

WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL NEWS

VOL.1 NO.7

JULY 1938

TWO PENCE

THE RETREAT FROM OCTOBER

Does The Soviet Government
Still Adhere to the Principles
of 20 Years Ago?

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In order to answer correctly the question posed at the head of this article it is necessary from the very outset to establish the disparity between the basic conquest of the October revolution, the nationalization of property, and the policies of the present government. The revolutionary form of property and the Thermidorian, *i.e.*, reactionary policies, stand in contradiction to each other. But up to now these policies have not yet been able, have not yet ventured, or have not yet succeeded in over-throwing the revolutionary form of property. The line of the present government is diametrically opposed to the programme of Bolshevism. But since the institutions founded by the revolution still exist, the bureaucracy is constrained in outward appearance to adapt its line to the old principles of Bolshevism; it continues to swear by the commandments of October, by the interests of the proletariat, and calls the Soviet regime nothing less than socialist. We can say without risk of mistake that in the history of humanity there has never been a government so

deceitful and hypocritical as the present Soviet bureaucracy.

The safeguarding of the state property in the means of production has enormous progressive importance in itself, since with the aid of planned economy it permits the attainment of a rapid development of the productive forces. True, the economic statistics of the bureaucracy do not merit confidence—they systematically exaggerate the successes and conceal the failures. Nevertheless, it is impossible to deny the fact that even now the forces of production in the Soviet Union are developing at a tempo such as no other country in the world has ever experienced or is experiencing now. Those who refuse to see this side of the question and identify the Soviet regime with fascism, as does Max Eastman, for instance, pour out the baby with the dirty bath water, as the German saying goes. The development of the productive forces is the fundamental factor in human civilisation. Without increasing the

power of man over nature it is impossible even to think of the annihilation of the power of man over man. Socialism cannot be erected on backwardness and destitution. In the last twenty years in the Soviet Union the technical premise for socialism has made an enormous stride forward. However, this is due least of all to the bureaucrat. On the contrary the ruling caste has become the greatest brake upon the development of the productive forces. Socialist economy, in its very essence, must be guided by the interests of the producers and by the needs of the consumers. These interests and needs can find their expression only through the intermediation of expanded democracy for producers and consumers. Democracy is not in this case a mere abstract principle. It is the only conceivable mechanism for the preparation and realisation of a socialist system of economy.

The present ruling clique has replaced democracy in the soviet, party, trade-union, and co-operative by the command of functionaries. But even if the bureaucracy consisted entirely of geniuses, it would not possibly be capable of assuring from its offices the necessary proportion to all branches of economy —*i.e.*, the necessary correlation between production and consumption. What in the language of Stalin's "justice" is termed "sabotage" is, in reality, the unfortunate consequence of the bureaucratic methods of command. The manifestations of disproportion, of waste, of blundering, growing more and more, threaten to sap the very foundations of planned economy. The bureaucracy invariably seeks a "culprit". This, in most cases, is the hidden meaning of the Soviet trials against "saboteurs".

Explaining the present regime by Stalin's personal "lust for power" is too superficial. Stalin is not just an individual but the symbol of a caste. Power is not something insubstantial. Power gives the possibility of disposing of material values and of appropriating them. Naturally complete equality cannot be achieved at one stroke. At the present stage certain differentiations in wages are dictated in the interest of increasing the productivity of labour. However, the question of decisive importance for the evaluation of the nature of society is whether society is developing toward equality or toward privilege. The answer to this question leaves no room whatever for any doubts. The differentiation in society has long since passed the limits of economic necessity. The material privileges of the bureaucracy grow like an avalanche. Frightened by its isolation from the masses, the bureaucracy is trying to create a new worker and collective farm aristocracy under the banner of Stakhanovism.

The distribution of the national income defines,

in its turn, the political regime. The ruling caste cannot permit democracy for producers and consumers for the very simple reason that it robs them both unmercifully. It can be assumed with assurance that the bureaucracy devours no less than half of the sum total of national consumption, counting, naturally, not only lodging, food, clothing, means of transportation and communication, but also the use of institutions of learning, the press, literature, sports, motion pictures, radio, theatres, museums, etc. We can therefore say with full justification that although the bureaucracy is still constrained to adapt itself to the institutions and traditions of the October revolution, its policies, expressing its own interests, are directly opposed to the interests of the people and of socialism. This fundamental contradiction can be verified in all the other realms of social existence, such as the state, the army, the family, the school, culture, science, the arts, etc.

From the point of view of Marxism, *the state* is the apparatus for the domination of one class over another. The dictatorship of the proletariat is only a temporary institution, required by the toilers in order to have done with the resistance of the exploiters and to end exploitation. In a society without classes, the state, as an apparatus of coercion, would gradually wither away and be replaced by the free self-administration of the producers and consumers. But what do we see in reality? Twenty years after the revolution the Soviet state has become the most centralised, the most despotic, and the most bloody apparatus of violence and coercion. The evolution of the Soviet state proceeds, therefore, in complete contradiction to the fundamental principles of the Bolshevik programme. The reason for this lies in the fact that society, as has already been said, is developing not toward socialism but toward the regeneration of social contradictions. If the process goes much further on this road, it will lead inevitably to the regeneration of classes, to the liquidation of planned economy, and to the restoration of capitalist property. In this case the state will inevitably become fascist.

The October revolution proclaimed as one of its tasks the dissolving of *the army* into the people. It proposed to build the armed forces on the militia principle. Only such an army organisation, making the people the armed master of its own fate, corresponds to the nature of a socialist society. The transition from a standing army of the barracks type to an army of militia was systematically prepared during the first decade. But from the moment that the bureaucracy completely crushed every manifestation of independence on the part of the working class, it has openly transformed the army into an instrument of its own domination. The mil...

system had been completely abolished. The two-million strong army is now, surely, a standing army. The caste of officers with generals and marshals at the top has been re-established. From an instrument of socialist defence the army has become an instrument for the defence of the privileges of the bureaucracy. However, things did not stop here. The struggle between Stalin's narrow clique and the most authoritative and talented military commanders, truly devoted to the interests of defence, has led to the beheading of the Red Army.

Woman's position serves as the clearest and most convincing index for the evaluation of a social regime and of state policy. The October revolution inscribed on its banner the emancipation of woman and created the most progressive legislation on marriage and family that has ever existed in history. Naturally this did not mean that a "happy life" had come all at once for the Soviet woman. The real liberation of woman is inconceivable without a general rise in economy and culture, without the destruction of the petty-bourgeois family economy, without the introduction of socialised kitchens and education. But meanwhile the bureaucracy, guided by its conservative instincts, has taken fright at the "destruction" of the family. It has begun to sing panegyrics to the family dinner and the family wash—that is, to the family enslavement of the woman. To crown everything it has re-established criminal punishment for abortion, thus officially returning woman to the status of a beast of burden. Thus, in complete contradiction to the ABC of communism, the ruling caste has restored the most backward, the most reactionary unit of class society the petty-bourgeois family.

But the situation is no better in the realm of *culture*. The growth of the productive forces was preparing the material prerequisites for a new culture. The development of culture, however, is impossible without criticism, without mistakes and groping, without independent creation; in a word, without the awakening of personality. But the bureaucracy does not tolerate independent thinking in any creative field. And, in its way, it is right; if criticism is aroused in the arts or pedagogy, it will inevitably direct itself against the bureaucracy, against its privileges, its ignorance and its arbitrariness. This explains the fact that the "purge" which began in the party afterwards penetrated into all branches of social life, without exception. The

G.P.U. "purges" poets, astronomers, pedagogues, and musicians under the label of "Trotskyism" and the best heads fall under the Mauser. Is it conceivable under such conditions to talk of "socialist" culture?

In the realm of simple *literacy* the successes are indubitable. Tens of millions have learned how to read and write. But parallel with this, they have been deprived of the right of expressing their opinions and interests in print. The press serves only the bureaucracy. The so-called "socialist" poets have the right of writing only hymns to Stalin. The same privilege is granted to writers of prose. The population is obliged to read these hymns. Exactly the same thing is happening in the motion pictures, radio, the theatre, etc. Recently a new prize history textbook was introduced in the schools. It can be said without exaggeration that this textbook contains nothing but falsifications the purpose of which is to justify the despotism of the bureaucracy and the personal absolutism of Stalin. Even the history textbooks of the Catholic Church, published with the approval of the Vatican, are models of scientific conscientiousness compared with the Stalinised textbooks of the U.S.S.R. Tens of millions of children's heads are contaminated and poisoned by this dishonest literature.

The October revolution proclaimed the right of every *nation* not only to independent cultural development but even to a separate state existence. The bureaucracy has in reality transformed the Soviet Union into a new prison of the peoples. True, the national language and the national school continue to exist; in this field the most powerful despotism can no longer turn back the wheel of development. But the language of the various nationalities is not an organ for their independent development but an organ of bureaucratic domineering over them. The governments of the national republics, are of course, appointed by Moscow, or stated more correctly, by Stalin. But what a striking fact, that thirty of these governments suddenly appear to be "enemies of the people" and agents of foreign powers! Behind this accusation which sounds too gross and preposterous even from the lips of Stalin and Vyshinsky, is really concealed the fact that even though appointees of the Kremlin, once in the national republics, the functionaries fall under the influence of local conditions and moods and generally become infected with the opposition spirit

