

In a telegram – probably of 6 August – Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogisches put an ultimatum to the RSDRP: if paragraph 7 were not removed, the Polish party would not participate in the congress. Lenin and the other Russian leaders did not retreat, so on 7 August the Polish delegates left the congress. [18]

This is not to say that the organisational problem was not of significance to Rosa Luxemburg. Her Polish party was a loose group of people, far removed from Lenin's concept of the revolutionary party:

To a large extent each member of the élite acted on his own initiative and in accordance with his own predilections and habits. Orders were rare indeed; apart from exceptional cases ... communication was a matter of dispensing rabbinical shades of opinion. Dzierzynski was horrified at this laxity and saw it as

evidence of deterioration. 'No policy, no direction, no mutual assistance ... everybody has to cope on his own' ... Far from being an accidental lacuna in the party's administration, this haphazard informality was deliberate and jealously guarded. Some of the leaders very much disliked having to deal with money and organisational routine at all; it kept them from their writing. 'I have no wish to concern myself with money matters ... You must approach Wladek [Olszewski], the cashier, in such matters', Marchlewski wrote indignantly to Cezaryna Wojnarowska in 1902. The same applied even more strongly to Rosa Luxemburg. At some stage a formal party decision was reached that she could not concern herself with organisational matters at all, that she should not participate in any of the official conferences or congresses. [19]

Rosa Luxemburg was never a member of the central committee of her party.

This looseness of the Polish party's organisation did not signify inner-party democracy. Whereas in the RSDRP formal means of disagreement as well as a formal procedure for solving those disagreements existed, the Polish 'leaders preferred to express their views informally to each other. Party cohesion was not a matter of discipline or any self-conscious act of will. It was rather the product of a consensus.' [20]

The leaders of the Polish party saw themselves as a 'peer group'. They saw themselves as equal and no one else as equal to quite the same extent – a matter of belief more than knowledge; co-operation, moreover, for certain purposes only; a group that makes no demands on its membership greater than are willingly accepted.' [21]

The informal way of running the Polish party did not mean that the members were even always informed correctly about why certain decisions were taken. Thus Nettl writes about the 1903 negotiations with the RSDRP:

No one bothered to inform the Polish membership officially about the negotiations or why they had failed; even some of the

leaders, particularly Julian Marchlewski and Cezaryna Wojnarowska, had to rely on information from the Russians or gossip from Polish visitors to find out what had happened. There was the blatant discrepancy between formal SDKPiL thinking on organisational problems, allegedly the main purpose of the negotiations in the first place, and Rosa Luxemburg's private assessment that the main purposes of joining had been for moral aid and comfort against the PPS. All the business about organisation now appeared as so much stuff and nonsense. Rosa and Leo Jogisches had apparently decided the issue off their own bat and had laid down fundamental priorities which might indeed be theirs but were not necessarily anyone else's. Some members were unaware of her reasoning and continued to see in the organisational questions the insurmountable obstacle. Others considered even these as an insufficient ground for failing to achieve that unity with the Russians which Rosa herself had preached for so long. [22]

Rosa Luxemburg transferred the traditions of the Polish party into the German Spartakusbund. 'In many ways the personal relationships, attitudes, and ideas about life and work, which evolved in the Spartakusbund, were all directly, if unconsciously, modelled on the SDKPiL ... In the Spartakusbund as in the SDKPiL there was great reluctance to squander effort on organisation.' [23]

Rosa Luxemburg's argument that Lenin's concept of the party violated inner-party democracy did not fit well with the practice of the Polish party. As Nettl explains, Rosa Luxemburg's 'own attitudes in the Polish party hardly bore out such demands for more "democracy"; instead of controlling local organisations, she simply ignored them altogether. [24]

Not until 1917-18 did Rosa Luxemburg change her mind about the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks being united in one party. In the summer of 1911 she wrote:

Despite everything, the unity of the party could still be saved if both sides could be forced to call a conference together.

In August 1911 she reiterated:

The only way to save the unity is to bring about a general conference of people sent from Russia, for the people in Russia all want peace and unity, and they represent the only force that can bring the fighting-cocks abroad to their senses. [25]

In December 1913 Rosa Luxemburg condemned the 'Lenin group' for splitting the RSDLP Duma fraction. She called the Bolsheviks 'a splinter group' created by Lenin. [26] [1\*]

Trotsky did not know the motives behind Rosa Luxemburg's opposition to Lenin's concept of party organisation, but he knew, of course, the fact that Rosa Luxemburg was fighting Lenin's concept of the party, and this played a paramount role in strengthening his own opposition to Lenin on the issue.

As history is made by human beings, Trotsky's personal characteristics must have played some role in his stubborn rejection of Lenin's concept of the party. One very common explanation for Trotsky's stubbornness on this issue is his pride. But this is nonsense. Trotsky was dedicated to the revolution to the extreme. The explanation for Trotsky's 'obstinacy' probably lies, to some extent, in a personal trait that Lenin pointed to in his *Testament* just before his death: 'He is personally perhaps the most capable man in the present CC. But he has displayed extreme self-assurance ...' [28] Trotsky's self-confidence was double-edged. It was his strength. But it could turn into a weakness.

### **In Conclusion**

Marx stated that the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class. At the same time he also stated that the prevailing ideas in every society are the ideas of the ruling class. There is a contradiction between these two statements, not in Marx's head but in social reality. If not for this contradiction, the transition to socialism would be either effortless or impossible. If the first statement were

exclusively correct then the transition to socialism would be effortless. The millions of workers would be united against their tiny ruling class. In the second case socialism would never come because workers would be prisoners of bourgeois ideas.

Because of these contradictions the class struggle – the struggle between workers and capitalists – expresses itself in the struggle between workers and workers. Some workers are more class-conscious and courageous, others are more backward and submissive to the capitalists. The picket line is not aimed to stop capitalists from working; they never work when there is no strike; they won't start working during the strike. Workers on the picket line are fighting workers who are, or 'night become, scabs. If not for this contradiction there would be no need for revolution, civil war, or the dictatorship of the proletariat. If all workers were united in support of socialism there would be no need for revolutionary violence: if all workers spat at the capitalists at the same time they would drown them.

It is precisely in the uneven consciousness of the workers, in the sectionalism that bedevils the unity of the class, that the need for a vanguard party lies, according to Lenin. But the same unevenness in consciousness in the working class breeds also élitism and substitutionism. Trotsky saw this danger one-sidedly, and for some fourteen years refused to accept Lenin's concept of the party, which he wholeheartedly embraced only in 1917.

Prior to 1917 Trotsky's approach to the question of the party made it impossible for him to build any sizeable organisation. Throughout the years 1903-1917 he had around him a group of writers but never an organisation. As chief of an 'anti-faction' faction he was always isolated. Trotsky's stand 'above the factions' meant that active socialists had in practice to choose, and did choose, either the Bolsheviks or the Mensheviks. One can win applause for the preaching of unity, but when the two basic factions are not ready to unite, a bridge cannot be built, and one falls between them.

Trotsky's wrong practice fed his wrong theory of the party. Having no cadres to deal with, he did not have to choose people of advanced views, weld them together into a tightly centralised

organisation, build a machine, and if need be, wrestle with this machine. Party centralism appeared to him only as a burden. The bird could say to itself: 'How much easier it would be to fly if not for the resistance of the air.' How much easier it would be to lead the working class if one were not encumbered with an organisation that suffered from inertia, conservatism, proneness to élitism and substitutionism.

Only in 1917, when the need for a centralised mass revolutionary party became obvious to Trotsky, did he free himself completely from his sweeping rejection of Lenin's concept of the vanguard party. He then clearly understood that one cannot run away from the danger of substitutionism by avoiding building such a party.

The assumption underlying Trotsky's approach to the question of the party in the years before he joined the Bolsheviks was that Lenin's centralism would undermine workers' self-activity. Of course, centralism, if applied wrongly, can undermine rank and file activity. Correctly applied centralism, a correct leadership, is a necessary condition to promote the self-confidence and activity of workers. This needs a leadership that is very far-sighted.

It was a tragedy that Trotsky's 'supra-factional' position so completely undermined the impact of his tremendous theoretical contribution – the theory of the permanent revolution. The Mensheviks rejected the theory because it was a revolutionary theory, and the Bolsheviks closed their ears and eyes to it as its author was a spokesman of Menshevism. As the strength of a chain is its weakest link, Trotsky's position on the party undermined the impact of his magnificent theory of permanent revolution, as we shall presently show.

### **Footnote**

1\*. In 1907 Jogisches decided to transform the Polish party into a centralist organisation. Now it became super-centralist, with very little internal democracy: '...from 1907 to 1911 for all intents and

purposes the SDKPiL was Jogisches ... He could be an extremely harsh and intolerant leader who brooked little opposition; his methods of dealing with opponents, if less polemical than Lenin's, were at least as effective ... Those who disagreed with him found it simpler to resign, and between 1908 and 1911 several prominent members of the SDKPiL Central Committee – the Polish Executive – quietly dropped out. Those who remained were subjected to increasingly rigid discipline and cavalier treatment – the choice was to put up and shut up, or go.' [27]

### Note

1. Lenin, *Works*, volume 7, page 404.
2. Tony Cliff, *Lenin*, volume 1 (Bookmarks, London 1986), pages 120-2.
3. Cliff, *Lenin*, volume 1, pages 128-9.
4. Cliff, *Lenin*, volume 1, pages 130-1.
5. Cliff, *Lenin*, volume 1, pages 308-17.
6. Cliff, *Lenin*, volume 2 (Bookmarks, London 1985), pages 149-50.
7. Lunacharsky, pages 60-1.
8. Preface to D. Sverchkov, *Na zare revoliutsii* (Petrograd 1921), pages 6-7.
9. Cliff, *Lenin*, volume 1, page 170.
10. J.V. Stalin, *Works* (Moscow) volume 1, page 80.
11. Cliff, *Lenin*, volume 1, page 175.
12. Cliff, *Lenin*, volume 1, page 170.
13. Rosa Luxemburg, *Organisational Questions in Russian Social Democracy*, in B.D. Wolfe (editor) *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism?* (Ann Arbor 1961), pages 89, 93 and 107-8.
14. Tony Cliff, *Rosa Luxemburg* (Bookmarks, London 1983), pages 44-5.
15. J.P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, volume 1 (London 1966), pages 285-6.
16. Nettl, volume 1, page 288.

17. Nettl, volume 1, pages 277-8.
18. Nettl, volume 1, pages 277-9.
19. Nettl, volume 1, pages 263-6.
20. Nettl, volume 1, page 267.
21. Nettl, volume 1, pages 267-8.
22. Nettl, volume 1, pages 279-80.
23. Nettl, volume 1, page 268.
24. Nettl, volume 1, page 288.
25. Quoted in Trotsky, *My Life*, page 225.
26. Nettl, volume 2, page 592.
27. Nettl, volume 2, page 570.
28. Lenin, *Works*, volume 36, page 595.

## 6. Trotsky and Parvus: The Inception of the Theory of Permanent Revolution

IN SEPTEMBER 1904 Trotsky announced his break with the Mensheviks, in an *Open letter to the Comrades* which he sent for publication to *Iskra*. The letter was never published. Trotsky was very antagonistic to the Mensheviks' softness towards the liberals during the *zemstvo* campaign in the latter half of 1904. In the autumn of the same year Trotsky went to stay with Alexander Israel Helphand (Parvus) in Munich. Parvus, twelve years older than Trotsky, was also a Russian Jew; he had lived in Germany since the mid-1890s. The meeting of the two had a profound influence on Trotsky's thinking which lasted for the rest of his life.

Parvus had an enormous reputation as a Marxist writer and political thinker at the time. In his autobiography Trotsky writes:

Parvus was unquestionably one of the most important of the Marxists at the turn of the century. He used the Marxian methods skilfully, was possessed of wide vision, and kept a keen eye on everything of importance in world events. This, coupled with his fearless thinking and his virile, muscular style, made him a remarkable writer. His early studies brought me closer to the problems of the social revolution, and, for me, definitely transformed the conquest of power by the proletariat from an astronomical 'final' goal to a practical task for our own day. [1]

Some years later Parvus degenerated politically and personally – becoming an arms merchant, enthusiastic supporter of imperialist

Germany during the war and adviser to Ebert, president of the Weimar Republic. Nonetheless, in 1915, after Parvus had turned social patriotic and Trotsky had broken all ties with him, Trotsky still in all honesty expressed his intellectual debt to Parvus:

The author of these lines considers it a matter of personal honour to render what is due to the man to whom he has been indebted for his ideas and intellectual development more than to any other person of the older generation of European Social Democrats ... Even now, I see less reason than ever to renounce that diagnosis and prognosis, the lion's share of which was contributed by Parvus. [2]

In 1895-96 Parvus wrote a series of articles for *Neue Zeit* about the effectiveness of the political mass strike. He preceded Rosa Luxemburg in developing the idea that the mass strike could and should be an important weapon in the arsenal of the socialist movement. In August 1904 he argued that the general strike was the crucial weapon of workers' offensive.

As early as 1895 Parvus had forecast a war between Russia and Japan and foreseen that out of that war would develop the Russian revolution. Soon after the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war he started a series of articles for *Iskra* under the significant title *War and Revolution* (later reprinted in his book *Rossija i revoliutsiia*) which opened with the prophetic sentence: 'The Russo-Japanese war is the blood-red dawn of coming great events.' [3]

He proceeded to develop the thesis that the period of European stability that had begun in 1871, after the last of the wars for national unification in Europe, had been brought to an end by the outbreak of the war between Russia and Japan. The national state, as well as the private ownership of the means of production, had become fetters on further economic development: 'The capitalist order in Europe has long since been an obstacle to the economic, political and cultural development in Europe.' Competition for raw materials and for overseas markets, rival national economic interests, the insatiable need for continuous industrial expansion – these would

'inevitably lead to a world war.' The key to an unparalleled development of the productive forces was in the hands of the international working class which would abolish private property and the national state at one and the same time.

Parvus wrote that Russia's involvement in imperialist conflict was the outcome of her urge to remain an independent power, and her wish to divert attention from domestic pressure by external conflict. However the war would expose the rottenness of the Tsarist regime and accelerate the process of social disintegration. The Tsarist regime was the most unstable of all European regimes. The upheaval in Russia would have worldwide repercussions: 'The worldwide process of capitalist development leads to a political upheaval in Russia. In turn this will affect political development in all capitalist countries. The Russian revolution will shape the capitalist world, and the Russian proletariat will assume the role of the vanguard of the social revolution.' [4]

### ***Up to the 9th January***

When Trotsky came to stay with Parvus he brought with him a half-finished pamphlet which dealt with the social and political crisis in Russia, in which he argued how hopeless was the prospect of a bourgeois-led revolution in Russia. He argued that the peasant movement could not by itself win, that the showdown with Tsarism demanded an armed insurrection, and that the very next step along that road would be the general strike. The pamphlet was written before Bloody Sunday in Petersburg, when the powerful wave of strikes began. In December 1904 Trotsky finished writing this pamphlet to which, after the events of Bloody Sunday (9 January 1905) he gave the title *Do 9 lanvara (Up to the 9th January)*. Parvus read the manuscript and was very excited by it. He exclaimed:

The events have fully confirmed this analysis. Now, no one can deny that the general strike is the most important means of fighting. The 22nd of January was the first political strike, even if

it was disguised under a priest's cloak. One need add only that revolution in Russia may place a democratic workers' government in power. [5]

*Up to the 9th January* was written in response to the liberals' *zemstvo* campaign, which culminated in November 1904 with a conference calling on the Tsar to reform the government system. The first part of the pamphlet was devoted to showing how cowardly the liberals' pleading was. They shied away from calling for the Constitution, universal suffrage and a republic:

Compromise instead of struggle. Consensus at all costs. Hence the urge ... to organise itself not for the purpose of a struggle against the autocracy, but for the purpose of making itself useful to it. Not to defeat the government, but to entice it to its side, to be worthy of its gratitude and trust ... [6]

After showing the cowardly nature of the bourgeoisie, Trotsky goes on to analyse the revolutionary nature of the proletariat. The power of Trotsky's realistic imagination is shown here at its best. He describes the coming revolution with astonishing clarity. Reading it one has to rub one's eyes, because it appears to have been written after the event. The revolution, he said, would develop from a general strike into an armed insurrection:

Above all it must be established that the main arena of revolutionary events will be the city. No one would venture to deny this. Further, there is no doubt that demonstrations can only turn into a popular revolution in the event that the masses are involved – above all the industrial proletariat ... To tear the workers away from the machines and workbenches, to lead them out of the factory gates on to the streets, to set out for the neighbouring mill, there to proclaim the stopping of work, to attract new masses on to the street, and so, in this fashion, from mill to mill, from factory to factory, growing larger and tearing down the police barriers, attracting passers by with speeches

and appeals, swallowing up groups coming from the opposite direction, filling the streets, taking possession of suitable premises for popular meetings, growing stronger in these places, using them for continuous revolutionary meetings, with an audience that constantly renews itself, bringing order to the movements of the masses, elevating their mood, explaining to them the aim and implications of what is going on – in this way, finally, to turn the town into a revolutionary camp – this is the general aim of the plan of action.

Let us repeat: the starting point, in accordance with the composition of our main revolutionary forces, must be the mills and factories. This means that important street demonstrations, bearing with them the possibility of decisive events, must begin with a mass political strike. [7]

But the urban working class alone will not decide the issue. The peasantry represents ‘a major reserve of potential revolutionary energy’:

The peasants must be called on to assemble at their own meetings on the day of the political strike, to pass a resolution demanding the convocation of the Constituent Assembly the suburban peasants must be summoned to the towns to participate in the street demonstrations of the revolutionary masses, gathered under the banner of the Constituent Assembly. [8]

Last but not least,

It is imperative to conduct the most intense agitation amongst the troops in order that on the day of the strike each soldier sent to put down the ‘rebels’, should know that he is facing the people who are demanding the convocation of the National Constituent Assembly. [9]

The war against Japan made the soldiers ready to absorb revolutionary socialist propaganda:

We have gone through a year of war. Of course it is impossible to show exactly the influence of the passing year on the consciousness of the army. But there can be no doubt that this influence is colossal. One of the main strengths of the military hypnosis consists in actively maintaining the soldiers' faith in their invincibility, power and superiority over the rest of the world. Not a trace of this belief has survived the war ... loss of faith in its invincibility means that the army already has a large degree of doubt in the invincibility of the order which it serves ... The one entails the other ...

Our ships go more slowly. Our guns have a shorter range, our soldiers are illiterate, the NCOs have no compass or map, our soldiers are barefoot, naked and hungry, our Red Cross pilfers. The Commissariat thieves – of course rumours and tidings of this reach the army and are greedily absorbed by it. Every such rumour, just like corrosive acid, wears away the rust of the armour of morale. Years of peaceful propaganda would not have accomplished what each day of war does. As a result only the mechanism of discipline remains ... The less the faith in the autocracy, the more space exists for reliance on the enemies of the autocracy.

This mood must be made use of. It is imperative that the meanings of the actions of the toiling masses, guided by the party, is explained to the soldiers. This meaning must be fixed strongly in their consciousness by new leaflets, and by more new leaflets. The slogan 'Down with the war!' which can unite the army with the revolutionary people, must be used in the widest manner. It is necessary, so that as the decisive day approaches, the officers cannot trust the soldiers ...

The street will do the rest. It will dissolve the last remnants of the barracks hypnosis in the revolutionary enthusiasm of the people. [10]

The picture Trotsky painted of the coming revolution was prophetic. He had very little historical experience to go by. In the French revolution the industrial proletariat played a very small role. In the 1848 revolution the proletariat did not lead the peasantry and did not pull the army to its side. The Paris Commune also did not prefigure the combination of proletariat, peasantry and army that took place in 1905. A restless, constructive imagination, clarity and self-confidence combined in Trotsky's *Up to the 9th January*.

Compare this with the prognosis of Peter Struve, the ex-Marxist and now leader of the liberals who said, two days before Bloody Sunday: 'There is not yet such a thing as a revolutionary people in Russia.' [11] Struve's words remind one of the statement by Witte, the Tsarist finance minister, in 1895: 'Fortunately, Russia does not possess a working class in the same sense as the West does. Consequently we have no labour problem; nor will either of these find in Russia a soil to produce them.' [12]

### **Parvus on the Prospects of Russian Revolution**

No wonder Parvus was impressed with what Trotsky had written; enthusiastically he set to work to write a preface to Trotsky's pamphlet. He begins with an analysis of the weakness of the Russian bourgeoisie and its inability to play a leading role in the revolution. In Tsarist Russia there were no independent provincial towns in which a politically active middle class could establish a power base. In past revolutions,

Political radicalism throughout Western Europe, as everybody knows, depended primarily on the petty bourgeoisie. These were artisans and generally all of that part of the bourgeoisie which was caught up by the industrial development but which at

the same time was superseded by the class of capitalists ... In Russia of the pre-capitalist period cities developed on the Chinese rather than on the European model. These were administrative centres, purely official and bureaucratic in character, devoid of any political significance, while in the economic sense they were trade bazaars for the landlord and peasant milieu of its environs. Their development was still rather inconsiderable, when it was terminated by the capitalist process, which began to establish large cities in its own image, that is, factory towns and centres of world trade ... That which had hindered the development of petty bourgeois democracy come to benefit the class consciousness of the proletariat in Russia – the weak development of the artisan form of production. The proletariat was immediately concentrated in the factories ...

What about the peasantry?

Greater and greater masses of peasants will be drawn into the movement. But all they can do is to aggravate the political anarchy already rampant in the country and thus weaken the government; they cannot become a compact revolutionary army ...

As the revolution develops, more and more of the political work will fall to the proletariat. This will also broaden its political self-awareness and increase its political energy. The Russian proletariat has already built up a revolutionary force that surpasses anything other peoples have achieved during revolutionary uprisings ... When the Russian proletariat finally overthrows autocracy, it will be an army tempered in the revolutionary struggle, firm and determined, always ready to use force to back up its demands.

... In Russia only workers can accomplish a revolutionary insurrection. In Russia the revolutionary provisional government will be a government of the workers' democracy.

... A Social-Democratic provisional government cannot effect a socialist overturn in Russia, but the very process of liquidating autocracy and establishing a democratic republic will provide a favourable soil for its political work ... [13]

It is clear that many of Trotsky's views on international perspectives of capitalism and revolution, on Russian history, on the Tsarist state, on the physiognomy of the Russian bourgeoisie and on the role of the peasantry and the working class were influenced by Parvus. As Trotsky wrote many years later: 'There is no doubt that he [Parvus] exerted considerable influence on my personal development, especially with respect of the social-revolutionary understanding of our epoch.' [14] Trotsky always saw the time he spent in Munich in 1904 as a turning point in his intellectual development.

Parvus's preface to *Up to the 9th January* did not suggest that the working-class revolution would go beyond democratic tasks to carry out the socialist transformation of society. In this it lagged behind the theory of permanent revolution which Trotsky was to develop in the following months. However, at that time, Trotsky himself did not visualise the future Russian revolution going beyond bourgeois democratic tasks. Thus, for instance, in *Our Political Tasks*, written in August 1904, he states:

... we, as communists, as pioneers of the new socialist world, will know how to carry out our revolutionary duty towards the old bourgeois world. We will fight on the barricades. We will conquer for it the freedom which it is impotent to gain without us ...

Only the free Russia of the future, in which we ... will obviously be obliged to play the role of opposition party and not government, will enable the class struggle of the proletariat to develop to its full extent. [15]

In the intellectual partnership of Parvus and Trotsky prior to the revolution of 1905, the elder was well ahead of his junior. But as a

result of the revolution and the development of the theory of permanent revolution following it, the roles were to be reversed.

## Notes

1. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 167.
2. *Nashe Slovo*, 14 February 1915.
3. A.L. Parvus, *Rossia i revoliutsiia* (St Petersburg 1906), page 83.
4. *Iskra*, 1 January 1905.
5. Quoted in Trotsky, *My Life*, page 167.
6. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 2, book 1, page 9.
7. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 2, book 1, pages 50-1.
8. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 2, book 1, page 52.
9. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 2, book 1, page 53.
10. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 2, book 1, pages 47-8.
11. Quoted in Trotsky, *1905* (New York 1972), page 77.
12. Quoted in M.N. Pokrovsky, *A Brief History of Russia*, volume 2 (London 1933), page 38.
13. Parvus, Preface to Trotsky, *Do 9 Ianvara* (Geneva 1905), pages x-xii; quoted in Trotsky, *Stalin*, page 430.
14. Trotsky, *Stalin*, pages 429-30.
15. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks*, pages 5-6 and 70.

## 7. The 1905 Revolution

THE 1905 REVOLUTION was a great test for Trotsky as a leader, organiser, and theoretician, and he passed it with flying colours.

On Sunday 9 January troops shot down thousands of unarmed workers and their families in Petersburg as they tried to make their way to the Tsar's Winter Palace with a petition begging for reforms. 'Bloody Sunday', as it became known, shook the workers into angry storms of mass protest strikes and demonstrations. One employer after another was forced to concede to the workers some of the reforms the Tsar had so haughtily rejected. The armed forces were not untouched by the popular rebellion. The first serious mutiny of the armed forces was that of the battleship Potemkin, where sailors in the Black Sea port of Odessa went over to the side of the workers. The sailors of Kronstadt, the naval fortress near Petersburg, and of Sevastopol on the Black Sea also mutinied. Outbreaks of unrest in the army rose from ten between April and June to 89 in the last six months of the year. [1] Peasants also moved into action: some 2,000 estates were burnt by rebelling peasants. [2]

On 13 October a workers' council (*soviet*) was established in Petersburg.

The revolution of 1905 revealed Trotsky's fantastic ability to lead the masses. It was also during the summer of 1905 that he 'finally formulated [his] conception of the inner forces of Russian society and of the prospects of the Russian revolution' [3] – he developed his theory of permanent revolution.

In this chapter we shall deal with Trotsky's role in the 1905 revolution. In the next we shall deal with the Theory of Permanent Revolution. Naturally the two are dialectically integrated. The

experience of 1905 nourished the theory and the theory guided the experience and practice.

Trotsky's confidence in the proletarian revolution was rock solid throughout his life, and the 1905 revolution was both expected and welcomed. As he wrote a couple of years after the revolution:

We had waited for it; we had never doubted it. For long years it had been for us the only logical conclusion of our 'doctrine' which was mocked by nonentities of every political hue. They did not believe in the revolutionary role of the proletariat; instead, they believed in the force of the *zemtsy's* petitions, in Witte, in Svyatopolk-Mirsky, in jars of dynamite. There was no political prejudice in which they did not believe. Our belief in the proletariat was the only thing they regarded as prejudice. [4]

### **Beginning of the Revolution**

In February 1905 Trotsky returned clandestinely to Russia. He arrived in Kiev, where he stayed for several weeks, using a passport in the name of a retired corporal, Arbuzov. Here he made contact with Leonid Krasin, a member of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party and a 'conciliator' who wanted to overcome the breach between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks in the party. Krasin had at his disposal a large and well-equipped secret printing press somewhere in the Caucasus. Trotsky wrote a number of leaflets for this press. In the spring Krasin helped Trotsky move to Petersburg by supplying him with secret addresses there.

For two months following Bloody Sunday strikes swept from province to province, affecting 122 towns and more than one million workers. [5] The number of workers on strike during January and February 1905 was greater than the total of the ten preceding years. [6]

Under the impact of these events, immediately after he returned to Russia, Trotsky wrote:

The revolution is moving the proletariat into the forefront and giving it hegemony ... Only the proletariat can ensure the victory of the uprising and the triumph of the revolution as a whole. Other groups of the urban population, as well as the peasantry, will play their role in the revolution to the extent that they follow the proletariat, support it, facilitate its work. Neither the peasantry, nor the petty bourgeoisie, nor the intelligentsia will play an independent role in the revolution at all comparable with that of the proletariat.

Consequently, the make-up of the provisional government will depend mainly on the proletariat. This means ... that the development of the revolution is leading the proletariat, and with it our party, toward temporary political supremacy. [7]

In the same issue of *Iskra* Martov argued the opposite. It was the historical mission of the middle classes, he said, to bring about the radical democratisation of Russia:

We have the right to expect that sober political calculation will prompt our bourgeois democracy to act in the same way in which, in the past century, bourgeois democracy acted in Western Europe, under the inspiration of revolutionary romanticism. [8]

On 6 August the Tsar issued a manifesto establishing a consultative Duma. Election to it was not based on universal but on limited suffrage: most of non-European Russia was excluded from representation, the franchise being denied to all the inhabitants of Poland, Siberia, Transcaucasia and Central Asia except for those in the cities of Baku, Warsaw, Lodz, Tashkent, Irkutsk and Tiflis. In all areas to be represented the franchise was restricted to men 25 years of age and over who could fulfil certain property qualifications. Most wage earners and even many urban property owners were excluded. Nor were the elections direct. Instead of equal suffrage, the law assigned representation to each class of voters – peasants,

landlords and city property owners – according to a complex formula that weighed votes heavily against the lower classes. The Tsar reserved to himself the right to prorogue or disband the Duma. This was called the Bulygin Duma.

Pavel Miliukov, leader of the liberal party – the Constitutional Democrats or Cadets, welcomed the Tsar's manifesto, describing it as the crossing of the Rubicon of constitutional government for the nation. This prompted Trotsky, who stood for boycotting the Duma, to write an *Open Letter to Professor P.N. Miliukov*:

In reality, the Rubicon of history is crossed only at the moment when the material resources of government pass from the hands of absolutism into those of the people. But such things, Professor, are never accomplished by a signature on a piece of parchment. Such things come about on the street. They are realised in battle. They are settled by victory in the clash of the people with the armoured forces of reaction.

He recalled how in the French Revolution the great turning points come not with the declarations of constitutional principle but with real shifts of power. He further recalled events in Germany in 1848 – how middle-class liberalism had contented itself with the Prussian king's promise of freedom; how it had helped the autocrat to subdue the revolution; and how, in the end, with the ebb of the revolution, the autocrat had defeated and humiliated liberalism:

History teaches nothing to its professors. The errors and crimes of liberalism are international. You are repeating what your predecessors did in the same situation half a century ago ... You are afraid of breaking with the Duma, because to you this constitutional mirage seems real in the dry and barren desert through which Russian liberalism has been wading not for its first decade ...

You, Professor, you will not tell the people this. But we shall. And if you try to debate with us not at the liberal banquets, but in

front of the masses, we shall show that in our crude, harsh, revolutionary language we can be irrefutably convincing and eloquent. For you, the people's great contest with absolutism is reduced to rural congresses, loyal deputations, constitutional addresses, mandates, consultations and manifestos. If the revolution does not ebb away, the bureaucracy will cling to you as to its bulwark; and if you really try to become its bulwark, the victorious revolution will throw you overboard ... [If, on the other hand, the revolution is defeated, then Tsarism will have no use for liberalism.]

You propose not to be disturbed by the voices from the right and the voices from the left ... The revolution has not yet said its last word. With powerful and broad thrusts it lowers the edge of its knife over the head of absolutism. Let the wiseacres of liberalism beware of putting their hands under the glittering steel blade. Let them beware. [9]

### **The October General Strike and the Emergence of the Petersburg Soviet**

On the May Day demonstration near Petersburg Trotsky's wife, Natalia Sedova, was arrested; an *agent provocateur* planted in the clandestine organisation was also pursuing Trotsky; Trotsky therefore hurriedly left for Finland, which was then part of the Tsarist empire but enjoyed much greater freedom. Here he remained studying and writing until mid-October, when the news came that a general strike had broken out in the capital.

On 9 October, at an extraordinary meeting of the Petersburg delegates' congress of railway personnel, the slogans of the railway strike were formulated and immediately disseminated by telegraph to all lines. They were the following: eight-hour day, civil liberties, amnesty, a Constituent Assembly ...

On 10 October a general political strike was proclaimed in Moscow, Kharkov and Revel; on the eleventh, in Smolensk, Kozlov, Yekaterinoslav and Lodz; on the twelfth in Kursk Byelgorod, Samara, Saratov and Poltava; on the thirteenth, in Petersburg, Orsha, Minsk, Kremenchug and Simferopol; on the fourteenth in Gomel, Kalish, Rostov-on-Don, Tiflis and Irkutsk; on the fifteenth, in Vilna, Odessa and Batum; on the sixteenth in Orenburg; on the seventeenth in Yuriev, Vitebsk and Tomsk. Riga, Libava, Warsaw, Plotsk, Byelostock, Kovna, Dvinsk, Pskov, Poltava, Nikolayev, Mariupol, Kazan, Chenstokhovo, Zlatoust and others also struck. Industrial life, and in many places also commercial life, collapsed everywhere. Schools and universities closed down ...

...the strike showed, wherever it could, that it was not a merely temporary interruption of work, a passive protest made with folded arms. It defended itself and, in its defence, passed to the offensive.

In a number of towns in the south it erected barricades, seized gun shops, armed itself and offered a heroic if not victorious resistance. [10]

On 13 October the Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies was formed. It represented some 200,000 workers, or about half of all the workers in the capital. At its height the Soviet had 562 deputies, of which the majority (351) were metalworkers. [11] The functions of the Soviet rapidly grew beyond those of a strike committee. It became a 'workers' parliament', giving a lead on a great many questions. Trotsky wrote of the Soviet:

Petersburg had the leading voice in the revolution..., the slogans and fighting methods of Petersburg found a mighty revolutionary echo in the country as a whole. The type of organisation adopted in Petersburg, the tone of the Petersburg press, immediately became models for the provinces ...

If, then, we are to recognise the capital on the Neva as the centre of the events of the final months of 1905, in Petersburg itself we must recognise the Council (Soviet) of Workers' Deputies as the cornerstone of all these events ... The Soviet was the axis of all events, every thread ran towards it, every call to action emanated from it. [12]

The Petersburg Soviet popularised the idea beyond the capital, so that *Soviets* were formed everywhere in larger and smaller industrial cities between October and December 1905. All told, between forty and fifty workers' *soviets* were formed. [13]

The day after the Soviet was formed Trotsky was back in the Russian capital. On joining the Soviet he to all intents and purposes became its leader. He was the author of practically all resolutions and declarations issued by the Soviet. He was also the editor of the Soviet mouthpiece *Izvestia*. He was the strategist and tactician of the Soviet. He was also its magnificent orator. As Lunacharsky, himself a notable speaker, put it: 'I regard Trotsky as probably the greatest orator of our age.'

His impressive appearance, his handsome, sweeping gestures, the powerful rhythm of his speech, his loud but never fatiguing voice, the remarkable coherence and literary skill of his phrasing, the richness of imagery, scalding irony, his soaring pathos, his rigid logic, clear as polished steel – those are Trotsky's virtues as a speaker. He can speak in lapidary phrases, or throw off a few unusually well-aimed shafts and he can give a magnificent set-piece political speech of the kind that previously I had only heard from Jaurès. I have seen Trotsky speaking for two and a half to three hours in front of a totally silent, standing audience listening as though spellbound to his monumental political treatise ... His articles and books are, as it were, frozen speech – he was literary in his oratory and an orator in literature. [14]

Besides editing *Izvestia*, Trotsky, together with Parvus, edited a mass circulation daily paper, *Russkaya Gazeta* (*The Russian Gazette*). He also participated in the editing of *Nachalo* (*The Beginning*), the mouthpiece of the Mensheviks. This was a brilliant journal with a circulation of about half a million.

### **The Tsar's October Manifesto**

On 17 October the Tsar, frightened by the general strike, issued a manifesto composed for him by the semi-liberal prime minister, Count Witte, promising a constitution, civil liberties and universal suffrage. Thus the Bulygin Duma was aborted before it was born.

For about three days, it appeared that all of urban Russia was holding jubilee, not just relieved by the turn of events, but irrepressibly elated by them ... City officials made stirring announcements of the news. The text of the manifesto was read in churches, synagogues, and mosques to receptive audiences. Civilians embraced one another as they met and discussed the changed prospects. Crowds cheered soldiers in the streets ...

[15]

Festive crowds filled the streets and read the manifesto with excitement and joy. Little did they know that at the same time the manifesto was issued, another order was issued by the minister of the interior, General Trepov, to the police, and posted on the walls: Spare no bullets!

On the 17th Trotsky moved with a huge and excited crowd towards the university. He recounts:

Everyone was trying to push their way through to the balcony from which the orators were to speak. The balcony, windows, and spire of the university were decorated with red banners. I got inside with difficulty. My turn to speak came third or fourth. The picture which opened before my eyes from the balcony was

extraordinary. The street was packed with people. The students' blue caps and the red banners were bright spots among the hundred-thousand-strong crowd. The silence was complete; everyone wanted to hear the speakers. 'Citizens! Now that we have got the ruling clique with its back to the wall, they promise us freedom. They promise us electoral rights and legislative power. Who promises these things? Nicholas the Second. Does he promise them of his own good will? Or with a pure heart? Nobody could say that for him. He began his reign by congratulating his splendid Fanagoriytsy [a Cossack regiment] on the murder of the workers of Yaroslav, and stepping over corpse after corpse, he arrived at Bloody Sunday, 9 January. It is this tireless hangman on the throne whom we have forced to promise us freedom. What a great triumph!

But do not be too quick to celebrate victory; victory is not yet complete. Is a promise of payment the same thing as real gold? Is the promise of liberty the same as liberty itself? If anyone among you believe in the Tsar's promises, let him say so aloud – we'd all be glad to meet such a rare bird. Look around, citizens, has anything changed since yesterday? Have the gates of our prisons been opened? The Peter and Paul Fortress still dominates the city, doesn't it? Don't you still hear groans and the gnashing of teeth from behind its accursed walls? Have our brothers returned to their homes from the Siberian deserts?

'Amnesty! Amnesty! Amnesty!' comes the shout from below. 'If the government had sincerely decided to make up its quarrel with the people, the first thing it would do would be to proclaim an amnesty. But, citizens, is an amnesty all? Today they will let out hundreds of political fighters, tomorrow they will seize thousands of others. Isn't the order to spare no bullets hanging by the side of the manifesto about our freedoms? Didn't they use their sabres this morning on people peacefully listening to a speaker? Isn't Trepov, the hangman, master of Petersburg?'

‘Down with Trepov!’ came the answering shout.

‘Yes, down with Trepov! but is he the only one? Are there no villains in the bureaucracy’s reserves to take his place? Trepov rules over us with the help of the army. The guardsmen covered in the blood of 9 January are his support and his strength. It is they whom he orders not to spare bullets against your breasts and heads. We cannot, we do not want to, we must not live at gunpoint. Citizens! Let our demand be the withdrawal of troops from Petersburg! Let not a single soldier remain within a radius of 25 versts from the capital! The free citizens themselves will maintain order. No one shall suffer from violence and arbitrary rule. The people will take everyone under their protection.’

‘Out with the troops! All troops to leave Petersburg!’ ‘Citizens! Our strength is in ourselves. With sword in hand we must stand guard over our freedom. As for the Tsar’s manifesto, look, it’s only a scrap of paper. Here it is before you – here it is crumpled in my fist. Today they have issued it, tomorrow they will take it away and tear it into pieces, just as I am now tearing up this paper freedom before your eyes!’ [16]

Thus Petersburg first heard the orator of the revolution.

On 18 October the Soviet adopted a resolution stating: ‘The struggling revolutionary proletariat cannot lay down its arms until the political rights of the Russian people are put on a solid footing, until a democratic republic is established.’ The Soviet demanded that the government remove the military and police from the city, to grant full amnesty to all political prisoners, to raise the state of siege everywhere in Russia, and finally, to guarantee a Constituent Assembly on the basis of a general, equal, direct and secret ballot. [17] In the Soviet paper *Izvestia* next day Trotsky wrote an editorial:

And so we have been given a constitution. We have been given freedom of assembly, but our assemblies are encircled by troops. We have been given freedom of speech, but censorship

remains inviolate. We have been given freedom of study, but the universities are occupied by troops. We have been given personal immunity, but the prisons are filled to overflowing with prisoners. We have been given Witte, but we still have Trepov. We have been given a constitution, but the autocracy remains. Everything has been given, and nothing has been given. [18]

On the 18th hundreds of thousands of people gathered by the Kazan Cathedral. The demonstration demanded amnesty. When it was clear that a strong army ambush was waiting for the demonstration, that all the places of imprisonment had been occupied by troops, that bloodshed was therefore inevitable, the leaders of the Soviet dispersed the crowd. [19]

On 19 October, two days after the Tsar issued his manifesto, Trotsky urged the Soviet to call off the general strike, as the strike started crumbling:

... the provinces, which had come out before the capital, now started going back to work. The Moscow strike ended on the nineteenth. The Petersburg Soviet decided to end the strike on 21 October at noon. The last to leave the field, it organised an astonishing demonstration of proletarian discipline by calling hundreds of thousands of workers back to their lathes at the same hour. [20]

### **Pogroms**

On 21 October the Soviet announced that a solemn funeral of workers who had been killed during the strike would take place on the 23rd. On the 22nd it was learned that General Trepov was preparing the gendarmerie to suppress the demonstration, and that the Okhrana, the Tsar's secret police, was scheming a pogrom against Jews. As a matter of fact, pogroms had already taken place in many towns. Trotsky moved the following resolution in the Soviet:

The pogroms against Jews and the persecution of workers and intellectuals which the hordes of the Black Hundred, with the cooperation of the uniformed and secret police, have caused to happen all over Russia represent a new attack on the social groups fighting for freedom in Russia. Therefore the Soviet of Workers' Deputies firmly resolves that the Russian proletariat will fight with all the available resources every attempt by the Black Hundreds, and those encouraged by them to take to the path of violence, murder and robbery, to stop its great and terrible march towards freedom. [21]

Trotsky had to teach the Soviet and the workers how to retreat. On the night of 22 October Trotsky pleaded with the Soviet to cancel the funeral, putting forward the following resolution:

The Soviet decides: the proletariat of Petersburg will give the Tsarist government the last battle not on a day chosen by Trepov, but when this suits the armed and organised proletariat. Therefore the Soviet of Deputies resolves to replace the usual funeral procession with impressive meetings in all localities in honour of the victims. [22]

This, however, did not stop a wave of pogroms spreading throughout the country. Trotsky wrote:

A hundred of Russia's towns and townlets were transformed into hells. A veil of smoke was drawn across the sun. Fires devoured entire streets with their houses and inhabitants. This was the old order's revenge for its humiliation.

It recruited its fighting battalions everywhere, from every alley, every slum. Here was the petty shopkeeper and the beggar, the publican and his perennial clients, the janitor and the police spy, the professional thief and the amateur housebreaker, the small artisan and the brothel doorkeeper, the hungry, dumb *muzhik* [peasant] and yesterday's villager deafened by the roar of the

machine. Embittered poverty, hopeless ignorance, and debauched corruption placed themselves under the orders of privileged self-interest and ruling-class anarchy.

These people had acquired their first experience of mass street actions during the so-called 'patriotic' demonstrations at the beginning of the Russo-Japanese war. It was then that their basic props came to be known: the Tsar's portrait, a bottle of vodka, a tricolor flag. Since that time, the planned organisation of society's rejects had been developed on a colossal scale. Whereas the mass of pogromists (if 'mass' is the right word) remained more or less haphazard, the nucleus was always disciplined and organised in para-military style, receiving its slogans and its watchwords from above and deciding the time and scope of every murderous operation. Komissarov, an official of the police department, said: 'It is possible to arrange any kind of pogrom, involving ten people if you like or 10,000 if you like' ...

During the black October bacchanalia, compared with which St Bartholomew's night looks like the most innocent piece of theatre, 3,500 to 4,000 people were killed and as many as 10,000 maimed in 100 towns. [23]

At Tomsk more than a thousand people were locked in a theatre and burnt alive in the presence of the governor and local bishop. [24]

In a number of towns workers organised armed detachments which actively resisted the thugs. Most effective was the armed workers' resistance in Petersburg. Here no pogrom took place:

The workers made active preparations to defend their city. In certain cases whole plants undertook to go out into the streets at any threat of danger. The gun shops, ignoring all police restrictions, carried on a feverish trade in Brownings. But revolvers cost a great deal and the broad masses cannot afford them; the revolutionary parties and the Soviet had difficulty in

arming their fighting detachments. Meanwhile rumours of a pogrom were growing. All plants and workshops having any access to iron or steel began, on their own initiative, to manufacture side-arms. Several thousand hammers were forging daggers, pikes, wire whips and knuckledusters. In the evening, at a meeting of the Soviet, one deputy after another mounted the rostrum, raising their weapons high above their heads and transmitting their electors' solemn undertaking to suppress the pogrom as soon as it flared up. Their demonstration alone was bound to paralyse all initiative among rank-and-file pogromists. But the workers did not stop there. In the factory areas, beyond the Nevsky Gate, they organised a real militia with regular night watches. In addition to this they ensured special protection of the buildings of the revolutionary press, a necessary step in those anxious days when the journalist wrote and the typesetter worked with a revolver in his pocket. [25]

### **Soviet Conquers Press Freedom**

The mass of the workers exercised new freedoms in this period, often called 'freedom days.' On 19 October the Petersburg Soviet proclaimed *de facto* freedom of the press:

The Soviet of Deputies resolves that only those newspapers may be published whose editors ignore the censorship committee, refuse to submit their issues for censorship, and generally act in the same way as the Soviet in publishing its own newspaper. For this reason typesetters and other workers of the press will work only after editors have declared their readiness to put the freedom of the press into practice ...

Newspapers which fail to accept the present resolution will be confiscated from their sellers, and any workers who do not accept the decision of the Soviet of Deputies will be boycotted.

This resolution, extended a few days later to all journals, brochures and books, became the new press law. [26]

From October on, the mass of rank-and-file typesetters were drawn into the work of publishing illegal literature. Conspiratorial methods within the printshops disappeared, almost entirely. The workers' pressure on the publishers increased at the same time. The typesetters insisted on newspapers being published in disregard of the conditions of censorship, threatening otherwise to withhold their services. [27]

### **The November General Strike**

On 26 October a mutiny broke out in Kronstadt. Two days later martial law was declared in Kronstadt and the mutiny was crushed. The best of the soldiers and sailors were threatened with execution. At the same time the government declared a state of siege in Poland. On 1 November the Soviet organised a solemn reception for the 'delegates of repressed Poland'. Trotsky warmly welcomed the delegates, proclaimed Poland's right to determine her own fate, and moved the following resolution:

The Soviet of Workers' Deputies calls upon the revolutionary proletariat of Petersburg to manifest its fraternal solidarity with the revolutionary soldiers of Kronstadt and the revolutionary workers of Poland by means of a political general strike, which has already shown its formidable power, and by means of mass protest meetings.

Tomorrow, 2 November, at 12:00 noon, the workers of Petersburg will stop work under the following slogans: Down with courts-martial! Down with the death penalty! Down with martial law in Poland and throughout Russia! ...

All large plants and factories represented on the Soviet were on strike before 12:00 noon on the second. Many medium- sized and small industrial undertakings which had not hitherto participated in political struggle now joined the strike, elected deputies and sent them to the Soviet. The regional committee of the Petersburg railway centre adopted the Soviet's decision and all railways with the exception of the Finland railway ceased to operate. The absolute number of working-class strikers involved in the November strike exceeded not only that of the January strike but also that of the October strike. [28]

Count Witte hoped to pacify the proletariat by sending the following telegram to the Petersburg Soviet:

Brother workers, go back to work, abandon sedition, think of your wives and children. Do not heed bad advice. The Tsar has instructed us to pay special attention to the workers' problems. For this purpose His Imperial Majesty has set up a Ministry of Trade and Industry, which is to establish just relations between workers and employers. Give us time and everything possible will be done for you. Listen to the advice of a man who is well disposed towards you and wishes you well. Count Witte. [29]

The Soviet made this telegram public at its meeting of 3 November. In reply to it Trotsky drafted the following statement on behalf of the Soviet:

The Soviet of Workers' Deputies, having taken note of Count Witte's telegram to his 'brother-workers', wishes first of all to express its extreme surprise at the Tsar's favorite's extraordinary familiarity in permitting himself to address the workers of Petersburg as his 'brothers'. There exists no family kinship whatsoever between the proletarians and Count Witte.

On the substance of the matter, the Soviet declares:

1. Count Witte calls upon us to think of our wives and children. In reply, the Soviet of Workers' Deputies calls upon all workers to count how many widows and orphans have been added to the ranks of the working class since the day Count Witte assumed state power.

2. Count Witte draws attention to the Tsar's gracious attention to the working people. The Soviet of Workers' Deputies reminds the Petersburg proletariat of Bloody Sunday 9 January.

3. Count Witte asks for 'time' and promises to do 'everything possible' for the workers. The Soviet of Workers' Deputies knows that Witte has already found time to hand Poland over to the military hangmen, and the Soviet of Workers' Deputies does not doubt that Count Witte will do everything possible to strangle the revolutionary proletariat.

4. Count Witte calls himself a man who is well-disposed towards us and wishes us well. The Soviet of Workers' Deputies declares that it has no need of favours from the Tsar's favorites. It demands a people's government on the basis of universal, equal, direct, and secret franchise. [30]

The strike called by the Soviet was confined to the Petersburg area, and even here it was not total. So on 4 November, at an executive committee meeting of the Soviet, Trotsky moved a resolution to call off the strike, which passed by nine votes to six. However when the motion was put to the Soviet as a whole, it was rejected overwhelmingly – by 400 votes to four. [31] Anxious about the outcome, the next day Trotsky, using his massive power of persuasion, managed to convince the Soviet of the necessity to call off the strike.

Immediately afterwards the government announced that the sailors and soldiers of Kronstadt would be tried by ordinary courts, not military courts-martial, so the Soviet could withdraw, if not with victory, at least with honour. It had to withdraw, as strikers in the

provinces were growing weary, and Trotsky believed it was always necessary to tell workers the truth.

A government telegram stating that the Kronstadt sailors are not to be judged by court-martial but by a military district court has just been made public.

The telegram is nothing but a demonstration of the weakness of the Tsarist government, nothing but a demonstration of our strength. Once more we can congratulate the Petersburg proletariat on a tremendous moral victory. But let us say straight out: even if this government telegram had not appeared, we should still have had to call upon the workers of Petersburg to stop the strike. Today's news shows that the political manifestation all over Russia is on the wane. Our strike, real as it is, is in the nature of a demonstration. Only from this viewpoint can we judge its success or failure. [32]

The struggle needed to rise to a much higher stage, but the proletariat was not yet ready for it. From strike demonstrations, Trotsky argued, we have to move to the insurrection:

A decisive and merciless struggle lies ahead. Let us call off the strike now, let us be satisfied with its tremendous moral victory ... We must immediately proceed to organise and arm the workers for battle. You must form 'fighting tens' with elected leaders at every plant, 'hundreds' with other leaders and a commander over the 'hundreds'. You must develop discipline in these cells to such a high point that at any given moment the entire plant will march forward at the first call ... The Soviet by an overwhelming majority of votes adopted the decision to call off the strike on Monday, 7 November, at 12:00 noon. Printed posters of the Soviet's decision were distributed in the plants and factories and posted in the city. On the appointed day, at the appointed hour, the strike ended with the same unity with which it had begun. It had lasted 120 hours. [33]

## The Struggle for the Eight-Hour Day

There is no Chinese Wall between partial struggle for economic reforms and political struggle for revolution. So it was that the two general strikes of October and November encouraged workers to fight for economic demands. Already it was often the case during great strikes during the great strikes that when work was resumed, the workers refused to work under the old conditions.

During the October general strike the employers did not take measures against the strikers. As a matter of fact, a number of industrialists allowed workers to hold meetings in factories, paid full or partial wages on strike days, and did not dismiss a single worker because of the strike. [34] The situation was different in the next confrontation:

On 26 October delegates from one of the Petersburg districts decided, without the knowledge of the Soviet, to introduce the eight-hour working day at their factories by revolutionary means. On the 27th the delegates' proposal was unanimously adopted at several workers' meetings. At the Alexandrovsky mechanical engineering works the question was decided by secret ballot to avoid pressure. The results were 1,668 for, 14 against. As of the 28th, several major metalworking plants began to work the eight-hour day. An identical movement flared up simultaneously at the other end of Petersburg ... The *Soviets* adopted a decision of enormous importance: it called on all factories and plants to introduce the eight-hour working day by takeover means on their own initiative. [35]

This was a challenge not to Tsarism but to the capitalists, and they reacted accordingly. Private employers as well as the state-employer carried out a universal lockout, forcing the workers to resume work under the old conditions; 19,000 workers were summarily fired. [36]

Again Trotsky had to lead an organised, disciplined retreat. He wrote:

The proletariat was up against the wall. A retreat became unavoidable. But the working masses persisted in their claim, refusing even to hear of a return to work under the old conditions.

On 6 November the Soviet adopted a compromise solution by declaring that the claim was no longer universal and calling for a continuance of the struggle only in those enterprises where there was some hope of success. The solution was clearly an unsatisfactory one because it failed to provide a clear-cut slogan and so threatened to break up the movement into a series of dissociated struggles. In the meantime the situation continued to deteriorate ...

Drastic steps were required, and on 12 November the Soviet decided to sound the retreat. This was the most dramatic of all the meetings of the workers' parliament. The vote was divided. Two leading metalworking plants insisted on continuing the struggle. They were supported by representatives of several textile, glassmaking, and tobacco factories. The Putilov works were definitely against [continuing the strike] ... After a debate lasting four hours, the Soviet by an overwhelming majority adopted a resolution to retreat.

Defending the resolution to drop the campaign in the Soviet, the rapporteur of the Executive Committee [Trotsky] summed up the campaign in the following words: 'We may not have won the eight-hour day for the masses, but we have certainly won the masses for the eight-hour day. Henceforth the war-cry: Eight hours and a gun! shall live in the heart of every Petersburg worker'. [37]

### **Impact on the Peasantry**

The decisive events of the revolution took place in the towns, and above all in Petersburg. But they had a strong echo in the countryside, as Trotsky describes:

... as a revolutionary background to the towns, which were seething like cauldrons, came the flames of peasant risings in the countryside. At the end of November and the beginning of December agrarian disorders spread to a large number of rural areas: in the centre near Moscow, on the Volga, on the Don, and in the Kingdom of Poland there were incessant peasants' strikes, wreckings of state-owned liquor shops, arson on country estates, seizures of property and land. The whole of Kovno province was in the grip of the Lithuanian peasants' rising. Messages of ever-increasing alarm arrived from Lifland. Landowners were fleeing from their estates, provincial administrators were abandoning their posts. [38]

One historian writes:

In late October and November, agrarian disorders [were widespread] ... turbulence was growing in Congress Poland, while it continued to rage without let-up in the Baltic provinces and in Georgia. But the most rebellious areas were in European Russia, specifically in nineteen provinces located in the south-central part. In this area, more than 50 per cent of the districts experienced waves of illegal agrarian acts ranging from the customary cutting of timber to the burning of manor houses and murder of landlords. In seven ... provinces – Voronezh, Kursk, Poltava, Chernigov, Saratov, Tambov, and Penza – the unsettled state approached full-scale revolt. The names of many leading families were included in the list of those whose properties were burnt or overrun and looted: Kasatkin-Rostovsky, Kochubei, Orlov-Davydov, Apraxin, Vorontsov-Dashkov, Volkonsky, Katkov, Shcherbatov, Stolypin, Shuvalov, Leichtenberg, Shakhovskoi, Petrovo-Solovovo, Woeikov, Panin, Rodzianko, and Musin-Pushkin. As the cry indicating the peasants' flaming retribution,

'The red cock is crowing!' was relayed from estate to estate, the governors bombarded Witte with demands for additional troops to deal with the situation. [39]

Trotsky exhibited unparalleled brilliance when he appealed to the peasantry. In a proclamation to the peasants which Krassin published under the signature of the Bolshevik Central Committee, Trotsky used simple language with refrains that were suitable to be read aloud, as very few of the peasants were literate. He related to the peasants the January massacre in Petersburg. He described how the workers marched 'peacefully and calmly' to the Tsar's palace, carrying the Tsar's picture, icons and Church banners.

What did the Tsar do? How did he answer the toilers of St Petersburg?

Hearken, hearken peasants ...

This is the way the Tsar talked with his people ...

All the troops of Petersburg were raised to their feet ... Thus the Russian Tsar girded himself for the talk with his subjects ...

200,000 workers moved to the palace.

They were dressed in their Sunday best, the grey and old ones and the young; the women went along with their husbands. Fathers and mothers led their little children by their hands. Thus the people went to their Tsar.

Hearken, hearken peasants!

Let every word engrave itself on your hearts ...

All the streets and squares, where the peaceful workers were to march, were occupied by troops.

‘Let us through to the Tsar!’ the workers begged.

The old ones fell on their knees.

The women begged and the children begged.

‘Let us through to the Tsar!’

And then it happened!

The guns went off with a thunder. The snow reddened with workers’ blood ...

Tell all and sundry in what way the Tsar has dealt with the toilers of St Petersburg! ...

Remember, Russian peasants, how every Russian Tsar has repeated with pride: ‘In my country, I am the first courtier and the first landlord’ ...

Russian Tsars have made the peasants into an Estate of serfs; they have made of them, like of dogs, presents to their faithful servants ...

Peasants, at your meetings, tell the soldiers, the people’s sons who live on the people’s money, that they dare not shoot at the people.

Thus, in plain words, without weakening for a moment his grasp on the *muzhik’s* imagination, Trotsky explained the end his party was pursuing, and the means it would employ; and he translated the alien term ‘revolution’ into the peasants’ idiom:

Peasants, let this fire burst all over Russia at one and the same time, and no force will put it out. Such a nation-wide fire is called

revolution. [40]

Trotsky ends his call to the peasants with the following words:

Rise up, peasants! It is time! The urban workers call you to battle! The Tsarist government holds its troops in readiness to crush the awakened people. But where the whole of the Russian peasantry rises up and unites with the urban workers, then the Tsarist troops will not be equal to the people's revolution. The Tsarist government will fall, our homeland will become free, and working people will be able to strike openly and freely for a happy lot.

Rise up, peasants!

Down with the Tsarist bureaucrats!

Down with the Tsarist autocracy!

Long live the workers' and peasants' uprising! Long live the National Constituent Assembly! [signed] *Central Committee of the RSDRP*. [41]

### **On the Armed Insurrection**

The November strike did not win the eight-hour day for the working class, but, as Trotsky said, it won the working class for the eight-hour day. Similarly, it did not win the insurrection for the working class, but the idea of insurrection won the working class.

Trotsky argued clearly that the general strike by itself cannot win the struggle against Tsarism, that it must be the springboard for the armed insurrection:

In struggle it is extremely important to weaken the enemy. That is what a strike does. At the same time a strike brings the army

of the revolution to its feet. But neither the one nor the other, in itself, creates a state revolution.

The power still has to be snatched from the hands of the old rulers and handed over to the revolution. That is the fundamental task. A general strike only creates the necessary preconditions. It is quite inadequate for achieving the task itself. [42]

The logical and necessary climax of the strike must be the open uprising, and the success of the armed uprising depends above all on winning the *muzhiks* in uniform on to the side of the revolutionary proletariat. Soldiers were also affected by the revolution:

The November strike stirred the consciousness of many circles within the army, and, in a matter of a few days, gave rise to a number of political meetings in the barracks of the Petersburg garrison. Not only individual soldiers, but also soldiers' delegates began to show up in the executive committee and even at meetings of the Soviet itself, making speeches, demanding support; revolutionary élan among the troops was reinforced; proclamations were widely read. [43]

A wave of army meetings swept the entire country. The barracks were filled with the spirit of mutiny. Here discontent generally arises on the ground of the soldiers' immediate needs, then develops rapidly and assumes a political orientation. From the ... third of November on, military disturbances of extreme gravity occurred in Petersburg (among sailors), Kiev, Yekaterinodar, Yelizavetpol, Proskurovo, Kursk, and Lomzha. In Warsaw guardsmen demanded the release of their arrested officers. Messages came in from all sides indicating that the entire Manchurian army was aflame with revolution. A meeting held at Irkutsk on 28 November was attended by the entire garrison – some 4,000 men. Under the chairmanship of a non-commissioned officer, the meeting decided to endorse the

demand for a Constituent Assembly. In many towns soldiers fraternised with workers at meetings. On 2 and 3 December rioting began among troops of the Moscow garrison. There were meetings in which even cossacks took part. Street processions to the strains of the 'Marseillaise'. Officers of certain regiments were forcibly removed from their posts. [44]

Not all soldiers were affected in the same way by the workers' action. Trotsky makes the acute observation that the class origin of the soldiers was decisive:

... the most revolutionary are sappers, engineers, gunners, in short, not the grey illiterates of the infantry, but skilled, highly literate, technically trained soldiers. To this difference at the intellectual level corresponds one of social origin. The vast majority of infantry soldiers are young peasants, whereas the engineers and gunners are recruited chiefly from among industrial workers.

The same applied to the navy. There also:

... the technically trained, that is, proletarian elements, played the principal revolutionary role ... Who were the men who led the sailors' mutinies? Who raised the red banner on the battleship? The technicians, the engine men. These industrial workers in sailors' uniforms who form a minority among the crew, nevertheless dominate the crew, because they control the engine, the heart of the battleship.

Friction between the proletarian minority and the peasant majority in the armed forces is a characteristic of all our military risings, and it paralyses them and robs them of power. The workers carry their class advantages with them to the barracks: intelligence, technical training, resoluteness, an ability for concerted action. The peasants contribute their overwhelming numerical strength. The army, by universal conscription,

overcomes the *muzhik's* lack of productive coordination in a mechanical way, and his passivity, his chief political fault, is transformed into an irreplaceable virtue. Even when the peasant regiments are drawn into the revolutionary movement on the ground of their immediate needs, they are always inclined to adopt wait-and-see tactics, and at the enemy's first decisive attack they abandon the 'mutineers' and allow themselves to be placed once more under the disciplinary yoke.

It follows from this that attack is the only proper method for military risings: attack without any interruptions that might engender hesitation and disorder. But it also follows that the tactics of revolutionary attack encounter the greatest obstacle in the backwardness and distrustful passivity of the *muzhik-soldier*.

This contradiction was shortly to reveal itself with full force in the suppression of the December rising which closed the first chapter of the Russian revolution. [45]

Winning soldiers and sailors to the side of the proletariat is crucial to the victory of the revolution, and Trotsky gives a brilliant analysis of the way the armed forces can be won, an analysis that proved absolutely prophetic in 1917.

Without class kinship between the forces on both sides of the barricades, the triumph of the revolution, given the military technology of today, would be impossible indeed. But on the other hand, it would be a most dangerous illusion that the army's 'crossing over to the side of the people' can take the form of a peaceful, spontaneous manifestation ...

The army's political mood, that great unknown of every revolution, can be determined only in the process of a clash between the soldiers and the people. The army's crossing over to the camp of the revolution is a moral process; but it cannot be brought about by moral means alone. Different motives and

attitudes combine and intersect within the army; only a minority is consciously revolutionary, while the majority hesitates and awaits an impulse from outside. This majority is capable of laying down its arms or, eventually, of pointing its bayonets at the reaction only if it begins to believe in the possibility of a people's victory.

Such a belief is not created by political agitation alone. Only when the soldiers become convinced that the people have come out into the streets for a life-and-death struggle – not to demonstrate against the government, but to overthrow it – does it become psychologically possible for them to 'cross over to the side of the people'.

Thus an insurrection is, in essence, not so much a struggle against the army, as a struggle for the army. The more stubborn, far-reaching and successful the insurrection, the more probable – indeed inevitable – is a fundamental change in the attitude of the troops. Guerrilla fighting on the basis of a revolutionary strike cannot in itself, as we saw in Moscow, lead to victory. But it creates the possibility of sounding the mood of the army, and after a first important victory – that is, once a part of the garrison has joined the insurrection – the guerrilla struggle can be transformed into a mass struggle in which a part of the troops, supported by the armed and unarmed population, will fight another part, which will find itself in a ring of universal hatred.

[46]

### **The Soviet – Embryo of Workers' Government**

The Petersburg Soviet, which existed for 50 days – from 13 October to 3 December 1905 – wrote Trotsky, 'organised the working masses, directed the political strikes and demonstrations, armed the workers and protected the population against pogroms.' It was an embryo of a workers' government.

The name of 'workers' government' which the workers themselves on the one hand, and the reactionary press on the other, gave to the Soviet, was an expression of the fact that the Soviet was a workers' government in embryo ...

Prior to the Soviet we find among the industrial workers a multitude of revolutionary organisations ... But these were organisations within the proletariat, and their immediate aim was to achieve influence over the masses. The Soviet was, from the start, the organisation of the proletariat, and its aim was the struggle for revolutionary power. [47]

Trotsky gives a graphic description of the Petersburg Soviet:

The Soviet's premises were always crowded with petitioners and plaintiffs of all kinds – mostly workers, domestic servants, shop assistants, peasants, soldiers and sailors. Some had an absolutely phantasmagorical idea of the Soviet's power and its methods. There was one blind veteran of the Russo-Turkish war, covered with crosses and decorations, who complained of dire poverty and begged the Soviet 'to put a bit of pressure on Number One' (that is, the Tsar). Applications and petitions arrived from remote parts of the country. After the November strike, the inhabitants of one district of a Polish province sent a telegram of thanks to the Soviet. An old Cossack from Poltava province complained of unjust treatment by the Princess Repnin, who had exploited him as a clerk for 28 years and then dismissed him without cause. The old man was asking the Soviet to negotiate with the princess on his behalf. The envelope containing this curious petition was addressed simply to 'The Workers' Government, Petersburg', yet it was promptly delivered by the revolutionary postal service. [48]

### **The Soviet's Last Gesture**

The massive Tsarist power machine remained intact. It is true there was ferment in the armed forces, especially in the navy, but by and large the *muzhik* infantry remained obedient to the Tsar. The sporadic revolts in the armed forces were put down. Behind the army stood the mass of the peasantry. Although in part it was awakened by the revolution, it was very tardy in rebelling. As Trotsky pointedly put it: 'All the elements that go to make a successful revolution were there, but they did not mature.' [49]

In face of this situation, Trotsky exhibited a brilliant tactical touch. The need was to encourage workers' action, to harass the enemy, without engaging him in general battle. To a large extent the aim of the actions was not so much to win real gains for the workers, which were out of reach, but to win the workers to revolutionary ideas. As we have seen, if the workers could not win the insurrection, they could be won to the idea of the insurrection, thus preparing them for future workers' revolution.

Trotsky, a born man of action, taught the workers not only how to advance but, much more difficult, how to retreat when need be.

The defeat of the November strike left the Soviet with only one way forward – to use gestures to expose Tsarism. On 2 December, a proclamation of a financial boycott of the Tsar was issued in the name of the Soviet, the Peasants' Union and the socialist parties. The *Financial Manifesto* was written by Parvus. It called on the people to stop payment of taxes, to accept only gold coins, not banknotes, and to withdraw deposits from the banks. The manifesto denounced the corruption of the Tsarist administration, the bankruptcy of its finances, its faked balances, and above all, its unrepresentative character:

Only the Constituent Assembly, after the overthrow of the autocracy, can halt this financial ruin. It will carry out a close investigation of the state finances, and will draw up a detailed, clear, accurate and certified balance sheet of state revenue and expenditure (a budget).

Fear of popular control, which would reveal to all the world the government's financial insolvency, is forcing it to keep putting off the convening of the people's representative assembly.

In order to safeguard its rapacious activities, the government forces the people to fight unto death. Hundreds of thousands of citizens perish and are ruined in this fight, and industry, trade, and means of communication are destroyed at their very foundations ...

The autocracy has never enjoyed the people's confidence, and has never received any authority from the people.

At the present time the government is behaving within the frontiers of its own country as though it were conquered territory.  
[50]

The *Financial Manifesto* was a substitute, and a poor one at that, for an insurrection. There was a contradiction between the *Financial Manifesto* and the whole argument put forward by Trotsky and the Soviet that the only way to overthrow Tsarism was by an armed uprising. After the event Trotsky wrote:

It goes without saying that this manifesto could not, in itself, overthrow Tsarism and its finances ... The Soviet's financial manifesto was nothing other than an overture to the December rising. [51]

### **The End of the Soviet**

On 3 December troops surrounded the building of the Free Economic Association where the Soviet met. In the afternoon Trotsky presided over a meeting of the executive which was to prepare the agenda for the Soviet session. He reported on the government's latest attacks: the provisional governors had been given power to

declare a state of siege – in some places they had already done so; the newspapers that had published the *Financial Manifesto* had been seized. Draconian new rules concerning strikes were promulgated. The minister of the interior was preparing to reimpose the ban on parties that had participated in the Soviet and to imprison their leaders.

The representative of the Central Committee of the Social Democratic Party [Bolsheviks] submitted his party's proposal to accept the challenge to establish contact immediately with all revolutionary organisations throughout the country, to appoint a date for the commencement of a political general strike, to mobilise all forces and all reserves, and, supported by the agrarian movement and soldiers' riots, to go forward towards a decisive solution.

The delegate from the railwaymen's union said it was certain that the railwaymen's congress convened for 6 December would decide in favour of a strike.

Trotsky thought these statements to be completely unrealistic. And events immediately proved him right.

The representative of the Postal and Telegraph Union spoke in favour of the party's proposal and expressed the hope that the general strike movement would instil new life into the postal and telegraph strike which was beginning to peter out. The debate was interrupted by the news that the Soviet was to be arrested that day. Confirmation arrived half an hour later. By that time the large assembly hall on the ground floor had filled with delegates, party representatives, press correspondents and guests. The executive committee, which was meeting upstairs, decided that some of its members should withdraw so as to ensure continuity in case of arrest. But it was already too late ...

[Trotsky] opened a first-floor window, leaned out and called: 'Comrades, don't offer resistance! We declare in advance that if any shots are fired, they will have to come from the police or an *agent provocateur*'. A few minutes later the soldiers climbed the stairs to the first floor and took up a position at the door of the room in which the executive committee was meeting.

The chairman (addressing an officer): 'I suggest you close the door and do not disturb the business.' The soldiers remain in the passage but do not close the door.

The chairman: 'The meeting continues. Who wants to take the floor?'

The representative of the Office Workers' Union: 'By today's act of brute force the government has reinforced the arguments in favour of a general strike. It has determined the strike in advance. The outcome of the proletariat's new and decisive action depends on the troops. Let them come out in defence of the motherland!' (The officer hastily shuts the door. The speaker raises his voice). 'Even through closed doors the fraternal call of the workers, the voice of their tormented country, will reach the soldiers!'

The door opens and the company commander of the gendarmerie, pale as death, creeps in (he was afraid of a bullet), followed by a couple of dozen policemen who place themselves behind the delegates' chairs.

The chairman: 'I declare the meeting of the executive committee closed.'

The sound of loud, metallic banging came from downstairs. It was as though a dozen blacksmiths were working at their anvils. The delegates were smashing their Brownings so as to prevent them falling into the hands of the police!

A search began. Everyone refused to give their names. Searched, their descriptions noted and a number allocated to each, the members of the executive committee were escorted away by the half-drunken guardsmen. [52]

Immediately after the arrests a second Soviet was formed from delegates who had accidentally escaped arrest and others newly elected; the new executive committee was headed by Parvus. The Soviet had to meet in secret, and a plenary session was held only once. Nor did the Soviet continue to enjoy the popularity of its predecessor. On 6 December the Soviet called for a political general strike throughout Russia, [53] but it got very little response.

On 9 December a workers' insurrection led by the Bolsheviks broke out in Moscow. This was the zenith of the revolution. Seven days later the insurrection was suppressed.

On 2 January 1906 the Second Petersburg Soviet was arrested.

### Precursor

Immediately after the doors of the prison closed on him, Trotsky summed up the lessons of the Petersburg Soviet for the future:

The substance of the Soviet was its effort to become *an organ of public authority*. The proletariat on one hand, the reactionary press on the other, have called the Soviet 'a labour government; this only reflects the fact that the Soviet was in reality *an embryo of a revolutionary government*. Insofar as the Soviet was in actual possession of authoritative power, it made use of it; insofar as the power was in the hands of the military and bureaucratic monarchy, the Soviet fought to obtain it. Prior to the Soviet, there had been revolutionary organisations among the industrial working men, mostly of a Social-Democratic nature. But those were organisations among the proletariat; their immediate aim was to influence the masses. The Soviet is an

organisation of the proletariat; its aim is to fight *for revolutionary power*.

The main weapon of the Soviet was a political strike of the masses. The power of the strike lies in disorganising the power of the government. The greater the 'anarchy' created by a strike, the nearer its victory ... The more effective the disorganisation of government caused by a strike, the more the strike organisation is compelled to assume governmental functions ...

There is no doubt, however, that *the first new wave of the revolution will lead to the creation of Soviets all over the country*. An All-Russian Soviet, organised by an All-Russian Labour Congress, will assume leadership of the local elective organisations of the proletariat ... History does not repeat itself, and the new Soviet will not have again to go through the experience of the Fifty Days. These, however, will furnish it a complete programme of action.

This programme is perfectly clear. To establish revolutionary cooperation with the army, the peasantry, and the plebeian lower strata of the urban bourgeoisie. To abolish absolutism. To destroy the material organisation of absolutism by reconstructing and partly dismissing the army. To break up the entire bureaucratic apparatus. To introduce an eight-hour workday. To arm the population, starting with the proletariat. To turn the *Soviets* into organs of revolutionary self-government in the cities. To create Councils of Peasants' Delegates (Peasants' Committees) as local organs of the agrarian revolution. To organise elections to the Constituent Assembly and to conduct a pre-election campaign for a definite programme on the part of the representatives of the people ...

The history of Fifty Days will be only a poor page in the great book of the proletariat's struggle and ultimate triumph. [54]

## Mensheviks Under the Heady Influence of Trotsky

In October and November the Petersburg Menshevik leaders, above all Dan and Martynov, fell under the influence of Trotsky. They dismissed the bourgeoisie as counter-revolutionary, and like the Bolsheviks they prepared for the seizure of power and the establishment of a revolutionary provisional government. As Dan wrote to Kautsky on 9 November 1905: 'We live here as though in a state of intoxication. The revolutionary air affects people like wine.' Two weeks later he wrote to Adler: 'As far as the general strike is concerned, it engendered the most revolutionary and activist mood among the St Petersburg workers [and] it strongly affected the leaders'. [55]

Many years later Dan remembered:

... the 'Trotskyite' themes ... began echoing more and more loudly in the utterances and articles of eminent members of the *Iskra* editorial board (first and foremost Martynov and the author of these lines) with the manifest approval of a substantial segment of the Mensheviks, especially of the Menshevik workers. The general editorial line of *Nachalo* also began becoming more and more 'Trotskyite'. [56]

Not all Menshevik leaders were affected by the revolutionary euphoria. Among the most consistent opponents of the move to the left by the Mensheviks were Axelrod and Plekhanov, also Martov, though less so.

Dan, Martynov, Martov and Potresov joined Parvus and Trotsky in editing *Nachalo*, which carried extremely revolutionary articles. Thus an editorial in *Nachalo* of 20 November 1905 stated:

The longer history postponed the collapse of autocracy, while world capitalism went on developing and capitalist conditions began to transform the old order in Russia, the more logical it became to expect a direct transition from democratic to socialist revolution.

Superficial Marxists generally reply to this argument that the character of a revolution is determined by the state of development of productive forces, and that a socialist revolution is technically impossible in Russia in the near future because those forces have not yet matured sufficiently. But this is a misunderstanding of Marxist doctrine. The state of development of productive forces certainly determines the character of a revolution, but only in the final analysis. What it does is to determine a certain economic development and, through it, a development of the class struggle, and it is this struggle which primarily and directly determines the character of a revolution. We must remember that compared with the development of productive forces, the class struggle develops much more convulsively and is far more subject to what we call elements of chance. [57]

Elsewhere in *Nachalo* Martynov wrote:

You ask what our demands in the Constituent Assembly are going to be? Our clear and categorical reply is this: we shall demand, not 'socialiastion', but socialism, not equal shares of the land, but public ownership of all means of production.' True, 'vulgar Marxists' might object that 'a socialist revolution in Russia is technically impossible in the near future'.

Martynov then triumphantly demolished their objections and concludes:

The Social Democrats alone ... have boldly raised the slogan of permanent revolution at the present time, they alone will lead the masses to the last and decisive victory. [58]

Martov found himself in a minority on *Nachalo*. He felt like a fish out of water on the editorial board. He wrote to Axelrod: 'We shall have to agree to the propaganda of a fairly risky idea without any counter-

criticism on our part.' [59] In 1909, in his *History of Russian Social Democracy*, Martov wrote of 'mitigating circumstances' that explained the 'aberration of the Mensheviks' political vision.' [60]

The revolutionary intoxication also affected the Moscow Mensheviks. They enthusiastically backed the Bolshevik-led army uprising in Moscow in December 1905. [61]

The line of *Nachalo* was hardly distinguishable from that of Lenin's *Novaia Zhizn*. When both papers were shut down by the government on 2-3 December, it was therefore found possible to publish a joint newspaper, *Severny Golos* (*Northern Voice*). Lenin could write with complete justification:

In *Severny Golos*, the Mensheviks, jointly with the Bolsheviks, called for a general strike and insurrection; and they called upon the workers to continue this struggle until they had captured power. The revolutionary situation itself suggested practical slogans. There were arguments only over matters of detail in the appraisal of events: for example, *Nachalo* regarded the Soviets of Workers' Deputies as organs of revolutionary local self-government, while *Novaia Zhizn* regarded them as embryonic organs of revolutionary state power that united the proletariat with the revolutionary democrats.

*Nachalo* inclined towards the dictatorship of the proletariat. *Novaia Zhizn* advocated the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. But have not disagreements of this kind been observed at every stage of development of every socialist party in Europe? [62]

The revolutionary mood was highly infectious. After the events, in 1906, Miliukov, the leader of the Cadets, explained the passivity of his party in the last few months of 1905 thus:

Any protest, even by a party such as the Constitutional Democratic Party, would have been completely impossible during the last months of 1905. Those who now charge our

party that it did not then protest against the revolutionary illusions of Trotskyism ... do not understand, or have forgotten, the mood of the democratic audiences who were attending the public meetings. [63]

After the revolution, during which they had moved very much to the left, the Mensheviks veered strongly to the right. At the Stockholm Unity Congress of April 1906 the left wing, influenced by Trotsky and Parvus, was hardly discernible. As Lenin put it:

... a striking thing was the complete absence among the Mensheviks of the trend that was so clearly revealed in *Nachalo*, and which in the party we are accustomed to connect with the names of Parvus and Trotsky. True, it is quite possible that there were some 'Parvusites' and 'Trotskyites' among the Mensheviks – I was told that there were about eight of them. [64]

Lunacharsky explained the *volte-face* of the Mensheviks thus:

The Mensheviks are impressionists, people who yield to the mood of the moment. When the revolutionary tide rose and October-November 1905 arrived, *Nachalo* galloped off at breakneck speed, and went even more Bolshevik than the Bolsheviks. It galloped from democratic dictatorship to socialist dictatorship. But when the revolutionary tide turned, when enthusiasm ebbed and the Cadets rose to the top, the Mensheviks hastened to adjust themselves to this subdued mood. They now trot behind the Cadets, and disdainfully brush aside the October-November forms of struggle. [65]

At the time of the revolution Trotsky did not clearly understand that the revolutionary stance of the Mensheviks was a by-product of their instability, of their impressionism. A few years later, in 1909, however, he could write:

It may seem paradoxical to say that the principal psychological feature of opportunism is its inability to wait. But that is

undoubtedly true. In periods when friendly and hostile social forces, by virtue of their antagonism and their interaction, create a total political standstill; when the molecular process of economic growth, by intensifying the contradictions, not only fails to disturb the political balance but actually strengthens it and, as it were, makes it permanent – in such periods opportunism, devoured by impatience, looks around for ‘new’ ways and means of putting into effect what history is not yet ready for in practice. Tired of its own inadequacy and unreliability, it goes in search of ‘allies’. It hurls itself avidly upon the dung-heap of liberalism. [66]

Many years later, in 1940, Trotsky understood very well the nature of the Mensheviks’ revolutionary stand in October- November 1905:

Opportunists to the very marrow of their bones, the Mensheviks were temporarily able to adapt themselves even to the revolutionary upsurge; yet they were incapable either of guiding it or of remaining faithful to its historic tasks during the Revolution’s ebb-tide. [67]

Impressionism was the main characteristic of Menshevism, swept by the ebbs and flows of the struggle. A revolutionary party needs steadfastness, resolution.

### **In His Element**

Trotsky was in his element in 1905. During the period of darkest reaction he could look back to 1905 and write:

Just because revolution tears the veil of mystery from the true face of the social structure, just because it brings the classes into conflict in the broad political arena, the Marxist politician feels that revolution is his natural element. [68]

He was impatient for the coming revolution:

The whole of history is an enormous machine in the service of our ideals. It works with barbarous slowness, with insensitive cruelty, but it works. We are sure of it. But when its omnivorous mechanism swallows up our life's blood for fuel, we feel like calling out to it with all the strength we still possess:

'Faster! Do it faster!' [69]

The 1905 revolution was a dress rehearsal for the 1917 revolution. It was also a dress rehearsal for Trotsky's role in 1917. The absolute resolution and confidence he showed then were nurtured in 1905.

The events of 1905 were a prologue to the two revolutions of 1917, that of February and that of October. In the prologue all the elements of the drama were included, but not carried through. The Russo-Japanese war had made Tsarism totter. Against the background of a mass movement the liberal bourgeoisie had frightened the monarchy with its opposition. The workers had organised independently of the bourgeoisie, and in opposition to it, in *soviets*, a form of organisation then first called into being. Peasant uprisings to seize the land occurred throughout vast stretches of the country. Not only the peasants, but also the revolutionary parts of the army tended toward the *soviets*, which at the moment of highest tension openly disputed the power with the monarchy. However, all the revolutionary forces were then going into action for the first time, lacking experience and confidence ... Although with a few broken ribs, Tsarism came out of the experience of 1905 alive and strong enough. [70]

Though the years following the defeat of the 1905 revolution were very arid in Trotsky's life, the immediate fruit of the revolution was his development of the theory of permanent revolution.

## Notes

1. Pokrovsky, volume 2, page 176.
2. Lenin, *Works*, volume 23, pages 248-9.
3. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 171.
4. Trotsky, *1905*, page 78.
5. Pokrovsky, volume 2, page 121.
6. W. Grinewitsch, *Die Gewerkschaftsbewegung in Russlands*, volume 1 (Berlin 1927), pages 231-5.
7. *Iskra*, 17 March 1905; Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 1, book 1, page 239.
8. *Iskra*, 17 March 1905.
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23. Trotsky, *1905*, pages 131-2 and 136.
24. Pokrovsky, page 170.
25. Pokrovsky, pages 137-8.
26. Trotsky, *1905*, pages 141-2; Geller and Rovenskaia, page 32.
27. Trotsky, *1905*, pages 140-1.

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32. Trotsky, 1905, page 171.
33. Trotsky, 1905, pages 173-4.
34. Khrustalev-Nosar in *Istoriiia Soveta*, page 127.
35. Trotsky, 1905, pages 180-1.
36. Khrustaluv-Nosar in *Istoriiia Soveta*, page 131.
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## **8. The Permanent Revolution**

IT WAS DURING the year 1905 that Trotsky developed the Theory of Permanent Revolution, which was his greatest contribution to Marxism, and a guide to his thinking and activity for the rest of his eventful life. As leader of the revolution, as founder and leader of the Red Army, as leader of the Communist International, as a hunted exile, he defended and elaborated the ideas he formulated in 1905. For Trotsky clarity of ideas was a fundamental necessity of life. As he said in his autobiography: Without a broad political view of the future, I cannot conceive of political activity or of intellectual life in general. [1]

The 1905 revolution was a laboratory in which all the basic tendencies in Russian Marxism were put to the test and developed. The core of the disagreements between the tendencies was the question of the historical nature of the Russian revolution.

### **Mensheviks and Bolsheviks on the Prospects of Russian Revolution**

The Bolsheviks and Mensheviks disagreed about the nature of the government that would and should come out of the revolution. The Bolsheviks called for a democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants, while the Mensheviks hoped for a bourgeois government. But on one thing both wings of Russian Social Democracy agreed: that the coming revolution would be a bourgeois revolution. By this was meant a revolution resulting from a conflict between the productive forces of capitalism on the one hand, and the autocracy, landlordism and other relics of feudalism on the other.

That this was the view of the Mensheviks needs no elaboration. But that Lenin at the time held the same opinion, and that he held it for many years afterwards, needs some demonstration, especially in the light of the victory of the October revolution of 1917, which went far beyond the limits of a bourgeois revolution.

Thus Lenin wrote about the future Russian revolution in the pamphlet *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*:

At best, it may bring about a radical distribution of landed property in favour of the peasantry, establish consistent and full democracy, including the formation of a republic, eradicate all the oppressive features of Asiatic bondage, not only in rural but also in factory life, lay the foundation for a thorough improvement for the conditions of the workers and for a rise in their standard of living, and – last but not least – carry the revolutionary conflagration into Europe. Such a victory will not yet by any means transform our bourgeois revolution into a socialist revolution: the democratic revolution will not immediately overstep the bounds of bourgeois social and economic relationships. [2]

Again he wrote, ‘this democratic revolution in Russia will not weaken but strengthen the domination of the bourgeoisie.’ [3]

In view of Russia’s backwardness and the smallness of her working class, Lenin rejected

... the absurd and semi-anarchist idea of giving immediate effect to the maximum programme and the conquest of power for a socialist revolution. The degree of Russia’s economic development (an objective condition), and the degree of class consciousness and organisation of the broad masses of the proletariat (a subjective condition inseparably bound up with the objective condition) make the immediate and complete emancipation of the working class impossible. Only the most ignorant people can close their eyes to the bourgeois nature of

the democratic revolution which is now taking place. Whoever wants to reach socialism by any other path than that of political democracy will inevitably arrive at conclusions that are absurd and reactionary both in the economic and the political sense. [4]

Further, 'we Marxists should know that there is not, nor can there be, any other path to real freedom for the proletariat and the peasantry, than the path of bourgeois freedom and bourgeois progress.' [5] In the same book Lenin makes it clear that the programme of the revolution should be limited to reform within the framework of capitalism:

... a programme of action that will conform with the objective conditions of the present period and with the aims of proletarian democracy. This programme is the entire minimum programme of our party, the programme of the immediate political and economic reforms which ... can be fully realised on the basis of the existing social and economic relationships. [6]

Lenin did not change this opinion until after the revolution of February 1917. In *The War and Russian Social Democracy* for example, written in September 1914, he was still writing that the Russian revolution must limit itself to

... the three fundamental conditions for consistent democratic reform, viz., a democratic republic (with complete equality and self-determination for all nations), confiscation of the landed estates, and an eight-hour working day.' [7]

It is clear, moreover, from all Lenin's writings up to 1917 that he anticipated that a whole period would elapse between the coming bourgeois revolution and the proletarian, socialist revolution. His treatment of the agrarian problem illustrates this point. Nationalisation of the land, he insisted, was not a socialist, but a capitalist demand, albeit one which, in clearing the way for capitalist development, would lead to a rapid increase in the number of

proletarians and a sharpening of the class struggle. It would make possible the 'American path of capitalist development – that is, development unfettered by any remnants of feudalism. The abolition of private property in land was the maximum of what could be done in bourgeois society, for the removal of all obstacles to the free development of capital in land, to the free flow of capital from one branch of production to another:

Nationalisation makes it possible to tear down all the fences of land ownership to the utmost degree, and 'clear' all the land for the new system of economy suitable to the requirements of capital. [8]

### **Trotsky on the Peculiarities of Russian History**

On the question of the historical nature of the Russian revolution and its future course of development, Trotsky had a position that diverged both from the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks.

In 1906 Trotsky wrote *Results and Prospects – The Moving Forces of the Revolution*, as a long concluding chapter to his book *Our Revolution* – a collection of essays and chronicles of 1905. This essay, together with Trotsky's writings of 1905, illustrates the theory of permanent revolution.

Traditional Marxism looked upon backward countries in the light of Marx's well-known formula that the advanced industrial countries showed the more backward countries their own future development. As Marx put it in his Preface to *Capital*: 'The country that is more developed industrially only shows to the less developed, the image of its own future.' The conclusion the Mensheviks drew from this statement was that with all the differences in national conditions, the historical tasks that faced the young capitalism in France in 1789 would face the newly developing capitalism in Russia and other relatively backward countries in the future. Trotsky rejected this mechanical and linear approach to Russia's historical development.

When he developed the theory of permanent revolution in 1906 he saw it as applicable to Russia. With the experience of the Chinese revolution (1925-27), he generalised it to embrace all relatively backward countries.

The point of departure of the theory of permanent revolution is the unity of the world. It is true that different countries have reached different levels of economic advance, but each has done it in the context of the world system.

Tsarist Russia did not develop in isolation. Throughout its history it was under pressure from its more advanced neighbours.

Russian social life, built up on a certain economic foundation, has all the time been under the influence, even under the pressure, of its external, social milieu.

When this social and state organisation, in the process of its formation, came into collision with other, neighbouring organisations, the primitiveness of the economic relations of the one and the comparatively high development of the others played decisive parts in the ensuing process. [9]

The Tsarist state became an ever-increasing burden on the economy and society, bleeding them and hampering the development of the productive forces. The power of the Tsarist state impeded the development of independent guilds of artisans, independent towns and an independent bourgeoisie.

In the same way that the military pressure of Lithuania, Poland and Sweden compelled old Russia to introduce firearms and create its standing army, so the economic pressure from the West was decisive in shaping Russian capitalism. A crucial role in the development of capitalism in Russia was played by foreign capital. The textile industry was almost totally owned by British capital, and in the metalworking industry one came across factories with such world-famous names as Siemens, Ericson and Nobel.

While international factors undermined the economic, social and political weight of the native Russian bourgeoisie, it gave added

weight to the Russian proletariat. The proletariat was concentrated in much larger factories than the proletariat in the West. The Putilov factory in Petersburg, with its 30,000 workers, was by far the largest factory in the world at the time. The specific weight of the Russian proletariat was far greater than its size.

The Russian bourgeoisie, being a latecomer, would be far less revolutionary than the French bourgeoisie at the time of its revolution. If the French bourgeoisie succeeded in carrying out the revolution in 1789-93, the German bourgeoisie in 1848 betrayed the revolution and capitulated to the Kaiser and the Junkers. The Russian bourgeoisie, Trotsky argued, would be even more cowardly than the German.

The young working class of Russia was not only much stronger materially than its equivalent in France during its revolution, or Germany during its, but also spiritually. Again the impact of the international set-up is decisive here. In its aspirations the Russian working class skipped a whole series of stages that the English proletariat, for example, passed through.

In Britain it took over a century after the industrial revolution for the idea of the eight-hour day to dominate workers' aspirations, while the young Russian working class grasped it firmly with its early steps. In Britain it took 91 years for the engineering union to allow women into its ranks, in Russia the unions from the beginning included women as well as men. Russia did not need a Russian Adam Smith and a Russian Ricardo to arrive at a Russian Karl Marx; nor did they need a Russian Hegel or a Russian Feuerbach. As a matter of fact the first language into which Marx's *Capital* was translated was Russian: the first volume was published in German in 1867 and in Russian five years later, many years before the English or French editions.

But Russia's advanced industry and proletariat are combined with the most backward agriculture and peasantry. So we see the combination of the wooden plough (the *sokha*) with the massive, most concentrated factories in the world. We see the combination of the peasant revolt – characteristic of the dawn of capitalism, such as those of Wat Tyler in England, Thomas Münzer in Germany, or the

Jacquerie in France – with the proletariat organised in the Soviet, struggling for power.

The law of uneven and combined development is the essence of the theory of the permanent revolution. Although Trotsky coined the term ‘The Law of Combined Development’ only in the 1930s, the concept of combined development permeated all his writings from *Results and Prospects* onwards.

The peasantry, argues Trotsky, is not an independent force. Being atomised, it cannot organise itself. Under capitalism the countryside always follows the town. So, if in the town the revolutionary force is that of the proletariat, the Russian peasantry will follow the proletariat.

The agrarian problem in Russia is a heavy burden to capitalism. It is an aid to the revolutionary party, and at the same time its greatest challenge. It is the stumbling block for liberalism, and a *memento mori* for counter-revolution. [10]

The fate of the revolution would depend on the working class mobilising behind it the peasantry.

*The proletariat in power will stand before the peasants as the class which has emancipated them.* The domination of the proletariat will mean not only democratic equality, free self-government, the transference of the whole burden of taxation to the rich classes, the dissolution of the standing army in the armed people, and the abolition of compulsory church imposts, but also recognition of all revolutionary changes (expropriations) in land relationships carried out by the peasants. The proletariat will make these changes the starting-point for further state measures in agriculture.

Under such conditions, the Russian peasantry, in the first and most difficult period of the revolution, will be interested in the maintenance of a proletarian regime (workers’ democracy) at all events not less than was the French peasantry in the maintenance of the military regime of Napoleon Bonaparte,

which guaranteed to the new property owners, by the force of its bayonets, the inviolability of their holdings. [11]

Reading this, one can see how unjustified was the charge later made against Trotsky by the Stalinists, that he underestimated the revolutionary potential of the peasantry.

After the victory of the revolution, wrote Trotsky, the alliance of proletariat and peasantry would come under increasing strain:

The proletariat will find itself compelled to carry the class struggle into the villages, and in this manner destroy that community of interest which is undoubtedly to be found among all peasants, although within comparatively narrow limits. From the very first moment after its taking power, the proletariat will have to find support in the antagonism between the village poor and the village rich, between the agricultural proletariat and the agricultural bourgeoisie. While the heterogeneity of the peasantry creates difficulty and narrows the basis for a proletarian policy, the insufficient degree of class differentiation will create obstacles to the introduction among the peasantry of developed class struggle upon which the urban proletariat could rely. The primitiveness of the peasantry turns its hostile face towards the proletariat. [12]

The peasants' fanaticism about their property meant they would welcome the proletariat for helping them acquire the landlords' lands, but also meant they would turn against it in the course of its collectivist and internationalist policies:

... the more definite and determined the policy of the proletariat in power becomes, the narrower and more shaky does the ground beneath its feet become. All this is extremely probably and even inevitable ...

The two main features of proletarian policy which will meet opposition from the allies of the proletariat are collectivism and

internationalism.

The primitiveness and petty bourgeois character of the peasantry, its limited rural outlook, its isolation from world political ties and allegiances, will create terrible difficulties for the consolidation of the revolutionary policy of the proletariat in power. [13]

The fate of the revolution in backward Russia would be decided by the march of the international revolution in the West:

... how far can the socialist policy of the working class be applied in the economic conditions of Russia? We can say one thing with certainty – that it will come up against political obstacles much sooner than it will stumble over the technical backwardness of the country. Without the direct state support of the European proletariat the working class in Russia cannot remain in power and convert its temporary domination into a lasting socialistic dictatorship. But on the other hand, there cannot be any doubt that the socialist revolution in the West will enable us directly to convert the temporary domination of the working class into a socialist dictatorship. [14]

The revolution could not survive for a long time in isolation:

Should the Russian proletariat find itself in power, if only as the result of a temporary conjuncture of circumstances in our bourgeois revolution, it will encounter the organised hostility of world reaction, and on the other hand, will find a readiness on the part of the world proletariat to give organised support. Left to its own resources, the working class of Russia will inevitably be crushed by the counter-revolution the moment the peasantry turns its back on it. It will have no alternative but to link the fate of its political rule and, hence, the fate of the whole Russian revolution, with the fate of the socialist revolution in Europe. That colossal state political power given it by a temporary

conjuncture of circumstances in the Russian bourgeois revolution, it will cast into the scales of the class struggle of the entire capitalist world. With state power in its hands, with counter-revolution behind it and European reaction in front of it, it will send forth to its comrades the world over the old rallying cry, which this time will be a call for the last attack: *Workers of all countries unite!* [15]

Events emphatically confirmed Trotsky's prophetic foresight.

After the revolution, in 1922, Trotsky gave a brilliant summary of the theory of permanent revolution:

The Russian revolution, although directly concerned with bourgeois aims, could not stop short at those aims. The revolution could not solve its immediate, bourgeois tasks, except by putting the proletariat into power. And the proletariat, once having power in its hands, would not be able to remain confined within the bourgeois framework of the revolution. On the contrary, precisely in order to guarantee its victory, the proletarian vanguard in the very earliest stages of its rule would have to make extremely deep inroads not only into feudal, but also into bourgeois property relations. While doing so it would enter into hostile conflict, not only with all those bourgeois groups which had supported it during the first stages of its revolutionary struggle, but also with the broad masses of the peasantry, with whose collaboration it, the proletariat, had come to power.

The contradictions between a workers' government and an overwhelming majority of peasants in a backward country could be resolved only on an international scale, in the arena of a world proletarian revolution. Having, by virtue of historical necessity, burst the narrow bourgeois-democratic confines of the Russian revolution, the victorious proletariat would be compelled also to burst its national and state confines, that is to say, it would have to strive consciously for the Russian revolution to become the prologue to a world revolution. [16]

## Trotsky's Unique Position

None of the Marxist leaders agreed with Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. We have already dealt with the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. But even Parvus, closest to Trotsky intellectually, did not agree with him. Parvus's ideas were not the same as Trotsky's. Trotsky explains that Parvus's

... views on the Russian revolution in 1905 bordered closely on mine, without however being identical with them ... Parvus was not of the opinion that a workers' government in Russia could move in the direction of the socialist revolution, that is, that in the process of fulfilling the democratic tasks it could grow over into the socialist dictatorship. Parvus confined the tasks of the workers' government to the democratic tasks ...

In 1905 ... Parvus saw in the conquest of power by the proletariat the road to democracy and not to socialism, that is, he assigned to the proletariat only the role which it actually played in Russia in the first eight to ten months of the October revolution. In further perspective, Parvus even then pointed to the Australian democracy of that time, that is, to a regime in which the workers' party does indeed govern but does not rule, and carries out its reformist demands only as a supplement to the programme of the bourgeoisie. [17]

What about Rosa Luxemburg?

In his autobiography Trotsky claims that Rosa Luxemburg, at the Fifth Congress of the RSDRP in London in 1907, adopted the same position as he did regarding the theory of permanent revolution. [18] Isaac Deutscher, in *The Prophet Armed*, repeats the claim without providing any further evidence. [19] The present author also repeated this claim in his book on Rosa Luxemburg. [20] But closer inspection reveals that this is not the case. [21]

In her *Organisational Questions of Russian Social Democracy* Luxemburg writes: ' ...the revolution soon to break out in Russia will

be a bourgeois and not a proletarian revolution.’ [22] Rosa Luxemburg told the Fifth Congress of the RSDRP that the mass strike of Russian workers was ‘a means of class struggle for winning the most elementary freedoms of the contemporary class state.’ [23] Again, in 1915, she wrote on the 1905 revolution: ‘It was a proletarian revolution with bourgeois duties and problems, or if you wish, a bourgeois revolution waged by socialist, proletarian methods.’ [24]

Rosa Luxemburg’s views on the Russian revolution – that it was bourgeois democratic but carried by the proletariat – was to all intents and purposes the same as Lenin’s, not Trotsky’s, though it is true she used the words ‘permanent revolution’. Thus immediately after Bloody Sunday, 9 January 1905, she wrote of the need ‘to maintain the Russian revolution *in Permanenz*’. [25]

Others, such as Karl Kautsky and Franz Mehring, also used the words ‘permanent revolution’ when they wrote on the Russian revolution. Kautsky did so in describing the 1905 revolution. Trotsky wrote in 1922: ‘Kautsky ... fully identified himself with my views. He adopted the viewpoint of “Permanent Revolution”.’ [26] Kautsky’s conception, however, was completely different from Trotsky’s. He defined the Russian revolution as a bourgeois revolution brought about by the proletariat and the peasantry because of the inconsistency of the bourgeoisie. Lenin was right when he claimed in a preface to the Russian translation of Kautsky’s essay that Kautsky’s position was that of Bolshevism.

### **Lenin and Trotsky’s Theory**

We have already described Lenin’s position regarding the ‘democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry’ as against the theory of permanent revolution. One of the saddest things is that Lenin never read Trotsky’s *Results and Prospects* prior to the October revolution. As Trotsky wrote in 1929:

I want to point out ... that Lenin, as has become particularly clear to me now in reading his old articles, never read my basic work ... This is probably to be explained not only by the fact that *Our Revolution*, which appeared in 1906, was soon confiscated and that all of us shortly went into emigration, but also perhaps by the fact that two-thirds of the book consisted of reprints of old articles. I heard later from many comrades that they had not read this book because they thought it consisted exclusively of old works ... Never did Lenin anywhere analyse or quote, even in passing, 'Results and Prospects', and certain objections of Lenin to the permanent revolution, which obviously have no reference to me, directly prove that he did not read this work.  
[27]

Lenin was so critical of Trotsky's conciliation towards the Mensheviks that he certainly was not encouraged to go out of his way to search for one of the very scarce copies of Trotsky's *Our Revolution*, of which *Results and Prospects* was a section.

There is no doubt that Trotsky's perspective on the Russian revolution was proved in 1917 to be absolutely correct. He was proved right in relation not only to the Mensheviks, but also to Lenin's 1905-16 perspectives for a democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants.

However, despite his clear vision of future developments, Trotsky badly misjudged the concrete prospects for the development of Bolshevism versus Menshevism. From an abstract standpoint, the Bolsheviks, claiming the Russian revolution to be a bourgeois revolution, were no less in error than the Mensheviks. Both were bound, in Trotsky's view, to become obstacles in the path of the revolution. Thus he wrote in 1909, in an article entitled 'Our Differences' and published in Rosa Luxemburg's Polish Marxist journal *Przegląd social-demokratyczny*:

Whereas the Mensheviks, proceeding from the abstract notion that 'our revolution is a bourgeois revolution', arrive at the idea that the proletariat must adapt all its tactics to the behaviour of

the liberal bourgeoisie to ensure the transfer of state power to that bourgeoisie, the Bolsheviks proceed from an equally abstract notion – ‘democratic dictatorship, not socialist dictatorship’ – and arrive at the idea of a proletariat in possession of state power imposing a bourgeois democratic limitation upon itself. It is true that the difference between them in this matter is very considerable; while the anti- revolution aspects of Menshevism have already become fully apparent, those of Bolshevism are likely to become a serious threat only in the event of victory. [28]

But Trotsky misjudged Lenin, whose 1905 perspective included not only the weakness of restricting the coming revolution to bourgeois democratic tasks, but also the strength of Lenin’s position – its inner dynamic of independent working-class action. When it came to the test of 1917, Bolshevism, after an internal struggle, overcame its bourgeois democratic crust. Lenin demonstrated in action that a revolutionary army with a limited programme can overcome the limits of its programme, so long as it is authentically revolutionary, independent and hegemonic in the struggle.

In Lenin’s position regarding the prospects of the Russian revolution there was a contradiction between the bourgeois democratic tasks of the revolution and its proletarian leadership. Concerning the first element there was no difference between Bolshevism and Menshevism, but concerning proletarian leadership they differed fundamentally. Lenin wrote:

The Bolsheviks claim through the proletariat the role of *leader* in the democratic revolution. The Mensheviks reduced its role to that of an ‘extreme opposition’. The Bolsheviks gave a positive definition of the class struggle and the class significance of the revolution, maintaining that a victorious revolution implied a ‘revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.’ The Mensheviks always interpreted the bourgeois revolution so incorrectly as to result in their acceptance of a

position in which the role of the proletariat would be subordinate and dependent on the bourgeoisie. [29]

And again:

Social Democrats ... rely wholly and exclusively on the activity, the class consciousness and the organisation of the proletariat, on its influence among the labouring and exploited masses. [30]

Further,

From the proletarian point of view hegemony in a war goes to him who fights most energetically, who never misses a chance to strike a blow at the enemy, who always suits the actions to the word, who is therefore the ideological leader of the democratic forces, who criticizes half-way policies of every kind. [31]

From the independence and hegemony of the proletariat in the bourgeois revolution, Lenin argued in September 1905 that it was only one step from the bourgeois revolution, with its limitations, to the proletarian revolution:

From the democratic revolution we shall at once and precisely in accordance with the measure of our strength, the strength of the class-conscious and organised proletariat, begin to pass to the socialist revolution. We stand for uninterrupted revolution. We shall not stop half-way. [32]

In short, Lenin poses two different answers to the question: What happens after the victory of the revolution? The first, to be found mainly in *Two Tactics*, is that there will be a period of capitalist development. The second can be summed up as: 'Let us take power and then we shall see.' To quote Napoleon: '*On s'engage, et puis ... on voit.*'

It is true that the vagueness of Lenin's formula of the democratic dictatorship in *Two Tactics* made it possible for Bolshevik leaders to

slide towards Menshevism, to subordinate their policy to the bourgeoisie, as happened in March-April 1917 when Stalin, Kamenev and others supported the Provisional Government. Trotsky was right in his criticism of *Two Tactics*; he was completely wrong in his underestimate of the Bolsheviks' basic political strength. He misjudged Lenin's stand because he did not grasp it dialectically.

The dynamic forces which Lenin was relying on and shaping must be taken into account: the proletariat fighting against Tsarism and its accomplices the liberal bourgeoisie; the proletariat struggling to be the spearhead of the peasantry; the proletariat leading an armed insurrection; the Marxist party fighting for the conquest of power, and so on. In this algebra of revolution the real value of the unknown or doubtful element in Lenin's equation – how far the revolution would go beyond the minimum programme – would be decided largely by the dynamic of the struggle itself. Nonetheless, the weakness of Lenin's concept of democratic dictatorship brought about the crisis of leadership in the Bolshevik Party in 1917 before his own return to Russia. It was he alone who rearmed the party, overcoming the vagueness of the concept of the democratic dictatorship. (In the rise of Stalin in the 1920s this concept again played a very sorry role).

Above all, Trotsky's genius for graphic abstract generalisation misled him. He failed to judge the merits of Bolshevism in terms of the people collected, organised and trained by Lenin. Thus one finds that in the whole of his book on the history of the Russian revolution Trotsky does not once mention the Bolsheviks or Lenin. Much later Trotsky admitted:

Having stood outside both of the two factions in the period of emigration, the author did not fully appreciate the very important circumstance that in reality, along the line of disagreement between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks there were being grouped inflexible revolutionaries on the one side, and, on the other, elements which were becoming more and more opportunist and accommodating. [33]

Elsewhere I wrote:

In conclusion we may say that Lenin's abstract, algebraic formula of the democratic dictatorship was translated in life into the language of arithmetic and the conclusions drawn were the result of the sum total of the activity of the Bolshevik party leading the working class. [34]

Trotsky was always inclined to over-abstraction. As he put it in his autobiography:

The feeling of the supremacy of general over particular, of law over fact, of theory over personal experience, took root in my mind at an early age and gained increasing strength as the years advanced. Later [this approach] became an integral part of my literary and political work. [35]

Trotsky's judgment that the Bolsheviks' view of the Russian revolution was analogous to the Menshevik view was completely wrong. One must always know the limits beyond which an analogy becomes false. It was this abstract view that motivated Trotsky's conciliationism over many years. After all, the two factions were equally in the wrong about the key issue of the prospects of the Russian revolution.

Trotsky's magnificent historical sweep blinded him to the real qualitative differences between Bolshevism and Menshevism. He overlooked the statement by Clausewitz that was so dear to Lenin: that in order to bring the abstract concept into line with the real world, one needs to 'fall back upon the corresponding results of experience; for in the same way as many plants only bear fruit when they do not shoot too high, so in the practical arts, the theoretical leaves and flowers must not be made to sprout too far, but keep near to experience, which is their proper soil.' [36]

Trotsky's supreme ability to generalise was the source of his weakness in understanding Bolshevism concretely. So, paradoxically, his magnificent theoretical contribution – his theory of

permanent revolution – became the source of his weakness in grasping the real nature of the Bolshevik party. As we shall see, only in 1917 did he overcome this weakness. He himself explained how he overcame this misjudgement:

Each of us had occasion to renounce one part of his already obsolete past in order to preserve, develop and assure victory to that other part of his past which did meet the test of events. An inner resolution of this type does not come easily. But only at this price, and at this price alone, can one acquire the right to really participate in the revolution of the working class. [37]

### **The Theory of Permanent Revolution Breaks the Hold of Kautskyian Marxism**

After the death of Marx and Engels the mantle of Marxism largely passed to Karl Kautsky, who was called the ‘Pope of Marxism’. His Marxism was very much affected by the social conditions of the German labour movement at the time. Experiencing relative social peace, with capitalism expanding rapidly without any convulsions and delivering systematic concessions to workers, Kautsky’s Marxism became subdued and dominated by reformism. His concept of history was deterministic, fatalistic and mechanical.

For Kautsky the working class was not the subject of history, not the shaper of objective conditions, but the passive reactor to the objective world. The working class was the object of history. According to him working-class strength would go on growing automatically – by a growth in the number of workers, by an increase in their economic power, and by the inevitable product of these events: the growth of consciousness. This would inevitably lead to socialism. As the working class grew, so did its consciousness, until there would be an overwhelming majority for socialism. ‘Economic development would lead naturally to the accomplishment of this progress,’ he wrote. [38] The only task for the socialist party was organisation and education:

The socialist party is a revolutionary party, but not a revolution-making party. We know that our goal can only be attained through a revolution. We also know that it is just as little in our power to create this revolution as it is in the power of our opponents to prevent it. It is not part of our work to instigate a revolution or to prepare a way for it. [39]

Three people shattered Kautsky's passive, mechanical Marxism: Lenin, with his theory of the revolutionary party and the rehabilitation of the authentic Marxist concept of the state and revolution; Rosa Luxemburg with her analysis of the mass strike; and Trotsky with his Theory of Permanent Revolution. In a way each reacted to the immediate aspect of Kautskyism that impinged on his or her own political activity. Lenin, who was the prime organiser of the revolutionary party, had to deal early with the question of the party, its relation with the class, the unevenness in the consciousness of different layers of workers, and how the revolutionary party had to relate to different sections of the class. Rosa Luxemburg, facing the massive bureaucracy of the trade unions and the German Social Democratic Party, looked to the mass strike as the volcano to blow off the hard crust on the labour movement. Trotsky, coming to maturity in the heady days of the revolution itself, developed the Theory of Permanent Revolution.

It was a tragedy that Trotsky's brilliant theory had practically no impact in the Russian socialist movement. The Mensheviks, who recoiled from their radicalism of 1905, gave it short shrift. The Bolsheviks were not ready to pay attention to the ideas of a spokesman of Menshevism. The 'anti-faction' faction led by Trotsky himself undermined the influence of his most important theoretical contribution. The strength of a chain is the strength of its weakest link, and in the case of Trotsky this was his stand on the question of the party. It was a weakness that was later to play into the hands of Stalin in his faction fight against Trotsky in the 1920s.

## Notes

1. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 211.
2. Lenin, *Works*, volume 9, pages 56-7.
3. Lenin, *Works*, volume 9, page 23.
4. Lenin, *Works*, volume 9, pages 28-9.
5. Lenin, *Works*, volume 9, pages 56-7.
6. Lenin, *Works*, volume 9, page 27.
7. Lenin, *Works*, volume 21, page 33.
8. Lenin, *Works*, volume 13, page 328.
9. Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects* (London 1971), page 170.
10. Trotsky, *1905*, page 35.
11. Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, pages 203-4.
12. Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, pages 208-9.
13. Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, page 209.
14. Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, pages 236-7.
15. Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, page 247.
16. Trotsky, *Preface to the first Russian edition of 1905*, in Trotsky, *1905*, pages vi-vii.
17. Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, pages 63-4.
18. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 203.
19. Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, page 178.
20. Cliff, *Rosa Luxemburg*, page 21.
21. As Norman Geras points out in his book *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg* (London 1976), pages 46-8.
22. Rosa Luxemburg, *Organisational Questions of Russian Social Democracy*, in M.A. Waters (editor) *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (New York 1970), page 127.
23. *Piatis (Londonskii) Sezd RSDRP* (Moscow 1963), page 97.
24. Luxemburg, *The Junius Pamphlet*, in Waters, page 290.
25. Luxemburg, *After the First Act*, in *Neue Zeit*, 4 February 1905.

26. Trotsky, *1905*, page page viii.
27. Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, page 42.
28. Reproduced in Trotsky, *1905*, pages 316-7.
29. Lenin, *Works*, volume 13, page 111.
30. Lenin, *Works*, volume 8, page 27.
31. Lenin, *Works*, volume 8, page 79.
32. Lenin, *Works*, volume 9, pages 236-7.
33. Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, pages 163-4.
34. Cliff, *Lenin*, volume 1, page 207.
35. Trotsky, *My Life*, pages 87-8.
36. Karl von Clausewitz, *On War* (London 1971), pages 164-5.
37. Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, volume 1 (London 1973), page 213.
38. Karl Kautsky, *The Class Struggle* (New York 1971), page 189.
39. Kautsky, *The Road to Power* (Chicago 1909), page 50.

## 9. Trotsky on Trial

ON 19 SEPTEMBER 1906 the trial of the Petersburg Soviet began. From the first day the court was flooded with resolutions signed by thousands of workers protesting against the trial. One such document states:

We, the undersigned, workers at the Obukhov plant ... protest against the government's unjust treatment of the Soviet, and particularly against the charges made against our comrades, who merely fulfilled our demands within the Soviet; and we declare to the government that if our comrade, P A Zlydnev, whom we all respect, is guilty, then we are guilty likewise, to which we testify with our signatures.

Over 2,000 signatures accompanied the resolution. [1]

The court building was placed under martial law, and virtually transformed into a military encampment. In the courtyard, at the gates, in the adjoining streets, were several companies of soldiers and Cossacks. Along the entire length of the underground corridor connecting the prison with the law courts, in every room of the law courts building, at the backs of the defendants, at every corner, probably even inside the chimney stack, were gendarmes with drawn sabres.

Some 400 witnesses were called, of whom more than 200 appeared and testified before the court. Workers, factory owners, gendarmes, engineers, domestic servants, ordinary

citizens, journalists, post office officials, schoolboys, members of the Duma, janitors, senators, hooligans, deputies, professors and soldiers, passed in review before the court throughout the month and under the crossfire of questions from the court, the prosecution, the defence and the defendants – especially the defendants – they reconstructed line by line, brushstroke by brushstroke, the picture of the period of activities, so rich in events, of the workers' Soviet.

The sentiments of the anti-Tsarist public expressed itself in a thousand incidents:

Newspapers, letters, sweets and flowers – infinite quantities of flowers! – appeared in the dock. There were flowers in the buttonholes, flowers held in hands and on laps, finally flowers simply lying on benches. The president of the court did not dare to remove these fragrant intruders. In the end, even gendarmerie officers and officers of the court, totally 'demoralised' by the prevailing atmosphere, were handing flowers to the defendants ...

And then the workers were called as witnesses! They gathered in dozens in the witness room, and when the court officer opened the door to the courtroom a wave of revolutionary song would reach the president's chair. These worker witnesses made an astonishing impression. They brought with them the revolutionary atmosphere of the factory suburbs, and such was the divine contempt with which they ignored the mystic solemnity of court ritual that the president, yellow as parchment, could only spread his hands helplessly. [2]

At one moment the defendants rose to pay homage to the memory of one of their number who had been executed before the trial:

... the witnesses, the defending counsel, members of the public – all rose in silence to honour the memory of the fallen victim.

Police and gendarmerie officers, in utter confusion, rose to their feet with the rest. [3]

The prosecution's main case was that the Soviet had been involved in organising an insurrection. On 4 October Trotsky rose to his feet. He began with a statement that the issue of an armed uprising had never figured on the Soviet agenda, but only because the Soviet had taken its attitude on this matter for granted, and had no need to discuss it. Then Trotsky dealt with the general problem of using force for political ends:

Did the Soviet consider itself entitled ... to use force or repressive measures in certain cases? My answer to this question put in such general terms is Yes! ...under the conditions created by a political general strike, whose nature consists in the fact that it paralyses the state mechanism – under such conditions the old power which had long outlived its day and against which, precisely, the political strike was directed, found itself ultimately incapable of action, quite unable to regulate and maintain public order, even by the barbaric means which were the only ones at its disposal. Meanwhile the strike had thrown hundreds of thousands of workers from the factories into the streets, and had freed these workers for public and political life. Who could direct them, who could bring discipline into their ranks? What order of the old state power? The police? The gendarmerie? The secret police? I ask myself: who? And I can find no answer. No one except the Soviet of Workers' Deputies. [4]

The Soviet, he said, challenges the Tsarist state machine as to how to organise a disciplined workers' power:

The Soviet, which directed this colossal elemental force, saw its immediate tasks in reducing internal friction to a minimum, preventing excesses and making sure that the inevitable victims of the struggle were as few as possible. And, that being so, the

Soviet, in the political strike which had created it, became nothing other than the organ of self-government of the revolutionary masses: an organ of power. It ruled the part of the whole by the will of the whole. It was a democratic power and it was voluntarily obeyed. But inasmuch as the Soviet was the organised power of the overwhelming majority, it was inevitably compelled to use repressive measures against those elements among the masses who brought anarchy into its united ranks. The Soviet, as a new historical power, as the sole power at a time of total moral, political and technical bankruptcy of the old apparatus, as the sole guarantee of personal immunity and public order in the best sense of that term, considered itself entitled to oppose its force to such elements. The representatives of the old power, which is wholly based on murderous repression, has no right to speak with moral indignation of the Soviet's violent methods. The historical power which the prosecutor represents in this is the organised violence of a minority over the majority. The new power, whose precursor was the Soviet, is the organised will of the majority calling the minority to order. In this distinction lies the Soviet's revolutionary right to existence, a right that extends above any legal or moral doubt. [5]

Trotsky then went on to argue that a political strike must lead naturally to insurrection:

What does a political strike do? It paralyses the economic apparatus of the state, disrupts communications between separate parts of the administrative machine, isolates the government and renders it powerless. On the other hand, it politically unites the mass of workers from the factories and plants and opposes this workers' army to the state power. Therein, gentlemen of the court, lies the essence of an insurrection. To unite the proletarian masses within a single revolutionary protest action, to oppose them as enemies to the organised power of the state – that, gentlemen of the court, is

insurrection as the Soviet understood and as I understand it too.  
[6]

For a victory of the insurrection the soldiers have to be won to the revolution:

Under what conditions did we think an insurrection might lead us to victory? The condition of the army's sympathy. The first requisite was to bring the army over to our side. To force the soldiers to recognise the shameful role they were playing, to persuade them to work with the people and for the people – that was the first task we set ourselves ...

Under what conditions, then, did we think – and do we think now – that the army can be expected to pass over to the side of revolution? What is the prerequisite for this? [7]

The answer to this question was the workers' readiness to sacrifice their lives in the struggle:

However important weapons are, it is not in weapons that the most essential strength lies. No, not in weapons. Not the capacity of the masses to kill, but their great readiness to die, that, gentlemen of the court, is what we believe ensures, in the last count, the success of a people's rising. [8]

Only when the mass of the workers show their readiness to die on the barricades can they win over the soldiers:

A barricade is not just a physical obstacle. The barricade serves the cause of insurrection because, by creating a temporary barrier to the movement of troops, it brings them into close contact with the people. Here, at the barricades, the soldier hears – perhaps for the first time in his life – the talk of ordinary honest people, their fraternal appeals, the voice of the people's conscience; and, as a consequence of such contact between

citizens and soldiers, military discipline disintegrates and disappears. [9]

Having thus defined the role of the insurrection in the revolution, Trotsky then turned to an attack on the Tsarist government with its Black Hundreds and secret police. The Tsar himself had been the protector of the Black Hundreds. Trotsky quoted revelations made in the first Duma by the liberal Prince Urusov, who related the boast of one of the leaders of the gendarmerie (already quoted above) that 'it is possible to arrange any kind of pogrom involving ten people, if you like, or 10,000, if you like.' Trotsky ended his speech with the following words:

The prosecution invites us to admit that the Soviet armed the workers for the struggle against the existing 'form of government'. If I am categorically asked whether this was so, I shall answer Yes! Yes, I am willing to accept this accusation, but on one condition only. I do not know if the prosecution and the court will accept my condition.

Let me ask: what does the prosecution mean by 'form of government'? Do we really have a form of government? For a long time past the government has not been supported by the nation but only by its military- police-Black Hundreds apparatus. What we have is not a national government but an automaton for mass murder. I can find no other name for the government machine which is tearing into parts of the living body of our country. If you tell me that the pogroms, the murders, the burrings, the rapes ... if you tell me that everything that happens in Tver, Rostov, Kursk, Siedlce ... if you tell me that Kishinev, Odessa, Bialystok are the form of government of the Russian Empire, then I will agree with the prosecution that in October and November last we were arming ourselves, directly and immediately, against a form of government of the Russian Empire. [10]

What a heroic speech!

On 13 October a sensation occurred in the court. One of the defence counsel received a letter from Senator Lopukhin, a recently dismissed director of the police department, asking to be called as a witness. A semi-liberal official, Lopukhin had conducted a special inquiry into the secret activities of his own department, and he forwarded to the court a copy of the report he had submitted to Stolypin, the new minister of the interior. According to this report pogrom proclamations were printed at the printworks of the secret police. These proclamations were distributed all over Russia by secret police agents and members of the Monarchist parties; close organisational links existed between the department of the police and the Black Hundred gangs; General Trepov, Commandant of the Imperial Court, personally submitted to the Tsar regular reports of these activities, and disposed of immense state funds for the express purpose of organising pogroms.

The court refused to take cognisance of the letter or to call Lopukhin as a witness. The refusal effectively exposed the political character of the trial, and much besides. The defence also asked that Witte, the former prime minister, and Durnovo, former minister of the interior, be summoned to the witness stand. This request was also refused. The defendants and their attorneys decided to boycott further proceedings.

On 2 November the verdict was delivered to an empty courtroom. Trotsky and fourteen others were sentenced to deportation to Siberia for life and loss of all civil rights. Two received short prison terms. The rest were acquitted.

### **Escape From Siberia**

On 3 January Trotsky and his colleagues were taken to a Tsarist prison and made to change into the grey trousers, jackets and caps of the convict uniform. But they were allowed to keep their own underwear and boots. The keeping of the boots was of no small

consequence to Trotsky, for in the sole of one of them he had a well-forged passport, and in the high heels, gold coins.

Two days later, at six in the morning, in the dark and empty streets, the party of deportees, with their wives and children, was taken to the railway station to start the long journey into exile. Before departing, the deportees managed to smuggle out a 'Farewell Message' to the workers of Petersburg, thanking them for their solidarity with the *Soviets*, and reaffirming their confidence in the future victory of the revolution. All the deportees were to be sent to the village of Obdorsk, far within the Arctic Circle. The distance of this village from the nearest railway line was 1,500 kilometres, and from the nearest telegraph station, 800 kilometres.

Exceptional measures were taken to guard the prisoners. Since the authorities feared that soldiers from Petersburg might be unreliable, the escort used was summoned from Moscow.

A letter from Trotsky to Natalia gives a lively description of the journey into exile:

We are very cheerful – and this after thirteen months in gaol. Although the carriage windows are barred, beyond them we can see freedom, life and movement ... The officer in command of our escort is obliging, and as for the men – nearly all of them have read accounts of our trial and show us marks of the greatest sympathy ... Up to the last minute, they did not know what kind of people they would be escorting, nor where. The strict security precautions surrounding our sudden departure from Moscow to Petersburg made them think we were about to be taken to Schlüsselburg for execution. I noticed in the hall of the prison that the men seemed very moved and quite exceptionally considerate, as if they felt slightly guilty. I didn't discover the reason until we boarded the train ... How happy the soldiers were when they found they were in the presence of 'workers' deputies' who had been sentenced to no more than exile! ...

The gendarmes seemed to keep a special watch on the escort; at least, that's what the latter think ...

12 January 1906:

At every station, our carriage is surrounded by gendarmes and at larger stations they are reinforced by the mounted police. The gendarmes, their rifles slung, threaten anyone approaching, whether by accident or out of curiosity, with drawn revolvers. Only two kinds of people are guarded like this, 'state criminals' and the most distinguished ministers ... On the one hand, there is this strict supervision, and on the other, tremendous courtesy within the limits prescribed ... We are entitled to be proud of ourselves: they are afraid of the Soviet even after its death. [11]

The prisoners were taken by rail as far as Tyumen, deep in Siberia. In a letter to Natalia on 16 January, Trotsky writes:

Tyumen prison was crowded with political detainees; most of them had been deported by administrative decree. During their exercise period, they stopped beneath our windows and started to sing. They even waved a red banner inscribed with the words 'Long Live the Revolution!' They made quite a good choir; they had no doubt had time enough to learn how to harmonise their voices ... It was all very impressive and even moving ... We sent them a brief message of sympathy through the ventilators. The non-politicals sent us a very long petition, in prose and verse, asking us, 'noble Petersburg revolutionaries' that we were, to help them in their ordeal ... [12]

Throughout the journey Trotsky's letters were secretly mailed by soldiers of the convoy.

From Tyumen the prisoners set out under close guard, slowly by sleigh, northward towards Tobolsk. It was very cold, the temperature around 30 degrees below zero. The convoy of 40 horse-driven

sledges moved only between sunrise and sunset, so as to prevent any attempt at escape.

Trotsky noted how radically the Siberian peasantry had changed as a result of the revolution:

They talk of political matters; they ask if this state of things will last forever or whether it will end soon. Our driver, a boy of thirteen – he assured me he was fifteen – kept shouting during the whole drive: 'Wake up! Wake up! All you working people get ready for the fight, you hungry people!' The soldiers scolded him (although it was plain to be seen that they sympathised with him) and threatened to report him to the officer. The lad knew quite well that they were all on his side and he continued to roar his call for the workers to revolt ... [13]

Day after day the convoy sped northwards, through an area where typhus was raging. At Berezov, on 12 February, Trotsky wrote the last letter of his journey, as he had decided to attempt to escape from there, rather than continue to Obdorsk and so add another 500 kilometres to his journey.

At Berezov Trotsky met a deportee doctor who taught him how to simulate sciatica, so as to dodge the last lap of the journey and be left behind under mild surveillance in the local hospital. Sciatica cannot be verified. The malingering requires much will-power. Trotsky proved so persuasive that he was left behind in hospital, to follow as soon as he had sufficiently recovered. Nobody had ever escaped from Berezov before. The task looked particularly hopeless in February, the month of snow blizzards. The police did not think that anyone would try to escape.

Trotsky had to choose one of three routes. The one by which the convoy had come was the easiest but also the most risky, since it was dotted with police posts, and a telegraph report on his escape would bring instant pursuit. A second route led directly westwards across the Urals to the port of Archangel and a ship, but this was difficult as well as dangerous. So Trotsky chose the third route – across the roadless tundra southwest along the river Sosva, to a

gold-mining settlement in the Urals, which was the terminus of a small single-track railway connected with the Perm-Viatka line.

In a little book originally titled *There and Back*, Trotsky described the dangers involved in the escape route he chose:

The way leads through a desolate and barren country. In the whole stretch of some thousands of versts there are no police, not a single Russian colony, only isolated Yakut yourtas. There are, of course, no telegraph stations – and not a horse along the whole route. One must travel only by reindeer ... the way is full of dangers, incredible dangers and privations.

There are stretches of a hundred versts and more without a trace of human habitation. Among the Yakuts, the only inhabitants of this section, infectious and contagious diseases are prevalent. There is no end of syphilis, and typhus is almost perpetual. Once taken ill there one must not expect relief. This last winter there died in the yourta of Ourvisnk, on the Sosvinski highway, a young merchant from Beresov, named Dobrovolsky. He lay for two weeks suffering from fever, with no care or attention. And suppose the reindeer become exhausted and cannot be replaced. And again – the blinding snowstorms. They continue for days and nights and February is just the month for snowstorms. Should one overtake you there would be no hope. [14]

Trotsky found a sympathetic peasant ready to help. And the latter found him a guide, a native Zyrian drunkard who knew his way in the tundra and spoke Russian and the native dialects. They struck a bargain:

We drew up the terms of the contract, Nikita and I. I am to buy three reindeer, the very best to be had. I am also to provide the sleigh. If Nikivor brings me safely to the mining district the sleigh and the reindeer are to be his and I am to pay him fifty roubles in addition. [15]

As the day of escape approached, Trotsky pretended to recover from the sciatica. On the evening before the escape he went to an amateur theatrical performance of a Chekhov play. During the interval he met the chief of the local police and told him he was feeling well enough to make the last lap of the journey northwards to Obdorsk. The ruse worked.

At midnight Trotsky hurried to the peasant's farmyard where a sleigh was waiting. The peasant spread frozen hay over him, bound it with rope, and they set off. The frozen hay gradually thawed to drip cold water over his body. He was driven a short distance from the town. The Zyrian was at the appointed meeting place, unutterably drunk.

To mislead the police, one of Trotsky's friends in Berezov arranged for one of the local men to take a slaughtered calf down the Tobolsk road. As was anticipated, the move was detected, and when Trotsky's escape was discovered two days later, the police rushed after the calf and lost two more days. [16] Trotsky describes his adventures colourfully:

We took the course along the Sosva. The deer that my guide had bought were the pick of a herd of several hundred. Early in the journey the drunken driver had a way of falling asleep frequently, and then the deer would stop. This promised trouble for both of us. In the end he did not even answer when I poked him. Then I took off his cap, his hair quickly froze, and he began to sober up.

We drove on. It was a magnificent ride through a desert of virgin snow all covered with fir-trees and marked with the footprints of animals. The deer kept up a lively trot, their tongues out at the side, breathing heavily with a 'chu-chu-chu-chu.' The track was narrow, the beasts herded close together, and it was a wonder they did not get in each other's way. Amazing creatures, knowing no hunger or fatigue! They had had no food for twenty-four hours before our sudden departure, and it was another twenty-four hours from the time we started before they got any.

According to the driver, they were just getting into their stride. They ran evenly, without effort, at a speed of eight to ten versts an hour. They found their own food. A log of wood was tied about their necks, and they were let loose; they chose a place where they sensed the presence of moss under the snow, dug deep holes with their hoofs, going in almost to the tops of their ears, and then fed themselves. I had the same feeling for these animals that an aviator must have for his motor when he flies over an ocean at an altitude of several hundred feet.

The leader of the three deer went lame. We were much upset about it; he had to be changed. We looked around for an Ostyak settlement. They are scattered here, many versts away from each other. My guide would find camps by almost imperceptible signs – several versts away he could smell the odour of smoke. The changing of the deer lost us another full day. But, on the other hand, I was lucky enough to see a beautiful thing at dawn: three Ostyaks, riding full-tilt, lassoed some deer, already marked, from their herd of several hundred while the dogs drove the deer toward them.

We drove on again through woods, over snow-covered swamps, and through vast forests that had been destroyed by fires. We boiled snow for water, sat on the snow and drank tea. My guide preferred liquor, but I saw to it that he did not over-indulge.

Although it looks always the same, the road is constantly changing, and the deer know it. Now we are going through an open field, between the birch woods and the river. The road is terrible. Behind us, the wind blows away the narrow track which the sleigh has left. The third deer keeps missing the trail. He sinks in the snow up to his belly and even deeper, makes a few desperate leaps, climbs to the road, pushes against the middle one and knocks the leader off the track. In another place the road, warmed by the sun, is so difficult that the straps on the front sled snap twice, and at each stop the sleds freeze to the

track; it is only with much effort that they can be made to move again. After the first two runs, the deer seem tired.

But now the sun has set, the road is frozen over, and driving is better again. Soft, but not mushy – the most ‘businesslike’ road, as the driver expresses it. The deer trot on almost noiselessly, and pull the sleigh without effort. In the end, we have to unharness the third deer and tie him behind because easy driving makes them prance about, and they might smash the sleigh. The sleigh glides smoothly and in silence, like a boat on a crystal-clear lake. In the darkening twilight the woods seem even more gigantic. I cannot see the road; the movement of the sleigh is hardly perceptible. The enchanted trees rush toward us, the bushes run away on the sides, slim birches and old stumps covered with snow fly past us. Everything is filled with mystery. Chu-chu-chu-chu resounds the even breathing of the deer in the wooded silence of the night.

The journey lasted a week. We had done 700 kilometres and were nearing the Urals; we were meeting whole trains of sleighs more often now. I posed as an engineer and a member of the polar expedition of Baron Tol. Near the Urals, we met a clerk who had worked on this expedition and knew its members. He overwhelmed me with questions. Fortunately he was not quite sober. I tried to get out of this fix with the aid of a bottle of rum which I had taken for use in emergency. Everything went off beautifully. Once in the Urals, I travelled by horse. Now I posed as an official and, together with an excise controller who was surveying his district, finally reached the narrow-gauge railway. The secret police at the station looked on indifferently as I extricated myself from my Ostyak fur coats.

My position on the local Ural line was still far from secure; on that line, where every ‘stranger’ is noticed, I might easily be arrested by cabled instructions from Tobolsk. I went on fearfully. But a day later, when I found myself in a comfortable car of the

Perm railway, I began at once to feel as if my case were won. The train passed through the same stations at which we had been received with such solemn ceremonies by the secret police, guards, and local police chiefs, not so long ago. But now my way lay in a different direction, and I was travelling with different emotions. For the first few minutes the almost empty car seemed too crowded and stuffy, and I went out onto the front platform, where the wind was blowing, and it was dark. A loud cry burst from me spontaneously – a cry of joy and freedom. [17]

Throughout the long hard journey, Trotsky never ceased to be the writer, the artist. Most of the time he fought off sleep, and when they halted to make a fire, and had to melt the snow for tea, he sat by the fire to jot down his observations in an exercise book. He wrote vivid descriptions of the landscape, of the shape of the woods, of the variety of trails left in the snow by the wolf, the fox and other beasts; of his conversations with his driver; of the customs of the Ostyaks.

The Ostyaks here do not speak a word of Russian – except profane words. These, and the officially distributed spirits, are the only contributions Russian culture has given these tribes. It is curious to hear, in the midst of a conglomeration of mysterious sounds which constitutes the Ostyakian speech, the sudden blazing forth, like a meteor, of a certain Russian word very much used in our country, spoken with remarkable distinctness and without the slightest trace of an accent. And they cannot even say ‘good day’ in the Russian language. [18]

Trotsky also described the abject slavery of the Ostyak women.

In his enthusiasm Trotsky now discarded all caution, and at the first stop he wired Natalia, who was living with their infant son in a Finnish town near Petersburg, asking her to meet him at the station where their respective trains would both call. She soon set off without knowing the name of the station, which had somehow been dropped from the text. Entering a compartment full of landowners

taking delicacies of all kinds back to their estates, she listened to their talk of caviar and wine. At last they mentioned the right station – Samino.

When the trains going in opposite directions stopped in Samino, Natalia rushed to the platform to look for Trotsky, but could not find him. She ran through all the carriages, but still could not find him. Suddenly she saw his fur coat in a compartment. She rushed out again. There he was! On the platform, looking for her. They both got back into the train, and quite openly he laughed and chatted aloud on the way to Petersburg. 'I wanted to keep him invisible,' Natalia wrote, 'to hide him away, because of the threat of hard labour hanging over him for his escape. But he was in full view and said it was his best protection.' [19]

Trotsky, Natalia and their son stayed in Petersburg for only a short while. It was too risky a place for him. They went to Finland and stayed for a few weeks in a little village called Oglbu, near Helsingfors. It was there that he wrote of his journey, in the short book *There and Back*. With the money he received from it they went abroad by way of Stockholm. Trotsky now set forth on a new foreign exile which was to last ten years.

## Notes

1. Trotsky, 1905, page 360.
2. Trotsky, 1905, pages 355-7.
3. Trotsky, 1905, page 357.
4. Trotsky, 1905, pages 385-6.
5. Trotsky, 1905, page 386.
6. Trotsky, 1905, page 391.
7. Trotsky, 1905, page 396.
8. Trotsky, 1905, page 397.
9. Trotsky, 1905, page 397.
10. Trotsky, 1905, pages 399-400.

11. Quoted in Victor Serge and Natalia Sedova Trotsky, *The Life and Death of Leon Trotsky* (London 1975), pages 18-19.
12. Quoted in Serge and Sedova Trotsky, page 19.
13. Trotsky, *Flight from Siberia* (Colombo 1969), pages 15-16.
14. Trotsky, *Flight from Siberia*, pages 20-1.
15. Trotsky, *Flight from Siberia*, pages 21-2.
16. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 195.
17. Trotsky, *My Life*, pages 195-8.
18. Trotsky, *Flight from Siberia*, page 36.
19. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 199.

## 10. Wasted Years: 1906-1914

TROTSKY NOW STARTED an exile that was to last a decade – until May 1917. 1907-10 were years of dreadful reaction. The retreat of the labour movement can be measured by the catastrophic decline in the strike movement after the peak year of 1905:

Year	<i>Number strike (thousands)</i>	<i>on Percentage of all workers</i>
1895-1904 (average)	431	1.46-5.10
1905	2,863	163.8
1906	1,108	65.8
1907	740	41.9
1908	176	9.7
1909	64	3.5
1910	47	2.4

‘In 1908, and even more 1909, the number of strikers was far smaller even than the average of the ten years prior to the revolution,’ wrote Lenin. [1] The decline in political strikes was especially marked. The figures for these [2] were:

Year	Total strike-days	Political strike-days
1895-1904 (total)	2,079,408	
1905	23,609,387	7,569,708
1906	5,512,749	763,605
1907	2,433,123	521,647
1908	864,666	89,021

The decline of the revolution left the initiative completely in the hands of the Tsarist government and mass White terror took over. During the dictatorship of Stolypin more than 5,000 death sentences were passed and more than 3,500 people were actually executed – this was at least three times as many as during the whole period of the mass movement (and this did not include shootings without trial, after the suppression of the armed insurrection). [3]

Once the revolutionary movement was on the decline, and the Tsarist government had regained its confidence, the disintegration of the labour movement proceeded rapidly, till it was in complete disarray. For instance in the summer of 1905 the Moscow district of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party had 1,435 members. [4] This rose in mid-May 1906 to 5,320. [5] But by mid-1908 it had dropped to 250, and six months later it was 150. In 1910 the organisation ceased to exist when the district secretary's job fell into the hands of one Kukushkin, an agent of the Okhrana, the secret police. [6] Zinoviev was later to write: 'At this unhappy period the party as a whole ceased to exist.' [7]

### **Trotsky and the Austrian Socialist Leaders**

From 1907 to 1914, Trotsky lived in Vienna. Belonging to no party or organisation in Russia, he found the time and inclination to participate in the Austrian Social Democratic movement. In this he differed fundamentally from Lenin. Lenin was so engrossed in the task of building the Russian party that he did not participate in any local labour movement until the outbreak of the war. Only then did he begin to participate in the Swiss socialist movement, trying to forge a group of revolutionary internationalists and split them from the Socialist Party – and he did succeed in organising a faction within the Swiss Socialist Party which eventually became the seed-bed of the Communist Party of Switzerland. [8]

Trotsky was a member of the Austrian Social Democracy, attended their meetings, took part in their demonstrations,

contributed to their publications, and sometimes made short speeches in German. [9] He also met, and was in close touch with, the leaders of Austrian Social Democracy. He warmly admired Victor Adler, the founder of the party, and repeatedly wrote with love and enthusiasm about him. Thus in 1913 he wrote: 'Austria has given the workers' movement two remarkable leaders ... Victor Adler and Karl Kautsky'. Victor Adler, said Trotsky, had a 'powerful analytical mind': 'he is one of the most remarkable orators in Europe'. 'He developed his rich political intuition to perfection, cultivated an excellent political vision, and made tactical improvisation a principal guarantee of political success'. Trotsky ends his article on Victor Adler with the following words:

During my six-year stay in Vienna I not infrequently come to observe Adler from close-up, as a politician and as party leader, as parliamentarian, people's orator and conversationalist. And out of all impressions one basic one stands out: the inexhaustible generosity of his nature. [10]

Trotsky also had very warm feelings towards Victor Adler's son, Fritz, secretary of the Austrian Social Democracy and editor of the party's theoretical journal, *Kampf*, who during the First World War, in an act of desperation, was to assassinate the Austrian prime minister, Baron Stürgkh. [11] [1\*]

Trotsky also associated with Rudolf Hilferding, Otto Bauer, Max Adler and Karl Renner. He quickly became convinced that they were not really revolutionaries. As he described many years later in his autobiography:

They were well-educated people whose knowledge of various subjects was superior to mine. I listened with intense and, one might almost say, respectful interest to their conversation in the 'Central' cafe. But very soon I grew puzzled. These people were not revolutionaries. Moreover, they represented the type that was farthest from that of the revolutionary. This expressed itself in everything – in their approach to subjects, in their political remarks and psychological appreciations, in their self-

satisfaction – not self-assurance, but self-satisfaction. I even thought I sensed philistinism in the quality of their voices. [12]

Many intellectuals ‘entered the party with a firm conviction that an approximate familiarity with Roman law grants a man the inalienable right to direct the fate of the working class.’ [13] These ‘Marxists’ were really commentators on events, who completely separated theory and practice. They always adapted themselves to the social and political status quo.

It was Trotsky’s close friendship with leaders of Austrian Social Democracy, as well as with Kautsky, Bebel and other leaders of German Social Democracy, that made it possible for him to be invited frequently to appear as spokesman of Russian Socialism before the congresses of the German and Austrian parties. He also became a familiar figure at the congresses of the International.

### **Liquidators and Ultra-Leftists**

The disintegration of the Russian labour movement led to two deviations: among the Mensheviks a move to the right, expressed in reluctance to resume the clandestine struggle, and in keeping activity within the limits the Tsarist regime allowed. These Lenin called Liquidators; they wished to liquidate the illegal party. Among the Bolsheviks, on the other hand, the deviation was ultra-leftist: a refusal to adjust at all to the triumphant counter-revolution, desperate efforts to continue the war-to-the-end while boycotting the few social and political institutions which existed precariously in the open.

Trotsky, like Lenin, was against both deviations. Both saw that it was necessary to rebuild the underground party, which should control every legal institution from the Duma to the trade unions. Trotsky, however, being a conciliator, was inconsistent in fighting the two deviations, and in fact collaborated with the representatives of both.

### **The Mensheviks Move to the Right**

During 1905 people such as Axelrod, Plekhanov and Martov had been lone voices arguing that the Social Democrats should show 'tact' towards the liberals. Now, during the period of reaction, an alliance with the liberal party, the Cadets, became the main tactic of Menshevism. One of the spokesmen of Menshevism, Rakhmetov, put the following argument for this coalition:

It is much easier for the Cadets to twist and turn when they are surrounded by a solid wall of hostility than it would be if they were approached with an offer of a *political coalition* ... Much more can be achieved by the pressure of public opinion on the Cadets (by sending to the Duma resolutions, instruction, petitions and demands, organising protest meetings, *negotiations between the Workers' Group and the Cadets*) than by senseless, and therefore useless, rowdyism, to put it strongly. [14]

Dan, a proponent of permanent revolution in 1905, wrote a year later:

However timid, cowardly, and blind the bourgeois parties, like the Cadets, are, they are propped up on classes that are thrust by the real historical background, and by real interests, on to a path not of reconciliation with the old order, but of sharp struggle against it ... Until the destruction of the autocracy the majority of the bourgeois classes must be fellow-travellers of the proletariat; and hence also the progressive bourgeois parties must also be fellow-travellers of the Social-Democracy. [15]

Axelrod told the Fourth Party Congress of April-May 1906:

Social relations in Russia have not matured beyond the point of bourgeois revolution: history impels workers and revolutionaries more and more strongly towards bourgeois revolutionism, making them involuntary political servants of the bourgeoisie, rather than in the direction of genuine socialist revolutionism and

the tactical and organizational preparation of the proletariat for political rule. [16]

In the same spirit Axelrod argued that should conflict develop between the 'special tasks of social democracy' and the general democratic demands of bourgeois progress, the 'party would have to renounce ... its tasks.' [17]

In October 1906 Axelrod entered into discussions with Professor Vladimir Gessen, the leading Cadet, about collaboration between the two parties, the Social Democrats and Cadets, in the elections to the second Duma.

... the evidence indicates that in some districts Mensheviks and liberals entered into informal coalitions for the elections to the Second Duma ... After the elections to the Second Duma in February 1907, moreover, Lenin accused the Mensheviks of deliberately having formed coalitions with the liberals in St Petersburg, thereby splitting the local Social Democratic vote in exchange for concessions for their candidates. [18]

Martov went some way towards Liquidationism with his call for equality of rights between the legal and illegal party organisations. According to him the illegal organisation ought to serve mainly as a support for the legal party:

... a more or less defined and to a certain extent centralised conspiratorial organisation now makes sense (and great sense) only in so far as it takes part in the *construction of a Social Democratic party*, which by necessity is less defined and has its main points of support in open workers' organisations. [19]

Lenin commented on this idea that it

... leads *in fact to the party being subordinated to the liquidators*, for the legalist who sets himself against the illegal party, considering himself on a par with it, is nothing but a Liquidator. The 'equality' between an illegal Social Democrat

who is persecuted by the police and the legalist who is safeguarded by his legality and his divorce from the party is in fact the 'equality' between the worker and the capitalist ...it is the *illegal organisations* that must *judge* whether the legalists *are in actual fact pro-party*, i.e. [we] specifically reject the 'theory of equality'! [20]

For Martov the underground was to be a mere skeleton apparatus, held in reserve for use in the event of a forced relapse into complete illegality. For Lenin, on the other hand, the legal activities were the skeleton apparatus, whose purpose was to broaden the sphere of operations of the underground party. The political consequences of turning one's back on the underground were bound to be far-reaching. It was, of course, impossible to advocate the overthrow of Tsarism in publications that were meant to be passed by the censor. Therefore to confine the party to legal forms of action meant virtually to abandon the republican principle. This was the first step towards advocating the gradual transformation of the Tsarist regime into a constitutional monarchy, a desire cherished by the Cadets.

One way of liquidating the underground party was to replace it with a broad Workers' Congress. This was the brainchild of Axelrod:

... the workers' congress will play the role of a proletarian constituent assembly, which will liquidate our old party system and initiate a new party regime in the ranks of Social Democracy and the advanced strata of the proletariat. Such a congress would be the greatest triumph for our party. [21]

Larin, the *enfant terrible* of Menshevism, advocated the same idea in a pamphlet called *A Broad Labour Party and a Labour Congress*. [22] A broad labour party, as conceived by Larin, should embrace something like 900,000 of the nine million-strong Russian proletariat. The 'signboard' had to come down – the party must not be Social Democratic. The Social Democrats and the Socialist Revolutionaries must merge; the new organisation must be a 'non-partisan party'.

The Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries must play the role of propaganda bodies within the broad party. [23]

Another Menshevik, N. Rozhkov, suggested the establishment of an open, peaceful, labour organisation – ‘a political association for the protection of the interests of the working class’:

There is no advocacy of any violence in this; there is not a word, not a thought about a violent revolution being necessary, because in reality, too, no such necessity may ever arise. If anyone, blinded by such reactionary frenzy, took it into his head to accuse the members of such an ‘association’ of striving for violent revolution, the whole burden of an absurd, unfounded and juridically flimsy accusation of this sort would fall upon the head of the accuser! [24]

Agitation for the workers’ congress was particularly strong over the summer of 1906, when the first Duma had been dissolved and preparations for the second Duma were already under way. As the biographer of Axelrod writes: ‘...by late 1906 the Mensheviks generally supported the workers’ congress, though there were differences of emphasis among them.’ [25]

Trotsky took an equivocal position regarding the workers’ congress. He supported the idea, but rejected the factional attitude of the Mensheviks on the issue. In a long, private letter to Axelrod on 2 September 1906, he argued that before any step be taken to organise the workers’ congress,

... the party must move toward an agreement binding on both sections ... The unity of the party on the basis of the unity of the class struggle, unity at all costs! I stand on this position, I cannot do otherwise ... ‘Long live the party!’ And I am firmly convinced that the hand of our teacher P.B.A. [Axelrod] will be the first stretched out to this banner.

Trotsky did not doubt that Axelrod would take charge of the organisation of the workers’ congress, for this

... requires the ability to disregard small and petty considerations of a formal revolutionary or formal party character in the name of a broad formulation of the genuine revolutionary and party tasks. [26]

The Bolsheviks moved a resolution at the Fifth Congress of the party in 1907 which, while affirming the right of party members to discuss the issue of the workers' congress in the party press, prohibited individual members or organisations of the party from engaging in agitational and organisational work among the working masses for the purpose of preparing a congress. This enraged Trotsky, who launched a sharp attack on the Bolsheviks. [27]

In 1907 the Menshevik organisation disintegrated. As Martov wrote: 'At this point the fortes of the party collapsed like a house of cards.' [28] In December 1907 Dan wrote to Axelrod: 'There are no money, no people, no [interest in party] work ... Menshevism as an organisation simply does not now exist in Russia.' [29]

### **Trotsky 'Above the Factions'**

Between 1907 and 1914 Trotsky took a supra-factional stand. He berated both sides, now one now the other. His tiny 'non-faction' faction sided with the Mensheviks when organisational issues were discussed, with the Bolsheviks when political perspectives were debated.

In October 1908 he started to edit a paper called *Pravda*. For lack of money it was published very irregularly. Only five issues appeared during his first year of editorship. Its aim, according to Trotsky, was to unite the Social Democrats by rejecting the 'dictatorship of the committee men':

... under the burial shroud of the old party, a new one is being formed. And, our task, the task of all the living healthy elements of Social Democracy, is to put all our forces to this end, to

facilitate the birth and growth of the Social Democratic party on this new, healthy, proletarian base. [30]

Menshevik centrists as well as ultra-left Vperyodists – people Lenin had expelled from the Bolshevik party – collaborated in *Pravda*. Trotsky ‘intended to address himself to “plain workers” rather than to politically-minded party men, and to “serve not to lead his readers.’ [31]

Deutscher comments on this statement that under Trotsky’s editorship,

*Pravda’s* plain language and the fact that it preached the unity of the party secured to it a certain popularity but no lasting political influence. Those who stated the case for a faction or group usually involved themselves in more or less complicated argument and addressed the upper and medium layers of their movement rather than the rank and file. Those who say, on the other hand, that, regardless of any differences, the party ought to close its ranks have, as Trotsky had, a simple case, easy to explain and sure of appeal. But more often than not this appeal is superficial. Their opponents who win the cadres of a party for their more involved argument are likely eventually to obtain the hearing of the rank and file as well; the cadres carry their argument, in simplified form, deeper down. Trotsky’s calls for the solidarity of all socialists were for the moment applauded by many ... But the same people who now applauded the call were eventually to disregard it, to follow the one or the other faction, and to leave the preacher of unity isolated. Apart from this there was in Trotsky’s popular posture, in his emphasis on plain talk and his promise to ‘serve not to lead’, more than a touch of demagoguery, for the politician, especially the revolutionary, best serves those who listen to him by leading them. [32]

Trotsky’s *Pravda* was written almost entirely by a tiny group of brilliant journalists – Trotsky, Adolphe Ioffe, David Riazanov and others. As Lenin wrote: ‘Trotsky’s workers’ journal is Trotsky’s journal

for the workers, as there is not a trace in it of either workers' initiative, or any connection with working-class organisations.' [33]

Trotsky was far from the only conciliator in Russian Social Democracy. As the party was in tatters, many of its members were calling simply for unity, a conciliation between Bolshevism and Menshevism and an end to all factionalism. Lenin was beginning to lose support within his own faction, as many leading Bolsheviks supported the call for a united party. The conciliators included several who had been elected as members or candidates of the central committee at the Fifth Congress, notably A.I. Rykov, V.P. Nogin, I.F. Dubrovinsky, S.A. Lozovsky and G.Y. Sokolnikov. [34]

In these circumstances the Menshevik leaders were able to call together a plenum of the central committee in Paris at the beginning of January 1910. Lenin, who was opposed to the meeting, was on this occasion in a minority, not only in the party as a whole, but within his own faction. The only prominent Bolshevik supporting him against conciliation was Zinoviev. (From that time on Zinoviev was Lenin's closest associate, completely trusted, until the events of 1917 put him to a severe test.)

For three long weeks Lenin was badly hammered. He was forced to agree to liquidate his faction's paper, *Proletary*, and to the publication of a common paper with the Mensheviks – *Sotsialdemokrat* – with two Bolsheviks, Lenin and Zinoviev, joining the Mensheviks Martov and Dan and a representative of Polish Social Democracy, Varsky, on the editorial board. Trotsky's Vienna paper, *Pravda*, was declared an official party organ (Kamenev was dispatched to assist him in editing it) and the central committee was instructed to give it financial support. To add insult to injury, while the plenum condemned the liquidators in words, at the same time it invited them to participate in the life of the party, and to name three of their number for membership of the underground central committee.

Trotsky went so far as to hail the results of the Paris plenum as 'the greatest event in the history of Russian Social Democracy'. [35]

However the 'unity' never became operational, not so much because of Bolshevik intransigence, but because the Mensheviks

were not ready to carry out their part of the bargain. The January 1910 plenum committed the Bolsheviks to have no dealings with the boycottists and the Mensheviks to sever their connections with the liquidators. Lenin was easily able to carry out his part of the instruction, as he had already expelled Bogdanov, Lunacharsky and the other boycottists from the Bolshevik camp. However, the Mensheviks found it impossible to fulfil their obligation. The liquidators' attitude was far too prevalent in their ranks. If the Mensheviks had expelled them this would have completely destroyed the group and would have helped the Bolsheviks towards victory in the movement. Martov made it clear a little later that he had never intended to carry out this commitment and that he had agreed to the 'unity' in the plenum only because the Mensheviks were too weak to risk an immediate break. [36]

The final blow was dealt to the scheme when the three liquidators nominated to join the central committee – P.A. Garvi, I.A. Isuv and K.M. Ermolaev – flatly refused to have anything to do with the underground organisation; they were hostile to the very concept of a central committee. When the Bolshevik 'conciliators', who were in a majority in Russia, proposed further negotiations with other liquidator leaders, Lenin ignored them. When Martov and Dan tried to put their views to *Sotsialdemokrat*, the paper they were supposed to be editing jointly with Lenin and Zinoviev, they were prevented from doing so. (Varsky voted with Lenin and Zinoviev on the editorial board).

In August 1910 Kamenev resigned his job as central committee representative on *Pravda*. Thus *Pravda* remained the paper of the conciliators, the *Vpered* group and a number of Mensheviks.

Trotsky's conciliationism made him a prisoner of the Mensheviks. Martov on one occasion wrote in a letter to Axelrod:

I have answered him [Trotsky] with a more ironical than angry letter, although I admit that I have not spared his *amour propre*. I have written him that he can escape nowhere from the Liquidators and ourselves, because it is not his magnanimity that compels him to defend the right of the liquidators to remain

in the party ... but the correct calculation that Lenin wants to devour all independent people, including Trotsky, as well as the liquidators. [37]

‘The logic of things,’ wrote Martov on another occasion,

... compels Trotsky to follow the Menshevik road, despite all reasoned pleas for some ‘synthesis’ of Menshevism and Bolshevism ... He has not only found himself in the camp of the liquidators, but he is compelled to take up their most pugnacious attitude towards Lenin. [38]

So the Menshevik leaders were as determined as Lenin to carry the party’s schism to the end, although tactically they found it useful to pretend otherwise publicly. Lenin openly called for a split from the Mensheviks. Trotsky’s conciliation only played into the hands of the Menshevik leaders, who wanted to place the responsibility for the split on Lenin. Trotsky’s thunder was directed practically solely at Lenin, because he, unlike the Mensheviks, frantically opposed the idea of the unity of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

On 26 November 1910 Trotsky produced a leaflet calling for unity of all the factions of the RSDRP. He called for:

... harmonious work carried on jointly by all sections of the Party – the ‘Lolos’, ‘Plekhanov’, ‘Leninist’, and ‘Vperyod’ groups, and the non-factionalists. The party has already spiritually outgrown the period of its infancy, and it is time that all its members felt and acted as revolutionary Social Democrats, as patriots of their party and not as members of factions. This co-operation must take place within the framework of the party as a whole, not around factional bodies. [39]

‘Our historic factions, Bolshevism and Menshevism, are purely intellectual formations in origin,’ Trotsky wrote in the Menshevik paper *Luch*. [40] Unlike Lenin, who saw the factional struggle inside the RSDRP as reflecting class pressures, Trotsky saw it only as the

struggle of the intelligentsia 'for influence over the immature proletariat'. Lenin argued that even 'if there had been no intelligentsia, the workers could not have evaded the issue of whether they should follow the liberals or lead the peasantry against the liberals.' [41]

In January 1912 Lenin convened a party conference in Prague, and so at last formally split the party by refusing to invite the Mensheviks to attend. In reply, Trotsky persuaded the Mensheviks associated with the organisation committee to convene a conference of all Social Democrats in Vienna in August 1912. The Bolsheviks refused to participate. The Mensheviks, the Vperyodists, the Jewish Bund and Trotsky's group came together and founded a confederation known as the August Bloc.

Trotsky expected that the rise of the revolutionary temper then taking place in Russia would, as in 1905, push the Mensheviks to the left, and this would make conciliation with Bolshevism possible. However the cleavage between Bolshevism and Menshevism was very wide in 1912. The Bolsheviks had been steeled during the period of reaction, while the Mensheviks became a loose coalition of disparate groups. The Menshevik leaders participated in the August Bloc without illusions of unity with the Bolsheviks. They joined it as a ruse to put the responsibility for the split on the Bolsheviks.

The August Bloc began to fall apart almost as soon as it came together. Riazanov, Trotsky's collaborator on *Pravda*, who stood outside both the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions, explained to Kautsky: 'Only personal hatred for the scoundrel Lenin keep together most of the Mensheviks, Bundists, and Trotsky.' That was hardly enough to sustain a political coalition of such diverse groups. By February 1913 Trotsky was denouncing *Luch*, the paper that the August Bloc had agreed to publish in St Petersburg. Instead of representing all the constituents of the bloc, he claimed, *Luch* was promoting an unadulterated liquidationist line. He further charged that the paper had refused to publish his articles and had not even bothered to answer his letters of protest. He pleaded with Axelrod to use his influence with the liquidators in St Petersburg to mend their ways. Otherwise he would be forced to split with those who 'usurped

the August conference'. It would pain him not to be in the same camp as Axelrod, 'but I cannot reproach myself in any way with disloyalty toward my allies.' [42]

By mid-1913 the August Bloc had in effect completely disintegrated.

### **The Rise of the Bolsheviks 1912-1914**

The year 1911 saw the workers of Russia gradually moving to the offensive. Their movement received a tremendous impetus from the terrible massacre of gold miners in Lena on 4 September 1912. Six thousand workers were on on strike in the Lena goldfields, which were situated in a region of taiga forests almost 2,000 kilometres from the Siberian railway. An officer ordered the gendarmerie to fire on the unarmed crowd, and 500 people were either killed or wounded. From then onwards waves of strikes spread throughout the country. The revival of the working class movement went on until the outbreak of the 1914 war.

The Bolsheviks flourished in these circumstances. They defeated the Mensheviks in several important elections in the legal working-class organisations. On 21 April 1913 in elections to the executive of the St Petersburg Metal Workers' Union ten of the fourteen members elected were from the *Pravda* list, that is, were Bolshevik supporters. On 22 August 1913, a meeting to re-election the executive of this same union was attended by about 3,000 metal-workers. The Bolshevik list was adopted by an overwhelming majority, only some 150 casting their votes for the list sponsored by the Mensheviks.

In June 1914 Lenin could report that of eighteen trade unions in St Petersburg the Bolsheviks controlled fourteen, the Mensheviks three, and in one both parties had an equal number of supporters. Of the thirteen unions in Moscow, ten were Bolshevik and three indefinite, although close to the Bolsheviks. There was not a single liquidationist or Narodnik union in Moscow. [43]

In the 1912 elections to the fourth Duma the Bolsheviks got six deputies elected to the Mensheviks' seven, but all the Bolshevik

deputies were elected in the workers' *curias*, whereas most of the Mensheviks came from middle-class constituencies. In the seven gubernias which returned Menshevik deputies, there were altogether 136,000 industrial workers, while in the six which returned Bolshevik deputies there were 1,144,000; in other words the Menshevik deputies could claim 11.8 per cent of the workers' electors, and the Bolsheviks 88.2 per cent. [44]

The Bolshevik press also got far more support from workers than the Menshevik. On 22 April 1912 a Bolshevik daily paper called *Pravda* started publication in Petersburg. Trotsky denounced the 'theft' and 'usurpation' of the name committed by 'the circle whose interests are in conflict with the vital needs of the party, the circle which lives and thrives only through chaos and confusion.' [45] Lenin did not budge.

Lenin's *Pravda* got far more support from workers than the Menshevik *Luch*, and reached an impressive circulation of between 40,000 and 60,000 copies. During 1913 *Pravda* received 2,181 money contributions from workers' groups while the Mensheviks received 661.

The Mensheviks, who had neglected the underground, found themselves lagging far behind the Bolsheviks, who were now riding the crest of the labour movement wave and dominating the legal organisations. The Mensheviks were beaten in their own favoured area of activity. In demoting the illegal organisations, the Mensheviks had handed the Bolsheviks a clear advantage in waging propaganda and in recruiting supporters among the workers who were looking for clear cut, sharp, revolutionary policies.

### War Correspondent

Finding himself isolated in the Russian socialist movement, Trotsky accepted an offer from *Kievskaja Mysl*, a liberal paper, to go in September 1912 as their military correspondent to the Balkans where the outbreak of war seemed imminent. Trotsky writes in his autobiography:

The proposal was all the more timely because the August conference had already proved to be abortive. I felt that I must break away, if only for a short time, from the interests of the Russian émigrés. The few months that I spent in the Balkans were the months of the war, and they taught me much. [46]

Early in October Trotsky left Vienna just as the first Balkan war broke out, in which Serbians, Bulgarians, Montenegrins and Greeks fought the Turkish empire. In a campaign of six weeks the Turks were pushed back virtually to the gates of Constantinople.

Trotsky opposed chauvinism in all its forms; he denounced the atrocities committed by the Bulgars against the Turks. As early as 3 January 1909 he had written about the situation in the Balkans:

The machinations of the capitalist powers are interwoven with the bloody intrigues of the Balkan dynasties. If these conditions continue, the Balkan Peninsula will go on being a Pandora's box

...

Only a single state of all the Balkan nationalities, with a democratic, federal basis, on the pattern of Switzerland or the USA, can bring internal peace to the Balkans and create the conditions for a mighty development of productive forces. [47]

But such a federation could not be brought about by the bourgeoisie, explained Trotsky in the Vienna *Pravda*:

State unity of the Balkan Peninsula can be achieved in two ways: either from above, by expanding one Balkan state, whichever proves strongest, at the expense of the weaker ones – this is the road of wars of extermination and oppression of weak nations, a road that consolidates monarchism and militarism; or from below, through the peoples themselves coming together – this is the road of revolution, the road that means overthrowing the Balkan dynasties and unfurling the banner of a Balkan federal republic ...

Here Trotsky applied his theory of permanent revolution to the Balkans:

The Balkan bourgeoisie, as in all countries that have come late to the road of capitalist development, is politically sterile, cowardly, talentless, and rotten through and through with chauvinism. It is utterly beyond its power to take on the unification of the Balkans. The peasant masses are too scattered, ignorant, and indifferent to politics for any political initiative to be looked for from them. Accordingly, the task of creating normal conditions of national and state existence in the Balkans falls with all its historical weight upon the shoulders of the Balkan proletariat. [48]

Now the Pandora's box opened and the horrors of war appeared to Trotsky in all their starkness. He describes his first impression of the war: '... a feeling ... of helplessness in the face of the historical fate ... and ... anguish for all those hordes of men who are being led to destruction.' [49]

That's how all this looks when you see it close up. Meat is rotting, human flesh as well as the flesh of oxen; villages have become pillars of fire; men are exterminating 'persons not under twelve years of age'; everyone is being brutalised, losing their human aspect. War is revealed as, first and foremost, a vile thing if you just lift up even one edge of the curtain that hangs in front of deeds of military prowess. [50]

Barbarism lurked behind the façade of civilisation:

... the chaotic mass of material acquisitions, habits, customs, and prejudices that we call civilisation hypnotises us all, inspiring the false confidence that the main thing in human progress has already been achieved – and then war comes, and reveals that we have not yet crept out on all fours from the barbaric period of our history. [51]

This sense of tragedy dominates all Trotsky's Balkan correspondence. Each item is a considerable essay, remarkable for its solid information, vivid impressions and colourful writing – and the social conflicts taking place in the nations involved in the war are the heart of these articles. To give just a sample chosen at random:

It has been written that the Bulgarian people wanted war, and demanded it. Especially insistent on this were certain Russian journalists who obtained their information about the people's feelings from the general staff, if not from the staff of the Octobrist Party. It was not true. The people did not want war and could not have wanted it. The peasant whose cattle, stocks of food, and carts were requisitioned and who was sent to attack Odrin; his wife, left with their children in the deserted hut – they did not want war. They would have been glad if there had been a peaceful settlement of the issue ... Quite a different picture is offered by the upper stratum of the Bulgarian officer corps. Bulgaria had not waged war for twenty-seven years. In this period the 'heroes' of the Bulgaro-Serbian war had managed to adjust themselves well enough to circumstances of peace, prosperity, and profit. The country's wealth increased, banks were founded, the budget grew, supplies for the army increased, extensive opportunities for enrichment opened up. The majors and colonels of 1885 were transformed into generals – mostly into generals of the supply services, involved in commerce and finance. The cult of the army was transformed for them into, first and foremost, a cult of gain for themselves. Their god had long been not Mars but Hermes – Hermes, as was shown at the trial of the Stambulovist ministers, in his dual calling as god of business and god of thieving. [52]

Then Trotsky describes life in a fashionable district of Bucharest, the Rumanian capital where wealth and poverty lived side by side:

Yesterday evening, sitting in an open-air café on the *Calea Victoriei*, I watched two young gypsy women making their way

through the crowds in the street. It was an after dinner crowd, and so at its freest, idlest, noisiest, most eager for amusement. The gypsies were quite young, shy girls of between seventeen and nineteen, but already mothers; they both had their children with them, tiny creatures wrapped tightly in rags so that they looked like little sacks. The gypsies were barefooted and dressed in pieces of cotton print roughly sewn together to make short skirts and half-open blouses. In build they were quite young girls, but the faces of each bore the concentrated expression of a young mother who is protecting her child. Military automobiles grunted (the warning-signals of military automobiles here are given, apparently so as to be impressive, the voices of exasperated pigs), wide-haunched *skoptsi* urged their black horses onward, elegant coquettes waggled their hips, patriotic old men minced along, officers jingled their spurs, bands played in the open-air cafés, everything was noisy, curious, and entertaining, but the two timid, barefooted mothers with their swaddled babies in their arms at once dispersed this atmosphere of idle enjoyment, as though driving a splinter into one's heart. How many young mothers in this peninsula cursed by fate, with babies in their arms or in their wombs, are vainly waiting for their husbands to come back? How many old mothers are waiting in vain for the return of their sons? [53]

What a heart-rending description! And again he writes:

On the one hand, the ladies of Bucharest are dressed too elegantly for the street, and the ritual boot-polishing is obviously Oriental in character. And on the other – the major part of the population go barefoot, among the magnificent, lacquered officers and the splendid ladies all of one size and shape, skinny, ragged, dirty peasants' children rush about, selling fresh nuts and plums, or half-naked lice-ridden gypsy children stretch out their hands for alms. Sunburned peasants in white shirts that reach to their heels tread the asphalt diffidently with their bare feet; they are carrying cabbages, or ducks, and when you

encounter these white-clad figures on the threshold of your hotel, they humbly doff their caps to you. This silent bow speaks of centuries of hunger, degradation, and hopeless slavery. [54]

Trotsky's experience as war correspondent in the Balkans was very important for his future. As he put it in his autobiography: 'The years 1912-13 gave me a close acquaintance with Serbia, Roumania – and with war. In many respects, this was an important preparation not only for 1914, but for 1917 as well.' [55] It was also useful for Trotsky in the founding and leading of the Red Army.

As a journalist Trotsky was extremely thorough. His articles on the Balkans were brilliant. The unusual combination of background material with flashes of colourful reportage and vignettes of people was alive, each article a vivid essay.

However Trotsky's engagement as a military correspondent in the Balkans for a radical liberal paper reflected the weakness of his roots in the Russian labour movement at the time. It was precisely during this period that there was a massive revival of the revolutionary movement. During 1912 and 1913 Trotsky wrote 73 articles on the Balkan war, the majority for *Kievskaja Mysl*. In the years 1912 to 1914 Lenin wrote 261 articles for *Pravda*; these were not as colourful as Trotsky's, but they fitted the needs of the party he was building and leading:

Lenin knew how to write very popular, short articles for *Pravda*. They were always factual, and every article centred on just one idea, which was argued out. He might repeat one theme again and again, but always used different angles, a different example, different stories ... His style was simple and direct. He was simply a man who wanted to convince. He was indifferent to literary form. His writing is plain, hard-hitting and repetitive. [56]

Lenin writing for *Pravda* had a clear party audience, while Trotsky's audience in *Kievskaja Mysl* was diffuse and the purpose of his writing was not clear at all. For all their journalistic merit, Trotsky's

articles had no serious ties with bodies of opinion or organisations that mattered in the real struggle. As against this, every one of Lenin's activities was dominated by a single purpose, and his relation with the working class was through the revolutionary party. The question of the party – the weakest link in Trotsky's armoury – affected every aspect of his activity.

### **Conclusion: Trotsky's Basic Error**

Nobody was clearer about the error of conciliation than Trotsky after he joined the Bolsheviks in 1917. Thus he wrote in 1929:

My inner-party stand was a conciliationist one, and when at certain moments I strove for the formation of groupings, then it was precisely on this basis. My conciliationism flowed from a sort of social- revolutionary fatalism. I believed that the logic of the class struggle would compel both factions to pursue the same revolutionary line. The great historical significance of Lenin's policy was still unclear to me at that time, his policy of irreconcilable ideological demarcation and, when necessary, split, for the purpose of welding and tempering the core of the truly revolutionary party ...

By striving for unity at all costs, I involuntarily and unavoidably idealised centrist tendencies in Menshevism. Despite my thrice-repeated episodic attempts, I arrived at no common task with the Mensheviks, and I could not arrive at it. Simultaneously, however, the conciliationist line brought me into still sharper conflict with Bolshevism, since Lenin, in contrast to the Mensheviks, relentlessly rejected conciliationism, and could not but do this. It is obvious that no faction could be created on the platform of conciliationism.

Hence the lesson: It is impermissible and fatal to break or weaken a political line for purposes of vulgar conciliationism; it is

impermissible to paint up centrism when it zig-zags to the left; it is impermissible, in the hunt after the will-o'-the-wisps of centrism, to exaggerate and inflate differences of opinion with genuine revolutionary co-thinkers. These are the real lessons of Trotsky's real mistakes. [57]

For Lenin the years 1907-1914 were years of forging a Bolshevik party, of selecting cadres, educating them and steeling them. For Trotsky they were seven long wasted years.

### Footnote

1\*. In 1919 Lenin and Trotsky nominated Fritz Adler honorary secretary of the Third International, and were very disappointed when he turned his back on them. Later he became secretary of the Second International.

### Notes

1. Lenin, *Works*, volume 16, pages 395-6.
2. Lenin, *Works*, volume 16, page 406.
3. Pokrovsky, volume 2, page 284.
4. D. Lane, *The Roots of Russian Communism* (Assen 1969) page 104.
5. Martov, *Geschichte der Russischen Sozialdemokratie* (Berlin 1926) page 195.
6. Trotsky, *Stalin*, page 95.
7. Zinoviev, page 241.
8. Cliff, *Lenin*, volume 2, page 17.
9. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 209.
10. *Kievskaya Mysl*, 13 July 1913, reproduced in Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 8, page 16.

11. *Kievskaya Mysl*, 13 July 1913, reproduced in Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 8, pages 33-6.
12. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 207.
13. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 8 pages 12-13.
14. Quoted in Lenin, *Works*, volume 11, pages 57-8 (italics added).
15. Quoted in Dan, page 380.
16. *Chetvertii (obedinitelii) sezd RSDRP* (Moscow 1959), page 248.
17. *Tovarishch*, 31 December 1906, reproduced in Ascher (editor) *The Mensheviks in the Russian Revolution*, page 16.
18. Ascher, *Pavel Axelrod*, pages 251-3 and 261.
19. Martov, *On Liquidationism*, in *Golos sotsialdemokrata*, August-September 1909; Getzler, *Martov*, page 125.
20. Lenin, *Works*, volume 16, page 158.
21. Quoted in Ascher, *Pavel Axelrod*, page 237.
22. Larin, *A Broad Labour Party and a Labour Congress* (Moscow 1906).
23. Lenin, *Works*, volume 12, page 390.
24. N. Rozhkov, *The present situation in Russia and the main tasks of the working-class movement at the present moment*, in *Nasha Zariia*, numbers 9-10; quoted in Lenin, *Works*, volume 17, pages 322-3.
25. Ascher, *Pavel Axelrod*, page 257.
26. Quoted in Ascher, *Pavel Axelrod*, pages 258-9.
27. *Piatii (Londonskii) sezd RSDRP*, pages 555-6.
28. Martov, *Geschichte der Russischen Sozialdemokratie*, page 231.
29. Quoted in Ascher, *Pavel Axelrod*, page 273.
30. Trotsky, *Our Party and its tasks*, in *Pravda* (Vienna), number 4, 2 June 1909, quoted in G. Swain, *Russian Social Democracy and the Legal Labour Movement 1906-14* (London 1983), page 89.
31. *Pravda* (Vienna), number 1.
32. Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, pages 193-4.
33. Lenin, *Works*, volume 20, page 328.
34. Zinoviev, page 162.
35. *Pravda* (Vienna), 12 February 1910; Getzler, *Martov*, page 132.
36. Martov, *Spasitelii iii uprazdnitelii?* (Paris 1911), page 16.
37. *Pisma Akselroda i Martova*, page 230.

38. *Pisma Akselroda i Martova*, page 233.
39. Quoted in Lenin, *Works*, volume 17, page 32.
40. Quoted in Lenin, *Works*, volume 18, page 554.
41. Quoted in Lenin, *Works*, volume 18, page 554.
42. Quoted in Ascher, *Pavel Axelrod*, pages 295-6.
43. Lenin, *Works*, volume 20, page 387.
44. Lenin, *Works*, volume 19, page 462.
45. *Pravda* (Vienna), number 25.
46. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 226.
47. *Kievskaya Mysl*, 9 January 1909; Trotsky, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913* (New York 1980), page 12.
48. *Pravda* (Vienna), 1 August 1910; Trotsky, *The Balkan Wars*, page 40.
49. *Kievskaya Mysl*, 3 October 1912; Trotsky, *The Balkan Wars*, pages 65-6.
50. *Kievskaya Mysl*, 23 December 1912; Trotsky, *The Balkan Wars*, page 272.
51. *Kievskaya Mysl*, 14 October 1912; Trotsky, *The Balkan Wars*, page 148.
52. *Kievskaya Mysl*, 6 December 1912; Trotsky, *The Balkan Wars*, page 262.
53. Trotsky, *The Balkan Wars*, page 359.
54. Trotsky, *The Balkan Wars*, page 361.
55. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 227.
56. Cliff, *Lenin*, volume 1, pages 343 and 345.
57. Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, pages 49-50.

## 11. The First World War

TO AVOID INTERNMENT in Austria when the war broke out, Trotsky moved from Vienna to Zurich. Neutral Switzerland became the refuge of Russian revolutionaries who had lived in Germany and Austria. To Zurich also went Karl Radek, Nikolai Bukharin, and a little later, Lenin.

During his stay in Zurich, which lasted only a little over two months, Trotsky wrote a pamphlet, *The War and the International*, first serialised in *Golos*, the Paris paper edited by Martov, and then appearing as a pamphlet in Germany circulated underground in December 1914. The German government sentenced Trotsky *in absentia* to several months in prison. This was the first extensive statement of anti-war policy by a Russian socialist. Trotsky was one of the main inspirers of the revolutionary opposition to the war and the coming Zimmerwald conference.

The pamphlet was directed first of all against German Social Democracy, the leading party of the Second International, which was now a supporter of the war. Trotsky wrote:

All talk of the present bloody clash being a work of national defence is either hypocrisy or blindness. On the contrary, the real, objective significance of the war is the breakdown of the present national economic centres, and the substitution of a world economy in its stead. But the way the governments propose to solve this problem of imperialism is not through the intelligent, organised cooperation of all humanity's producers, but through the exploitation of the world's economic system by the capitalist class of the victorious country; which country is by

this war to be transformed from a Great Power into the World Power.

The war proclaims the downfall of the national state. Yet at the same time it proclaims the downfall of the capitalist system of economy ....

The war of 1914 is the most colossal breakdown in history of an economic system destroyed by its own inherent contradictions ...

Capitalism has created the material conditions of a new socialist economic system. Imperialism has led the capitalist nations into historic chaos. The war of 1914 shows the way out of this chaos by violently urging the proletariat on to the path of revolution. [1]

War is the method by which capitalism, at the climax of its development, seeks to solve its insoluble contradictions. To this method the proletariat must oppose its own method, the method of the social revolution. [2]

Trotsky argues the case for a new International:

As the national states have become a hindrance to the development of the forces of production, so the Socialist parties have become the main hindrance to the revolutionary movement of the working class.

... the entire book, from the first to the last page, was written with the idea of the New International constantly in mind, the New International which must rise up out of the present world cataclysm, the International of the last conflict and the final victory. [3]

What is the programme Trotsky put forward for the anti-war movement?

‘Immediate cessation of the War’ is the watchword under which the Social Democracy can reassemble its scattered ranks, both within the national parties, and in the whole International ...

The conditions upon which peace should be concluded – the peace of the people themselves, and not the reconciliation of the diplomats – must be the same for the whole International.  
*No reparations.*

The right to every nation to self-determination.

The United States of Europe – without monarchies, without standing armies, without ruling feudal castes, without secret diplomacy.

The surest way by which the Social Democracy can isolate the militaristic reaction in Europe and force it to take the offensive is by the slogan of peace. [4]

Later, in November 1914, Trotsky left Switzerland for France, and stayed in Paris until he was deported to Spain on 30 October 1916.

### **Lenin’s Anti-War Policy**

Like Trotsky, Lenin saw the war as imperialist. Both condemned the socialist leaders who supported the war efforts of their own governments. Both called for working-class struggle against the war. Both called for the construction of a new International. However there were significant differences between Lenin and Trotsky regarding the strategy and tactics of opposing the imperialist war, differences that grew out of the long factional strife of the past which kept them away from each other.

First, Lenin called for a policy of revolutionary defeatism. In August 1914 he wrote:

From the viewpoint of the working class and the toiling masses of all the peoples of Russia, the defeat of the Tsarist monarchy and its army, which oppress Poland, the Ukraine, and many other peoples of Russia, and foment hatred among the peoples so as to increase Great Russian oppression of the other nationalities, and consolidate the reactionary and barbarous government of the Tsar's monarchy, would be the lesser evil by far. [5]

And Lenin was not equivocal. To aim at overthrowing one's own ruling class through civil war, one must welcome the defeat of one's 'own' country:

A revolution in wartime means civil war; the conversion of a war between governments into a civil war is, on the one hand, facilitated by military reverses ('defeats') of governments; on the other hand, one cannot actually strive for such a conversion without thereby facilitating defeat. [6]

... 'a war against war' is a banal phrase unless it means a revolution against their own government. [7]

... To repudiate the defeat slogan means allowing one's revolutionary ardour to degenerate into an empty phrase, or sheer hypocrisy. [8]

A revolutionary class cannot but wish for the defeat of its government in a reactionary war, and cannot fail to see that the latter's military reverses must facilitate its overthrow ... the socialists of all the belligerent countries should express their wish that all their 'own' governments should be defeated ...

Not 'peace without annexations', but peace to the cottages, war on the palaces; peace to the proletariat and the working people, war on the bourgeoisie! [9]

The line of 'revolutionary defeatism' is a universal one, applicable to all imperialist countries:

... if we call on the masses to fight against their governments, 'regardless of the military position of the given country', we thereby not only repudiate the admissibility of 'defending the country', as a principle, in the present war, but admit the desirability of defeat for every bourgeois government in order to transform its defeat into revolution. [10]

Any retreat from 'revolutionary defeatism', said Lenin, could lead to hesitation in carrying through the class struggle, in case this would weaken national defence.

Besides the question of 'revolutionary defeatism', another bone of contention between Lenin and Trotsky was the slogan of Peace. Lenin argued that there is no reformist half-measure way out of the war. The only way to stop the imperialist war was by civil war:

It would be a crying deception of the masses to suggest to them, directly or indirectly, that a reformist solution of the problems raised by the present war is possible. For this war has brought about a revolutionary situation in Europe by making an issue of the most fundamental problems of imperialism, which must needs be solved the imperialist way unless the present governments and ruling classes of Europe happen to be overthrown the revolutionary way. [11]

Thus Lenin rejected with utter disgust the pacifist programme of Kautsky and his group:

Any 'peace programme' will deceive the people and be a piece of hypocrisy, unless its principal object is to explain to the masses the need for a revolution, and to support, aid and develop the mass revolutionary struggles breaking out everywhere (ferment among the masses, protests, fraternisation in the trenches, strikes, demonstrations ... [12]

While opposing pacifism and the 'Peace' slogan, Lenin does not oppose the spontaneous urge of the masses for peace. One must distinguish, he argues, between the urge of the masses for peace and the revolutionary party programme to end the war; the party should not tail-end the awakening masses.

Should ... socialists ... remain indifferent to the peace demand that is coming from ever greater masses of the people? By no means. The slogans of the workers' class-conscious vanguard are one thing, while the spontaneous demands of the masses are something quite different. The yearning for peace is one of the most important symptoms revealing the beginnings of disappointment in the bourgeois lie about a war of liberation', the 'defence of the fatherland', and similiar falsehoods that the class of capitalists beguiles the mob with. This symptom should attract the closest attention from socialists. All efforts must be bent towards utilising the masses' desire for peace. But how is it to be utilised? To recognise the peace slogan and repeat it would mean deceiving the people with illusion that the existing governments, the present-day master classes, are capable ... of granting a peace in any way satisfactory to democracy and the working class. Nothing is more harmful than such deception ... we must make use of the desire for peace so as to explain to the masses that the benefits they expect from peace cannot be obtained without a series of revolutions. [13]

The strength of Lenin's position was that by its extremism, by its 'bending the stick' – by speaking about the defeat of one's own country as being the lesser evil, it was better calculated to create a clear division between revolutionaries and social patriots. Lenin's position was direct, his language was simple. What he said could not be misinterpreted.

### **Trotsky and 'Revolutionary Defeatism'**

Trotsky did not agree with Lenin's slogan of revolutionary defeatism. Thus he wrote, in an article entitled *War Catastrophe and Political Perspectives*:

Other things being equal, a defeat that shatters one state structure implies the corresponding strengthening of that of its opponent. And we do not know of any European social and state organism which it would be in the interests of the European proletariat to strengthen ...

Russian Social Democracy could not link its political plans to the mobilising effect of military catastrophe ...

... a revolution which grows out of a defeat inherits an economic life utterly disordered by war, exhausted state finances, and extremely strained international relations. ... military catastrophe, exhausting as it does the economic and spiritual forces and resources of the population, retains only a limited capacity to arouse active indignation, protest and revolutionary action. Beyond a certain point, exhaustion can be so great as to suppress energy and paralyse the will. Despair, passivity, and moral disintegration set in ...

... The gigantic dimensions of the present war – *with its indefinitely prolonged character* – may for a long period clip the wings of all social development, and consequently, first and foremost, that of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat.

[14]

Trotsky's argument is purely rationalist, not dialectical materialist. From the standpoint of economic rationality, the revolution and civil war are purely negative: their immediate impact is to damage the productive forces of society. However, as a matter of fact, the conditions of economic chaos are prerequisites of the proletarian revolution.

In an *Open Letter to the Editorial Board of the Bolshevik journal Kommunist* Trotsky wrote:

I cannot possibly agree with your view ... that the defeat of Russia is the lesser evil'. This is an uncalled for and absolutely unjustifiable concession to the political methodology of social patriotism, which would replace the revolutionary struggle against the war and the conditions causing it, with an orientation, extremely arbitrary in the present conditions – towards the lesser evil. [15]

The experience yet to come of 1917 and 1918 in Russia and Germany showed who was right about the impact of military defeat on the revolution. Of course wisdom after the event is cheap, but in reality Trotsky's method of approach to revolutionary defeatism was flawed. Of course the aim of the socialist revolution is to advance the productive forces, but in practice the socialist revolution in the short run does damage to the productive forces, and can be the outcome of this damage. Thus no one will argue in the name of socialist construction against a revolutionary army blowing up bridges to stop the advance of a counter-revolutionary army. The truth is always concrete. Trotsky's approach to the question was totally abstract, hence vague.

Trotsky also argued strongly against Lenin's opposition to the slogan of Peace. Thus in the *Open Letter to the Editorial Board of Kommunist* he wrote:

I cannot reconcile myself to the vagueness and evasiveness of your position on the question of mobilising the proletariat under the slogan of the *struggle for peace*. It is under this slogan that the working masses are now in fact coming back to their senses politically, and the revolutionary forces of socialism are rallying in all countries. Under this slogan an attempt to restore the international ties of the socialist proletariat is now being made. [16]

Lenin always called a spade a spade. The slogan must always fit the task. Seeing that there was no way to stop the imperialist war through the path of reform, the slogan of the revolutionary party must set the workers symmetrically against their enemy. So, to stop an imperialist war a civil war was needed. Any talk of peace would be to accept the possibility that reform might overcome the imperialist war.

It is important, however, to place the dispute between Lenin and Trotsky on revolutionary defeatism in proper perspective. First of all, Trotsky was not the only international socialist leader to oppose the slogan of revolutionary defeatism. Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and Franz Mehring also did so. They declared themselves against national defence and in favour of peace without victors or vanquished, peace without reparations or annexations. For political reasons Lenin was far more uncompromising in his criticism of Trotsky's position than that of Luxemburg or Liebknecht.

In addition, not all the Bolsheviks supported Lenin's position of revolutionary defeatism.

When Lenin's theses on the war reached Petersburg at the beginning of September 1914, the party leaders raised a number of objections, especially to the slogan of 'revolutionary defeatism'. The Duma fraction tried to tone down the sharpness of Lenin's formulations. It was the same story in Moscow and in the provinces. 'The war caught the "Leninists" unprepared', testifies the Moscow *okhrana* (secret police), 'and for a long time ... they could not agree on their attitude toward the war.' The Moscow Bolsheviks wrote in code by way of Stockholm for transmission to Lenin that, notwithstanding all respect for him, his advice to 'sell the house' (the slogan of defeatism) had not struck a chord. [17]

The old Bolshevik Baevsky noted that the slogan of defeat of one's own government raised objections in Russia and that there was a tendency to eliminate the word 'defeat' 'as a very odious one'. [18] Shliapnikov also recalled that, while the theses on the whole reflected the state of mind of party workers, the question of 'defeat' provoked perplexity. [19] *Sotsialdemokrat* noted that the Bolshevik organisation in Moscow adopted the manifesto with the exception of the paragraph dealing with the defeat of one's own country. [20]

There is other evidence of reluctance by party workers in Russia and outside to adopt the defeatist point of view, not only at the beginning of the war but right up to the revolution of 1917. [21]

In November 1914 the five Bolshevik deputies to the Duma were arrested (the sixth had resigned some time earlier). In February 1915, together with another five Bolshevik leaders, they were brought to trial. They, and above all their theoretical mentor, Kamenev, went out of their way to repudiate Lenin's theses on revolutionary defeatism. (The only notable exception was the Duma deputy M.K. Muranov.) Kamenev declared that Lenin's theses decidedly contradicted his own views on the current war. He said that Lenin's views were rejected both by the Social Democratic deputies and the central institutions, meaning the central committee, whose spokesman Kamenev claimed to be. Another of the Bolsheviks on trial pointed out that Lenin's theses contradicted the declaration in the name of the Social Democratic fractions which had been read in the Duma on 27 July 1914. [22]

### **Still a Conciliator**

There was another bone of contention between Lenin and Trotsky. Trotsky did not agree with Lenin's strict definition of who were the internationalists. Lenin was for excluding Karl Kautsky, Victor Adler, the organising committee of the Mensheviks, and other similar leaders. Thus in a *Letter from the Central Committee of the RSDRP to the Editors of Trotsky's paper Nashe Slovo* Lenin wrote:

What should be understood by internationalism? Is it, for instance, possible to number among the internationalists those who stand for the International being restored on the principle of a mutual 'amnesty'? As you know, Kautsky is the leading representative of the 'amnesty' theory. [1\*] Victor Adler has come out in the same vein.

We consider the adherents of an amnesty the most dangerous opponents of internationalism ... A most determined struggle against the 'amnesty' theory is a *conditio sine qua non* of internationalism. It is vain to speak of internationalism if there is no desire and no readiness to make a complete break with the defenders of an 'amnesty'. [23]

Before dealing with Trotsky's attitude to various Menshevik leaders during the war, let us sketch the position of the Menshevik leaders toward the war. On the extreme right – defencists and chauvinists – were Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich and Lev Deich. They declared themselves for the Entente and the defence of Russia. Plekhanov wrote: Russia belongs not to the Tsar, but to its working population. Whoever holds dear the interests of this population cannot remain indifferent to the fate of Russia.' [24] Angelica Balabanoff reported that Plekhanov said: 'So far as I am concerned if I were not old and sick I would join the army. To bayonet your German comrades would give me great pleasure.' [25] What a blow it must have been to Trotsky to see the old veterans to whom he was so dedicated, Zasulich and Deich, largely for whose sake he had broken with Lenin in 1903, now joining the patriotic camp.

A hardly better position than Plekhanov's was taken by Potresov. He was not ready to go so far as to support the Tsarist government in a war, but he was against opposing the war. Thus early in 1915 he wrote:

The defeat of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey was incomparably more to be hoped for from the socialist point of view than the defeat of Britain, France, Belgium and Russia ... Russian socialists are confronted by a reactionary government which prohibits all action by independent social forces even for the sake of national defence, which calls for the fullest exertion of the people's energies ... Consequently, while the Russian socialists do not oppose the national effort of self-defence, and while they recognise that the war raises issues which must be judged and solved, now and in future, by all classes of the

community, they continue with all their powers to fight against the Russian government. They do not oppose the war or put out anti-war slogans, not only because these would be ineffectual but because they would consider them harmful. [26]

More equivocal than this was the position of Pavel Axelrod. In December 1914 he wrote that it was impossible 'to ignore the question of who actually started' the war, 'thereby imposing upon all attacked countries the necessity of defending their independence' ... 'To blame the Belgian socialists for defending their country' is 'not Marxism, but cynicism' ...

While fatherlands exist, while, as at present, the proletariat's life and its movement are compressed into the framework of the fatherlands, and while the proletariat does not feel another and international soil under its feet, the question of patriotism and self-defence will continue to exist for the working class.

Axelrod asserted that the conduct of the German Social Democratic leaders was not treachery, as their behaviour was dictated by 'a keen sentiment, the consciousness of an organic bond with that piece of land, the fatherland, on which the German proletarians live and work'. [27]

Axelrod quoted approvingly a point made by Jules Guesde, the French social patriot: if the house occupied jointly by a worker and a capitalist catches fire, the worker must try to extinguish the flames for it is also his home. Moreover, French workers had every reason to prefer a French republican regime to rule by semi-absolutist Germany: 'The French socialists could not but actively participate in the defence of their country.' [28]

Abraham Ascher, the biographer of Axelrod, described his position thus:

He sympathised with the decisions of the French and Belgian socialists to defend their countries, but refused to sanction support of the Tsar by Russian socialists. By the same token, he

opposed the idea of total victory or defeat of either side ... a crushing defeat of a major power could only amount to a 'great misfortune for all humanity' because the economic devastation it would produce would impede the economic development of Europe as a whole. At the same time, however, he suggested that a minor defeat for Tsarist Russia, one that would not affect the 'organic development of the country, would be of assistance in the liquidation of the old regime.'

Axelrod's ambivalent position on the war did not endear him to the social patriots who were in the majority among the Mensheviks, or the Internationalists who were in a minority. Ascher writes:

Axelrod's refusal to advance a straightforward, uncomplicated line on the war irritated many Russian Marxists. In 1916 he complained that 'Since the outbreak of the war until the present I have been quite isolated, even within the narrow circle of my colleagues.' It seemed to him that nearly everyone misunderstood his position. Yet the real source of his isolation was the widespread belief that his guarded and judicious statements concealed indecision, vagueness, and, most serious, insufficient dedication in opposing the war. [29]

To the left of Axelrod stood Martov. Looking back in 1930, Trotsky called Martov 'the Hamlet of Democratic Socialism': '...his thought lacked the mainspring of will'. [30] So he always vacillated. 'Martov's first reaction to events was nearly always revolutionary, but before he could put his ideas on paper, his mind would be besieged by doubts from all sides.' [31]

At the beginning of the war Martov took a very favourable attitude to Lenin's position on the war. [32] At the time Lenin praised *Golos*, the Paris paper edited by Martov as 'the best socialist paper in Europe'. He said:

The more frequently and the more violently I differed with Martov before, the more definitely I must say now that that writer

is now doing precisely what a Social Democrat should do. [33]

Martov toyed with the idea of collaborating with Lenin. On 14 October 1914 he wrote to Axelrod: 'Sooner than with Plekhanov we could perhaps come to terms with Lenin, who appears to be ready to assume the role of champion against opportunism in the International.' But as if with second thoughts he added: 'With regard to an agreement with Lenin, I only just mentioned it: I have no wish to work with him and would prefer that we on our own, within the Menshevik camp, declare ourselves in this matter.' [34] On 27 October Martov shied even further away from Lenin: 'It is obvious that Lenin and Co. would compromise us more than they would help us.' [35]

For many months Martov vacillated between Axelrod and Trotsky. When Trotsky moved to Paris in November 1914 he joined the editorial board of *Golos*. In the middle of January 1915 *Golos* ceased publication, being harassed by the censorship. On 19 January a new paper was published, *Nashe Slovo*. This was a modest sheet of two, rarely four, pages, abundantly strewn with white spaces marking the censors' deletions. The co-editors were Martov and Trotsky. Martov found himself very often in conflict with the majority of the editorial board and above all with Trotsky. Lunacharsky, who was also on the editorial board of *Nashe Slovo* describes the heated arguments between Trotsky and Martov at meetings of the board:

Trotsky tried by every means to persuade Martov to break his links with the defencists. The meetings of the editorial board turned into lengthy discussions, during which Martov, with astounding mental agility, almost with a kind of cunning sophistry, avoided a direct answer to the question whether he would break with the defencists, and at times Trotsky attacked him extremely angrily. Matters reached the point of an almost total break between Trotsky and Martov – whom, by the way, Trotsky always respected as a political intellect – and at the same time a break between all of us left Internationalists and the Martov group. [36]

For all his sharp arguments against Martov, Trotsky still for a very long time shirked an actual break with him.

By August 1915 Martov was practically out of *Nashe Slovo*, although his official resignation from the editorial board came only on 18 March 1916. In reply to his letter of resignation, the board asserted that he had always opposed all attacks on the defencists, and that he had fudged over the distinction between 'passive internationalism and proletarian pacifism on the one hand, and, on the other, social revolutionary internationalism which alone fits the tasks of the working class in the new era.' [37]

While on *Nashe Slovo*'s editorial board, Martov continued to collaborate with Axelrod on the organisation committee of the Mensheviks, which declared in late 1915: 'The proletariat cannot remain indifferent to the impending defeat ... The proletariat is vitally interested in national self-preservation.' [38]

Of special significance in the Menshevik camp were the War Industry Committees and the group of Duma deputies led by N.S. Chkheidze. In May 1915 the industrialists set up War Industry Committees to step up production for the war effort, and in July it was decided to include workers' representatives on these. The Mensheviks were in favour of participation in the committees, while the Bolsheviks were against. The Bolsheviks did, however, run candidates in the elections for delegates to the committees, in order to explain their anti-war views to the workers. Out of 176 delegates in Petersburg, 95 voted for the Bolshevik resolution which opposed participation in the committees and 81 voted against. [39] All the main Menshevik leaders, with the exception of Martov, advocated participation.

As regards the Menshevik Duma deputies, they continued to preserve their freedom after the Bolshevik deputies were arrested in 1914. One of the Menshevik deputies – Makov – went so far as to vote for the defence budget, and for that was expelled from the fraction. Two others – Chkhenkeli and Khaustov – were openly patriotic. Chkheidze, the leader of the fraction, although declaring himself in favour of the Zimmerwald conference resolution which

opposed the war, still supported workers' participation in the War Industries Committees. [40]

Trotsky was for a complete break with Plekhanov, Zasluch, Deich and Potresov. He was very much against participating in the War Industry Committees. On 11 November 1915 he wrote in *Nashe Slovo*, after the elections to the War Industries Committees in Petersburg:

Organisational contact with the social patriotic general staffs is ... becoming intolerable for Social Democracy and its organisations. We cannot involve ourselves in collaboration with social patriots who openly link themselves with the bourgeoisie's struggle against us. We cannot use the authority of the workers' party to cover up for those prisoners of proletarian consciousness, and we cannot allow any organisational ties whatsoever to restrict our struggle with them, which must be and will be taken to the very end! [41]

However, when it came to the Menshevik Duma deputies and Chkheidze, Trotsky's position was not so clear cut. In June 1915 he defended the Duma group against Lenin's criticism:

... the latest actions of our deputies, the speeches of Chkheidze, Chkhenkeli, and Tulyakov, and their voting, undoubtedly represents a step forward towards political precision and revolutionary irreconcilability ...

Along with all the revolutionary elements of the International, I am proud of the conduct of our deputies; I regard them at present as the most important channel of internationalist education of the proletariat of Russia. [42]

But by 20 April 1916 Trotsky was singing a different tune, criticising 'the inadequately defined position of the Social Democratic Duma fraction under Chkheidze's leadership':

Some of them are 'revolutionary' social patriots, they accept the war. They therefore seek to further the development of a 'national revolution' by assuming the role of critique of the

government's conduct of the war. It is understandable that from their standpoint, that of a national revolution under the patriotic banner, it is necessary to seek a common language with the 'Progressive Bloc' and to limit the sphere of 'revolutionary' criticism to questions of domestic policy and military technique.

Other members of the Duma fraction he claimed, limited their activity to 'passive internationalism'. [43]

### **The Zimmerwald Conference**

After months of preparation, on 5 September 1915 a conference of anti-war socialists met in Zimmerwald in Switzerland. As a result, the name of this hitherto obscure, tiny village was to echo throughout the world. Trotsky reminisced many years later:

The delegates, filling four stage-coaches, set off for the mountains. The passers-by looked on curiously at the strange procession. The delegates themselves joked about the fact that half a century after the founding of the First International, it was still possible to seat all the internationalists on four coaches. [44]

Thirty-eight delegates attended, some of whom were observers without votes. From the very beginning of the conference three fairly distinct groups emerged. On the right there were some nineteen or twenty delegates, constituting a majority of the conference, who, although they supported a general demand for peace, opposed any breach with the social patriots or split with the Second International. This group included most of the German delegation, the French, some of the Italians, the Poles and the Russian Mensheviks. Those who were dissatisfied with this moderate objective and favoured a denunciation of civil peace, an organisational break with the social patriots and a revolutionary class struggle, constituted a left group of eight led by Lenin. To this group belonged Zinoviev, one Lithuanian, the Pole Karl Radek, two Swedish delegates and Julian Borchardt,

the delegate of a tiny German group, the International Socialists. Between these two was a smaller centre group of five or six, among whom were Trotsky, Grimm, Balabanoff and Roland-Holst.

The German edition of a pamphlet titled *Socialism and War*, by Lenin and Zinoviev, was distributed among the delegates. But the Bolsheviks were unable to persuade the conference to adopt the draft resolution and thesis which Lenin proposed. This stipulated, as an essential pre-condition for the revolutionary mobilisation of the proletariat, the splitting of the socialist parties in a ruthless struggle against the majority of the labour leaders. Their minds, it declared, were 'twisted by nationalism and eaten up with opportunism'. 'At the moment of world war,' they 'had delivered the proletariat into the hands of imperialism and abandoned the principles of socialism and therewith the real struggle for the daily needs of the proletariat'.

Lenin's resolution was overwhelmingly defeated, being dubbed childish and dangerous nonsense. Merrheim said that he could not pledge himself to urge the French people to rise up in rebellion against the war; the European situation was not in his view ripe for revolution.

The leader of the majority of Germans was Georg Ledebour, a follower of Kautsky. Kautsky had recommended either abstaining from voting for the war credits or voting for them 'with reservations.' In justification for this stand he stated: 'The International is an instrument of peace and not of war.' After the war it would be necessary to come to agreement with the social patriots: 'All men are human and make mistakes; nevertheless the war will pass and we can make a new start'. Ledebour declared at the Zimmerwald conference: 'Lenin's resolution is unacceptable.' 'Perhaps,' he added, 'revolutionary actions might occur, but not because we call for them in a manifesto ... In the belligerent countries people who sign or distribute such a manifesto would at once be liquidated.' Ernst Meyer stated that not even a tiny proportion of the German proletariat would be prepared for the kind of action proposed by Lenin's manifesto. An Italian delegate stressed that the task of the conference was to end the world war, not to unleash a civil war.

The conference decisively rejected Lenin's efforts to create a breach with the Second International and found a new International. Merrheim, for example, declared in the debate: 'You, comrade Lenin, are not motivated by the desire for peace, but by the wish to lay down the foundations of a new International; it is this which divides us.' In similar vein the official conference report stated: 'In no way must the impression be created that this conference aims to provoke a split in or to establish a new International.' [45]

The manifesto eventually adopted by the conference was almost identical with Trotsky's draft. This movingly described the plight of embattled Europe, placed the responsibility for the war on the capitalist order, their governments and the treacherous parties. It called on the workers to overcome the chauvinist infection and put an end to the slaughter. It ended thus:

Never in the history of the world has there been a more urgent, a more noble, a more sublime task, the fulfilment of which must be our common work. No sacrifice is too great, no burden too heavy, to attain this end: the establishment of peace between the nations.

Working men and women! Mothers and fathers! Widows and orphans! Wounded and crippled! To all who are suffering from the war or in consequence of the war, we cry out, over the frontiers, over the smoking battlefields, over the devastated cities and hamlets.

Workers of all countries unite!' [46]

Rousing though it was, the manifesto was vague in its conclusions: no call for civil war to put an end to the imperialist war, and no call for the founding of a new International. Instead they consisted largely of vague liberal and pacifist sentiments:

[The] struggle is also the struggle for liberty, for brotherhood of nations, for socialism. The task is to take up this fight for peace

– for a peace without annexations or war indemnities. Such a peace is only possible when every thought of violating the rights and liberties of the nations is condemned. There must be no enforced incorporation either of wholly or partly occupied countries. No annexations, either open or masked, no forced economic union, made still more intolerable by the suppression of political rights. The right of nations to select their own government must be the immovable fundamental principle of international relations. [47]

Although in *Nashe Slovo* Trotsky referred to the coming social revolution and the necessity to create a Third International, nothing of this was included in the draft manifesto. Even the question of voting for or against the military budget was evaded: on the categorical demand of the German delegates, the concrete parliamentary measures of class struggle (the refusal of credits, the withdrawal from the ministries, and so on) were not included, though in Trotsky's original draft they had been pronounced imperative for all socialist organisations in time of war.

Still, Lenin and his supporters signed the manifesto: 'We vote for the manifesto because we regard it as a call to struggle, and in this struggle we are anxious to march side by side with the other sections of the International.'

In criticising the far left group, Trotsky stated:

Especially at the preliminary conference Comrade Lenin revealed clearly that, consistent with his earlier reports and articles, he personally had a completely negative attitude to the slogan of the struggle for peace. His political position on this question was summed up with the aphorism: Our task is not to force the cannons to be silent, but rather to make them serve our ends. [48]

Besides his activities amongst Russian socialists and the international movement against the war, Trotsky was active among French socialists. Almost from the beginning of his stay in Paris, he

kept in touch with a small French anti-war group, mainly syndicalists, headed by Alfred Rosmer, Pierre Monatte and Albert Bourderon, who were later to found the French Communist Party. Trotsky regularly attended their weekly meetings, and influenced their ideas and policies. In spring 1916 a common anti-war manifesto was issued in the name of *Nashe Slovo* and *Vie Ouvrier*. Its slogans did not indicate that only the socialist revolution could put an end to the war: 'Down with the war! Down with annexations! Down with war credits! Long live the liberty and independence of nations! Long live the economic union of peoples!' [49]

### **Trotsky Moves Towards the Bolsheviks**

It became more and more clear during the war that in the Russian labour movement the dividing line between internationalists and defencists was by and large congruent with the old line of division between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. The demarcation affected the 'non-factional' editorial board of *Nashe Slovo*. Among the members of the *Nashe Slovo* group were a number of Mensheviks: Martov, Semkovsky, Kollontai, Chicherin, and Uritsky; some former Bolshevik boycotters: Manuilsky, Lunacharsky, and Pokrovsky; and the former conciliators Sokolnikov and Lozovsky. In addition, the Bulgarian-Rumanian Christian Rakovsky, the Pole Karl Radek, and the Italo-Russian Angelica Balabanoff attached themselves to *Nashe Slovo*. Trotsky held an intermediate position.

On 14 February 1915 Trotsky published a statement in *Nashe Slovo* in which for the first time he told of his past disagreements with the Mensheviks, his refusal to write for their press from 1913 onwards, and his refusal to be their spokesman at international conferences. It was an open break with the August Bloc and the politics that informed it. [50]

In an editorial on 5 June 1915, Trotsky declared that the old divisions of Russian socialism had been liquidated: *Nashe Slovo* should support neither the Menshevik Organising Committee nor the Bolshevik Central Committee. [51] The ex-Bolsheviks, however,

above all Manuilsky, Lozovsky and Lunacharsky, moved back closer to Lenin under the influence of the war. Next day Manuilsky and Antonov-Ovseenko, supported by Lunacharsky and Zalewski, published their own manifesto calling for the 'rallying of all Social Democratic internationalist elements' and in favour of working first of all with the Bolshevik *Sotsialdemokrat*. [52] In four issues of *Nashe Slovo* Manuilsky criticised Trotsky for his attempts to excuse the ambiguous conduct of Chkheidze and the other Menshevik deputies. [53] (In the same issues Trotsky went on defending Chkheidze in unsigned articles).

A number of Mensheviks in the *Nashe Slovo* group were also moving towards Bolshevism, above all Kollontai, who was in regular contact with Lenin throughout the war years. In an article entitled 'Two Parties', one writer contrasted the social patriotism of the Mensheviks with the internationalism of the Bolsheviks:

Workers' groups linked to *Sotsialdemokrat* represent at present for Russia the single, active, sustained and strong spirit of internationalism. This section represents the fundamental nucleus which in Russia can pull together a genuine proletarian internationalist party, and revive revolutionary class struggle, insistently demanding a single political organisation of the proletariat. For active, non-factional internationalism in Russia there is no other organisational way out but unity in a single organisation with 'Leninism'. That in the most important sense means entry into the 'Leninist' organisation. [54]

The 'non-faction' faction of *Nashe Slovo* was disintegrating. Some broke off toward Menshevism: Martov, and even further rightward Semkovsky. The majority moved toward Bolshevism. Practically all the collaborators of *Nashe Slovo* were to join Lenin in 1917: Trotsky, Lunacharsky, Pokrovsky, Ryazanov, Manuilsky, Kollontai, Antonov-Ovseenko and Rakovsky.

Perhaps because of the very conflict that Trotsky had had with Lenin over many years, perhaps because of his conciliationism, rooted in the belief that under pressure of great revolutionary events

in the future the Mensheviks would move leftwards as they did in 1905, it was more difficult for Trotsky to make obvious moves towards Bolshevism. But this he did. He broke with Martov and sharpened his attack on Chkheidze and the Menshevik Duma fraction.

But still he was not ready to join the Bolsheviks, even as late as August 1916, when he wrote a general assessment of the different currents in Russian Social Democracy, admitting that the pre-war divisions in Russian Social Democracy had a close bearing on the current controversy. He accepted the need to cooperate with the Bolsheviks, but still expressed his criticism of their position on the war question, and the threat they represented to the non-Bolshevik internationalists. At the same time he was very frank in his harsh criticism of the 'August Bloc' – in which he himself had played a decisive role:

The political work of the 'August Bloc' in Russia takes place almost entirely in the context of participation in the defencist War Industries Committees. The Petersburg Initiative Group and the Moscow Group base their tactics primarily on coordination of activities with the liberal-imperialist bourgeoisie.

Within this milieu disagreements are breaking out regularly on appraisal of their participation in the actual work of the War Industries Committees. Some, the open social patriots, demand that the participation proceed under the banner of defence. Others – while in fact subordinating the proletariat's policy to the bourgeoisie's defencist 'opposition' policy – supplement this with a purely verbal internationalism, with platonic declarations of solidarity with Zimmerwald, and so on.

The internal struggle of these two tendencies is, in fact, paralysing the [Menshevik] Organising Committee. Despite this, they remain tied to the framework of a single 'August Bloc' organisation on the common ground of defencist practice, even

after the entire international and Russian experience of two years.

The centre of the day-to-day work of the 'August Bloc', its twin focal points, remains the central Petersburg and the Moscow War Industries Groups, with their battle flag of patriotism.

The Duma fraction is in a state of chronic breakdown. From the rostrum Chkheidze and Skobelev declare their solidarity with Zimmerwald and decline all political responsibility for the Organising Committee. But not once have they come out against participation in the War Industries Committees.

The so-called Secretariat Abroad is tied to a parliamentary fraction whose work is being carried out on the basis of the War Industries Committees.

After this sharp attack on the Mensheviks, it might have been assumed that Trotsky would bury the hatchet and call for a merger with the Bolsheviks. But he was still not ready for this:

In the camp of the Russian internationalists we find first of all the *Sotsialdemokrat* Group. It has been our lot, time and again, to point out those traits of this organisation which, not to detract from its role as a weighty revolutionary factor in the present time of crisis, prevents it at this moment from including all the revolutionary elements of the movement. From the very beginning of the war *Sotsialdemokrat* showed hostility to the slogan of the struggle for peace. But experience shows that the mobilisation of proletarian organisations everywhere has taken place precisely under this slogan. Only on this basis can revolutionary internationalists today successfully carry out their work ... Finally, the paradoxical and internally contradictory formula 'the defeat of Russia is the lesser evil', creates difficulties for our German co-thinkers and does not enrich, but, rather hampers our agitation. [55]

In a private letter to Henriette Roland-Holst at the beginning of 1916 Trotsky was even sharper in criticising Bolshevism:

Russian extremism is the product of an amorphous and backward social milieu, where the initial historical movement of the proletariat naturally requires a simplification and vulgarisation of theory and politics.

...I know only too well with what scorn the leaflet of the Zimmerwald Left was regarded here to have any doubts of this. You must not forget, after all, that the Leninists do not have co-thinkers in Germany, or in France, or in Britain, and in my view they cannot have them. [2\*]

While arguing for keeping a distance from Lenin, Trotsky spoke of the need 'to maintain a more polite tone with Kautsky, who has been steadily moving to the left throughout the last six months'. [56] Nevertheless he slowly distanced himself from conciliation. In November 1924 in an essay entitled *Our Differences*, looking back at his move toward Bolshevism during the war, he wrote:

... if the period of the war is taken as a whole, it becomes quite clear that the terrible humiliation of socialism at the beginning of the war was a turning point for me from centrism to Bolshevism – in all questions without exception. 196 Towards October And as I worked out a more and more correct, i.e. Bolshevik, conception of the relations between class and party, between theory and politics, and between politics and organisation, my general revolutionary point of view towards bourgeois society was naturally filled with a more vital and realistic content.

From the moment when I clearly saw that a struggle to the death against defencism was absolutely necessary, Lenin's position came through to me with full force. What had seemed to me to be 'splitterism', 'disruption', etc, now appeared as a salutary and incomparably far-sighted struggle for the revolutionary

independence of the proletarian party ... Until a revolutionist has arrived at the correct attitude toward the fundamental task of building a party and toward the method by which a party functions, there can be no question of any correct, stable, or consistent participation by such a person in the labour movement. Without the proper mutual relations between doctrine, slogans, tactics, and the work of the party organisation, there can be no revolutionary Marxist – Bolshevik – politics ...

Without the Bolshevik Party, the October revolution could not have been carried through or consolidated. Thus, the only truly revolutionary work was the work that helped this party take shape and grow stronger. In relation to this main road all other revolutionary work remained off to the side, lacking any inner guarantee of success or dependability, and in many cases was directly detrimental to the main revolutionary work of that time. In this sense Lenin was right when he said that the conciliationist position, by giving protection and cover to Menshevism, often transformed revolutionary slogans, perspectives, etc. into mere phrases. [59]

What an example of intellectual honesty!

Trotsky's move toward Bolshevism was not a smooth, straight line. It had zigzags, it often faltered, halted, and then moved on again.

On 15 September 1916 *Nashe Slovo* was banned. Next day Trotsky was ordered to leave France. On 30 October he was deported to Spain. From there he went to the United States. On 13 January 1917 he disembarked in New York harbour. Straight away he joined the editorial board of *Novy Mir*, a Russian daily edited by Bukharin, Kollontai, Volodarsky and Chudnovsky. He became its mainstay.

### **Trotsky and the February Revolution**

Trotsky's revolutionary optimism was as strong as ever. On 14 January he wrote: 'I left Europe wallowing in blood, but I left with a profound faith in the coming revolution.' [60]

When the news of the February revolution reached New York, Trotsky started a series of articles on the revolution. On 27 February he wrote:

The streets of Petrograd again speak the language of 1905 ... And as in 1905, only those two powers are facing each other in the streets – the revolutionary working men and the army of the Tsar ... The disorganised, compromised, disintegrated government at the top, the army shaken to the depths, the discontent, uncertainty and fear among the ruling classes, deep bitterness in the popular masses, the numerically developed proletariat tempered in the fire of events – all this gives us the right to say that we are witnessing the beginning of the second Russian revolution. Let us hope that many of us will be its participants. [61]

A few days later Trotsky learned that the Tsar had abdicated and that the liberals had come to power. Their leader Miliukov now declared that Russia would continue the war 'to the end'. Without hesitation Trotsky declared that the bourgeoisie would not be able to consolidate its power and that what had happened was only the beginning: 'The powerful avalanche of the revolution is in full swing, and no human force will stem it. The Rodziankos and Miliukovs have begun talking too soon about law and order.' The liberals were afraid that the popular movement which had given them power would swamp them, so they were calling for an end to the revolution ... 'as if its iron broom had already cleared to the end all the reactionary litter that had over the centuries piled up' around the Tsarist thieves.

The nation will now rise, layer after layer – and all the oppressed, destitute, robbed by Tsarism and the ruling classes ...

At the head of the popular masses of Russia the revolutionary proletariat will carry on its historical work: it will expel monarchist reaction from wherever it tries to shelter; and it will stretch out its hand to the proletariat of Germany and of the whole of Europe. It is necessary to liquidate not only Tsarism but the war as well ...

Now the second wave of the revolution will roar over the heads of the Rodziankos and Miliukovs, burying all their attempt to restore order and come to terms with the monarchy. From its own depths the revolution will produce its government, a revolutionary organ of the people marching to victory. Both the chief battles and the chief sacrifices are in the future, and only after them will come complete and genuine victory. [62]

The liberals, he said, could not retain state power:

Should the Russian revolution stop today as the representatives of liberalism advocate, tomorrow the reaction of the Tsar, the nobility and the bureaucracy would gather power and drive Miliukov and Guchkov from their insecure ministerial trenches, as did the Prussian reaction years ago with the representatives of Prussian liberalism. But the Russian revolution will not stop. The time will come and the revolution will make a clean sweep of the bourgeois liberals blocking its way, as it is now making a clean sweep of the Tsarist reaction. [63]

A couple of days later, on 6 March, Trotsky wrote practically word for word the same as Lenin was writing, unknown to him, in *Letters from Afar* – and later in the famous *April Theses*. Trotsky wrote:

Already at this moment, immediately, the revolutionary proletariat ought to oppose its revolutionary institutions, the Soviet of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies to the executive institutions of the Provisional Government. In this struggle the proletariat, uniting around itself the rising popular

masses, ought to make its direct goal the conquest of power. Only a revolutionary workers' government will have the will and ability, even during the preparation for a Constituent Assembly, to carry out a radical clean-up throughout the country, reconstruct the army from top to bottom, convert it into a revolutionary militia, and demonstrate in action to the lower ranks of the peasants that their salvation lies only in supporting a revolutionary workers' regime. [64]

Next day Trotsky wrote about the impact of the continuing war on the revolution. The Provisional Government would go on with the war:

Now the interests of naked imperialism are inscribed on the governmental banners. 'The Tsar's government is no more', the Guchkovs and Miliukovs are telling the people, 'now you must pour out your blood for the all-national interest.' But by the national interest the Russian imperialists mean the getting back of Poland, the conquest of Galicia, Constantinople, Armenia, Persia ...

Should the German proletariat be given a right to think that all the Russian people and the main force of the Russian revolution, the proletariat, are behind the bourgeois government of Russia, it would be a terrific blow to the men of our trend of mind, the revolutionary socialists of Germany.

To turn the Russian proletariat into patriotic cannon fodder in the service of the Russian liberal bourgeoisie, wrote Trotsky, would mean 'to throw the German working masses into the camp of the chauvinists and for a long time to halt the progress of a revolution in Germany.' The Russian workers would oppose the continuation of the imperialist war, and this, together with the inability of the liberals to pursue the war successfully, would accelerate the process leading to a workers' government. And such a government 'will be a mortal blow to the Hohenzollerns because it will give a powerful stimulus to

the revolutionary movement of the German proletariat and to the working masses of all other countries.' [65]

Next day, 8 March, Trotsky outlined the immediate revolutionary potentialities of the alliance of the peasantry with the proletariat:

... the land question will play an immense role in uniting the proletarian cadres of the army with its peasant depths. 'The land of the landlords, and not Constantinople!' the soldier proletarian will say to the soldier peasant, explaining to him whom and what the imperialist war is serving. And upon the success of our agitation and struggle against the war – above all among the workers, and in the second place, among the peasant and soldier masses, will depend the answer to the question how soon the liberal imperialist government can be replaced by a revolutionary workers' government resting directly upon the proletariat and the rural lower ranks adhering to it. [66]

But still Trotsky differed with the Bolsheviks regarding a split from the socialist parties. In New York Bukharin urged American socialists to split from the Socialist Party and form a new revolutionary party. Trotsky argued against him. Throughout January and February 1917 Trotsky and Bukharin argued in front of the American socialists. Alexandra Kollontai, a Bolshevik at the time, supported Bukharin in the dispute and wrote a letter to Lenin denouncing Trotsky. Lenin replied in equal measure. [67]

### **Returning to Russia**

On 27 March Trotsky, his family, and a small group of other émigrés, sailed from New York on board the Norwegian ship *Christianiafjord*. On 3 April it dropped anchor at Halifax, Nova Scotia, and British naval police forcibly removed Trotsky and his family from the ship. They took Trotsky to a camp for German prisoners of war at Amherst.

There were 800 German prisoners at the camp. Trotsky addressed them, explaining to them the ideas of Zimmerwald, and told them of the fight Karl Liebknecht had been waging against the Kaiser and the war. The camp turned into a continuous mass meeting. On the insistence of the German officers the Commandant of the camp forbade Trotsky to address the prisoners; 530 German prisoners of war signed a protest against the ban.

Trotsky writes in his autobiography:

When the news of my arrest found its way into the revolutionary Russian press, the British Embassy in Petrograd, which apparently was not expecting my early return, issued an official statement to the Petrograd press that the Russians who had been arrested in Canada were travelling 'under a subsidy from the German Embassy to overthrow the Provisional Russian Government.' This, at least, was plain speaking. The *Pravda*, which was published under Lenin's direction, answered Buchanan [the British Ambassador] on 16 April, doubtless under Lenin's own hand: 'Can one even for a moment believe the trustworthiness of the statement that Trotsky, the chairman of the Soviet of Workers' Delegates in St Petersburg in 1905 – a revolutionary who has sacrificed years to a disinterested service of the revolution – that this man had anything to do with a scheme subsidised by the German government? This is a patent, unheard-of, and malicious slander of a revolutionary.'

[68]

The British Ambassador was abashed by the hue and cry over the detention of Trotsky at Halifax. In his diary on 30 April 1917 Sir George Buchanan wrote:

I ... reminded [Miliukov] that I had, early in April, informed him that Trotsky and other Russian political refugees were being detained at Halifax until the wishes of the Provisional Government with regard to them had been ascertained. On 8 April I had, at his request, asked my government to release

them and to allow them to proceed on their journey. Two days later he had begged me to cancel this request and to say that the Provisional Government hoped they would be detained at Halifax until further information had been obtained about them. It was the Provisional Government, therefore, that was responsible for their further detention until 21 April, and I should have to make this fact public unless a statement was published to the effect that we had not refused visas to the passports of any Russian presented by the Russian Consular authorities. This he consented to do. [69]

In the end, the *Soviets* stepped in, and Miliukov had to bow. On 29 April Trotsky left Amherst, followed to the gates of the camp by cheering German prisoners and by the sound of the *Internationale* played by their orchestra. After a sea voyage of nearly three weeks, on 4 May Trotsky arrived in Finland. From there he travelled by train across Finland to Petrograd.

## Footnotes

1\*. Kautsky argued that after the war socialists would have to forgive and forget the actions of those in the movement who had supported the national defence of their countries. A general amnesty would be needed in order to re-establish the International.

2\*. This reminds one of the letter Trotsky wrote to Chkheidze on 1 April 1913: 'And what a senseless obsession is the wretched squabbling systematically provoked by the master squabbler Lenin ... that professional exploiter of the backwardness of the Russian working-class movement ... The whole edifice of Leninism at the present time is built upon lies and falsifications and bears within it the poisoned seed of its own disintegration. [57] Trotsky later confirmed the authenticity of this letter. [58]

## Notes

1. Trotsky, *The War and the International* (Colombo 1971), pages vii-viii.
2. Trotsky, *The War and the International*, page x.
3. Trotsky, *The War and the International*, pages xii-xiii.
4. Trotsky, *The War and the International*, pages 74-5.
5. Lenin, *Works*, volume 21, page 18.
6. Lenin, *Works*, volume 21, page 276.
7. Lenin, *Works*, volume 21, page 280.
8. Lenin, *Works*, volume 21, page 278.
9. Lenin, *Works*, volume 22, page 140.
10. Lenin, *Works*, volume 41, page 375.
11. Lenin, *Works*, volume 36, page 380.
12. Lenin, *Works*, volume 36, page 176.
13. Lenin, *Works*, volume 21, page 292.
14. Trotsky, *Voina i revoliutsiia*, volume 1 (Moscow-Petrograd 1923), pages 242-4.
15. *Nashe Slovo*, 4 June 1915.
16. *Nashe Slovo*, 4 June 1915.
17. Trotsky, *Stalin*, page 168.
18. D.A. Baevsky, *Ocherki po istorii oktiabrskoi revoliutsii*, volume 1 (Moscow 1927), page 379.
19. A.G. Shliapnikov, *Kanun semnadtsatogo goda* (Moscow-Petrograd 1923), volume 1, page 29.
20. *Sotsialdemokrat*, number 51, 29 February 1916.
21. Baevsky, page 379.
22. T. Dan in Martov, *Geschichte der russischen Sozialdemokratie*, page 283; Cliff, Lenin, volume 2, pages 22-3.
23. Lenin, *Works*, volume 21, page 166.
24. G.V. Plekhanov, *Furthermore on the War*, in *Voina: Sbornki Statei* (Paris 1915).
25. Quoted in A. Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel* (New York 1938), page 120.
26. Quoted in Ascher, *The Mensheviks in the Russian Revolution*, pages 83-8.
27. Quoted in Lenin, *Works*, volume 21, pages 120-3.
28. Quoted in Ascher, *Pavel Axelrod*, page 306.

29. Quoted in Ascher, *Pavel Axelrod*, page 307.
30. Trotsky, *History*, page 1156.
31. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 246.
32. See Golos, 25 and 27 October 1914.
33. Lenin, *Works*, volume 36, pages 300-1.
34. *Pisma Akselroda i Martova*, page 303.
35. *Pisma Akselroda i Martova*, page 305.
36. Lunacharsky, pages 63-4.
37. *Nashe Slovo*, 19 April 1916.
38. *Internatsional i voina* (Zurich), number 1, 1915.
39. Cliff, *Lenin*, volume 2, page 42.
40. Shliapnikov, *On the Eve of 1917* (London 1982), page 74.
41. Trotsky, *Voina i revoliutsiia*, volume 2, pages 143-4.
42. Trotsky, *Open Letter to the Editorial Board of Kommunist*, in *Nashe Slovo*, 4 June 1915.
43. Trotsky, *Voina i revoliutsiia*, volume 2, pages 181-2.
44. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 249.
45. J. Braunthal, *History of the International 1914-1943* (London 1967), volume 2, pages 47-8.
46. O.H. Gankin and H.H. Fisher, *The Bolsheviks and the World War: The Origins of the Third International* (Stanford 1940), page 322.
47. Gankin and Fisher, page 322.
48. Trotsky, *The Work of the Conference*, in *Voina i revoliutsiia*, volume 2, pages 45-6 and 49.
49. A. Rosmer, *Le Mouvement Ouvrier pendant la Guerre* (Paris 1959), volume 2, pages 83-6.
50. *Nashe Slovo*, 14 February 1915.
51. *Nashe Slovo*, 5 June 1915.
52. I.G. Temkin, *Tsimmerval-Kintal* (Moscow 1967), page 14.
53. *Nashe Slovo*, 29 March-1 April 1916.
54. *Nashe Slovo*, 18 and 19 January 1916.
55. Trotsky, *Groupings in Russian Social Democracy: Theses* (April 1916), in *Voina i revoliutsiia*, volume 2, pages 201-3.
56. L.J. Van Rossum, *A Private Letter of Trotsky at the beginning of 1916*, in *International Review of Social History*, 1969, volume 14,

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57. Quoted in N. Popov, *Outline History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (Moscow-Leningrad 1934), volume 1, page 289.

58. Trotsky, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-25*, pages 262-3.

59. Trotsky, *Our Differences*, in *The Challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-25*, pages 265-6.

60. *Novy Mir*, 14 January 1917.

61. *Novy Mir*, 13 March 1917 (27 February by the old calendar); Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, page 3.

62. *Novy Mir*, 16 March 1917 (3 March by the old calendar); Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, pages 6-7.

63. *Novy Mir*, 17 March 1917 (4 March by the old calendar); Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, page 11.

64. *Novy Mir*, 19 March 1917 (6 March by the old calendar); Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, page 13.

65. *Novy Mir*, 20 March 1917 (7 March by the old calendar); Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, pages 15-16.

66. *Novy Mir*, 21 March 1917 (8 March by the old calendar); Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, page 118.

67. See T. Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York 1957), pages 80-3; Lenin, *Works*, volume 35, page 285.

68. Trotsky, *My Life*, pages 283-4.

69. G. Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia* (London 1923), page 121.

## 12. May and June 1917

### Trotsky Returns to the Petrograd Soviet

The following five chapters cover Trotsky's political activity between his return to Russia in May and the October revolution. To work on the period one cannot but borrow heavily from Trotsky's monumental *History of the Russian Revolution*. This work is an outstanding achievement. No other revolution was as fortunate as the Russian in having a historian of genius as one of its key leaders. In Trotsky's *History* the revolution is superbly analysed and described as an event in which the oppressed millions, who for centuries have been kept down, get up off their knees and speak out. The changes in the consciousness of workers, peasants and soldiers under the feverish conditions of the struggle are vividly depicted.

In the case of Trotsky and the Bolshevik revolution, it is impossible to separate the biographical from the historical, but we shall have to restrict ourselves to a schematic description of the bare bones of the historic events as a background to Trotsky's activity, influencing him and influenced by him.

When Trotsky arrived at Beloostrov, the station on the Finnish border, he was welcomed by a delegation of his own group, the Mezhraiontsy, and the representatives of the central committee of the Bolsheviks. No one was there from the Mensheviks. Trotsky writes:

We were given a tremendous welcome at the Finnish terminal in Petrograd. Uritsky and Fyodorov made speeches, and I answered with a plea for the necessity of preparing a second revolution – our own. And when they suddenly lifted me into the air, I thought of Halifax, where I had had the same experience; but this time the arms were those of friends. [1]

Straight from the station Trotsky went to the meeting of the executive committee of the Petrograd Soviet. This was the very day the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries joined the coalition government. Kerensky became minister of war and the navy, Skobelev minister of labour, Tseretelli minister of posts and telegraphs, Pereverzev minister of justice, and Peshekhonov minister of supply.

Chkheidze, chairman of the Soviet and former associate of Trotsky, but more recently attacked by Trotsky in *Novy Mir*, could not be enthusiastic about the newcomer. Nikolai Sukhanov, the left-wing Menshevik and author of *Notes on the Revolution*, invaluable memoirs which are the most honest and vivacious description of the great events by an eye-witness, describes the welcome Trotsky got at the Soviet:

Chkheidze, behaving differently from the way he behaved with his ‘friends’, ignored Trotsky’s appearance and didn’t propose a welcome to the distinguished revolutionary, who had, moreover, just returned from imprisonment. But Trotsky had already been pointed out, and the hall resounded with cries of: ‘Trotsky! We want Comrade Trotsky!’

It was the famous orator’s first appearance on a revolutionary tribune. He was warmly greeted. And, with characteristic brilliance, he made his first speech – on the Russian Revolution and its influence in Europe and overseas. He spoke of proletarian solidarity and the international struggle for peace; but he also touched on the coalition. In mild and cautious terms, not characteristic of him, he pointed out the practical fruitlessness

and erroneousness in principle of the step that had now been taken. He called the coalition a capture of the Soviet by the bourgeoisie ...

Trotsky was visibly disturbed at this debut under the neutral gaze of an unknown crowd and to the accompaniment of the hostile exclamations of a couple of dozen 'social-traitors'. From the outset he did not expect any sympathy ...

The socialist ministers argued against him. Peshekhonov and Tseretelli were livid. Skobelev, demonic, pronounced his sacramental formula about a hot-blooded heart and a cold-blooded mind. As for Kerensky – he, of course, had not turned up at all. [2]

Sukhanov commented:

Although Trotsky did not belong to the Bolshevik party, rumours were already going around to the effect that he was worse than Lenin. [3]

This is a newspaper report of Trotsky's first speech to the Soviet:

News of the Russian revolution found us in New York ... It has opened a new epoch, an epoch of blood and iron, not in a war of nations, but in a war of the oppressed classes against the domineering classes. (Tumultuous applause) ... The Russian revolution is the prologue to the world revolution. But I cannot conceal that I do not agree with everything. I regard it as dangerous to join the ministry. I do not believe that the ministry can perform miracles. We had, before, a dual government, due to the opposing points of view of two classes. The coalition government will not remove opposition, but will merely transfer it to the ministry. But the revolution will not perish because of the coalition government. We should, however, keep three precepts

in mind: 1. Trust not the bourgeoisie. 2. Control our own leaders. 3. Have confidence in our own revolutionary strength.

What do we recommend? I think that the next step should be the handing over all power to the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Only with the authority in one hand can Russia be saved. Long live the Russian revolution as the prologue to the world revolution. (Applause). [4]

'All power to the *Soviets*; no support to the Provisional Government', these were words practically identical with those Lenin had used in the preceding month.

The attitude of the Bolsheviks to Trotsky was warm. Trotsky remembers:

The Bolsheviks moved that I be elected to the executive committee on the strength of my having been chairman of the Soviet in 1905. This threw the committee into confusion. The Mensheviks and the Populists began whispering to one another. They had then an overwhelming majority in all the revolutionary institutions. Finally it was decided to include me in an advisory capacity. [5]

### **The *Mezhraiontsy***

Trotsky was associated with the *Mezhraiontsy* group. This organisation had existed in Petrograd since 1913, and kept itself independent from both the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. In 1915 it succeeded in establishing a precarious contact with Trotsky and the editors of *Nashe Slavo*. At that time it had some 60-80 members. [6] Up to the February revolution the membership 'never went beyond some 150'. [7] It published leaflets and a small four-page newspaper, *Vpered (Forward)*, of which sixteen issues appeared. In their politics the *Mezhraiontsy* were very close to the Bolsheviks, as Shliapnikov says:

In the sphere of policy they fully accepted our attitude to the war, even including civil war, and the tactics of the working class in it. This did not prevent them, however, from dreaming of unity with those against whom they, daily and hourly, conducted agitation, and from whom they in every way sought to dissociate themselves. [8]

The slogans of the *Mezhraiontsy* included 'Long Live the Third International!' and 'Long live the United Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party!' [9]

However small the group, it took some quite impressive initiatives. *Mezhraiontsy* women played a significant role in initiating International Women's Day with an anti-war demonstration. [10] They issued a leaflet stating:

The government is to blame [for all the suffering of the people]! It started the war and cannot end it. The government is ruining the country and causing us to go hungry. The capitalists are to blame! The war brings them profits. It is high time to cry out to them: 'Enough!' 'Down with the criminal government and its whole gang of robbers and murderers. Long live peace!' [11]

Even before the Petrograd Soviet was formed, on 27 February, the *Mezhraiontsy* called for the establishment of the Soviet. They urged the people not to give power to the bourgeoisie but to form a provisional revolutionary government:

The place of the Tsarist government is being taken over by the Provisional Revolutionary Government. It must be created by the representatives of the proletariat and the army. Comrades! Immediately undertake elections to the Soviet of Workers' Deputies. The army is already conducting elections of their representatives. Tomorrow the Provisional Revolutionary Government will finally be formed. [12]

It was the *Mezhraiontsy* who first issued, on 1 March 1917, a leaflet calling for the election of all officers in the army:

Elect your own platoon commanders, company commanders and regiment commanders, elect company committees for taking charge of food supplies. All the officers must be under the control of these company committees. Accept only those officers whom you know to be friends of the people ... Soldiers! Now that you have revolted and won, former enemies will come to you along with your friends – officers who call themselves your friends. Soldiers! The tail of a fox is more to be feared than the tooth of a wolf. [13]

The Social Revolutionary and Menshevik leaders in the Soviet were so infuriated by this leaflet that they issued a general denunciation of it in their daily paper *Izvestiia* on 3 March. [14] However, the revolutionary mood among the troops was such that the compromisers did not feel it was possible simply to preserve the old disciplinary set-up. The result was a compromise, Order No.1:

In all companies, battalions, regiments, parks, batteries, squadrons, in the special services of the various military administrations, and on the vessels of the navy, committees from the elected representatives of the lower ranks of the above-mentioned military units shall be chosen immediately ...

... In all its political actions, the military branch is subordinated to the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies and to its own committees.

... The orders of the Military Commission of the State Duma shall be executed only in such cases as do not conflict with the orders and resolutions of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

... All kinds of arms, such as rifles, machine guns, armoured automobiles and others, must be kept at the disposal and under the control of the company and battalion committees, and in no case should they be turned over to officers, even at their demand.

... In the ranks and during the performance of the duties of the service, soldiers must observe the strictest military discipline, but outside the service and the ranks, in the political, general civic, and private life, soldiers cannot in any way be deprived of those rights that all citizens enjoy. In particular, standing at attention and compulsory saluting, when not on duty, is abolished. [15]

This Order formalised and extended dual power inside the army. It was rightly described by Trotsky as 'the single worthy document of the February revolution', [16] and by Sukhanov as 'practically the sole independently created political act of the Soviet Plenum throughout the revolution'. [17]

If anything, the *Mezhraiontsy* were in these days to the left of the Bolsheviks. In February 1917 the *Mezhraiontsy* called for workers and soldiers to 'take power into their own hands!' Negotiations for merger with the Bolsheviks were in progress, and according to Shliapnikov, a complete merger had almost been reached:

In the middle of March the question was settled positively, and only the appearance within our party of differences with the comrades returning from Siberia and the jump to the side of defencism of our *Pravda* prevented a merger then. [18]

Shliapnikov refers to the role of Kamenev, Stalin and Muranov who returned to Petrograd from Siberia on 12 March 1917 and took control of the editing of *Pravda*. This led to a massive swing of the paper to the right. The new editors announced that the Bolsheviks would decisively support the Provisional Government 'insofar as it struggles against reaction or counter-revolution' – forgetting that the only important agent of counter-revolution at the time was that same Provisional Government. The new editors also declared a change of policy towards the war. As Kamenev wrote:

When an army stands against an army, the most absurd policy would be to propose that one of them lay down its arms and go home. This policy would not be a policy of peace but a policy of slavery, a policy which the free people would reject with indignation. No, the free people will stand firmly at their posts, will reply bullet for bullet and shell for shell. This is unavoidable.  
[19]

The *Mezhraiontsy* had in their ranks a number of very talented writers and orators. Besides Trotsky there was Lunacharsky, Pokrovsky, Ioffe, Volodarsky and other future leaders of the October revolution. But when Trotsky came to Russia the *Mezhraiontsy* were still only a small group, not really a party – probably with 300 members. (The number of Bolsheviks in April 1917 in Petrograd alone was 16,000.) In the face of the stupendous events of the revolution, it was obvious that only a mass revolutionary party would fit the requirements.

### **Trotsky Still Hesitates about Joining the Bolsheviks**

But still Trotsky balked at joining the Bolsheviks. As already mentioned, Trotsky's political line in *Novy Mir* was the same as Lenin's in his *Letters from Afar* and *April Theses*. When Trotsky met Kamenev in May 1917, Kamenev said in reply to Trotsky's words that he had no differences with Lenin: 'I should think not – in view of the *April Theses* ...' And Trotsky comments: '...not only Kamenev, but dozens of others ... considered Lenin's position "Trotskyist" and not Bolshevik at all.' [20] So it was inevitable that Trotsky, notwithstanding the squabbling of the past, would join the Bolsheviks.

On 10 May Lenin, accompanied by Zinoviev and Kamenev, held a meeting with the *Mezhraiontsy* leaders and offered them a seat on the editorial board of *Pravda* and on the organising committee of the forthcoming party congress. According to notes taken by Lenin at the time, Trotsky replied that he was in agreement 'insofar as

Bolshevism internationalises itself’ but added: ‘The Bolsheviks de-bolshevised themselves, and I cannot call myself a Bolshevik. It is impossible to demand of us a recognition of Bolshevism. It is undesirable to stick to old labels.’ They ought to fuse into a new party with a new name at a joint congress of the organisations. [21]

This was too much for Lenin. Petty personal grudges played no role with him. After all, even prior to the meeting of 10 May he proposed to the Bolshevik Central Committee that Trotsky be invited to edit *Pravda* (a proposal rejected by the central committee). [22] But to deny the Bolshevik party’s past – that was not on.

### **Trotsky Comes to Lenin**

However, Trotsky had no alternative but to accept Bolshevism. Trotsky was a brilliant general commanding a tiny squad of soldiers, while Lenin was the recognised leader of a great party. To lead the revolution what was needed was a party which had members in every factory, every army unit, able to win the minds and hearts of workers and soldiers. As an individual Trotsky could make his words heard; but only a mass, well-disciplined party could transform words into deeds. When in July the *Mezhraiontsy* joined the Bolsheviks, they brought with them 4,000 members, while the Bolsheviks had about 200,000. [23]

In fact a couple of days after his meeting with Lenin, Zinoviev and Kamenev on 10 May, Trotsky come to the conclusion that the *Mezhraiontsy* should join the Bolsheviks. The fact that it took until July to accomplish the fusion was because Trotsky had to convince the other members of the group who for years had kept away from the Bolsheviks.

Between May and the October revolution, Trotsky became captivated by the strategic genius of Lenin. Trotsky could write in retrospect, and in all honesty: ‘Trotsky come to Lenin as to a teacher whose power and significance he understood later than many others, but perhaps more fully than they.’ [24] He described Lenin as ‘the greatest revolutionary of our century’. [25]

Raskolnikov, the leader of the Kronstadt sailors who was in close contact with Trotsky from the time of his arrival in Russia, and afterwards spent several weeks side by side with him in prison, wrote in his memoirs:

Trotsky's attitude to Vladimir Ilyich [Lenin] was one of enormous esteem. He placed him higher than any contemporary he had met with, either in Russia or abroad.

In the tone in which Trotsky spoke of Lenin you felt the devotion of a disciple. In those times Lenin had behind him thirty years' service to the proletariat, and Trotsky twenty. The echoes of their disagreements during the pre-war period were completely gone. No difference existed between the tactical line of Lenin and Trotsky. Their rapprochement, already noticeable during the war, was completely and unquestionably determined, from the moment of the return of Lev Davidovich [Trotsky] to Russia. After his very first speeches, all of us old Leninists felt that he was ours. [26]

The same theme is repeated by Lunacharsky, who collaborated with Trotsky for many years:

After Trotsky's merger with the Bolsheviks, it was only in his attitude to Lenin that Trotsky always showed – and continues to show – a tactful pliancy which is touching. With the modesty of all truly great men he acknowledges Lenin's primacy. [27]

In his *History of the Russian Revolution* Trotsky's admiration of Lenin shines through:

Lenin became the unqualified leader of the most revolutionary party in the world's history, because his thought and will were equal to the demands of the gigantic revolutionary possibilities of the country and the epoch. Others fell short by an inch or two, and often more. [28]

Besides the factories, barracks, villages, the front and the *Soviets*, the revolution had another laboratory: the brain of Lenin. [29]

The art of revolutionary leadership in its most critical moments consists nine-tenths in knowing how to sense the mood of the masses ... An unexcelled ability to detect the mood of the masses was Lenin's great power. [30]

Lenin ... was filled with deep realism and an infallible feeling for the masses. [31]

The party press did not exaggerate success, did not distort the correlation of forces, did not try to win by shouting. The school of Lenin was a school of revolutionary realism. [32]

... the ever-lasting preoccupation of Lenin: to express with the utmost simplicity that which on the one hand flowed from the objective conditions, and on the other formulated the subjective experience of the masses. [33]

His [Lenin's] simple and deep generalisation ... could so lastingly insert themselves into the consciousness of the masses, his clear sayings caught up from the people and handed back to them ... [34]

... the fundamental traits of Lenin as a statesman [were] boldness of conception and meticulous carefulness in its fulfilment. [35]

During the June Days, the July Days, the persecution that followed, and the Kornilov coup, Trotsky supported Lenin to the hilt. He was in complete agreement with the strategy and tactics Lenin adopted, and again and again drew the same conclusion independently. In the preparation for the Bolsheviks' taking of power, Lenin found himself

quite often in a minority on the central committee, but had his staunchest supporter in Trotsky.

There was largely a division of labour between Lenin and Trotsky. While Lenin, even before going into hiding on 6 July, rarely appeared at the Soviet, and was largely engrossed in directing the party, Trotsky, almost from the moment of his arrival in Russia, was a constant speechmaker, and soon established himself as the most outstanding speaker of the Soviet.

Sukhanov describes Trotsky's prominence at this time in these words: 'Trotsky, like Lenin, was a monumental partner in the monumental game, and in Lenin's own party, after himself, there was nothing for a very, very, very long time. [36]

### **Trotsky and Kronstadt**

Practically immediately after returning to Russia Trotsky had to act as a representative of the Bolsheviks. This happened around Kronstadt.

The 80,000 Baltic sailors played a role in the 1917 revolution out of all proportion to their numbers, and those at Kronstadt, an island naval fortress 20 miles from the capital, were their vanguard. The population of Kronstadt in February 1917 was 82,000, made up of 20,000 soldiers, 12,000 sailors and 50,000 civilians. [37] Of the latter, 17,000 were employed in the shipyards, the huge dry-docks, the steamship plant, the arsenal, the chemical laboratories, and other factories. [38] The class differences in the Tsarist navy were far sharper than in the army. In the infantry the proportion of factory workers was tiny – 3 per cent in 1913. In the navy, because of its mechanisation, 53.5 per cent of all sailors were proletarian (of whom 30.8 per cent were factory workers), 9.3 per cent semi-proletarian, and only 24.9 per cent peasants. [39] While 84 per cent of the naval ratings were literate and 10 per cent semi-literate, comparable figures for the infantry were 49 per cent and 23 per cent. [40] Among the officers of the navy, 93 per cent were from the gentry. [41] The

fact that sailors and officers lived in close contact sharpened the antagonism.

When the February revolution took place, the anger of the sailors in Kronstadt expressed itself in bloody attacks on the officers unparalleled in the army. Some 24 naval officers and probably 10-15 naval NCOs were killed, and 162 officers and NCOs arrested; others fled for their lives. [42] Thus 'the officer corps had been effectively liquidated.' [43] 'One witness later recalled that here it was a case of "October in February" – in other words, power changed hands eight months earlier than in the rest of Russia.' [44]

The influence of the Bolsheviks rose very swiftly in Kronstadt. While on 10 March there were few Bolsheviks in the Kronstadt Soviet (only 4.1 per cent of all deputies), on 5 May Bolsheviks made up 31.2 per cent of the deputies. [45] While the Bolsheviks had virtually no members in Kronstadt in February, by late April it had 3,000 members. [46]

As one historian put it:

... there was no dual power in Kronstadt, for the Soviet and its executive committee reigned supreme and brooked no interference, not even from the provisional government.

As for its relations with Petrograd, like the vast majority of *Soviets*, the Kronstadt Soviet regarded itself from the start as 'under the authority of the Petrograd Soviet'. [47]

The Kronstadters were very impatient indeed, and became far more radical than the rest of the country in the first two weeks after the February revolution. On 18 April, when the news spread that foreign minister Miliukov had sent a note to the Allies supporting 'War till Victory', the Kronstadt Soviet, which rejected a Bolshevik resolution condemning the government, found itself isolated in the town. Large crowds gathered outside the Bolshevik headquarters, at mass meetings in factories and barracks, and passed a Bolshevik resolution which called for 'the overthrow of the Provisional Government and the transfer of all power to the *Soviets*'. [48] One of

the large street meetings, numbering some 20,000 people, was addressed by a Bolshevik member of the Soviet executive committee, S.C. Roshal, who called for the overthrow of the government. [49] The executive committee of the Kronstadt Soviet then expelled Roshal for indiscipline. Immediately the Bolsheviks began a campaign for the re-election of the *Soviets*, which proved very successful. Elections were held, and the Bolsheviks, who had been the smallest party in the Soviet, became the largest.

Unfortunately, the Kronstadt Bolsheviks' campaign for the immediate overthrow of the Provisional Government was contrary to the policy of the central committee, and was condemned in a central committee resolution of 22 April. [50] (This resolution was not aimed only at the Kronstadt committee. The Helsingfors committee, and even some Petrograd Bolsheviks had also put forward the same slogan.)

However the Kronstadt Committee of the Bolsheviks rejected the central committee reprimand. On 5 May the new Kronstadt Soviet assembled. On 13 May the new executive committee of the Soviet decided to formalise the fact that the Soviet was the sole power on the island, and issued a draft resolution to this effect. On 14 May Trotsky addressed the Kronstadt Soviet. He called for all power to the *Soviets*, and described the coalition government as 'the politics of lies'; he approved the executive committee resolution, saying,

You yourselves have drafted a resolution about taking power into your hands! Don't you agree that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, and what is good for Kronstadt is also good for any other town?

It is you who stand in the front line, while the others have fallen behind. It is up to you to call on them to adopt your standpoint. What you have to say is: we are standing firm as a rock, and you too must stand firm, take power into your own hands and demand that the central power of Russia be transferred to the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. [51]

On 16 May the Kronstadt Soviet decided that it would break off all relations with the Provisional Government:

The sole power in the town of Kronstadt is the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which in all questions of state order will enter into direct relations with the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies of Petrograd. [52]

Straight afterwards the government commissar V.N. Pepeliaev resigned. The Provisional Government and the Soviet of Petrograd condemned the Kronstadters. The Congress of Peasants' *Soviets* voted overwhelmingly to threaten to cut off food supplies to Kronstadt. On 18 May a member of the Bolshevik Central Committee came to Kronstadt demanding to know what was going on. Raskolnikov and Roshal were summoned to Petrograd, where they were reprimanded by Lenin. [53]

The events in Kronstadt threatened the Bolshevik party's whole strategy of 'patiently explaining', winning the majority of the proletariat to its policies. The dilemma facing Kronstadt was explained by Raskolnikov thus:

The ... task facing us was, on the one hand, not to let ourselves be forced to our knees, that is, to avoid suffering the disgrace of surrender, and, on the other hand, not to give the Provisional Government any excuse to utilise the given conflict for an armed onslaught on Kronstadt. Vladimir Ilyich's prognosis proved to be absolutely correct. The Provisional Government did indeed try to force us to our knees. We had not long to wait for the first sign of this development. [54]

Trotsky went to Kronstadt where he addressed the Soviet. He aimed to strengthen the Kronstadt position in principle, while yielding upon the practical issue. He won the day, as Raskolnikov describes:

When he arrived at Kronstadt, Comrade Trotsky at once summoned an extraordinary meeting of the Kronstadt Executive

Committee. His proposal that we issue a manifesto explaining in a concrete way our attitude on all the disputed questions was adopted unanimously. He sketched out a draft of the manifesto there and then.

Next day the manifesto was approved by the Soviet, and a meeting was held in Anchor Square at which I read out the text which had been adopted by the Kronstadt Executive Committee. By a show of hands the entire meeting unanimously voted its acceptance of the manifesto. It was quickly reproduced by our party printing press in an enormous number of copies, distributed among the proletariat and garrison of Kronstadt and sent out to Petrograd and the provinces. [55]

On 27 May the Petrograd Soviet brought the Kronstadters to trial. Tseretelli acted as chief prosecutor. He denounced Kronstadt as 'a hotbed of anarchy and a disgrace to the revolution' whose destruction it was now preparing; he then moved a resolution which condemned it for 'secession from the revolutionary democracy' and castigated the Soviet for its 'utter inability' to stand up to 'those anarchist elements which it had itself fostered' and for disgracing the revolution by incarcerating hundreds of prisoners 'in the worst Tsarist dungeons', without specific accusation and proper trial, in an act of 'unbecoming vengeance and reprisal'. Finally, he reminded the Kronstadters of the exceptional privileges they enjoyed regarding food supplies and demanded that they 'immediately and unconditionally execute all instructions of the provisional government, which issued them in the interests of the revolution and the external security of the country'. This resolution was to be broadcast to all Kronstadt forts and garrisons and to all naval crews of the Baltic Fleet and all other *Soviets*. [56]

Appearing for the defence, Trotsky argued that the excesses of Kronstadt were caused by the appointment by the government of discredited and hated men as commissars for the island:

Our socialist ministers refuse to fight against the danger of Black Hundreds. Yet should reaction rise and should a counter-revolutionary general try to throw a noose around the neck of the revolution, your Black Hundred commissars will soap the rope for all of us, while the Kronstadt sailors will come and fight and die with us. [57]

This phrase was prophetic. It was quoted later when the sailors of Kronstadt did defend the revolution against General Kornilov's coup.

The result of the May events in Kronstadt was two-fold. It hardened the hostility of Kronstadt towards the Provisional Government and established the nation-wide reputation of Kronstadt.

### **The Mass Orator**

At that time Trotsky established a platform in the Modern Circus in Petrograd where almost every night he addressed enormous crowds. Trotsky remembers:

The mass meetings in the Modern Circus were for me quite special. My opponents likewise considered them so, but in a different light. They regarded the Circus as my particular fortress, and never even attempted to speak in it. But whenever I attacked the conciliationists in the Soviet, I was interrupted by bitter shouts: 'This is not your Modern Circus.' It became quite a refrain.

I usually spoke in the Circus in the evening, sometimes quite late at night. My audience was composed of workers, soldiers, hard-working mothers, street urchins – the oppressed underdogs of the capital. Every square inch was filled, every human body compressed to its limit. Young boys sat on their fathers' shoulders, infants were at their mothers' breasts. No-one spoke. The balconies threatened to fall under the excessive weight of human bodies. I made my way to the platform through a narrow

human trench, sometimes I was borne overhead. The air, intense with breathing and waiting, fairly exploded with shouts and with the passionate yells peculiar to the Modern Circus. Above and around me was a press of elbows, chests and heads. I spoke from out of a warm cavern of human bodies; whenever I stretched out my hands I would touch someone, and a grateful movement in response would give me to understand that I was not to worry about it, not to break off my speech, but keep on. No speaker, no matter how exhausted, could resist the electric tension of that impassioned human throng. They wanted to know, to understand, to find their way. At times it seemed as if I felt, with my lips, the stern inquisitiveness of this crowd that had become merged into a single whole. Then all the arguments and words thought out in advance would break and recede under the imperative pressure of sympathy, and other words, other arguments, utterly unexpected by the orator, but needed by these people, would emerge in full array from my subconsciousness.

The crowd lifted Trotsky emotionally. He became its medium. The interaction between the speaker and his audience was the lifeblood of his oratory:

On such occasions I felt as if I were listening to the speaker from the outside, trying to keep pace with his ideas, afraid that, like a somnambulist, he might fall off the edge of the roof at the sound of my conscious reasoning.

Such was the Modern Circus. It had its own contours, fiery, tender, and frenzied. The infants were peacefully sucking the breasts from which approving or threatening shouts were coming. The whole crowd was like that, like infants clinging with their dry lips to the nipples of the revolution. But this infant matured quickly. [58]

What a magnificent description!

## Trotsky's First Speech at the All-Russian Congress of Soviets

On 3 June the first All-Russian Congress of the *Soviets* assembled in Petrograd and continued in session until the 24th. The Social Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks dominated the congress, having about five-sixths of all the votes. Of the 822 delegates with voting rights, the Social Revolutionaries accounted for 285, the Mensheviks for 248, and the Bolsheviks for 105. The *Mezhraiontsy* had ten delegates, and they supported the Bolsheviks solidly throughout the congress. In addition there were some 180 delegates who supported various groups or had allegiance to none. The congress revealed a clear split: between the representatives of the army, the peasantry and the provinces on the one hand, which supported the Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, and the working-class suburbs which supported the Bolsheviks.

On the eve of the congress Trotsky delivered a speech in which he explained that the war was imperialist in nature, even if carried by the Provisional Government, and that the only way to peace was by the seizure of power by the proletariat:

I consider it necessary, first of all, to insist on the class character of the war now being waged.

The war now being waged is an imperialist war, and democracy must conduct the bitterest fight against this imperialist war. After all, the Russian revolution has in no way changed its imperialist character. As before, the whole state apparatus lies in the hands of the bourgeoisie, permeated throughout with imperialist ambitions. If the bourgeoisie remains in power, it will apply all its efforts to achieving its imperialist goals.

Thus, the present war is imperialistic. The tactics of the Petrograd Soviet and its efforts to create an efficient army are therefore only playing into the hands of the ruling bourgeoisie.

Its pressure on the Allied governments is absurd. It is answered by one slap on the face after another. The occupation of Albania by Italy, the coercion of Greece by England and France, testify to this. And I assert that a separate peace will be a consequence of the policy which the Provisional Government is pursuing with the support of the majority of the Petrograd Soviet.

What is now happening in the army, i.e., fraternisation or actual truces, is a spontaneous occurrence, a product of the revolution, and no effort on the part of the Soviet to create an efficient army will create fighting efficiency, since spontaneity cannot be stopped.

And the international conference, is it going to liquidate the war – the war of the imperialists? I will answer you: no – this is self-deception, this is an illusion. Only a European revolution, only a ruthless fight on the part of all the proletariat against their bourgeois and imperialist governments will end the war. And this revolutionary ferment is growing day by day throughout Europe.

And only by the seizure of power will the proletariat once and for all ensure itself against imperialism. [59]

On 4 June Lenin spoke at the congress on the attitude towards the Provisional Government. He argued that Prince Lvov and the Cadets had a negligible following, that the Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks represented the overwhelming majority of the nation. ‘... in Russia there is no group, no class, that would resist the power of the *Soviets*’. [60] So why should they consent to be the servants of the Cadets? Why do they not form their own government?

On the same day, 4 June, Trotsky’s speech followed similar arguments to Lenin’s. Trotsky, like Lenin, argued against the coalition government. He called on the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries to break with the bourgeois parties. It was hopeless, he argued, to turn the government into a chamber of conciliation between social classes: ‘A chamber of conciliation cannot exercise

power in a revolutionary epoch.’ However Trotsky expressed his views in a much more conciliatory vein towards the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries than did Lenin.

Trotsky referred to the speech of the Menshevik minister of food supply, Peshekhonov, in which the latter argued that the economic difficulties facing the country were caused by the decline in labour productivity, and that labour discipline and sacrifices were the only way to overcome the crisis. Trotsky’s speech made friendly reference to Peshekhonov, which brought him applause from the majority benches:

I have listened to Peshekhonov’s speech with enormous interest, since it is always possible to learn from one’s theoretical opponents. What should come next is the collaboration of the minister of labour and industry, but Konovalov [the Cadet minister] has left, after sabotaging the organisation of industry. For three weeks a replacement has been looked for, but cannot be found. Put twelve Peshekhonovs in power, and that would already be an enormous step forward. (*Applause*) Find another Peshekhonov to replace Konovalov. (*Applause*)

You see that I am not proceeding from factional considerations, but only from the point of view of efficiency ... Comrades, I am not hoping to convince you today, for this would be too bold a hope. What I would like to achieve today is to make you aware that if we oppose you, we do so not from any hostile ... motive of a selfish faction, but because, together with you, we are suffering all the pangs and agonies of the revolution. We see solutions different from those you see, and we are fully convinced that while you are consolidating the present of the revolution, we prepare its future for you. (*Loud applause*) [61] [1\*]

The call for a government of ‘twelve Peshekhonovs’ was basically the same as that of Lenin for ousting the ten bourgeois ministers

from the government. But Trotsky's tone was very different from that of Lenin.

On 4 June a declaration that Trotsky submitted concerning Kerensky's preparations for an offensive at the front was read to the congress by the Bolsheviks. A few days later, in a speech to the congress Trotsky denounced the planned military offensive: the army was incapable of further fighting. The offensive would end in disaster:

Luckily for the whole of Russian history our revolutionary army has done away with the old outlook of the Russian army, the outlook of the locust ... when hundreds of thousands used to die passively ... I say: Yes, this historic period which we have just left behind us will be cursed! What we now value is not elemental, unconscious heroism of the mass, but heroism which refracts itself through every individual consciousness ...

The army of the French revolution had consciously responded to calls for an offensive, but this could not apply to the Russian army today:

No such purpose that would rally the army exists now. You won't be able to hide with any sophisms the fact that every thinking soldier puts before himself the question, in the name of what goals is he going on the offensive? Or to say it more precisely, to say it in a more objective form, every thinking soldier says to himself: from these five drops of blood that I shed today, will there be one shed in the interests of the Russian revolution, but four for the French bourgeoisie and English imperialists? (*Applause*) This, comrades, is the whole essence of the thing. If only Russia cut her ties with imperialism, if only the old ruling classes were overthrown and a new democratic government established by the *Soviets*, then we should be able to summon all the European peoples and tell them that now a citadel of revolution has risen on the map of Europe. [62]

## The June Days

Between the middle of May and the middle of June the increasing government agitation for a military offensive added to the threat to transfer military units from Petrograd to the front, inflamed the troops in the capital. Giving vent to the fury, the 9 June issue of *Pravda* published an appeal for a demonstration the following day, with the slogans:

Down with the Tsarist Duma!

Down with the State Council!

Down with the ten capitalist ministers!

All power to the All-Russian Soviet of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies!

Re-examine the 'Declaration of the Rights of the Soldiers'!  
Abolish the 'orders' against soldiers and sailors!

Down with anarchy in industry and the lockout capitalists! Hail the control and organisation of industry!

Time to end the war! Let the Soviet of Deputies declare just conditions of peace!

Neither a separate peace with Wilhelm, nor secret treaties with the French and English capitalists!

Bread, peace, liberty! [63]

On hearing of the Bolshevik plan for a demonstration, the Executive Committee of the Soviet immediately issued a call prohibiting it:

There must not be a single company, a single regiment, a single group of workers on the street. [There must not be] a single

demonstration today. A great struggle still lies ahead of us. [64]

Neither Lenin nor Trotsky wanted to defy the ban. They knew they had to 'patiently explain' to the masses until they won the majority. While a retreat was inevitable, the question was how to organise it without demoralising their own supporters. How to keep the revolutionary spirit while restricting the action. Lenin drafted the statement to explain the decision of the Bolsheviks to cancel the demonstration, but he was not satisfied with it, so Trotsky submitted another text that fitted the needs, and this was read out at the congress. The retreat under pressure from the Executive of the Soviet was done in a very defiant way:

We hold that the unique institution known as the *Soviets* of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies is the nearest approach to a popular body expressing the will of the majority of the people to a revolutionary parliament.

On principle we have been, and are, in favour of all power passing into the hands of such a body, despite the fact that at present it is in the hands of the defencist Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionaries, who are hostile to the party of the proletariat.

The fact that the position of the *Soviets* is internally contradictory, shaky and unstable, and powerless in regard to the counter-revolution, is due to their tolerating a pest of counter-revolution – the ten bourgeois ministers – and to their not breaking with Anglo-French imperialist capital. The shakiness of their position accounts for the nervousness of the present majority of the *Soviets*, and their touchiness towards those who point out this shakiness.

We refuse to co-ordinate our struggle against the counter-revolution with the 'struggle' of the defencist and ministerialist parties.

We cannot recognise the decisions of the *Soviets* as proper decisions taken by a proper government as long as there remain the ten bourgeois, counter-revolutionary ministers who are part and parcel of the Miliukov spirit and the Miliukov class. But even if the *Soviets* seized all power (which we want and would always support), and even if they became an omnipotent revolutionary parliament, we would not submit to decisions that restrain our freedom of propaganda, for instance, prohibiting leaflets at the front or in the rear, banning peaceful demonstrations, and so on. In that event we prefer to become an illegal, officially persecuted party, rather than give up our Marxist, internationalist principles. We shall act similarly if the Congress of *Soviets* sees fit to brand us before the entire population of Russia as 'enemies of the people', or as 'enemies of the revolution'.

We regard only one of the motives given for banning the demonstration for three days as conditionally valid, namely, that concealed counter-revolutionaries lying in wait wanted to take advantage of the demonstration. If the facts underlying this motive are correct, and if the names of the counter-revolutionaries are known to the entire Soviet (as they are known to us privately from the verbal information given by Lieber and others on the executive committee), then these counter-revolutionaries should be immediately proclaimed enemies of the people and arrested, and their followers and helpers tried in court.

As long as the Soviet does not take such measures, even its valid motive is only conditionally valid, or altogether invalid. [65]

On 10 June Petrograd remained calm. On the evening of 12 June, during the same session at which the Bolsheviks were censured for their plan to demonstrate two days earlier, the Menshevik leaders Dan, Bogdanov and Khinchuk moved a resolution for a demonstration on 18 June, hoping by this to show mass support for

the policies of the Congress of *Soviets*. All garrison military units were ordered to take part without arms, and even provincial *Soviets* were directed to organise similar demonstrations in the other major Russian cities on the same day. When it came to it, the demonstration in Petrograd on 18 June was massive. About 400,000 people participated: 'it was on a magnificent scale. All worker and soldier Petersburg took part in it', Sukhanov writes:

But what was the political character of the demonstration? 'Bolsheviks again', I remarked, looking at the slogans, 'and behind them is another Bolshevik column'.

'Apparently the next one too,' I went on calculating, watching the banners advancing towards me and the endless rows going towards Michael Castle a long way down the Sadovoy. 'All power to the *soviets*!' 'Down with the ten capitalist ministers!' 'Peace for the hovels, war for the palaces!'

In this sturdy and weighty way, worker-peasant Petersburg, the vanguard of the Russian and world revolution, expressed its will. The situation was absolutely unambiguous. Here and there the chain of Bolshevik flags and columns was interspersed with specifically Social Revolutionary and official Soviet slogans. But they were submerged in the mass; they seemed to be exceptions, intentionally confirming the rule. Again and again, like the unchanging summons of the very depths of the revolutionary capital, like fate itself, like the fatal Birnam Wood, there advanced towards us: 'All power to the *Soviets*!' 'Down with the ten capitalist ministers!' ...

I remembered the purblind Tseretelli's fervour of the night before. Here was the duel in the open arena! Here was the honest, legal review of forces in an official Soviet demonstration!

[66]

‘Judging by the placards and slogans of the demonstrators,’ reported Gorky’s paper, ‘the Sunday demonstration revealed the complete triumph of Bolshevism among the Petersburg proletariat.’ [67]

On the same day mass demonstrations took place all over Russia: in Moscow, Kiev, Minsk, Reval, Riga, Kharkov, Helsingfors and many other towns. [68]

### Footnote

1\*. In the report on this speech in Trotsky’s *Sochineniia*, the friendly references to the Mensheviks have been retouched.

### Notes

1. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 287.
2. N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917: A personal record* (London 1955), page 340.
3. Trotsky, *History*, page 377.
4. *Izvestia*, 7 May 1917; F. Golder (editor), *Documents of Russian History* (New York 1927), pages 357-8.
5. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 288.
6. *Partiia bolshevikov v gody mirovoi imperiaalisticheskoi voinii 1914-17* (Moscow 1963), page 235.
7. Shliapnikov, *On the Eve of 1917*, page 164.
8. Shliapnikov, *On the Eve of 1917*, page 202.
9. I. Iurenev, *Mezhraionka 1911-1917*, in *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, number 2, 1924.
10. E.N. Burdzhalev, *Russia’s Second Revolution: The February Uprising in Petrograd* (Bloomington and Indianapolis 1987), pages 104-5.
11. Shliapnikov, *The February Revolution in Documents*, in *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, number 1 (13), 1923, page 283.

12. Quoted in Burdzhalev, *Vtoraia russkaia revoliutsiia: vosstanie v Petrograde* (Moscow 1967), page 211.
13. R.P. Browder and A.P. Kerensky (editors), *The Russian Provisional Government 1917: Documents* (Stanford 1961), volume 2, page 845.
14. Browder and Kerensky, volume 2, pages 849-50.
15. Browder and Kerensky, volume 2, pages 848-9.
16. Trotsky, *History*, page 291.
17. Sukhanov, page 114.
18. Shliapnikov, *Semnadtsaty god* (Moscow 1925), volume 2, page 173.
19. *Pravda*, 15 March 1917; Browder and Kerensky, volume 2, page 868.
20. Trotsky, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition 1928-29* (New York 1981), page 61.
21. *Leninski Sbornik*, volume 4 (Moscow 1930), pages 301-3.
22. *Krasnaia Letopis*, number 3, 1923.
23. *Shestoi Sezd RSDRP (bolshevikov)* (Moscow 1958), page 36.
24. Trotsky, *History*, page 814.
25. Trotsky, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition 1928-29*, page 246.
26. Quoted in Trotsky, *History*, page 814.
27. Lunacharsky, page 66.
28. Trotsky, *History*, pages 337-8.
29. Trotsky, *History*, page 975.
30. Trotsky, *History*, page 138.
31. Trotsky, *History*, page 324.
32. Trotsky, *History*, page 810.
33. Trotsky, *History*, page 819.
34. Trotsky, *History*, page 925.
35. Trotsky, *History*, page 308.
36. Sukhanov, page 406.
37. I. Getzler, *Kronstadt 1917-1921* (Cambridge 1983), page 1.
38. Getzler, *Kronstadt*, page 11.
39. E. Mawdsley, *The Russian Revolution and the Baltic Fleet* (London 1978), page 159.

40. Mawdsley, page 7.
41. Mawdsley, pages 5-6.
42. Mawdsley, page 14.
43. Mawdsley, page 17.
44. Mawdsley, page 21.
45. Mawdsley, page 164.
46. Mawdsley, page 34.
47. Getzler, *Kronstadt*, pages 35-6.
48. *Sedmaia (Aprelskaia) Vserossiiskaia konferentsiia RSDRP* (Moscow 1958), page 355.
49. V.V. Kutuzov (editor), *Velikaia oktiabroskaia sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia – Khronika Sobytii* (Moscow 1957), volume 2, page 45.
50. *KPSS v borba za pobedu sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii v period dvoevlastii – 4 iulia 1917 g Sbornik dokumnetov* (Moscow 1957), pages 62-3.
51. Getzler, *Kronstadt*, page 73.
52. Kutuzov, volume 2, page 84.
53. *Krasnaia Letopis*, number 1 (10), 1924, page 47
54. F.F. Raskolnikov, *Kronstadt and Petrograd in 1917* (London 1982), page 96.
55. Raskolnikov, page 104.
56. Getzler, *Kronstadt*, pages 97-8.
57. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, page 52.
58. Trotsky, *My Life*, pages 295-6.
59. *Izvestia*, 3 June 1917; Browder and Kerensky, volume 2, page 119.
60. Lenin, *Works*, volume 25, page 23.
61. *Pervii Vserossiiskii sezd sovetov* (Moscow 1930), pages 142-9.
62. *Pervii Vserossiiskii sezd sovetov*, pages 353-6.
63. Browder and Kerensky, volume 3, pages 1312-13.
64. Browder and Kerensky, volume 3, page 1314.
65. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, page 137. The Stalinist editors of Lenin's *Works* plagiarised this statement by Trotsky, attributing it to Lenin; see Lenin, *Works*, volume 25, pages 77-8.
66. Sukhanov, pages 416-17.
67. Quoted in Trotsky, *History*, page 463.

68. A.L. Sidorov and others, *Vilikaia Oktiabrskaiia sotsialisticheskaiia revoliutsiia: Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow 1957), volume 3, pages 541-51.

## 13. The July Days

AFTER THE 18 JUNE demonstration the Bolsheviks still insisted that the main task was to patiently explain. On 22 June the Bolshevik press appealed to the garrison: 'Do not trust any summons to action in the street.' Lenin and Trotsky well knew the danger of falling into the trap of ultra-leftism. One 'must soberly follow the actual state of the class consciousness and preparedness of the entire class (not only of its Communist vanguard) and of all the working people (not only of their advanced elements),' wrote Lenin. [1] 'A vanguard performs its task as vanguard only when it is able to avoid being isolated from the mass of the People it leads and is able really to lead the whole mass forward.' [2]

On 18 June Kerensky launched a military offensive against Germany and Austria. The bourgeoisie and general staff looked to this as a way of unifying the deeply divided people behind a national purpose.

The offensive was officially announced in Petrograd on 19 June. Next day several garrison regiments of the capital received orders to be ready to move to the front. The First Machine Gun regiment was given seven days to furnish 500 machine guns, and on 21 June was presented with a 'reorganisation plan' according to which about two-thirds of its personnel were to be sent to the front. This enraged the soldiers, who well remembered the Provisional Government's promise that units participating in the February revolution would not be disarmed or removed from Petrograd. The machine gunners later made it clear that they had decided 'to go not to the German front, against the German proletariat, but against their own capitalist ministers.'

On 30 June the regiment received a further order for a particularly large transfer of men and machine guns, and there were rumours that this was a prelude to a complete disbanding of the regiment. The unit initiated a massive demonstration on 2 July. Other army units, as well as factory workers, joined the machine gunners and demonstrated on 3 July. And the demonstration continued the next day.

The demonstrators could easily have overthrown the Provisional Government, which at the time had no reliable troops in the capital. But had the Bolsheviks taken power, could they have retained it? Lenin and Trotsky argued not. The influence of the Bolsheviks in the provinces and key army units away from Petrograd was still far too small. When in October the Bolsheviks did take power, they found that the greatest difficulties occurred after the insurrection. The masses needed to be profoundly convinced that there was no alternative to Bolshevik power. In July even the Petrograd proletariat was not ready for such a trial. It was not until 31 August that the Bolsheviks became a majority in the Petrograd Soviet.

If the proletariat was not sure and steadfast, the troops were even less so. On 5 July, when the government slandered Lenin, accusing him of being a German spy, the troops in Petrograd kept their distance from the Bolsheviks. The situation was even worse in the active army where the 'Bolshevism' of many soldiers was spontaneous – agreeing with the Bolshevik slogan of 'Land, Peace and Bread', but in no way identifying themselves with the party.

By far the greatest paradox of the July Days lay in the contradictory consciousness of the masses supporting the Bolsheviks in Petrograd itself: calling for Soviet power and nursing illusions that the Social Revolutionary and Menshevik leaders might take this, which was precisely what they refused to do. This paradox was expressed in the cry of a fist-shaking worker to Chernov, the Social Revolutionary minister of agriculture: 'Take power, you son-of-a-bitch, when it is given to you.' [3]

This refusal of the Soviet to take power brought about an impasse for the soldiers and workers of Petrograd during the July days. As Trotsky wrote:

Running into this armed resistance from the very institution to which they wished to turn over the power, the workers and soldiers lost a clear sense of their goal. From their mighty mass movement the political axis had been torn out. [4]

Lenin and Trotsky were absolutely right in refusing to seize power in the July days – as they could easily have done. As Lenin wrote in retrospect two months after the events:

It would have been wrong if the Bolsheviks had aimed to seize power on 3-4 July, since neither the majority of the people nor even the majority of the workers at that time had yet actually experienced the counter-revolutionary policies of the generals in the army, of the landowners in the countryside, and of the capitalists in the town. [5]

Trotsky wrote many years later:

... the Bolsheviks could have seized the power in Petrograd at the beginning of July. But if they had done so, they could not have held it.' [6]

So Lenin and Trotsky faced an awkward task during the July Days: to persuade the workers and soldiers to avoid battle while not only not dampening the revolutionary temper, but, on the contrary, sharpening it.

In the middle of the demonstrations an incident occurred that put Trotsky's cool-headedness and decisiveness to the test: Kronstadt sailors arrested the Social Revolutionary minister Victor Chernov. When someone ran into the hall where the executive committee of the Soviet was sitting and yelled that Chernov was arrested and that the sailors were going to put an end to him, Trotsky rushed out to rescue the minister. Sukhanov describes the scene graphically:

Trotsky ... climbed up on the bonnet of a car. The mob was in turmoil as far as the eye could reach. Around the motor-car a number of sailors with rather savage faces were particularly

violent. Chernov, who had plainly lost all presence of mind, was in the back seat.

All Kronstadt knew Trotsky and, one would have thought, trusted him. But he began to speak and the crowd did not subside. If a shot had been fired nearby at that moment by way of provocation, a tremendous slaughter might have occurred, and all of us, including perhaps Trotsky, might have been torn to shreds.

Trotsky said:

‘You hurried over here, Red Kronstadters, as soon as you heard the revolution was in danger! Red Kronstadt has once again shown itself to be the champion of the proletarian cause. Long live Red Kronstadt, the glory and pride of the revolution! ...’

Nevertheless he was listened to with hostility. When he tried to pass on to Chernov himself, the ranks around the car again began raging.

‘You’ve come to declare your will and show the Soviet that the working class no longer wants to see the bourgeoisie in power. But why hurt your own cause by petty acts of violence against casual individuals? Individuals are not worthy of your attention ... Every one of you has demonstrated his devotion to the revolution. Every one of you is ready to lay down his life for it. I know that. Give me your hand, Comrade! Your hand, brother!’

Trotsky stretched his hand down to a sailor who was protesting with special violence, but the latter firmly refused to respond, and moved his hand – the one which was not holding a rifle – out of reach ... they were Kronstadt naval ratings who had, in their own judgment, accepted Bolshevik ideas. It seemed to me that the sailor, who must have heard Trotsky in Kronstadt more than once, now had a real feeling that he was a traitor: he

remembered his previous speeches and was confused. Let Chernov go?

Not knowing what to do, the Kronstadters released Chernov. Trotsky took him by the arm and hurried him off into the palace. [7]

A day later Trotsky was instrumental in saving the Kronstadt sailors from arrest. Lieber, the Menshevik leader, demanded the disarming of the Kronstadt sailors. Raskolnikov tells the story:

[Trotsky] advised us immediately and discreetly to send the Kronstadters home. It was decided to despatch comrades round the barracks to warn the Kronstadters of the forcible disarmament that was being prepared. Fortunately, however, most of the Kronstadters had already managed to get safely away – some of them even during the night of 4 July, but principally during 5 July, after we had visited the barracks and announced that the demonstration was over. The only ones left were those stationed in Kshesinskaya's house [the Bolshevik headquarters] and in the Peter and Paul fortress in order to protect the party's premises. [8]

On 5 July the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks had issued a leaflet calling for an end to the demonstration:

Comrades! On Monday you come out on the streets. On Tuesday you decided to continue the demonstration. We called you to a peaceful demonstration yesterday. The object of this demonstration was to show to all the toiling and exploited masses the strength of our slogans, their weight, their significance and their necessity for the liberation of the peoples from war, hunger and ruin.

The object of the demonstration was achieved. The slogans of the vanguard of the working class and of the army were

imposingly and worthily proclaimed. The scattered firing of the counter-revolutionaries on the demonstrators could not disturb the general character of the demonstration.

Comrades! For the present political crisis our aim has been accomplished. We have therefore decided to end the demonstration. Let Bach and every one peacefully and in an organised manner bring the strike and the demonstration to a close.

Let us await the further development of the crisis. Let us continue to prepare our forces. Life is with us, the course of events shows the correctness of our slogans. [9]

Once the mass of the soldiers and workers held an armed demonstration, even against the wishes of the Bolshevik Party, the party could not stand apart. It could not wash its hands of responsibility for the actions of the workers and soldiers. It would rather suffer defeat with them than leave them without leadership, to be slaughtered by the counter-revolutionaries. Thanks to the Bolshevik Party's taking its place at the head of the movement, the blow struck at the masses by reaction during the July days and after, although considerable, was not mortal. The victims were counted in tens and not thousands. The working class emerged more experienced, more mature, more sober.

### **The Month of General Slander Against the Bolsheviks**

On 4 July the Provisional Government, with the consent of the Soviet Executive Committee, authorised General Polovtsev, Commander of the Petrograd Military District, to rid Petrograd of armed mobs, to disarm the First Machine Gun regiment, and to occupy the Ksheshinskaya mansion.

At dawn on 5 July a detachment of soldiers went to *Pravda's* printing works. They wrecked the machinery and arrested the

workers and soldiers on duty there. During the day patrols of officers, soldiers and Cossacks began mopping up operations. They confiscated armed trucks and disarmed suspicious looking workers, soldiers and sailors, who were prevented from escaping behind the barricades in the workers' districts because the bridges on the Neva either remained raised or were under heavy guard.

At a late night meeting of Cabinet Ministers on 6 July it was resolved that:

Anyone guilty of inciting officers, soldiers, and other military ranks during wartime to disobey the laws in effect under the new democratic system in the army and the orders of the military authorities consistent with them is to be punished as for state treason. [10]

This decree was followed by orders for the arrest of Lenin, Zinoviev and Kamenev, and a few days later, Trotsky and Lunacharsky.

On 7 July the Provisional Government ordered the military units that had participated in the July Days to be disbanded, and their personnel distributed at the discretion of the war and navy minister. In the provinces land committees were arrested en masse. On 17 July the Menshevik Tseretelli, minister of the interior, sent out instructions for the taking of 'quick and energetic measures to put a stop to all arbitrary actions in the field of land relations.'

On 8 July General Kornilov, Commander in Chief of the South Western Front, gave orders to open fire on retreating soldiers with machine guns and artillery. The generals realised that unless iron discipline was imposed in the army everything would be lost. The call for the re-imposition of strict discipline became more and more strident. Thus on 11 July the Supreme Commander, General Brusilov, wrote to the minister of war, Kerensky:

Time does not wait. It is necessary to restore immediately iron discipline in all its plenitude and the death penalty for traitors. If we do not do it at once, without delay, then the army will perish, Russia will perish. [11]

On the same day the government decided to restore the death penalty at the front – reverting to the situation before 12 March, when it had been abolished. But this did not satisfy the generals. On 16 July General Denikin told a conference in the presence of Kerensky: ‘The death penalty [should] be introduced not only in the theatre of war but also in the rear where replacements are stationed.’ General Lukomskii remarked that the death penalty should also apply to ‘civilians who are corrupting the army’. [12]

Factory managers started a massive campaign of suppression of factory committees and lock-outs of workers. Up to the end of September 768 enterprises employing 165,372 workers closed down. [13] On 3 August, at the Second All-Russian Commercial and Industrial Congress in Moscow, P.P. Riabushinskii, a banking and industrial magnate, gave a particularly vitriolic speech:

... it is necessary that the long bony hand of hunger and national impoverishment seize by the throat those false friends of the people, the members of the various committees and soviets, in order that they come to their senses ...

For a month there was continuous slander against the Bolsheviks as German agents. The fact that Lenin had come to Russia in a sealed train through Germany served to fuel the story. Even Trotsky could not be saved from the accusation of being a German agent. Thus *Rech*, the Cadet paper, published a story that before his departure from New York Trotsky had received 10,000 dollars from German-Americans, which he was to use for defeatist agitation in Russia. Trotsky at once replied with an open letter which appeared in Gorky’s paper, *Novaia Zhizn*, and poked fun at Miliukov’s revelations. He remarked ironically that the Germans apparently considered the overthrow of the regime in Russia an extremely cheap affair, costing only 10,000 dollars. Then he related what really happened before his departure from New York: American, Russian, Lettish, Jewish, Lithuanian and Finnish friends had given him and three other Russian émigrés a farewell meeting at which a collection was taken for the Russian revolution. The sum collected amounted to 310

dollars, of which 100 dollars was contributed by German workers. On the following day Trotsky distributed the 310 dollars among the four emigrés. The article ends with a good-humoured confession:

To provide the necessary correction for future accusers, I feel it is pertinent for me to state, for the benefit of liars, slanderers, Cadet reporters and blackguards in general that in my entire life I have not only never had at my disposal, at one time, 10,000 dollars, but even a tenth of that sum. Such confession, I am afraid, may ruin my reputation among the Cadet public more completely than all the insinuations of Mr Miliukov, but I have long since become reconciled to the thought of living without the approval of the liberal bourgeoisie. [14]

From the July Days onwards, in public attacks on the Bolsheviks, the name of Trotsky was practically always combined with that of Lenin. As Lenin was accused of being a German agent, and was at the time in hiding, Trotsky went out of the way to make it clear that he was at one with Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Thus on 13 July there appeared in *Novaia Zhizn* an open letter from Trotsky to the Provisional Government which said:

Citizen Ministers,

I understand that in connection with the events of 3-4 July a warrant has been issued for the arrest of Lenin, Zinoviev and Kamenev, but not for me. I think it is necessary to bring the following facts to your attention:

1) I share the main thesis of Lenin, Zinoviev and Kamenev. I have advocated it in the journal *Vpered* and in all my public speeches.

2) My attitude towards the events of 3 and 4 July was the same as that of the above-mentioned comrades ...

When ... notwithstanding our effort, the demonstration did take place, my comrade Bolsheviks and I made numerous speeches in front of the Tauride Palace, in which we come out in favour of the main slogan of the crowd: 'All power to the Soviets', but we, at the same time, called on those demonstrating, both the soldiers and the civilians, to return to their homes and barracks in a peaceful and orderly manner ...

3) The fact that I am not connected with *Pravda* and am not a member of the Bolshevik Party is not due to political differences but to certain circumstances in our party history which have now lost all significance ...

5) You can have no logical base for exempting me from the implications of the decree under which Lenin, Zinoviev and Kamenev are subject to arrest. So far as concerns the political side of the question, you can have no reason to doubt that I am as uncompromising an opponent of the general policy of the Provisional Government as the above-named comrades. My exemption only emphasises more graphically the counter-revolutionary and capricious character of the action you have taken against them. [15]

On 2 August, Trotsky, in an open letter to the minister of justice, A.S. Zarudny, protested against what he called the frame-up of the Bolshevik leaders, stating that 'the Dreyfus case and the Beilis case are nothing compared with this deliberate attempt at moral assassination.' [16] On 17 July, at a joint session of the two executive committees of the Soviet, Trotsky said:

An intolerable atmosphere has been created, in which you as well as we are choking. They are throwing dirty accusations at Lenin and Zinoviev. (Voice: 'That is true.' Uproar. Trotsky continues.) There are in this hall, it appears, people who sympathise with these accusations.

There are people here who have only sneaked in to the revolution. (Uproar. The president's bell long tries to restore order)

... Lenin has fought thirty years for the revolution. I have fought twenty years against the oppression of the people. And we cannot but hate German militarism ... Only he who does not know what a revolutionary is can say otherwise.

Let nobody in this hall say that we are hirelings of Germany, for that is not the voice of convinced revolutionaries but the voice of villains. [17]

On 23 July Trotsky was arrested and held in the Kresty prison. Together with him in prison were Kamenev, Lunacharsky, Antonov-Ovseenko, Krylenko and the leaders of Kronstadt, Raskolnikov and Dybenko. Here were assembled the majority of the chief actors of the October insurrection and practically the whole first Bolshevik commissariat of war.

Taking time out only for quick walks, Trotsky used every minute of the day in writing numerous political pamphlets and preparing articles for the Bolshevik press. However strong the slanders against Bolshevism, whatever blows were delivered by the Provisional Government and its supporters the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, Trotsky's optimism was undiminished. Thus he wrote on 18 August:

Retribution does not linger. Hounded, persecuted, slandered, our party has never grown as rapidly as it is growing in recent days. This process will spread from the capital to the provinces, from the towns to the country and the army ... Without for one minute ceasing to be the class organisation of the proletariat ... our party will in the fire of persecution become the true leader of all the oppressed, crushed, deceived, and persecuted masses. [18]

## Kerensky's Bonapartism

The retreat of the revolution and the radical change in the balance of class forces after the July Days made it obligatory for Lenin and Trotsky to re-evaluate the situation. Both defined the regime as Bonapartist.

In an article called *The Beginning of Bonapartism* published in *Rabochii i soldat* on 29 July, Lenin wrote:

Kerensky's cabinet is undoubtedly a cabinet taking the first steps towards Bonapartism.

We see the chief historical symptoms of Bonapartism: the manoeuvring of state power, which leans on the military clique (on the worst elements of the army) for support, between two hostile classes and forces which more or less balance each other out. [19]

Trotsky, in the middle of July at a session of the Petrograd Soviet, defined Kerensky as 'the mathematical centre of Russian Bonapartism':

... led by politicians who are afraid of their own shadow, the Soviet did not dare take the power. The Cadet Party, representing all the propertied interests, could not yet seize power. It remained to find a great conciliator, a mediator, an arbitrator. [20]

The essence of Bonapartism is a state power rising above contending classes as an arbiter balancing between them. Trotsky went on to compare Kerensky's Bonapartism with that of Napoleon Bonaparte himself. Kerensky had all the vices of French Bonapartism, but none its strength: he was impotent. French Bonapartism

... grew out of a struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and seeks support in the passive stability of the peasantry; the chief instrument of Bonapartism is a disciplined army. With us, however, not one of these conditions is met. The whole of society is gripped by the most tense, naked antagonisms. The struggle between workers and capitalists, peasants and landlords, soldiers and generals, oppressed nationalities and central power does not afford the latter any basis of stability ... without a complete agrarian revolution, all attempts of this 'super-class' dictatorship will inevitably remain short-lived.

Kerensky wants to frighten democracy with counter-revolution, and counter-revolution with democracy, and thereby sanction a permanent dictatorship which will not improve the conditions of the masses. But all this is reckoning without the true master. The revolutionary masses have not yet said their final word. [21]

### **Permanent Revolution or Permanent War?**

For Trotsky the answer to Kerensky's Bonapartist regime was the unfolding of the permanent revolution, so in *What Next?* a pamphlet published by the Bolshevik publishing house Priboi, Trotsky elaborates his concept of permanent revolution as it applied to the immediate situation:

Once it had cast off the shackles of capitalist power, the revolution would become permanent, i.e. uninterrupted: it would take state power not to strengthen the regime of capitalist exploitation, but, on the contrary, to overcome it. Its final success in that direction would depend on the success of proletarian revolution in Europe. On the other hand, the more decisively and courageously the Russian revolution overcame the opposition of its own bourgeoisie, the more powerful would be the impetus imparted to the revolutionary movement in the

West. This was and remained the sole practical perspective of the further development of the revolution. [22]

The alternatives facing Russia and humanity, he said, are socialism or barbarism:

Present-day world slaughter shows that Europe has reached the limits of capitalist greed, that it can no longer live and develop on the foundation of private ownership of the means of production. This chaos of blood and destruction is a savage uprising of blind and dark productive forces, the revolt of iron and steel against the reign of profit, against wage slavery, against the vulgar stupidity of human relations. Caught up in the flames of war it had itself begat, capitalism screams to humanity from the mouths of its cannons: 'Cope with me, or I shall bury you beneath my ruins!'

All past development, millennia of human history, class struggle, and cultural accumulations, now turns on a single question, and that is the question of proletarian revolution. There is no other solution or different way out. In that lies the Russian revolution's gigantic strength. This is not a 'national', not a bourgeois revolution. Anyone who evaluates it in this way lives in a world of ghosts, of the 18th and 19th centuries. But the 20th century is our 'native land in time'. The ultimate fate of the Russian revolution is directly dependent on the course and outcome of the war, i.e. on the development of the class conflicts in Europe, which this imperialist war has made into a catastrophe.

... Meanwhile the revolution has spoken only its first word. It still has great reserves in Western Europe. [23]

The fate of the proletarian regime in Russia

... will be directly and immediately dependent on the development of the revolutionary movement in Europe – first

and foremost in Germany.

Internationalism for us is not an abstract idea, existing only to be betrayed on every opportune occasion (as for Tseretelli or Chernov), but is a real guiding and wholly practical principle. A lasting decisive success is inconceivable for us without a revolution in Europe. [24]

For us the struggle for power is not merely the next stage of a national-democratic revolution; no, this is the fulfilment of our international duty, in this we are occupying one of the most important positions on the common front in the struggle with world imperialism. This point of view fundamentally defines our attitude to so-called national defence. The episodic shift in the front in one direction or the other can neither halt nor deflect our struggle, directed at the very foundations of capitalism, which relies on the imperialist mutual destruction of peoples.

A permanent revolution versus a permanent slaughter: that is the struggle which determines the fate of mankind. [25]

And Trotsky, under the most trying circumstances – given when Riga fell into the hands of the Germans and Petrograd was threatened, still stuck to his internationalism. In a pamphlet, *When will there be an end to this Accursed Slaughter?* Trotsky writes:

The fall of Riga was a cruel blow. The fall of Petersburg would be a misfortune. But the fall of the internationalist policy of the Russian proletariat would be a disaster.

... Those 183,000 working men, working women and soldiers who voted for our party in Petersburg at elections for the City Duma form a stout bulwark for the International. The Moscow workers who carried out their protest strike at the time of the 'State Conference' – they too are a glorious stronghold. As long as these bulwarks exist, spread and strengthen, the revolution is

not lost. All that is needed is, for us from now on to stand steadfastly at our post, beneath the banner of a new, Third International.

... The people must take power into their own hands. The people – that means the working class, the revolutionary army, the rural poor. Only a workers' government will end the war and save our country from ruin.

Forward! Into battle! Raise high the red banner!

The day is near when not only the war, but also the capitalist system which begat it, will be smothered in the fraternal embraces of the workers of all lands. [26]

#### **The Sixth Congress of the Bolshevik Party**

On 2 July a conference of the *Mezhraiontsy* took place. The main item on the agenda was the question of joining the Bolshevik party. Sukhanov, who was present in the gallery, describes:

... the majority were workers and soldiers unknown to me. There was no doubt that here – despite the miniature quality of the conference – the authentic worker-soldier masses were represented.

We arrived during the 'reports from the floor'. They were listened to with interest, and really were interesting. Party work was being feverishly carried on and its successes were perceptible to everyone. There was one hindrance: 'What distinguishes you from the Bolsheviks, and why aren't you with them?' All the speakers reiterated this ... [27]

In order to hasten the fusion of the *Mezhraiontsy* with the Bolsheviks, which certain individual leaders of the *Mezhraiontsy* were trying to

postpone, Trotsky published the following statement in *Pravda*:

There are in my opinion at the present time no differences either in principle or tactics between the *Mezhraiontsy* and the Bolsheviks. Accordingly there are no motives which justify their separate existence. [28]

But Trotsky met resistance. In May he had already been for joining the Bolsheviks. But the majority of the *Mezhraiontsy* balked, and on their behalf Iurenev still warned against ‘the bad sectarian organisational methods’ of the Bolsheviks. Trotsky headed the minority that was for a speedy merger. He argued that coming out of clandestinity and working in the broad popular movement, the Bolsheviks had largely rid themselves of their sectarian traits. Assisted by Lunacharsky, Trotsky convinced the majority to this view [29], and the 4,000 *Mezhraiontsy* joined the Bolshevik party. [30] As already mentioned, Sverdlov reported that the Bolshevik Party at the time had about 200,000 members. [31]

On 26 July the joint congress – in essence the Sixth Congress of the Bolshevik Party – opened, and it conducted its meetings semi-legally, concealing itself in two different workers’ districts.

The Congress began with the election of Lenin, Trotsky, Kamenev, Kollontai and Lunacharsky to the posts of honorary congress co-chairmen. With Lenin in hiding, Trotsky was nominated to deliver the main speech and to present a draft resolution on ‘the current political situation’. [32] When Trotsky was arrested three days before the start of the congress, and with the other honorary co-chairmen also in prison, Bukharin was hastily called to perform the task.

Sverdlov, the actual organiser of the congress, reported:

Trotsky already before the congress joined the editorial staff of our paper, but his imprisonment prevented his actual participation. [33]

On the subject of elections to the central committee, the report of the congress reads:

The names of the four members of the central committee receiving the most votes are read aloud: Lenin – 133 votes out of 134. Zinoviev 132, Kamenev 131, and Trotsky 131. (*Loud applause*) [34]

## Notes

1. Lenin, *Works*, volume 31, page 58.
2. Lenin, *Works*, volume 33, page 227.
3. P.N. Miliukov, *Istoriia vtoroi russkoi revoliutsii* (Sofia 1921), volume 1, page 244.
4. Trotsky, *History*, page 576.
5. Lenin, *Works*, volume 25, page 312.
6. Trotsky, *History*, page 1130.
7. Sukhanov, pages 446-7.
8. Raskolnikov, page 185.
9. Browder and Kerensky, volume 3, pages 1354-5.
10. Browder and Kerensky, volume 3, page 1358.
11. Browder and Kerensky, volume 2, page 981.
12. Browder and Kerensky, volume 2, page 1000.
13. W.H. Chamberlain, *The Russian Revolution* (New York 1965), page 276.
14. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 219; Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, pages 150-4.
15. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, pages 165-6.
16. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, page 203.
17. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, pages 169-70.
18. *Proletarii*, 18 August 1917; Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, page 256.
19. Lenin, *Works*, volume 25, page 220.
20. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, pages 226-7.

21. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, pages 231-2.
22. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, page 223.
23. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, pages 247-8.
24. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, page 249.
25. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, page 252.
26. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, pages 267-9.
27. Sukhanov, page 420.
28. Trotsky, *History*, page 811.
29. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, pages 145-9.
30. *Iurenev's Report to the Sixth Congress of the Bolshevik Party*, in *Shestoi Sezd RSDRP*, page 49.
31. *Shestoi Sezd RSDRP*, page 36.
32. *Shestoi Sezd RSDRP*, page 7.
33. *Shestoi Sezd RSDRP*, page 7.
34. *Shestoi Sezd RSDRP*, page 252.

## 14. The Kornilov Coup

THE FALL OF RIGA into the hands of the Germans on 21 August became the signal for a general attack by the bourgeois press against 'soldiers who will not fight' and 'workers who will not work'. Rodzianko, a former chairman of the Duma, declared in *Utro Rossii* that the taking of Petrograd by the Germans would be a blessing because it would destroy the Soviets and get rid of the revolutionary Baltic fleet.

Prime minister Kerensky, behind the back of part of his government, of the Soviets that had given him power, and of the Social Revolutionary party to which he belonged, conspired with the highest generals of the army for a radical change in the regime.

On 24 August General Kornilov, Supreme Commander in Chief, put General Krymov in command of the Petrograd region, including the Baltic Fleet, Kronstadt, and the 42nd Corps in Finland. Krymov was instructed to occupy and disarm the capital, and to dissolve the Petrograd Soviet.

Kornilov began to move his forces on 27 August.

But at the last minute Kerensky got a fight, figuring that the military dictatorship would deliver him into the hands of the generals. Sukhanov writes:

Kerensky, just like Kornilov, had set himself the goal of introducing a bourgeois dictatorship (even though, also like Kornilov, he didn't understand this).

These two ... had fallen out over the question of which could be the bearer of this dictatorship. One represented the stock

exchange, capital and the *rentiers*; the other the same, plus the still to a large extent indeterminate groups of petty bourgeois democratic artisans, intelligentsia, the third estate, and the paid managers of home industry and commerce.

But Kornilov and Kerensky each needed the other ... Each was trying to use the other for his own aims. Kornilov was striving for a pure dictatorship of finance, capital and *rentiers*, but had to accept Kerensky as hostage of the democracy. Kerensky was aiming at a dictatorship of a bloc of the big and petty bourgeoisie, but had to pay heavy tribute to his ally as the wielder of the real power. And each was trying to ensure that at the finishing post he would be the actual and formal master of the situation. [1]

Kerensky 'was a Kornilovite – on condition that he himself head the Kornilov rising.' [2]

Unfortunately for the plot, at the last moment, on 27 August, before Kornilov's troops got the order to march on Petrograd, Kerensky stepped out of the general's embrace and turned against him.

General Kornilov's response made it clear that his efforts were directed towards ridding Russia not only of Bolshevism, but also of the Soviets.

The Bolshevik Party, in a state of semi-legality, suppressed and persecuted by the Kerensky government, and with its leaders viciously slandered as German agents by the same body, did not hesitate for a moment to take steps to form a practical alliance with its gaolers and slanderers – Kerensky, Tseretelli and company – in order to fight Kornilov. In a letter [1\*] to the central committee of 30 August Lenin wrote:

The Kornilov revolt is a most unexpected (unexpected at such a moment and in such a form) and downright unbelievably sharp turn in events. Like every sharp turn, it calls for a revision and change of tactics. [3]

However, when a radical change in tactics was needed, Lenin warned, one 'must be extra cautious not to become unprincipled.' There must be no concealment of principled disagreements, no weakening of the criticism of the position of the temporary ally, no cover-up of differences:

*Even now we must not support Kerensky's government. This is unprincipled. We may be asked: Aren't we going to fight against Kornilov? Of course we must! But this is not the same thing ... We shall fight, we are fighting against Kornilov just as Kerensky's troops do, but we do not support Kerensky. On the contrary, we expose his weakness. There is the difference ... Now is the time for action; the war against Kornilov must be conducted in a revolutionary way, by drawing the masses in, by arousing them, by inflaming them. (Kerensky is *afraid* of the masses, *afraid* of the people.) [4]*

Independently Trotsky, in the Kresty prison, took the same line: for united action with Kerensky against Kornilov but without fudging the political differences with this unreliable ally. Thus Trotsky describes how, when the cruiser Aurora entered the Neva River, the sailors sent a delegation to meet Trotsky in Kresty and ask him for advice:

... should they defend the Winter Palace or take it by assault? I advised them to put off the squaring of accounts with Kerensky until they had finished Kornilov. What's ours will not escape us'.

'It won't?'

'It will not.' [5]

Trotsky made it clear that not for a moment should any trust be put in Kerensky. One should support Kerensky's physical fight against Kornilov without supporting him politically. It was not a question of defending the government, but of defending the revolution.

On 27 August the Bolshevik fraction in the executive committee of the Soviet declared that the current struggle between the coalition government and the Kornilov generals was a struggle between two methods of liquidating the revolutionary conquests. The declaration listed a number of demands: the removal of all counter-revolutionary generals, and their replacement by elections carried out by the revolutionary soldiers; the immediate transfer of all landlords' land to the peasant committees; the eight-hour working day by law and the organisation of democratic control over factories, offices and banks; immediate abolition of all secret treaties, and the offer of terms for a general democratic peace; and last, but not least, the transfer of all power to the revolutionary workers, peasants and soldiers. [6]

The Bolsheviks' attitude was decisive.

The Military Revolutionary Committee [of the Petrograd Soviet] in organising the defence, had to set in motion the masses of workers and soldiers, and these masses, insofar as they were organised, were organised by the Bolsheviks and followed them. At that time theirs was the only organisation that was large, welded together by elementary discipline, and united with the democratic rank and file of the capital. Without them the Military Revolutionary Committee was impotent. With the Bolsheviks ... the Military Revolutionary Committee had at its disposal all organised worker-soldier strength, of whatever kind. [7]

The most effective measure taken by the Military Revolutionary Committee was the arming of the workers. Thus in the Vyborg district of Petrograd the Red Guard received 940 rifles to supplement the 270 that they had before the Kornilov coup. [8]

It goes without saying not only that this was on the initiative of the Bolsheviks, but also that they issued an ultimatum on the subject. As far as I know it was a condition of their participation in the Military Revolutionary Committee. The majority of the committee could not help accepting this condition ... The

democratic, military, and trade union organisations in the suburbs wired the Military Revolutionary Committee their readiness to place themselves completely at its disposition. Without any superfluous words the Kronstadt Soviet eliminated the post-July authorities and installed their own commander in the fortress. The central committee of the fleet also went over to a revolutionary position and was ready for battle – on sea or land – at the first demand from the central executive committee [of the Soviet]. The same night [28 August] and early morning the Bolsheviks had begun to display a feverish activity in the workers' district. Their military apparatus organised mass meetings in all the barracks. Everywhere instructions were given, and obeyed, to remain under arms, ready to advance. By and large Smolny [the Bolshevik headquarters] was meeting Kornilov with all its lights blazing. [9]

Factory committees all over Petrograd swiftly organised detachments of Red Guards consisting largely of Bolsheviks, encompassing as many as 40,000 workers. The influence of the Bolsheviks increased massively. As Sukhanov writes:

The Bolsheviks were working stubbornly and without let-up. They were among the masses, at the factory benches, every day without a pause. Tens of speakers, big and little, were speaking in Petersburg, at the factories and in the barracks, every blessed day. For the masses they had become their own people, because they were always there, taking the lead in details as well as in the most important affairs of the factory or barracks ... The mass lived and breathed together with the Bolsheviks. It was in the hands of the party of Lenin and Trotsky. [10]

The coup collapsed after four days: Kornilov's troops disbanded without firing a shot. Bolshevik agitators had done their work well.

### **After the Coup**

The Kornilov coup prepared the workers and soldiers for the future uprising. The masses, having lost confidence in the Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, saw with their own eyes the danger of counter-revolution. They come to the conclusion that it was up to the Bolsheviks to overcome the political crisis.

On 4 September Trotsky was freed from prison. He went straight to Smolny to participate in a session of the Committee for Struggle Against Counter-Revolution, which had been formed on 28 August by the Soviet to fight Kornilov. This body was the prototype of the Military Revolutionary Committee that led the October insurrection.

If the July Days swung the political pendulum massively toward the counter-revolution, the defeat of the Kornilov coup swung it massively in the direction of the revolution. In the Soviet Trotsky and Kamenev asked for an investigation by the Bureau of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet of the events that led to the Kornilov coup, and of Kerensky's role in the plot. [11] They argued strongly that the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries should part company with the Cadets, many of whom backed Kornilov.

On 9 September Trotsky demanded the unequivocal rehabilitation of himself and other Bolshevik leaders. He asked for the government's long overdue report on the July events, and he tabled a motion of no confidence in the Menshevik president of the Soviet. The motion was carried. The Bolsheviks took over the leadership of the Soviet.

### **Footnote**

1\*. This letter did not reach the capital until early in September, well after the end of Kornilov's coup.

### **Notes**

1. Sukhanov, page 503.

2. Sukhanov, page 509.
3. Lenin, *Works*, volume 25, page 285.
4. Lenin, *Works*, volume 25, pages 285-9.
5. Trotsky, *My Life*, page 317.
6. Sidorov and others, volume 5, pages 476-7.
7. Sukhanov, page 505.
8. V.I. Startsev, *Ocherki po Istorii petrogradskoi krasnoi gvardii i rabochei militsii (Mart 1917-Aprel 1918 g)* (Moscow 1965), page 167.
9. Startsev, pages 507-8.
10. Startsev, page 529.
11. *Rabochii put*, 10 September 1917; Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, pages 274-5.

## 15. Towards the Insurrection

THIS CHAPTER will deal with the turn of the Bolshevik Party towards the armed insurrection. In this Trotsky's role was far less significant than Lenin's: after all Trotsky was a new recruit to the party and could not have very great influence over its leadership. Lenin's role was crucial. Hence this is far more a chapter in the political biography of Lenin than of Trotsky.

### Lenin Calls up the Insurrection

As soon as the Bolsheviks gained control of the Soviets of Petrograd and Moscow Lenin said: 'Our hour has come.' Sometime between 12 and 14 September Lenin wrote a letter entitled *The Bolsheviks must Assume Power*. It was addressed both to the party's central committee and to its Petrograd and Moscow committees. The Bolsheviks could seize power, he argued,

... because the active majority of revolutionary elements in the two chief cities is large enough to carry the people with it, to overcome the opponent's resistance, to smash him, and to gain and retain power. For the Bolsheviks, by immediately proposing a democratic peace, by establishing the democratic institutions and liberties which have been mangled and shattered by Kerensky, will form a government which nobody will be able to overthrow. [1]

A day or two later Lenin wrote another letter to the central committee, on 'Marxism and Insurrection'. In it he compared the

situation prevailing in mid-September with that during the July Days. His aim was to overcome the inertia of the Bolshevik leadership, which, having bent the stick in one direction in July, was too conservative and timid to change course now. The Bolsheviks were right not to have taken power in July, but now things were different, Lenin argued.

The urgency of the issue, of the need to take immediate steps towards the seizure of power, was so overwhelming that Lenin left no stone unturned in his efforts to convince, and if need be, to circumvent the Central Committee. Party formalities dwindled in significance under such momentous conditions. This explains the tone of his letter of 27 September to I.T. Smilga, the young chairman of the Regional Committee of the Army, Navy and Workers of Finland. Smilga was only 25, but a veteran Bolshevik – he had been a party member for ten years, five of which he had spent in administrative exile. At the Sixth Congress of the Bolshevik Party (July 1917), he had been elected to the central committee. Lenin called on Smilga to act: to use his control over troops in Finland and the Baltic fleet to organise an uprising, seize power. [2]

On 29 September Lenin wrote a document entitled *The Crisis is Ripe* which was in the nature of a declaration of war on the central committee – which was dragging its feet on the issue of insurrection. He put forward a plan for a military campaign to seize power.

The Bolsheviks are now guaranteed the success of the insurrection: we can (if we do not ‘wait’ for the Soviet Congress) launch a surprise attack from three points – from Petrograd, from Moscow and from the Baltic fleet ... we are technically in a position to take power in Moscow (where the start might even be made, so as to catch the enemy unawares). [3]

To increase the pressure he was applying, Lenin went beyond criticising the leaders of the party. As an expression of protest he resigned from the central committee:

I am compelled to tender my *resignation from the central committee* which I hereby do, reserving for myself freedom to campaign among the *rank-and-file* of the party and at the party congress. [4]

The records do not show what happened next. In any event Lenin did not leave the central committee.

A couple of days later, on 1 October, Lenin wrote another letter to the central committee, the Moscow and Petrograd committees and the Bolshevik members of the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets. The Moscow Soviet should take power into its hands:

Victory in Moscow is guaranteed, and there is no need to fight. Petrograd can wait. The government can not do anything to save itself; it will surrender. [5]

On 2 October Lenin wrote to the Petrograd city conference, repeating his plan for armed insurrection, to start from Moscow as a base:

We must appeal to the Moscow comrades, persuade them to seize power in Moscow, declare the Kerensky government deposed, and declare the Soviet of Workers' Deputies in Moscow the provisional government of Russia in order to offer immediate peace and save Russia from the conspiracy. Let the Moscow comrades raise the question of the uprising in Moscow immediately. [6]

In an article titled *Advice of an Onlooker* and written on 8 October, Lenin addressed the comrades assembling at the Congress of the Northern Soviets, and developed Marx's idea that 'insurrection is an art.' He sketched a military plan for the seizure of power. What was needed, Lenin wrote, was

... a simultaneous offensive on Petrograd, as sudden and as rapid as possible, which must without fail be carried out from within and from without, from the working-class quarters and

from Finland, from Reval and from Kronstadt, an offensive of the entire navy ... [Z]

On 10 October the celebrated meeting of the central committee took place at which Lenin flatly posed the question of the armed insurrection, and won. Eleven of the 21 members of the central committee were present (plus one candidate member). There were ten votes in favour (nine, plus the one candidate) and two (Zinoviev and Kamenev) against.

Immediately after the meeting, Zinoviev and Kamenev issued a statement which they circulated among the members of the Petrograd committee, the Moscow committee, the Moscow regional committee, and the regional Finnish committee, arguing against the central committee decision.

#### **Central Committee Resistance to Lenin's Call**

On 16 October, that is, nine days before the insurrection, the central committee still showed signs of nervousness, hesitation and vacillation. The minutes of the enlarged meeting of the central committee (which included members of the executive commission of the Petersburg committee, the Military Organisation, the Petrograd Soviet, the leaders of the Bolsheviks in the trade unions, the factory committees, the Petrograd area committee and the railwaymen) are really astonishing. It is hard to believe that with such leadership the revolution would emerge victorious.

On 18 October a bombshell exploded. Kamenev, in association with Zinoviev, published an article in a non-party paper, Gorky's *Novaia Zhizn*, attacking the idea of insurrection. Lenin was beside himself with rage. The same day he wrote a letter to the central committee demanding the expulsion of the two blacklegs.

Lenin found it very hard to convince the central committee members of the need for insurrection. It was as though the days when Kamenev, Stalin and others-12 March to 5 April – supported the Provisional Government and the war, had returned. Again the

committee appears to have been too passive, too compromising in its attitude towards the Menshevik and Social Revolutionary leaders, too accommodating toward the Provisional Government. Admittedly the relentless criticisms of Lenin on the one hand, and pressure from the rank-and-file workers on the other, had forced the central committee to change course radically in April. But conservatism and the urge to adapt are not eliminated by a single instance of admitting one's error. Lenin had to overcome his lieutenants again and again. Insurrection demands the greatest daring, and the conservatism of leadership, therefore, appeared in an even more extreme form now than in April. The *April Theses* had not been accepted by all members of the central committee. The April conference had elected nine members to the central committee, of whom four – Kamenev, Nogin, Miliutin and Fedorov – were right-wingers who opposed the Lenin's theses. Now, in addition to these four, the opposition to the insurrection was strengthened by Zinoviev, Rykov and Lunacharsky, while a number of other central committee members prevaricated.

How can we explain the vacillation of the party leadership both in April and in September-October?

First of all, every party, including the most revolutionary, inevitably produces its own organisational conservatism – without routine there is no stability. In a revolutionary situation, tradition must be combined with initiative and daring. Both routinism and initiative are most concentrated in the top leadership of the party. In addition, even the most revolutionary party is subject to pressure from alien social forces. The main psychological support of the social *status quo* is the belief of the petty bourgeoisie, and through its influence many of the workers, that the oppressed classes are intrinsically inferior, ignorant and impotent. To isolate a revolutionary party from bourgeois public opinion, to cut any link with the bourgeois and petty bourgeois milieu, to insulate the party from these alien influences, was a goal for which Lenin fought all of his life. But no party can free itself completely from the pressure of the petty bourgeois environment.

The sharpest turning point, at which the pressure of bourgeois disbelief in the potential of the oppressed is also most strongly exerted, is the moment when the revolutionary party has to progress

from the work of preparation, of propaganda, agitation and organisation to the immediate struggle for state power, to the armed insurrection.

A revolutionary party develops over a whole historical period, during which experience convinces its members that on the whole the correlation of class forces is such as to give the capitalist class power over the working class. While the workers may be stronger in individual parts of the battlefield, on the whole they are weaker than their opponents. If this were not the case, the rule of the capitalists would be long past. Any revolutionary party that did not control its impatience over the years in the light of this fact would condemn itself to adventurism and to its own destruction. But the moment comes – and this is the meaning of revolution – when the habit of considering the enemy as stronger becomes the main obstacle on the road to victory. This conservative attitude expressed itself in the opposition of Zinoviev and Kamenev to the coming insurrection: ‘At this moment the most harmful thing of all would be to underestimate the enemy’s strength and overestimate our own,’ wrote Zinoviev and Kamenev on 11 October.

Another serious obstacle hinders the attempt to turn the party sharply towards insurrection: the state of mind of the proletariat on the eve of the armed uprising. The masses may be waiting, listless and not ready for spontaneous action. In Russia the experience of April, June, July and the Kornlov episode brought the masses to the conclusion that isolated, uncoordinated actions were useless. Between the exuberant mood of the early days and the confidence born out of the well-led, relentless struggle of the masses, directed by a clear revolutionary leadership, there was a pause, a lull.

### **The Role of the Slogan of ‘Democratic Dictatorship’**

We have described above the role of the slogan ‘For the Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Peasantry’ in the Bolsheviks’ struggle against Tsarism since 1905. Let us now look at the influence of that slogan of the Bolsheviks’ past in the critical days of Lenin’s

struggle to move the central committee to accept the immediate need for insurrection.

The Bolsheviks had argued that the coming revolution would be a bourgeois democratic revolution. By this was meant a revolution resulting from a conflict between the productive forces of capitalism, on the one hand, and Tsarism, landlordism and other relics of feudalism on the other. The task of the democratic dictatorship would not be to create a socialist society, or even the forms transitional to such a society, but to get rid of the dead wood of mediaevalism.

Lenin did not change this opinion until after the revolution of February 1917. In *The War and Russian Social Democracy* (September 1914), for example, he was still writing that the Russian revolution must limit itself to 'the three fundamental conditions for consistent democratic reform, viz, a democratic republic (with complete equality and self-determination for all nations), confiscation of the landed estates, and an eight-hour working day.' [8]

It is clear, moreover, from all Lenin's writings up to 1917 that he expected a substantial interval to elapse between the coming bourgeois revolution and the coming, proletarian revolution.

Lenin's strength was that for him the democratic dictatorship was a dynamic, hence concretely developed concept. It was an algebraic formula that needed the insertion of more precise arithmetic qualities. It was not a supra-historical abstraction, but a guide to action.

Now history relentlessly imposed the alternative: either victory of the counter-revolution or a victorious revolution culminating in the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In spite of Lenin's dynamic viewpoint, the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry became, after February, a brake on the struggle for workers' power, and was used again and again inside the Bolshevik Party between February and October by opponents of Lenin's fight to start the insurrection.

### **The Party Adapts to Constitutionalism**

The debate on the insurrection was largely confined to the top circles of the Bolshevik Party – the central committee, the Petrograd and Moscow committees, the Military Organisation, and so on – and was kept hidden from public view. But one expression of the conflict among the Bolshevik leaders on the issue of the insurrection was public: their attitude to the Democratic Conference and the Pre-Parliament convened by the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries.

The Menshevik and Social Revolutionary leaders decided to call a Democratic Conference on 14-19 September, in order to paper over the cracks in the government and attempt to demonstrate the existence of popular support for the government. It was intended to be a rival to the Congress of Soviets. The compromising leaders were trying to create a new base for themselves, by an artificial combination of different kinds of organisations. The delegacies were apportioned very arbitrarily, but they followed one rule: that the organisations of the higher strata of society were far better represented than the lower. The *zemstvos* and cooperatives enormously outweighed the Soviet. Before the Democratic Conference closed, it appointed a permanent Council of the Republic, or Pre-parliament, from among its members, which was to represent the nation until the Constituent Assembly met.

The debate amongst the Bolshevik leaders on whether or not to participate in these institutions hinted at a more fundamental debate on whether or not the armed insurrection should be carried out.

Lenin thought that revolutionaries ought to participate in parliamentary institutions only so long as the immediate overthrow of the regime was not on the agenda. Now any support for Bolshevik participation in those institutions was tantamount to opposition to the insurrection, and he called on the Bolsheviks not to participate in them. The Bolshevik leadership did not heed his argument, and adopted a compromising attitude. The minutes of the central committee of 21 September reported:

On the subject of the Democratic Conference, it is decided not to withdraw from it but merely to recall members of our party from the Praesidium. Where the Pre-Parliament is concerned, a

decision not to go into it was passed by nine votes to eight, but since the vote was divided almost equally, the final decision was referred to the party meeting being organised right now from the group gathered at the Democratic Conference. Two reports by comrade Trotsky and comrade Rykov are planned.

At the meeting, participation in the Pre-Parliament was approved by 77 votes to 50, a decision which the central committee also confirmed. [9]

Lenin was so angry that he proposed to call an emergency party conference, advancing as a platform the boycott of the Pre-Parliament. Henceforth all his letters and articles hammer at a single point: we must not go into the Pre-Parliament but out into the streets – to struggle for power. The emergency conference was unnecessary: Lenin's pressure had the required effect both in the central committee and in the Bolshevik fraction to the Pre-Parliament.

Lenin singled Trotsky out for praise for his sharp opposition to participation in the Pre-Parliament:

Trotsky was for the boycott. Bravo, Comrade Trotsky!

Boycottism was defeated in the Bolshevik group at the Democratic Conference.

Long live the boycott! [10]

At last on 5 October the central committee bent to Lenin's will and resolved, with only one dissenting voice – Kamenev's, to withdraw from the Pre-Parliament on its first day. Trotsky succeeded in convincing the Bolshevik delegates to the Pre-Parliament that they should boycott this body – again with only one vote against.

On 7 October Trotsky read out a fighting statement at the Pre-Parliament. This was probably the first time he appeared as the main Bolshevik spokesman. Sukhanov describes the scene:

There was a sensation in the hall. For most of the bourgeoisie the famous leader of the bandits, idlers and hooligans was still a novelty.

‘The officially stated aim of the Democratic Conference,’ Trotsky began, ‘was the elimination of the personal regime that fed the Kornilov revolt, and the creation of a responsible government capable of liquidating the war and promoting the convocation of a Constituent Assembly at the appointed time. Meanwhile, behind the back of the Democratic Conference, directly contrary results have been achieved by way of the backstage deals of Citizen Kerensky, the Cadets and the Social Revolutionary and Menshevik leaders. A government has been formed in and around which both avowed and clandestine Kornilovites play the leading role. The non-responsibility of this government [to the Council of the Republic] has been formally established. The Council of the Russian Republic has been declared a consultant body. Propertied elements have come into the Provisional Council in numbers to which, as all elections throughout the country indicate, they are not entitled. Despite this it is precisely the Cadet Party that has made the government independent of the Council of the Republic. Propertied elements will undoubtedly occupy a much less favourable position in the Constituent Assembly than in the Provisional Council. The government cannot help but be responsible to the Constituent Assembly. If the propertied elements were really preparing for the Constituent Assembly in a month and a half, they would have no grounds for defending the non-responsibility of the government now. The whole point is that the bourgeois classes have set themselves the goal of preventing the Constituent Assembly ...’

There was an uproar. Shouts from the right: ‘Lies!’ Trotsky tried to show complete indifference and didn’t raise his voice. ‘In the fields of industry, agriculture and supply the policy of the government and the possessing classes is aggravating the

havoc produced by the war. The propertied classes, who provoked the uprising, are now moving to crush it and are openly steering a course for the bony hand of hunger, which is expected to strangle the revolution and the Constituent Assembly first of all.

‘Nor is foreign policy any less criminal. After forty months of war the capital is threatened by mortal danger. In response to this a plan has been put forward for the transfer of the government to Moscow. The idea of surrendering the revolutionary capital to German troops does not arouse the slightest indignation amongst the bourgeois classes; on the contrary it is accepted as a natural link in the general policy that is supposed to help them in their counter-revolutionary conspiracy.’

The uproar grew worse. The patriots leaped from their seats and wouldn't allow Trotsky to go on speaking. Shouts about Germany, the sealed car and so on. One shout stood out: ‘Bastard!’ I make the point now that throughout the revolution, both before and after the Bolsheviks, neither in the Tauride, nor in Smolny, however stormy the sessions and however tense the atmosphere, there was never once such an outcry at the meetings of our rank and file. But it was enough for us to come into the fine society of the Marian Palace, the company of polished lawyers, professors, financiers, landowners, and generals, for the tavern atmosphere of the bourgeois State Duma to revive immediately.

The chairman called the meeting to order. Trotsky was standing there as though none of this were any concern of his, and finally found it possible to go on.

‘We, the Bolshevik fraction of the Social-Democratic Party, declare that with this government of national treachery and this “Council” we –’

The uproar took on an obviously hopeless character. The majority of the right got to their feet with the obvious intention of stopping the speech. The chairman called the speaker to order. Trotsky, beginning to lose his temper, and speaking by now through the hubbub, finished:

‘– that we have nothing in common with them. We have nothing in common with that murderous intrigue against the people which is being conducted behind the official scenes. We refuse to shield it either directly or indirectly for a single day. In leaving the Provisional Council we call upon the workers, soldiers, and peasants of all Russia to be stalwart and courageous. Petersburg is in danger, the revolution is in danger, the nation is in danger. The government is intensifying that danger. The ruling parties are increasing it. Only the nation can save itself and the country. We appeal to the people: Long live an immediate, honourable democratic peace, all power to the Soviets. All land to the people, long live the Constituent Assembly!’ [11]

All the Bolsheviks stood up and walked out of the assembly hall to the accompaniment of shouts ‘Go to your German trains!’

The dramatic withdrawal of the Bolsheviks from the Democratic Conference could have only one clear meaning: ‘... there was only one road for [the Bolsheviks] out of the Pre-Parliament’, writes Sukhanov, ‘– to the barricades. If they cast away the “electoral ballot”, they must take up the rifle.’ [12]

Turning their backs on the Pre-Parliament signified a turn towards insurrection, argued Lenin and Trotsky. The Petrograd Soviet’s report on the Bolshevik withdrawal from the Pre-Parliament ended with the cry ‘Long live the direct and open struggle for revolutionary power in the country!’ That was on 9 October. The same day the Petrograd Soviet accepted Trotsky’s proposal to form a Military Revolutionary Committee to be presided over by Trotsky as president of the Soviet. This would be the general staff of the insurrection.

## Lenin Adopts the Right Strategy, Wrong Tactics

While Lenin was proved absolutely correct on the strategic decision, the need for an armed insurrection to seize power, his technical suggestions, the details of the plans he drafted, were very defective.

Let us consider the suggestion that the revolution should be started in Moscow. He thought that in Moscow the insurrection could be carried out almost without bloodshed. As matters turned out, even after the success of the uprising in Petrograd on 25 October, the Moscow Bolsheviks found the going extremely difficult. The insurrection there took much longer – eight days of bloody battle – and entailed far greater sacrifice.

It was astonishing that Lenin should think of Moscow as the starting place for the insurrection. First of all the Moscow proletariat was dispersed amongst smaller factories and was far more backward than the Petrograd proletariat. [13] The engineers who were the vanguard of the working class had only a quarter of their Petrograd numbers; in Petrograd metalworkers as a whole made up 41.5 per cent of all workers (in 1914); in Moscow the figure was 15.3 per cent (in 1913). [14] The workers of Moscow were far less purely proletarian than the workers of Petrograd: up to 40 per cent had plots of land in the countryside, and 22.8 per cent owned their plots. (The corresponding figures for Petrograd were 16.5 and 7.8 per cent). [15]

Moscow's strike record was far behind that of Petrograd. During the period 1895-1916 government statistics recorded 17.6 strikes for every Petrograd worker, but only 3.5 for each Moscow province worker. [16] During the war less than 9 per cent of the workers involved in political strikes were in Moscow, whereas 74 per cent were in Petrograd. [17] Koenker explains:

Much of this difference can be explained by the different industrial composition of the two capitals. The dominant industry in St Petersburg was metalworking, and metallists were by far the most active strikers: for every hundred Russian

metalworkers an average of fifty-six struck each year between 1895 and 1916. The corresponding figure for textile workers, predominant in Moscow province, was 25 per hundred, and for food workers, another big Moscow industry, only seven of one hundred workers struck each year. These industrial differences can be explained in part by low wages and high numbers of women in the less strike-prone industries, but the net result was that Moscow was, by and large, a backwater of the strike movement ... the industries with the greatest number of skilled, well-paid, literate, and urban workers ... led the strike movement. [18]

During the months of the 1917 revolution,

...Petrograd set the pace, and Moscow, from the February days to the Soviet seizure of power in October, lagged behind. February street demonstrations occurred in Moscow only after the news arrived that the old regime in Petrograd had collapsed. Angry demonstrations in June in the capital, where workers and soldiers demanded radical solutions to the problems of war and political power, were echoed in Moscow only by hastily organised neighbourhood rallies. The July days, which provoked armed confrontations in Petrograd between revolutionary soldiers and workers and defenders of the Provisional Government, brought forth in Moscow a small procession of unarmed Bolsheviks taunted by larger crowds of local citizens. [19]

The July events were particularly instructive. In Petrograd on 3 July some 400,000 workers and soldiers demonstrated. What was the picture in Moscow?

When the Moscow Committee of the Bolshevik Party learned of the demonstrations in Petrograd, they voted reluctantly to join their comrades and called for workers to march to the centre to

demand Soviet power. The march was scheduled for six o'clock on the evening of 4 July.

By all accounts the demonstration was a pathetic affair. Columns of demonstrators were harassed on their way to the city centre by groups of 'drunken hooligans'. By ten o'clock that evening, only a few hundred marchers had actually reached Skobelev Square in front of Soviet headquarters, and these were outnumbered by a hostile crowd who jeered and insulted the small band of Bolsheviks. After some brave speeches, the demonstrators moved off – retreated, actually – to Bolshevik party headquarters nearby, to tend their wounds and assess the damage the July days had done to their party. [20]

The Moscow garrison was also much more backward than that of Petrograd. It was more isolated from the front. In addition, the troops in Petrograd had experienced the baptism of the February revolution, while in Moscow they had not had to fight for that victory. Further, the revolutionary spirit of the Petrograd garrison was fanned by the threat to transfer regiments to the front. The Moscow garrison was not subjected to this pressure.

The subjective element – the Bolshevik Party leadership – was also far weaker in Moscow than in Petrograd:

... the character of revolutionary leadership for all parties in Moscow differed from that in Petrograd. The latter capital was a centre of political power, and naturally, leading politicians gravitated to that centre, leaving Moscow and other regional centres with second-level activists or people whose local ties were more important to them than being in the centre of revolutionary activity. So political leadership in Moscow was marked by a restraint and moderation ... [21]

Nogin, the Bolshevik chairman of the Moscow Soviet, opposed the October insurrection. 'The Moscow party committee in fact had opposed an armed insurrection all along.' [22] It was only on 25 October that a Military Revolutionary Committee was established in

Moscow and this consisted, at first, of four Bolsheviks, two Mensheviks, and one United Internationalist. The Mensheviks openly declared that they were joining the Military Revolutionary Committee in order to obstruct its work (they soon withdrew from it). In Petrograd the Military Revolutionary Committee had existed since 9 October.

... Moscow Bolsheviks reluctantly made preparations to support the rising in the capital city ... the indecision ... prolonged the struggle for power in Moscow. For ten days, starting on 25 October, local power hung in the balance ... Street skirmishing between pro-government military cadets (junkers) and revolutionary soldiers began on the night of 27 October with an exchange of fire in Red Square. [23]

In Petrograd the armed insurrection was carried out in two instalments: the first at the beginning of October, when the Petrograd regiments, obeying the decision of the Soviet, refused to carry out orders from headquarters; the second on 25 October, when only a minimal and supplementary insurrection was required. But in Moscow the insurrection took place in a single step, and this was probably the main reason why it was protracted and bloody. [24] In Moscow 500 Bolshevik supporters died during the insurrection, compared with a total of only six in Petrograd. [25] Had the insurrection begun in Moscow, prior to the action in Petrograd, it would have dragged on far longer, and would have been even much more bloody, and the outcome would have been very much in doubt. This could have had a decisive effect on the prospects of the revolution altogether.

As we have mentioned, Lenin put pressure on Smilga, head of the regional committee of Soviets in Finland, to launch an assault on the Provisional Government, using troops stationed there, with backing from the Baltic fleet. This was bound to have ended in catastrophe, burying all hope of an insurrection. Thank heaven this scheme never got off the ground.

No less erroneous was Lenin's idea that the uprising should be prepared and carried out through party channels and in the name of the party, and should be sanctioned by the Congress of Soviets only after victory had been achieved.

How can we explain Lenin's tactical wrong-footedness in the face of his brilliant grasp of the strategy of the insurrection?

Having been in hiding for 111 days, from 6 July until 25 October, and out of touch with the practicalities of the situation, he could not judge them correctly. It is also possible that his emphasis on the strategic decision – his accustomed stick-bending – made it difficult for him to grasp the particulars. Concentrating on the key link, on the strategic choice, and absent from the scene of the struggle, Lenin was almost bound to make serious tactical miscalculations.

Suspecting that the leadership was procrastinating and using the excuse of the coming Congress of Soviets to delay the insurrection, Lenin looked for direct action that would not allow the leadership to temporise. His justified suspicion of the central committee's tardiness in itself led to his distortion of the tactics needed.

Nonetheless, Lenin's role in preparing the Bolshevik party for the insurrection was crucial. As Trotsky put it a few years after the event:

Had Lenin not sounded the alarm, had there not been all this pressure and criticism on his part, had it not been for his intense and passionate revolutionary mistrust, the party would probably have failed to align its front at the decisive moment. For the opposition among the party leaders was very strong, and the staff plays a major role in all wars, including civil wars. [26]

## Notes

1. Lenin, *Works*, volume 26, page 19.
2. Lenin, *Works*, volume 26, page 72.
3. Lenin, *Works*, volume 26, page 83.
4. Lenin, *Works*, volume 26, page 84.

5. Lenin, *Works*, volume 26, page 141.
6. Lenin, *Works*, volume 26, page 146.
7. Lenin, *Works*, volume 26, pages 180-1.
8. Lenin, *Works*, volume 21, page 33.
9. *The Bolsheviks and the October Revolution: Minutes of the Central Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks): August 1917-February 1918* (London 1974), page 67; hereafter referred to as *CC Minutes*.
10. Lenin, *Works*, volume 26, page 57.
11. Sukhanov, pages 538-40; see also Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, pages 287-93 and 321-3.
12. Sukhanov, page 541.
13. G.S. Ignatiev, *Oktiabr 1917 goda v Moskve* (Moscow 1964), page 4.
14. D. Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (Princeton 1981), page 25.
15. P.S. Volubuev, *Proletariat i Burzhuaziia Rossii v 1917 godu* (Moscow 1964), pages 25-6.
16. Koenker, page 76.
17. A. Sidorov, *The Labour Movement in Russian during the years of the Imperialist War*, in M.N. Pokrovsky (editor) *Ocherki po istoriioktiabrskoi revoliutsii* (Moscow-Leningrad 1927), volume 1, page 287.
18. Koenker, pages 76-7.
19. Koenker, page 94.
20. Koenker, pages 122-3.
21. Koenker, page 95.
22. Koenker, page 342.
23. Koenker, page 332.
24. Trotsky, *The Lessons of October*, in Trotsky, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-25*, page 246.
25. *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, number 6, 1967, page 21.
26. Trotsky, *The Lessons of October*, in *The Challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-25*, page 240.

## 16. Trotsky Organizes the October Insurrection

WITH the Bolshevik Central Committee dithering over preparations for the armed insurrection, and Lenin in hiding, Trotsky came to play the role of the organiser of the insurrection. The Minutes of the central committee show that the most important questions – the Military Revolutionary Committee, control of the garrison, the relation between the insurrection and the coming Congress of Soviets – were not discussed in advance by the Central Committee, and did not issue from its intervention, but were worked out only by the executive of the Petrograd Soviet led by Trotsky.

A possible factor in Trotsky's acting largely independently of the central committee was the still strongly held suspicion of the new recruit by the old Bolsheviks. Trotsky's prominence in the party was undisputed; but one need but to scan the minutes of the central committee to glimpse the feelings below the surface. As already noted, early in May Lenin tried unsuccessfully to convince his colleagues to appoint Trotsky to the editorship of *Pravda*. As late as 4 August – with Trotsky in prison, and after he had been elected to the central committee with a very high vote – the central committee still refused, by eleven votes to ten, to elect Trotsky to the editorial board of the Bolshevik press. [1] This was rectified on 6 September, when, two days after his release, he first appeared at the central committee, and he was elected to the editorial board unopposed. [2]

For the mass of the workers and soldiers, Trotsky came to be synonymous with Bolshevism, but to the old party workers of the underground, Lenin's professional revolutionaries, with their *esprit de corps*, Trotsky was an outsider. The resentment towards the new

recruit was destined to play a significant role in later years – after Lenin's disappearance from the scene.

While in public Trotsky was by far the most prominent representative of Bolshevism, in the central committee, if one follows its minutes, his behaviour is highly circumspect; his usual *élan* is missing in the debate on the coming insurrection. The preparations for October, in fact, hardly get an echo in the central committee minutes.

Lenin was the architect of the Bolshevik Party, the great instrument of the revolution. He also directed the party throughout the period and months between April and October, and won the argument for the seizure of power. It was Lenin who spoke to the party members, and through them to the masses. But it was Trotsky, the brilliant orator and writer, who inspired the masses directly to great enthusiasm and courage. Until mid-September Trotsky had played a secondary role to Lenin. Now, as organiser of the insurrection, he came uniquely into his own. To the masses Trotsky symbolised the very essence and aspirations of Bolshevism, even more than Lenin, who withdrew from the public eye.

Jacques Sadoul, a member of the French military mission to Russia, who became a Communist and volunteered for the Red Army, wrote at the time: 'Trotsky dominated the insurrection, being its soul of steel, while Lenin remains rather its theoretician.' [3]

Trotsky approached the insurrection from his vantage point as president of the Petrograd Soviet. He agreed with Lenin on the urgency of carrying out the insurrection, but he disagreed over the method, especially over the idea that the party should stage it in its own name. Since the agitation of the Bolshevik Party was under the slogan 'All power to the Soviets', he argued that the strategy of the insurrection should appear to all as a direct culmination of this agitation. It should therefore be timed to coincide or slightly precede the Congress of Soviets, into whose hands the insurgents should hand over the power. Further, the insurrection should be conducted in the name of the Soviet of Petrograd, and through its machinery.

Marx wrote that insurrection was an art, and Trotsky demonstrated in September and October 1917 that he was the

greatest artist in this field.

Every step Trotsky undertook was aimed to convince the workers and soldiers that it fitted the needs of the Petrograd Soviet, that defence of the Soviet from attack by the Provisional Government constituted at the same time an offensive against that same government. This meant progressive encroachment on the power of the Provisional Government in the name of defence from counter-revolution, and this should serve as preparation for the final blow – the overturning of the government.

As a first step, Trotsky argued in a resolution to the Petrograd Soviet:

In order to unite and co-ordinate the action of all the Soviets in the struggle with the advancing danger, and in order to decide problems of organisation of the revolutionary power, the immediate calling of a congress of the soviets is necessary.

He commented years later on this resolution:

Thus a resolution on self-defence brings us right up to the necessity of overthrowing the government. The agitation will be conducted on this political keynote from now straight on to the moment of insurrection. [4]

Trotsky expands further on this point:

In co-ordinating the revolutionary efforts of the workers and soldiers of the whole country, giving them a single goal, giving them unity of aim and a single date for action, the slogan of the Soviet Congress, at the same time made it possible to screen the semi-conspirative, semi-public preparation of an insurrection with continual appeals to the legal representation of the workers, soldiers and peasants. Having thus promoted the assembling of forces for the revolution, the Congress of Soviets was afterward to sanction its results and give the new government a form irreproachable in the eyes of the people. [5]

On 23 September the Petrograd Soviet elected Trotsky as its president. Sukhanov writes:

Now he became the chairman of the Petersburg Soviet; there was a hurricane of applause when he appeared. Everything had changed! Since the April Days the Soviet had gone against the revolution and been the mainstay of the bourgeoisie. For a whole half-year it had served as bulwark – against the people’s movement and their wrath. It had been the Praetorian Guard of the Star Chamber, at the disposal of Kerensky and Tseretelli. Now it was once again a revolutionary army, inseparable from the popular masses of Petersburg. It was now Trotsky’s guard, ready at a sign from him to storm the Coalition, the Winter Palace and all the citadels of the bourgeoisie. The Soviet, reunited with the masses, had once again recovered its enormous energies. [6]

On behalf of the new Soviet leadership, Trotsky sounded the first summons to the second revolution. At the session of 25 September the Soviet passed this resolution by an enormous majority:

The new government will go down in the history of the revolution as the government of the civil war.

The Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies declares: ‘We, the workers and the garrison of Petersburg, refuse to support the government of bourgeois autocracy and counter-revolutionary violence. We express the firm conviction that the new government will meet with a single response from the entire revolutionary democracy: “Resign!”’ Relying on this unanimous voice of the authentic democracy, the All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers’ and Peasants’ Deputies will create a genuinely revolutionary government. [7]

Commenting on this resolution years later in his history of the revolution, Trotsky aptly wrote:

The enemy tried to see in this resolution a mere ritual vote of non-confidence. In reality it was a programme of revolution. Exactly a month was required for its realisation. [8]

### **The Rise of the Military Revolutionary Committee**

The Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet was an extension of the Committee for the Struggle Against Counter-Revolution, formed during the Kornilov coup. Sukhanov tells the story:

... the Right Menshevik Weinstein had proposed, in the name of his fraction, that a special 'committee for the struggle against the counter-revolution' be formed ... what should this special committee do? Its initiators were not quite clear about that. In any case it must give every kind of technical aid to the official organs of government in the struggle against Kornilov.

The Menshevik resolution was of course passed. Later the new body received the name of Military Revolutionary Committee. It was this institution that bore the whole brunt of the struggle against the Kornilov campaign. [9]

Trotsky seized upon the Menshevik proposal for the 'committee for the struggle against the counter-revolution.' He used the Military Revolutionary Committee brilliantly to encroach more and more on the power of the Provisional Government under the guise of defence from counter-revolution.

On 6 October a rumour concerning a counter-revolutionary conspiracy reached the Soldiers' Section of the Petrograd Soviet – that the government was preparing to flee from Petrograd, and intended to abandon the heart of the revolution to the approaching Germans. Rodzianko, the ex-president of the Duma, went so far as to state publicly that he would rejoice if the German army re-established law and order in Petrograd. Trotsky immediately acted

upon the rumour, moving the following resolution at the Soldiers' Section of the Petrograd Soviet:

If the Provisional Government is incapable of defending Petrograd, then it ought either to conclude peace or to make room for another government. The transfer of the government to Moscow would be a disastrous retreat from a responsible battle position. [10]

The resolution was carried unanimously, and was to have far-reaching consequences, as the Soldiers' Section of the Soviet, which had long been a moderating counterweight to the militancy of the workers, now moved solidly behind Trotsky.

Trotsky continued this line of argument, the next day, as we have seen, berating the Pre-Parliament with the bourgeoisie's counter-revolutionary policy of the surrender of the revolutionary capital to German troops.

On 11 October the Commander of the Northern front, General Cheremissov, reported to the war minister a demand of the army committees that the exhausted units at the front be replaced by fresher Petrograd units from the rear. In reply the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet instructed the Military Revolutionary Committee:

To get in touch with the Northern front and with the headquarters of the Petrograd district, with Centrobalt and the regional Soviet of Finland, in order to ascertain the military situation and take the necessary measures: to take a census of the personal composition of the garrison of Petrograd and its environs, also of the ammunition and military supplies; to take measures for the preservation of discipline in the soldier and worker masses. [11]

Trotsky commented aptly on this:

The formulae were all-inclusive and at the same time ambiguous: they almost all balanced on a fine line between defence of the capital and armed insurrection. However, these two tasks, heretofore mutually exclusive, were now in actual fact growing into one. Having seized the power, the Soviet would be compelled to undertake the military defence of Petrograd. [12]

On the same day a Congress of the Soviets of the Northern Region was held in Petrograd. Speaking to the Congress Trotsky declared:

Our government can run away from Petrograd, but the revolutionary people will never leave Petrograd; they will defend it to the end ... Now the General Staff puts forward a plan to evacuate two-thirds of the garrison from Petrograd. This is a problem facing us. The Soviet 'authorities' have decided to support the General Staff ... On the eve of the Kornilov conspiracy [the military authorities] also issued an order to evacuate the troops, and then they argued it was necessitated by strategic reasons.

There is only one way out – it is necessary to transfer power into the hands of the All-Russian Soviet of Workers and Soldiers' Deputies. [13]

Trotsky then moved the following resolution:

The nation can be saved only by the immediate transfer of all power into the hands of the organs of the revolution – the Soviets of Workers' Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies – at the centre and in the provinces ... The hour has arrived when only a decisive and unanimous action of all the Soviets can save the country, by solving the question of the central power. [14]

This was overwhelmingly carried. Two years after these events, Trotsky wrote in an article on the October Revolution:

As soon as the order for the removal of the troops was communicated by headquarters to the executive committee of the Petrograd Soviet ... it became clear that this question in its further development would have decisive political significance. [15]

Elsewhere he wrote:

From the moment when we, as the Petrograd Soviet, invalidated Kerensky's order transferring two-thirds of the garrison to the front, we had actually entered a state of armed insurrection ... the outcome of the insurrection of 25 October was at least three-quarters settled, if not more, the moment that we opposed the transfer of the Petrograd garrison; created the Revolutionary Military Committee (16 October); appointed our own commissars in all army divisions and institutions; and thereby completely isolated not only the general staff of the Petrograd zone, but also the government. As a matter of fact, we had here an armed insurrection – an armed though bloodless insurrection of the Petrograd regiments against the Provisional Government – under the leadership of the Revolutionary Military Committee and under the slogan of preparing the defence of the Second Soviet Congress, which would decide the ultimate fate of the state power ... The insurrection of 25 October was only supplementary in character. [16]

This act of defiance over the issue of the transfer of the garrison from Petrograd also demonstrated the hegemony of the proletariat over the peasantry – one of the key themes of the Theory of the Permanent Revolution. Usually it is difficult to organise the atomised peasantry; but the war organised them in an army of many millions. The hegemony of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' Deputies over the garrison was a demonstration of the proletarian leadership of the peasantry. The defence of the Petrograd garrison from attack directed by the Kerensky government, the prevention of its transfer

to the front, was a key feature in the strategy of the Soviet and the Military Revolutionary Committee.

The same theme of the alliance of workers and peasants was emphasised by Trotsky in his report to the conference of factory committees on 10 October on the need for economic aid by the industrial proletariat to the peasantry. He declared: 'We must explain to the village that all attempts of the workers to help the peasants by supplying the village with agricultural implements will be impossible until workers' control of organised production is established.' [17] The conference issued a manifesto to the peasantry in this sense, the central theme of which was that the proletariat felt itself to be a special class and a leader of the people.

On 12 October the executive committee of the Petrograd Soviet declared:

A Military Revolutionary Committee is being formed by the Petersburg Executive Committee and is its organ. It is composed of: the praesidiums of the plenum and of the Soldiers' Section of the Soviet, representatives of the Central Committee of the Fleet, the Railwaymen's Union, the Union of Post Office and Telegraph Employees, the factory committees, the trade unions, representatives of the party military organisations, the military section of the central executive committee, and the workers' militia, as well as individuals whose presence is thought necessary. The Military Revolutionary Committee's first tasks are the allocation of combat and auxiliary forces, necessary for the defence of the capital and not subject to evacuation; then the registration of the personal composition of the garrison of Petersburg and its suburbs, and also the registration of supply sources; the elaboration of a working plan for the defence of the city; measures of protection against pogroms and desertions; the maintenance of revolutionary discipline amongst the working class and soldiery. [18]

On 13 October Trotsky issued a radio message: *To All, To All, To All*, calling on all Soviets and the army to send delegates to the coming

Second Congress of Soviets.

On the same day the executive committee of the Petrograd Soviet made public the creation under its supervision of a special department of the Red Guard. Four years after the event, Trotsky, in an evening devoted to recollections of the October revolution, told the following story:

The arms situation was as follows. The prime source of weapons was the Sestroretsky factory. When a delegation of workers came and said that they needed weapons, I said: 'You know that the arsenal is not in our hands.' They replied: 'We have been to the Sestroretsky factory' 'Well, what happened?' 'They said that if the Soviet issued an order, they would deliver.' This was the first test. I issued an order for five thousand rifles, and they received them the same day. [19]

### **Encroaching on the Provisional Government**

On 16 October, when the Bolshevik resolution on the Military Revolutionary Committee was discussed in the Petrograd Soviet, a Menshevik spokesman complained:

'The Bolsheviks won't answer the straight question whether or not they are preparing a coup. This is either cowardice or lack of confidence in their own strength.' (Laughter in the audience). 'But the projected Military Revolutionary Committee is nothing but a revolutionary staff for the seizure of power ... We have many local reports that the masses are out of sympathy with a coup. There is a "Provisional Military Committee" attached to the Central Executive Committee, whose object is real co-operation in the defence of the Northern front. The Petersburg Soviet ought to send its representatives there and reject the proposal for a military revolutionary committee.'

Trotsky got up. In this gathering his task was not especially difficult.

‘The Menshevik representative is preoccupied with whether the Bolsheviks are preparing an armed demonstration. In whose name has he asked this question: in the name of Kerensky, the counter-intelligence, the Secret Police, or some other body?’  
[20]

Trotsky did not deny that the Bolsheviks were preparing for a seizure of power. ‘We make no secret of that’ but at present, he said, ‘that is not the question.’

On 18 October Trotsky moved the following declaration in the name of the Petrograd Soviet:

Lately all the press had been full of reports, rumours and articles about a coming initiative which is an event sometimes attributed to the Bolsheviks and sometimes attributed to the Petrograd Soviet.

The decisions of the Petrograd Soviet are published for general information. The Soviet is an elected institution, every member of which is responsible to the workers and soldiers who elected him. The revolutionary parliament of the proletariat and the revolutionary garrison cannot keep its decisions secret from the workers and soldiers.

We are not concealing anything. I declare in the name of the Soviet: we have not been planning any kind of armed initiative. However, if the course of events forced the soviet to take an initiative, workers and soldiers would respond as one man to its initiative ...

It has been stated further, that I have signed an order for 5,000 rifles from the Sestroretsky factory. Yes, I signed the order because of a decision already adopted in the days of the

Kornilov revolt so as to arm the workers' militia. And the Petrograd Soviet will continue to organise and to arm the proletarian guard.

We are in conflict with the government and it may take on a very acute form. This is a question of the withdrawal of troops. You can see how the bourgeois press is trying to create around the Petrograd soldiers and workers an atmosphere of enmity and suspicion and to evoke hatred at the front for Petrograd soldiers.

The Congress of Soviets is another thorny question. Governmental circles know our point of view as regards the role of the Congress of Soviets. The bourgeoisie knows that the Petrograd Soviet will propose to the congress that it should take power into its own hands, propose a democratic peace to the belligerent people and give land to the peasants. They are trying to disarm Petrograd, by withdrawing its revolutionary guard. They are hastening, before the congress opens, to arm and to station, at different points, all those who are loyal to them, in order that they may put in motion all their forces, to bring to nothing the representations of the workers, soldiers and peasants. Just as an artillery bombardment prepares an attack against the army, so the present campaign of lies and calumny is preparing an armed assault on the Congress of Soviets.

We must be on our guard. We have entered upon a period of most acute struggle. One must constantly expect an attack by counter-revolutionaries.

However, at the first attempt by them to disrupt the Congress of Soviets, at the first attempt to attack, we shall answer with a counter-attack which will be merciless and which we shall carry through to its conclusion. [21]

Years later Trotsky could write correctly that in this speech the complete definition of the intended insurrection was given: '... the

announcement of a decisive political offensive was made under the formulae of military defence.' [22]

The resistance to the Provisional Government's attempt to remove units of the garrison from Petrograd solved the key issue of the insurrection: winning the soldiers to the side of the revolution. Usually this is done through mass strikes, demonstrations, street encounters, battles at the barricades. The unique thing about the October insurrection was that the winning of the troops preceded the insurrection, and happened without the mass actions of workers as a prologue.

In those days, Sukhanov writes, Trotsky dominated the scene:

Trotsky, tearing himself away from work on the revolutionary staff, personally rushed from the Obukhovsky plant to the Trubochny, from the Putilov to the Baltic works, from the Riding School to the barracks; he seemed to be speaking at all points simultaneously. His influence, both among the masses and on the staff, was overwhelming. He was the central figure of those days and the principal hero of this remarkable page of history. [23]

### **Challenging the Provisional Government**

On the night of 21 October the Military Revolutionary Committee sent a group of representatives to General Staff Headquarters to assert formally the committee's claim to authority over garrison units. General Polkovnikov retorted that the garrison was his responsibility. When the Military Revolutionary Committee delegates returned to Smolny, Trotsky drafted for endorsement by the garrison conference and circulation to all units later in the day what has to be one of the most crucial documents of the October revolution: a formal declaration that amounted to a categorical repudiation of the Provisional Government's authority over the garrison troops.

The following message was sent to the garrison on 22 October:

At its meeting on 21 October, the revolutionary garrison of Petrograd rallied to the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies as its leading organ.

Despite that fact, headquarters of the Petrograd military district on the night of October 22 has not recognised the Military Revolutionary Committee, refusing to work with the representative of the soldiers' section of the Soviet.

Thereby, headquarters has broken with the revolutionary garrison, and the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

Having broken with the organised garrison of the capital, headquarters is a direct armed instrument of the counter-revolutionary forces.

The Military Revolutionary Committee disclaims all responsibility for the actions of headquarters of the Petrograd military district.

Soldiers of Petrograd!

1. The defence of revolutionary order against counter-revolutionary attempts falls upon you, under the leadership of the Military Revolutionary Committee.
2. No directives to the garrison are valid unless signed by the Military Revolutionary Committee.
3. All directives for today – (Petrograd Soviet Day) – retain their full force.
4. On all soldiers of the garrison is imposed the duty of vigilance, steadfastness and strict discipline.

5. The revolution is in danger. Long live the revolutionary garrison!

[signed] The Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet  
of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. [24]

Sukhanov comments on this declaration: 'Now this was definitely an insurrectionary act.' [25]

On 21 October Trotsky conveyed the above instruction to the congress of the garrison, and this body adopted the following resolution drafted by Trotsky:

Endorsing all political decisions of the Petrograd Soviet, the garrison declares:

The time for words has passed. The country is on the brink of disaster. The army demands peace, the peasants demand land, the workers demand employment and bread. The coalition government is against the people, an instrument in the hands of the people's enemies. The time for words has passed. The All-Russian Congress of Soviets must take power in its hands and guarantee to the people peace, land and bread.

The safety of the revolution and the people demands it. All power to the Soviets!

Immediate armistice on all fronts!

Land to the peasants!

Honest summoning of the Constituent Assembly at the appointed date!

The Petrograd garrison solemnly promises to put at the disposal of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets all its forces to the last man, to fight for these demands.

Rely on us, authorised representatives of the soldiers, workers and peasants. We are at our posts, ready to conquer or die. [26]

Not satisfied with its formal denial of the rumour of an insurrection, the Soviet openly designated Sunday 22 October – the half-year anniversary of the February revolution – as the day for a peaceful review of its forces, not in the form of street demonstrations, but of meetings in the factories, barracks and all major institutions of the city. With the obvious aim of provocation, a call in the name of some unknown Cossacks invited citizens to take part in a religious procession, ‘in memory of the delivery of Moscow from the enemy in 1812’. Trotsky made a brilliant move, appealing to the Cossack units:

Brother Cossacks!

The Petrograd Soviet addresses you as follows:

Attempts are being made to incite you, Cossacks, against us, the workers and soldiers. This work of Cain is done by our common enemies – nobles, bankers, landlords, former bureaucrats, and servants of the Tsar. They always maintain their power by setting the people against each other, inciting the soldiers against the workers. And now they are instigating the Cossacks against the soldiers.

By what means do they achieve their purpose? Through abuse and calumny, of course. Cossacks, soldiers, sailors, workers, and peasants are all brothers; are all alike in that they have to work hard, are poor, are living from hand to mouth, and are suffering from the same war which has taken everything from them.

Who wants this war? Who started it? Certainly not the Cossacks or the soldiers, not the workers or the peasants! It is the generals and the bankers, the Tsars, and the landlords who want the war! Upon it they build their power, their might, and their riches ...

The people want peace. The soldiers and workers of every country are thirsting for peace. The Petrograd Soviet demands of the bourgeoisie and the generals: 'Get out of the way, you tyrants! Let the power pass into the hands of the people, and the people will at once conclude an honest peace!'

Are we not right, Comrade Cossacks? We have no doubt that you will say yes. But it is just for this reason that we are hated by the rich, the profiteers, the princes, the nobles and the generals, including your own Cossack generals. They are ready at any moment to destroy the Petrograd Soviet, to strangle the revolution and to enchain the people as in the days of the Tsar. To accomplish this they spread lies about us.

... They tell you that the Soviet intends to start an insurrection on 22 October to enter a fight with you and to prepare a massacre. Those who tell you this are scamps and traitors. You may tell them so! For 22 October the Soviet is arranging peaceful gatherings ... where workers, soldiers, sailors, and peasants may come together and listen to speeches about peace and war and the welfare of the people. You too are invited to attend these peaceful meetings. You will be cordially welcomed, Brother Cossacks!

Let those of you who are still in doubt come to Smolny where the Soviet is located. You will find there many soldiers and Cossacks who will explain to you what the Soviet stands for and by what means it attains its ends. Was it not for just that very purpose of enabling you to discuss freely your needs and to take your destinies into your own hands that the people

overthrew the Tsar? You too, Cossacks, should remove from your eyes the cover by which the enemies of the toiling Cossacks, the Kaledins, Bardizhis, and Karaulovs, are trying to blindfold you ...

[signed] *The Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies* [27]

One Cossack regiment after another announced that they would not take part in the religious procession, so the procession was cancelled.

On 'Soviet Day', the Bolsheviks' most popular orators, among them Trotsky, Lunacharsky, Volodarsky and Raskolnikov spoke at mass rallies, in factories and public meeting halls throughout the capital. Sukhanov describes one such meeting addressed by Trotsky:

I remember that at length and with extraordinary power he drew a picture (difficult through its simplicity) of the suffering of the trenches ...

The Soviet regime was not only called upon to put an end to the suffering of the trenches. It would give land and heal the internal disorder. Once again the recipes against hunger were repeated: a soldier, a sailor, and a working girl, who would requisition bread from those who had it and distribute it gratis to the cities and front. But Trotsky went even further on this decisive 'Day of the Petersburg Soviet'.

'The Soviet Government will give everything the country contains to the poor and the men in the trenches. You, bourgeois, have got two fur caps! – give one of them to the soldier who's freezing in the trenches. Have you got warm boots? Stay at home. The worker needs your boots ...'

... All round me was a mood bordering on ecstasy. It seemed as though the crowd, spontaneously and of its own accord, would break into some religious hymn. Trotsky formulated a brief and general resolution, or pronounced some general formula like 'we will defend the worker-peasant cause to the last drop of our blood.'

Who was – for? The crowd of thousands, as one man, raised their hands. I saw the raised hands and burning eyes of men, women, youths, soldiers, peasants, and – typically, lower middle-class faces ...

Trotsky went on speaking. The innumerable crowd went on holding their hands up. Trotsky rapped out the words: 'Let this vote of yours be your vow – with all your strength and at any sacrifice to support the Soviet that has taken on itself the glorious burden of bringing to a conclusion the victory of the revolution and of giving land, bread, and peace!'

The vast crowd was holding up its hands. It agreed. It vowed.  
[28]

Every hour the stranglehold of the Petrograd Soviet on the Provisional Government became tighter. However, on 23 October a serious setback occurred for the Military Revolutionary Committee: the strategically crucial Peter and Paul Fortress and the adjoining Kronverk Arsenal, a central storehouse of arms and ammunition, refused to recognise the commissar assigned to it by the Military Revolutionary Committee and threatened to arrest him. To take the fortress by force was very risky. Trotsky found a daring solution. Sukhanov writes:

It was necessary to take the Peter-Paul quickly, before the government stopped debating and started doing something to protect itself. Two methods were proposed for taking over the fortress. Antonov proposed to bring in a reliable battalion of the

Pavlovskys immediately and disarm the garrison of the fortress. But in the first place this involved a risk; secondly, it was essentially an act of war, after which it would be necessary to attack at once and liquidate the government. Trotsky had another proposal, namely, that he, Trotsky, go to the fortress, hold a meeting there, and capture not the body but the spirit of the garrison. In the first place there would be no risk in that, secondly it might be that even after this the government would go on living in Nirvana and allow Smolny to extend its authority further and further without let or hindrance.

No sooner said than done. Trotsky set off at once, together with Lashevich. Their harangues were enthusiastically received. The garrison, almost unanimously, passed a resolution about the Soviet regime and its own readiness to rise up, weapons in hand, against the bourgeois government. A Smolny commissar was installed in the fortress, under the protection of the garrison, and refused to recognise the Commandant. A hundred thousand extra rifles were in the hands of the Bolsheviks. [29]

Control of the Peter and Paul Fortress, whose cannons overlooked the Winter Palace, was a victory of immense importance.

The Military Revolutionary Committee continued its encroachment on the power of the Provisional Government, without firing a shot. Trotsky, in his *History of the Russian Revolution* summed up this policy thus:

The committee is crowding out the government with the pressure of the masses, with the weight of the garrison. It is taking all it can without a battle. It is advancing its positions without firing, integrating and reinforcing its army on the march. It is measuring with its own pressure the resisting power of the enemy, not taking its eyes off him for a second. Each new step forward changes the disposition of forces to the advantage of Smolny. The workers and the garrison are growing up to the insurrection. Who is to be first to issue the call to arms will

become known in the course of this offensive, this crowding out. It is now only a question of hours. If at the last moment the government finds the courage, or the despair, to give the signal for battle, responsibility for this will lie upon the Winter Palace. But the initiative just the same will have been taken by Smolny. Its declaration of 23 October had meant the overthrow of the power before the government itself was overthrown. The Military Revolutionary Committee was tying up the arms and legs of the enemy regime before striking him on the head. It was possible to apply this tactic of 'peaceful penetration', to break the bones of the enemy legally and hypnotically paralyse the remnants of his will, only because of the indubitable superiority of forces on the side of the committee and because they were increasing hour by hour. [30]

Still, on the 23rd, the talk was not about insurrection, but about the 'defence of the coming Congress of Soviets'. Now the only thing needed was to entice the government into an act of open provocation against the revolution, so that a defensive mantle could be thrown over the further activities of the Military Revolutionary Committee. And this happened on 24 October.

The government decided to instigate legal proceedings against the Military Revolutionary Committee, to shut down the Bolshevik paper for advocating insurrection, and to summon reliable military detachments from the environs and the front.

And so the government fell into the trap. The district commander, General Polkovnikov, sent a squad of soldiers to close down the Bolshevik printing press. Trotsky reacted sharply:

Two revolutionary papers, *Rabochi Put* and *Soldat*, have been closed by the conspiratorial headquarters. The Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies cannot tolerate suppression of the free word. For the people fighting off the attack of pogromists there must be assurance of an honest press. [31]

Trotsky ordered two of the best organised, most revolutionary units of the garrison – the Litovsky Regiment and the Sixth Engineer Battalion – to take charge of reopening the Bolshevik printing press and ensure its security. Years later he recounted:

The seals were torn from the building, the moulds again poured, and the work went on. With a few hours delay, the newspaper suppressed by the government came out under the protection of the troops of a committee which was itself liable to arrest. That was insurrection. That is how it developed. [32]

Trotsky convened an extraordinary session of the Petrograd Soviet and reported the steps taken by the Military Revolutionary Committee regarding the Bolshevik press. Even now Trotsky did not drop the defensive stance. He reminded the Soviet that the Military Revolutionary Committee had arisen ‘not as an instrument of insurrection, but on the basis of revolutionary self-defence.’ The committee did not allow Kerensky to remove the revolutionary troops from Petrograd, and it had taken under its protection the workers’ press.

Is this an insurrection? We have a semi-government in which the people do not trust, and which has no confidence in itself, because it is internally dead. This semi-government only awaits the sweep of history’s broom that will clear the space for a real power of the revolutionary people ... Tomorrow the Congress of Soviets opens. It is the task of the garrison and of the proletariat to put at its disposal the power they have gathered, a power on which any governmental provocation will founder ... If the sham government makes a reckless attempt to revive its own corpse, the popular masses will strike a decisive counter-blow, and the blow will be the more powerful the stronger the attack. If the government tries to use the 24 or 48 hours still left to it in order to stab the revolution, then we declare that the vanguard of the revolution will answer blow with blow, iron with steel. [33]

On 24 October the cruiser *Aurora* addressed a question to Smolny: Shall we go to sea or remain in the Neva?

The very same sailors, [writes Trotsky], who had guarded the Winter Palace against Kornilov in August were now burning to settle accounts with Kerensky. The government order was promptly countermanded by the committee, and the crew received Order No. 1218: 'In case of an attack on the Petrograd garrison by the counter-revolutionary forces, the cruiser *Aurora* is to protect herself with tugs, steam-boats and cutters.' The cruiser enthusiastically carried out this order for which it had only been waiting. The *Aurora* in the Neva meant not only an excellent fighting unit in the service of the insurrection, but a radio station ready for use. Invaluable advantage! The sailor Kurkov has remembered: 'We got word from Trotsky to broadcast ...that the counter-revolution had taken the offensive.'  
[34]

An attempt to suppress the papers, a resolution to prosecute the Military Revolutionary Committee, an order removing commissars, the cutting-out of Smolny's telephones – these pinpricks were just sufficient to convict the government of preparing a counter-revolutionary coup d'état. Although an insurrection can win only on the offensive, it develops better, the more it looks like self-defence. A piece of official sealing-wax on the door of the Bolshevik editorial-rooms – as a military measure that is not much. But what a superb signal for battle! Telephonograms to all districts and units of the garrison announce the event. 'The enemy of the people took the offensive during the night. The Military Revolutionary Committee is leading the resistance to the assault of the conspirators.' The conspirators – these were the institutions of the official government. [35]

On 24 October the Military Revolutionary Committee issued this appeal:

To the people of Petrograd:

For the information of workers, soldiers and all citizens of Petrograd we declare:

In the interests of the defence of the revolution and its conquests against attacks by the counter-revolution, commissars have been appointed by us in military units and at strategic points in the capital and its environs. Orders and instructions which are being distributed to these points are to be carried out only with the sanction of our authorised commissars. Commissars, as representatives of the Soviet, are inviolable. Opposition to commissars is opposition to the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. The Soviet has taken all measures to protect revolutionary order against attacks by counter-revolutionaries and thugs. All citizens are invited to give every form of support to our commissars. In the event of disturbances arising one should turn to the commissars of the Military Revolutionary Committee in the nearest military unit.

[signed] *Military Revolutionary Committee* [36]

### **Sticking to Soviet Legality**

Trotsky persevered in carrying out the insurrection in the name of the Soviet, not the party. History has shown he was correct. The reports of the Bolshevik Petrograd Committee, as well as the central committee, repeat the refrain: the troops and the workers will come out if summoned by the Soviets; but it is less certain they will do so if summoned by the party. Thus it was a matter of great importance which institution was to call for the insurrection.

At an enlarged meeting of the Petrograd Bolshevik party on 15 October, with many activists present, Nevsky, representing the Military Organisation of the party, stated: 'The whole garrison will come out at the call of the Soviet'.

Ravich (Moscow District): 'The masses will rise only at the call of the Soviet, but very few will respond to the call of our party.'

A comrade from the Obukhov factory: 'The factory will no doubt respond to the call of the Petrograd Soviet.'

Spokesmen of the trade unions: 'The masses might respond to the call of the Soviet.' [37]

An enlarged meeting of the central committee on 16 October, including, besides central committee members, the executive commission of the Petersburg committee, the Military Organisation, the Petrograd Soviet, the leaders of the Bolsheviks in the trade unions, the factory committees, the Petrograd area committee and the railwaymen, heard similar views.

Speaker from Moscow district: 'A reckless mood, will come out if the Soviet calls, but not the party.'

Speaker from Neva district: 'The mood has swung sharply in our favour. Everyone will follow the Soviet.'

Comrade Volodarsky from the Petrograd Soviet: 'The general impression is that no one is ready to rush out on the streets, but everyone will come if the Soviet calls.' [38]

On 17 October Smilga made it clear that he opposed any action before the meeting of the Congress of Soviets. He said that 'without the knowledge of the Congress and before the Congress there can be no uprising of any sort.' [39]

Trotsky commented on these discussions:

The very fact that agitators and organisers in estimating the state of mind of the masses always alluded to the distinction between the Soviet and the party, shows what great significance this question had from the standpoint of the summons to insurrection. [40]

What would have happened if the insurrection had been called by the party? It would have had great disadvantages. Trotsky writes:

In those millions upon whom the party legitimately counted it is necessary to distinguish three layers, one which was already

with the Bolsheviks on all conditions; another, more numerous, which supported the Bolsheviks insofar as they acted through the Soviets; a third which followed the Soviets in spite of the fact that they were dominated by the Bolsheviks ...

The party set the Soviets in motion, the Soviets set in motion the workers, soldiers, and to some extent the peasantry. What was gained in mass was lost in speed. If you represent this conducting apparatus as a system of cog-wheels – a comparison to which Lenin had recourse at another period on another theme – you may say that the impatient attempt to connect the party wheel directly with the gigantic wheel of the masses – omitting the medium-sized wheel of the Soviets – would have given rise to the danger of breaking the teeth of the party wheel, and nevertheless not setting sufficiently large masses in motion. [41]

### **Smooth Passage to Victory**

The smooth passage of the October revolution in Petrograd is clear from the fact that only ten people died during it (as against 1,315 who lost their lives in the February revolution). This was largely the result of Trotsky's superlative grasp of what Marx and Engels called 'the art of insurrection'. In his *History of the Russian Revolution* Trotsky elaborates on this art:

The co-ordination of the mass insurrection with the conspiracy, the subordination of the conspiracy to the insurrection, the organisation of the insurrection through the conspiracy, constitutes that complex and responsible department of revolutionary politics which Marx and Engels called 'the art of insurrection'. It presupposes a correct general leadership of the masses, a flexible orientation in changing conditions, a thought-out plan of attack, cautiousness in technical preparation, and a daring blow. [42]

Above all, the insurrection was a brilliant success because Trotsky imbued the mass of the workers and soldiers with courage and energy through his far-sightedness, firm, confident and decisive leadership.

The fact that on the day of the insurrection the resistance of the government was reduced to defending the Winter Palace demonstrates how successful Trotsky's direction of the preparation and the carrying out of the final insurrection had been. Sukhanov described the insurrection:

... no resistance was shown. Beginning at two in the morning, the stations, bridges, lighting installations, telegraphs, and telegraphic agency were gradually occupied by small forces brought from the barracks. The little groups of cadets could not resist and didn't think of it. In general the military operations in the politically important centres of the city rather resembled a changing of the guard. The weaker defence force of cadets retired; and the strengthened defence force, of guards, took its place ... the decisive operations that had begun were quite bloodless; not one casualty was recorded. The city was absolutely calm. Both the centre and the suburbs were sunk in a deep sleep, not suspecting what was going on in the quiet of the cold autumn night ... The operations, gradually developing, went so smoothly that no great forces were required. Out of the garrison of 200,000, scarcely a tenth went into action, probably much fewer. [43]

Sukhanov could quite rightly refer to the 'meticulously executed October insurrection'. [44] 'Compared with the classical revolutionary scheme', wrote one historian, 'October was quite unique. There were no great street processions in Petrograd that day, no mass demonstrations, no baton charges, not even a marked rise in popular agitation, and barely any victims.' [45]

Victor Serge, in his moving account of the revolution, writes:

The revolution did, indeed, go off in proletarian style – with organisation. That is why, in Petrograd, it won so easily and completely ... The rational element of co-ordination, the superb organisation of the rising as a military operation conducted along the rules of the war-making art, is clearly demonstrated here, and forms a striking contrast with the spontaneous or ill-organised movements which have been so numerous in the history of the proletariat. [46]

Even Stalin had to admit the crucial role of Trotsky in the October insurrection, in an article that is of course missing in his Works. In *The Role of the Most Eminent Party leaders* written on 6 November 1918, Stalin wrote:

All the work of practical organisation of the insurrection was conducted under the immediate leadership of the chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, Trotsky. It is possible to declare with certainty that the swift passing of the garrison to the side of the Soviet and the bold execution of the work of the Military Revolutionary Committee the party owes principally and above all to comrade Trotsky. [47]

### **The Establishment of Soviet power**

Opening the session of the Petrograd Soviet of 25 October, Trotsky stated:

In the name of the Military Revolutionary Committee I declare that the Provisional Government has ceased to exist. (*Applause*) Some ministers have been arrested. (*Hurrah!*) The others will be arrested in a few days or a few hours. (*Applause*)

The revolutionary garrison, which is at the disposal of the Military Revolutionary Committee, has dispersed the Pre-

Parliament. (*Stormy applause. Cries of 'Long live the Military Revolutionary Committee!'*)

We were told that the insurrection of the garrison would promote a pogrom and drown the revolution in torrents of blood. Up to now no blood was spilt. We don't know of a single casualty. I don't know of any other example in history of a revolutionary movement involving such gigantic masses that was carried through without bloodshed ...

The Winter Palace has not yet been taken, but its fate will be settled in the course of the next few minutes.

At the present time, we, the Soviet of Soldiers', Workers' and Peasants' Deputies, are going to undertake an experiment unique in history, the establishment of a government that will have no other aim than the satisfaction of the needs of the soldiers, workers and peasants.

The state must be an instrument of the masses in the struggle for them breaking from all slavery ...

It is essential to establish control over production. The peasants, workers and soldiers must feel that the national economy is their economy.

This is the basic principle of the establishment of the authority.

The introduction of universal labour service is one of the immediate tasks of genuine revolutionary power. [48]

Then Trotsky moved the Report on the overthrow of the Provisional Government:

The Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies welcomes the victorious revolution of the proletariat and the

garrison of Petrograd, and especially underlines the solidarity, organisation, discipline and the complete unanimity which the masses showed in this uprising as remarkable for its bloodlessness and for its success.

The Soviet, expressing its unshakeable conviction that the proletarian and peasant government, which, as the Soviet Government, will be created by the revolution and which will provide support for the urban proletariat from the whole mass of the poorest peasantry, that this government will resolutely march towards socialism, the one and only means of saving the country from the unprecedented disasters and horrors of the war.

The new proletarian and peasant government will propose immediately a just democratic peace to all the belligerent peoples.

It will abolish immediately the landlords' ownership of land and will hand it over to the peasants. It will create workers' control over the production and distribution of goods, it will establish social control over banks, as well as simultaneously merging them into one state enterprise. The Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies calls on all the workers and peasants of Russia to support selflessly, with all their strength, the proletarian and peasant revolution. The Soviet expresses its conviction, that the urban workers, in alliance with the poorest peasants, will display inflexible discipline, necessary for the victory of socialism. The Soviet is certain that the proletariat in western European countries will aid us to carry the cause of socialism through to a complete and lasting victory. [49]

Sukhanov records:

Then Trotsky introduced Lenin to the meeting and gave him the floor for a speech on the Soviet regime. Lenin was given a

tumultuous ovation ...

The oppressed masses [Lenin said] themselves will form a government. The old state apparatus will be destroyed root and branch and a new administrative apparatus will be created in the form of the Soviet organisations. Now begins a new era in the history of Russia, and this third Russian revolution must finally lead to the victory of Socialism. One of our routine tasks is to end the war at once. But in order to end this war, closely bound up with the present capitalist order, it is clear to everyone that our capitalism itself must be conquered. In this task we shall be helped by the world-wide working-class movement which has already begun to develop in Italy, Germany and England.

Within Russia an enormous section of the peasantry has said: Enough playing around with the capitalists; we will go with the workers. We shall win the peasants' trust with a single decree which will annihilate landed property. We shall institute a genuine workers' control of industry. We have the strength of a mass organisation that will triumph over everything and bring the proletariat to the world revolution. In Russia we must set to work at once on the construction of a proletarian Socialist State. Long live the worldwide Socialist revolution! [50]

Trotsky, together with Lenin, led the Russian proletariat to the conquest of power, provided leadership to the workers' state, and to an international whose immediate task was to lead workers' revolution worldwide.

## Notes

1. *CC Minutes*, page 11.
2. *CC Minutes*, page 29.

3. J. Sadoul, *Notes sur la Révolution Bolchevique* (Paris 1919), page 76.
4. Trotsky, *History*, page 931.
5. Trotsky, *History*, pages 938-9.
6. Sukhanov, page 528.
7. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, page 318.
8. Trotsky, *History*, page 847.
9. Sukhanov, page 504.
10. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 1, page 321.
11. Trotsky, *History*, pages 944-5.
12. Trotsky, *History*, page 945.
13. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 2, pages 5-6.
14. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 2, page 13.
15. Trotsky, *History*, page, pages 943-4.
16. Trotsky, *The Lessons of October*, in *The Challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-25*, pages 240-1.
17. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 2, page 4.
18. Sukhanov, pages 560-1.
19. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 2, page 93.
20. Sukhanov, pages 561-2.
21. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 2, pages 31-3; M. McCawley (editor) *The Russian Revolution and the Soviet State 1917-1921: Documents* (London 1988), pages 119-21.
22. Trotsky, *History*, page 957.
23. Sukhanov, page 578.
24. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 2, pages 37-8; Lovell (editor), *Leon Trotsky Speaks*, pages 67-8.
25. Sukhanov, page 592.
26. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 2, page 37.
27. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 2, pages 38-40; Gankin and Fisher, pages 80-1.
28. Sukhanov, pages 584-5.
29. Sukhanov, pages 595-6.
30. Trotsky, *History*, pages 969-70.
31. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 2, page 51.
32. Trotsky, *History*, pages 1054-5.

33. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 2, pages 51-3.
34. Trotsky, *History*, pages 1055-6.
35. Trotsky, *History*, page 1055.
36. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 2, page 45; McCawley, pages 121-2.
37. P.F. Kudelli (editor), *Pervii legalnyi Peterburgskii komitet bolshevikov v 1917 g* (Moscow-Leningrad 1927), pages 310-16.
38. *CC Minutes*, pages 95-109.
39. Mawdsley, page 110.
40. Trotsky, *History*, page 1129.
41. Trotsky, *History*, pages 1127 and 1180.
42. Trotsky, *History*, page 1019.
43. Sukhanov, pages 620-1.
44. Sukhanov, page 47.
45. M. Liebman, *The Russian Revolution* (London 1970), pages 285-6.
46. Victor Serge, *Year One of the Russian Revolution* (London 1972) pages 68-9.
47. *Pravda*, 6 November 1918.
48. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 2, pages 55-7.
49. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, volume 3, book 2, pages 58-9; McCawley, pages 124-5.
50. Sukhanov, pages 628-9.