

# The history of Bolshevism: Trotsky's "prophecy" and Lenin's party

By Max Shachtman

*"Under Jacobin-Bolshevik tactics, the whole international proletarian movement would be accused of moderation before the revolutionary tribunal, and the lion head of Marx would be the first to fall under the knife of the guillotine." Predictions like this, in a polemic written by Trotsky in 1904, have often been used to "explain" Stalinism as a logical continuation of Bolshevism. In this polemic against the book "Three Who Made A Revolution", by Bertram D Wolfe (which has been continuously in print since it was first published in 1948), Max Shachtman dissected such views.*

---

*The organisation of the party will take the place of the party; the Central Committee will take the place of the organisation; and finally the dictator will take the place of the Central Committee.*

Leon Trotsky, 1904

It is hard to say who has written more absurdities about Lenin's "organisational principles": the Stalinists who seek to prove that their totalitarian party regime conforms identically with the views set forth by Lenin or the modern anti-Bolsheviks who argue that if the two are not quite identical it is nevertheless Lenin's views and practises that led directly to the present Stalinist regime. They represent complementary and mutually parasitic parts of a division of labour which has successfully devastated the thinking of millions of people, with one saying that the totalitarian tyranny leads to (or is!) socialism and the other that socialism can lead to nothing but this totalitarian tyranny.

Either as perpetrators or victims of falsification, both are so thoroughly and extensively wrong that it would require volumes just to exhume and properly correlate the facts. It is not merely a matter of setting the historical record right — that is of secondary importance. It is above all a matter of resuming the lagging fight for socialism, which a Stalin abandoned so completely to pursue one reactionary course and a Wolfe has abandoned just as completely to pursue a different reactionary course.

In Lenin's conception of the "party machine," of its role in relationship to the working class, Wolfe finds (as what popular writer nowadays does not?) "the germ of a party dictatorship over the proletariat itself, exercised in its name," that is, the germ of Stalinism. It is out of this feature of Bolshevism that Wolfe erects the third pillar of his analysis. He reminds us that at the beginning Trotsky warned against the inevitable outcome of Lenin's conception:

*The organisation of the party will take the place of the party; the Central Committee will take the place of the organisation; and finally the dictator will take the place of the Central Committee.*

"Was ever prophecy more fatefully fulfilled by history?" exclaims Wolfe. The truth is that if prophets had no better example than this of how they are confirmed by history, the profession would be in sorry shape. With due respect to Trotsky, it can be said that to find in Stalinism a fulfilment of Trotsky's "Cassandra — like prevision" (Wolfe's phrase) of Lenin's conception requires a well-trained capacity for superficiality assisted by an elaborate ignoring — we will not say manipulation — of the historical facts. The "prevision" was not fulfilled at all,; and Trotsky himself was not the last to understand this.

But before this is established, let us see what it is that makes Lenin's views so reprehensible in Wolfe's eyes. Rather, let us try to see, for on this score Wolfe is either ambiguous or obscure, or just plain silent. He makes the task of the reviewer almost baffling. Attentive reading of page after page of Wolfe fails to disclose exactly what it was in Lenin's ideas about the "party machine" that led to Stalinism.

Was it Lenin's conception of who is entitled to party membership? Wolfe describes the dispute at the party congress in 1903 on the famous Article I of the party constitution. Lenin's draft defined a party member as one "who recognizes the party's program and supports it by material means and by personal participation in one of the party organisation." Martov, leader of the Mensheviks-to-be, proposed that the phrase in italics be replaced entirely by the following: "and by regular personal assistance under the direction of one of the party organisations." Martov's formula was supported by the majority of the delegates.

Wolfe describes Lenin's view unsympathetically, which is his God-given right. But what was wrong with it? Wolfe's answer is a significant wink and a knowing nod of the head, as if to say, "Now you can see where Lenin was heading from the very start, can't you? Now you know what Bolshevism was at its very origin. If you really want to trace Stalinism to its historical roots, there indeed is one of the sturdiest and most malignant of them."

But wink and nod notwithstanding, all that Lenin proposed was a provision that had been and was then and has ever since been a commonplace in every socialist party we ever heard of, namely, that to be considered a party member, with the right of determining the policy and leadership that the membership as a whole is to follow, you have to belong to one of the units of the party. That would seem to be, would it not, an eminently democratic procedure, to say nothing of other merits.

By Martov's formulation, the policy and leadership of the party to one of whose branches you belong are determined for you by persons who are given the title of party members in exchange for "assisting" it without the obligation of belonging to any of its established branches. It is the thoroughly bureaucratized bourgeois political machines that are characterized by the kind of party "membership", that Martov's draft proposed, and it is one of the ways in which leadership and party policy are divorced from control by the ranks. But what socialist party, regardless of political tendency, does Wolfe know that has ever adopted a party statute such as Martov defended? The Social Democratic Federation of August Claessens and Algernon Lee is not entirely corroded by Bolshevism, it is said. But suppose someone were to advocate that membership in the SDF be extended to persons who assist the Federation under the direction of one of its branches without actually joining a branch. These nonagenarians would immediately summon every remnant of their remaining muscularity to crush the hardy advocate as a madman who threatens the integrity of the SDF and the "Leninist organisational principle" which they take even more for granted than they do the atrocity stories about the history of Bolshevism.

Or suppose the roles had been reversed, and it was Lenin who had advocated the Martov formulation in 1903. Just imagine the speed with which heads would bob knowingly and eyes blink significantly, and how profound would be the conclusions drawn about the sinister character of Bolshevism as far back as the date of its birth! And the whole joke is that there was a reversal, at least on the part of Martov! Wolfe is oblivious to it; but in his history of the Russian Social Democracy Martov reminds us that under the influence of the 1905 revolution, the Mensheviks, at their Petersburg conference in December of that year, "abandoned Paragraph I of the old party statutes [that is, the Martov formula of 1903] which weakened the strict party-character of the organisation in so far as it did not obligate all the members of the party to join definite party organisations." So, about two years after the London debate, the Mensheviks themselves adopted Lenin's definition of party membership and there is no evidence that they ever altered it subsequently. From then on, at least, Lenin's view was never really in dispute. It is only in our time that it is splattered across the pages of anti-Bolshevik literature, with all sorts of dark but always undefined references to its ominous overtones, undertones and implications.

Was it Lenin's intolerance toward difference of opinion within the party, his conception of a party monolithism that allowed only for obedience to a highly-centralized, self-appointed and self-perpetuating leadership, his autocratic determination to have his own way regardless of the consequences, with a penchant for splitting the movement when he did not get his way? These are familiar charges against Bolshevism, and against Lenin in particular. Wolfe might have made an original contribution to these charges by providing some facts to sustain them. Instead he preferred to repeat them, and more than once.

We feel neither the desire nor the need to canonise Lenin as a saint, or to regard his works as sacred texts. He was the greatest revolutionary leader in history, and that is more than enough to assure his place against both detractors and iconographers. If we knew nothing at all about him, it would be safe to assume that he had his faults, personal and political; learning about him only confirms this innocent and not very instructive assumption. He was devoted to the cause of socialist freedom and his devotion was durable and passionate. As an adversary, Paul Axelrod, said, "there is not another man who for twenty-four hours of the day is taken up with the revolution, who has no other thoughts but thoughts of the revolution, and who, even in his sleep, dreams of nothing but revolution." This made him, in the eyes of dilettantes and philistines, let alone defenders of the old order, a fanatic. It was his strength. He was, in consequence, a passionate partisan of the instrument he regarded as indispensable for the revolution, the party, of the sharpness and clarity of its thought. This necessarily brought him into conflict with others, and not only with dabblers but with revolutionists no less devoted to socialism than he. In polemic and in factional struggle generally (neither of which was really invented by Lenin, and which can be avoided only by eschewing politics altogether), he was resolute, self-confident and uncompromising. It is easy to think of worse qualities. But they were qualities that made him incomprehensible or insufferable in the eyes of tergiversaters and cobwebheads. If, as was often the case, he exaggerated or overreached himself, it was generally because nobody helped him by inventing a method of carrying on polemical and factional struggle without risk of exaggeration. (Reading Wolfe, for example, shows that such a method has still to be invented. Only, for his exaggerations there is not even that excuse.) But all this about Lenin, and a good deal more, does not begin to prove the "standard" charges against him.

Take splits. Wolfe says that "in the matter of splitting, Lenin was invariably the aggressor" It is a categorical statement — one of the few made by Wolfe who generally prefers indirection. To illustrate how much dehydrated bunk there is in the statement, we can take the famous 1903 party congress which split the Russian Social Democratic Party. There was a furious fight over the above-mentioned Paragraph 1 of the party statutes. Lenin was defeated after a two-day debate. But he did not bolt the congress or the party. Earlier in the sessions, however, the delegates led by Lenin and Martov, Axelrod, Trotsky and Plekhanov, overwhelmingly defeated the position of the Jewish Bund on the question of autonomy. The Bund, refusing to bow to the majority, split from the congress. No sermon from Wolfe on the virtue of unity and the vice of splitting.

Then the congress, Lenin and Martov included, voted against the separate organisation around the "Economist" journal, Rabochye Dyelo. Whereupon, two Economist delegates split from the congress. Still no sermon from Wolfe. Then the congress, by a slender majority but nonetheless a majority, adopted Lenin's motion for an Iskra editorial board of Plekhanov, Lenin and Martov, as against the outgoing board which had included old-timers like Axelrod and Zasulich. Whereupon Martov announced his refusal to abide by the decision — to serve on the board — and the split between the now-named Mensheviks (Minority) and Bolsheviks (Majority) became a fact. Conclusion? "In the matter of splitting, Lenin was invariably the aggressor."

Of course Lenin was responsible for a split here and a split there! To deny it would be absurd; to feel apologetic about it, likewise. But it is interesting to see how Wolfe applies different standards in different cases — so sternly moralistic toward the Bolsheviks and so maternally tender toward their opponents. He quotes Lenin as writing that he could not understand why the Bund split from the congress since "it showed itself master of the situation and could have put through many things"; and then observes with haughty severity:

*Since, all his life, Lenin attached a feeling of moral baseness to “opportunism,” he found it hard to understand that these men of the Bund and Rabocheye Dyelo could have firm convictions principles of their own, and, defeated on them, would not content themselves with “putting through” what he regarded as opportunistic measures.*

Happy Bundists to have so sympathetic an advocate! Lenin found it hard to understand, but he, Wolfe, he understands. After all, if people have firm convictions and principles, they will not, if defeated in their own organisation, consent to forego them just for the sake of unity. They will not and they should not. Better a split than that! All this applies to Bundists, Economists, Mensheviks and other opponents of the Bolsheviks. But not to the Bolsheviks themselves. Even though their principles and convictions were no less firm, they deserve no such affectionate consideration. Why not? Because... because... well, because in the matter of splitting Lenin was invariably the aggressor.

The tale of Lenin's “intolerance” toward opponents inside the party has been told in a dozen languages. In the best of cases (they are rare enough), the record is seen through the completely distorting glasses of the present-day Stalinist regime; in the worst of cases (that is, as a rule), the record is falsified in whole or in part. At least nine times out of ten, Lenin's “intolerance” consisted, for the opponents, in the fact that he refused to accept their point of view on a question.

The phenomenon is familiar to anyone who has been active for any length of time in politics, especially in those working-class movements where politics is not an intellectual pastime but is taken most seriously. A man who puts forward a point of view on some question, but adds that his opponent's view is probably just as good if not better — there is a tolerant man for you. If he says that it really doesn't matter much whether the organisation adopts his view or not — there's a tolerant man. If he is not so impolite as to try vigorously to win supporters for his view and to plan, with his initial supporters, on how to win a majority for it — he is tolerant too. Or if his point of view miraculously wins the support of, let us say, the organisation's convention, and he then announces that he is ready to concede the leadership to his opponents who are against his position and who, with the best will in the world, could not carry out the adopted policy with enthusiasm or understanding — there is a most tolerant man. He is not at all like Lenin, granted. He differs from him in that he does not take his views or his organisation — or himself — very seriously. He is in politics for a week-end, warmed by the sunny thought that after he has returned to his normal pursuits he will have left behind a memory unmarred by the tiniest Leninist stain.

The references generally made to Lenin's “intolerance” are actually calculated to convey the impression that he imposed upon the Bolsheviks a uniquely dictatorial regime in which his word, or at best, the word of his Central Committee was law that could be questioned only under penalty of the severest punishment. The unprepared reader tends to think of Lenin's organisation in terms of Stalin's — not quite the same, to be sure, but as an only slightly modified version.

The comparison is utterly monstrous. Up to 1917, the Russian revolutionary movement was an illegal, underground movement, working under the onerous conditions of czarist autocracy. In spite of that, the Bolshevik movement had, on the whole, more genuine democracy in its organisation, more freedom of opinion and expression, a freer and healthier internal life, than at least nine-tenths of the other socialist or trade-union organisations of Europe, most of which enjoyed legality and other facilities beyond the dreams of the Russians. This was true not only of the relations between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks when they represented only contending factions within a more-or-less united party, but likewise true among the Bolsheviks themselves, first as a faction and, after 1912, as an independent party. The hideous monolithism of Stalin's regime was entirely unknown — it was not even dreamed of — among the Bolsheviks. Political tendencies were formed without let or hindrance, and if they dissolved it was not under compulsion of any kind. The official leading committee always had its central organ — the spokesman of the faction or the party — but time and again periodicals would be issued on their own responsibility by political groupings or tendencies inside the party and even (or rather particularly!) inside the Bolshevik faction (later inside the Bolshevik Party) itself. Even after the Bolsheviks took power, this tradition was so strong and normal and deeply rooted that, in the most perilous period for the new Soviet regime, it was possible for

groups of dissident Bolsheviks not only to publish newspapers and reviews of their own independently of the Central Committee but to attack that committee (and of course Lenin!) with the utmost freedom and... impunity.

These separate organs of tendencies or groups or factions discussed all questions of party theory, party policy, party organisation, and party leadership with a fullness, a freedom and an openness that was known to no other working-class organisation of the time and has certainly had no equal since the rise of Stalinism. The idea of "secret" or "internal" discussion of political or theoretical questions of the movement, introduced by Zinoviev and Stalin in the period of the revolution's decline and now considered perfectly good "Bolshevik" practise, alas, even by self-styled Marxist organisations, was simply not known among the Bolsheviks — mind you, among the Bolsheviks even while they were an illegal, police-hounded and police-infiltrated movement! Lenin's collected works, which are composed largely of open "inner-party" polemics and the files of a dozen different factional papers and pamphlets, provide inundating evidence of this rich, free and open party life. In this respect, no other socialist organisation of those days could even equal the Bolsheviks.

Even in its best days, the German Social Democracy did not have anything like so free and democratic an organisational-political life, while it was an outlawed party or afterward in the period of legality. Why, even Marx and Engels sometimes had to fight to get their views published in the German party press and their fight was not uniformly successful. Among the Bolsheviks, such a thing was unheard of, and not just with respect to a Marx or Engels or Lenin, but also to the spokesman of some unpopular grouping in the party or faction.

Read, or re-read, all the anti-Bolshevik histories or commentaries with the closest care, and see what facts are related about how Lenin's "organisational principles" worked out in party practice. You will find all sorts of hints, suggestions, innuendo, clouded allusions, grunts, grimaces, pursed lips, winks and nods; you will find gossip, chit-chat about factional excesses which are "normal" in heated factional fights, titillating tales about the "dubious" sources of Bolshevik funds calculated to shock the sensibilities of our pious business and trade-union circles and of course a lot of plain kiln-dried falsification without filler, shellac or varnish. But it would be astounding if you found even one fact about the regime in the Bolshevik party or fraction that contradicts the record cited here about what the regime actually was. And it is this regime, as it really existed, that is supposed to have led to Stalinism! This is the tradition that is said to have helped Stalinism appear and triumph! Stalinism rests upon it exactly the same way a stiletto rests on the heart it has stabbed.

Or just suppose that, in the search for facts about Lenin and the old Bolshevik movement, Wolfe or any other anti-Bolshevik writer had discovered about them the things that are known about other leaders and other political groupings. For example, in the early Iskra days, Plekhanov, in order to assure his domination of the editorial board that was evenly divided between the "old" and the "young," was given two votes as against one for all the other members! If that had happened with Lenin — then or at any other time in his life — can you imagine the pages — no, the chapters — filled with outrage in every line, that would be written to argue that this was the very essence of Bolshevism, the core itself of Leninism, the proof positive and irrefutable of how it was pregnant with Stalinism from the day it was born?

Or take the party of Rosa Luxemburg, who was, writes Wolfe generously and rightly, "the outstanding advocate of revolutionary policy and the outstanding defender of democracy within the labour movement." Yet, she shared the theory of the permanent revolution which, says Wolfe, led to Stalinism; her party was opposed, and not on very democratic grounds, to the Soviets of Workers' Deputies in the revolution of 1905; she and her party were opposed to the democratic slogan of the right of self-determination and on grounds that were, objectively, reactionary; her party (we refer to the Social Democratic Party of Poland and Lithuania) was opposed to the idea of mass, formally non-party trade unions and insisted that the unions must declare their allegiance to the revolutionary party; and in spite of her criticisms of Lenin's "organisational principles," the regime in her own party in Poland was exceptionally factional, narrow, super-centralistically disciplined and far more "bureaucratic" than anything the Bolsheviks were ever guilty of.

The anti-Bolsheviks, who have exactly nothing in common with Luxemburg, ghoulishly drag her into court against Lenin, but if that record were to be found in the history of the Bolsheviks, can you imagine the uproar in twelve languages?

Or take the Narodniks (Populists) for whom Wolfe has such an extravagant reverence. In their early days, these spiritual (and political) ancestors of the Social Revolutionists, convinced but primitive revolutionists, exploited — with the best intentions in the world — the anti-Semitic pogrom feelings of the Russian peasants and even issued leaflets spurring them on. Can you imagine what the anti-Bolshevik professionals would make of such a thing if it could be found in the record of the Bolsheviks or their forebears? Or what they would say if some Bolshevik argued that Kerensky's role in 1917 "flowed from" the anti-Semitic aberrations of the Narodniks four decades earlier?

Such examples could be cited almost indefinitely — but not with reference to Lenin and the Bolsheviks. If they and they alone are the targets today, it is not as a result of objective historical re-examination but because of the frenetic campaign against socialism by a desperate and dying bourgeoisie and by disoriented and disillusioned ex-revolutionists. And by the same token, if we defend the Bolsheviks today it is in the interest of historical objectivity but also because we remain loyal to the emancipating fight for socialism.

Wolfe does deal with two aspects of Lenin's "conception of the party machine" that are indeed of decisive importance. He separates them when they should be connected. Properly connected and focussed, they would throw a most revealing light on Bolshevism, the Russian Revolution, its decline and on the rise and meaning of Stalinism. Right here, perhaps, is Wolfe's most glaring failure. He fumbles the problem helplessly and hopelessly, where he is not utterly oblivious to its significance. You cannot help asking yourself what in heaven's name this man learned about Marxism during his long years in the communist movement — or since.

First, Wolfe finds in Lenin's views on the interrelations between the revolutionary movement, socialist consciousness and the spontaneous struggles of the workers, as he expressed them early in the century, the

*... dogma, obscure as yet in its implications, [that] was at the very core of "Leninism." From it flowed an attitude toward the working class, toward its ability to think for itself, to learn from experience, toward its capacities and potentialities for self-rule, toward its "spontaneous" movements such as might take place without orders and control from the party of socialist theoreticians and professional revolutionaries. From it would spring a special attitude toward trade unions, toward the impromptu strikers' councils or Soviets, even toward two revolutions — in 1905 and the spring of 1917 — that would come not on order but by surprise.*

Elsewhere, Wolfe finds something else that makes up "the real core of 'Leninism,' separating him by an abyss from the Mensheviks, and blurring to the vanishing point the dogmatic line which divided him from Trotsky." The "core" is this:

*In short, Lenin's real answer to the question: what happens after we get power? is: Let's take power and then we'll see.*

This "core" separated Lenin not only from the Mensheviks but from Marx as well, and Wolfe argues the point with a brevity, if not erudition, which merits full quotation:

*To Marx it might have seemed that "the forms of the state are rooted in the material conditions of life," that "the economic structure of society. .. independent of men's will... determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes," and that "no social order ever disappears before all the productive forces for which there are room in it have been developed." But to Lenin's political-power-centred mind, for all his Marxist orthodoxy, such formulae were intolerable fetters unless subject to the proper exegesis. And the exegesis literally turned Marx on his head until the Marxist view that "in the last analysis economics determines politics" became the Leninist view that, with enough*

*determination, power itself, naked political power, might succeed wholly in determining economics.*

Wolfe has more to say about these two points, but very little more.

Lenin's ideas about socialist consciousness and the struggle of the working class were not invented by him nor were they uniquely his own. They are nothing less than the intellectual underpinnings of any genuinely socialist party, and it is inconceivable without them. In an even deeper sense they underlie the very conception of a rationally-ordered socialist society. No one developed these ideas more sharply and profoundly, even if with polemical vehemence, than Lenin, and that was his special contribution. But the ideas themselves go back to the beginnings of the scientific socialist movement, back to Marx and Engels. A serious examination of Lenin could not have failed to establish this fact and draw conclusions that it indicates Wolfe cannot help but know that Lenin's views were an almost literal copy of those expressed earlier, just as the century turned, by Karl Kautsky. And his present-day venerated would be horrified to hear that, by virtue of what he wrote at that time, he was the fountainhead of what was inevitably to become Stalinism!

Kautsky, before Lenin, wrote:

*Many of our revisionist critics believe that Marx asserted that economic development and the class struggle create, not only the conditions for socialist production, but also, and directly, the consciousness of its necessity ... In this connection socialist consciousness is presented as a necessary and direct result of the proletarian class struggle. But this is absolutely untrue.*

*Of course, socialism, as a theory, has its roots in a modern economic relationship in the same way as the class struggle of the proletariat has, and in the same way as the latter emerges from the struggle against the capitalist-created poverty and misery of the masses. But socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises out of different premises.*

*Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. Indeed, modern economic science is as much a condition for socialist production as, say, modern technology, and the proletariat can create neither the one nor the other, no matter how much it may desire to do so; both arise out of the modern social process. The vehicles of science are not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia: It was out of the heads of members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually-developed proletarians who, in their turn, introduce it into the proletarian class struggle where conditions allow that to be done.*

*Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without, and not something that arose within it spontaneously. Accordingly, the old [Austrian] Hainfeld program quite rightly stated that the task of Social Democracy is to imbue the proletariat with the consciousness of its position and the consciousness of its tasks. There would be no need for this if consciousness emerged from the class struggle. (Kautsky's emphasis.)*

To this should be added: neither would there then be any need for a distinct, separate political movement of socialism — a socialist party — except, perhaps, to fulfil the not very useful function of passive reflector of the welter of ideological and political confusion that, to one extent or another, will always exist in the working class, at least so long as it is a class deprived of social power and therewith of the means of wiping out its own inferior position in society. It is kept in this inferior position under capitalism by force but only in the last analysis, only at times of crisis. As a rule, be it under democratic or even under fascist capitalism, the ruling class maintains or seeks to maintain itself by ideological means.

The whole of capitalism's "headfixing industry", as one Marxist wittily called it, is directed toward keeping the working class in ignorance or confusion about its social position, or rather about the purely capitalist reasons for its position, toward concealing from the working class the emancipating historical mission it has and the road it must travel to perform it.

So long as the workers do not acquire an understanding of their social position and their social task, their battles against the ruling class, be they ever so militant or massive, can only modify the conditions of their economic subjugation but not abolish them. Indispensable to their abolition is the socialist consciousness (an exact mathematical formulation of which is neither possible nor necessary) of the working class, which means nothing more and nothing less than its realisation of its position in society today, of its power, and of its obligation and its ability to reconstruct society socialistically.

Now the dispute over the ideas of Kautsky-Lenin on the subject boils down to this: either the working class, long inbred in its elementary trade union organisations or not, acquires this consciousness by spontaneous generation in the course of repeated struggles for the improvement of its conditions — or in its decisive section, it acquires it, in the course of these struggles, to be sure, with the aid of those who already possess this socialist consciousness and who are banded together (in a group, a league, a movement, a party — call it what you will) in order more effectively to transmit it, by word of mouth and by the printed page, to those whose minds are still cluttered up with bourgeois rubbish, that is, the products of the “head-fixing industry.”

Between these two, there is not a single person today who calls himself a socialist of any kind who would venture to defend, flatly and frontally, the former conception. All you get from the anti-Bolsheviks is, as in Wolfe's case, murky reference to the “special attitude” that flowed from Lenin's formulation of the position, in which the only thing definite is a sneer at the very conception of a socialist party — the “socialist theoreticians and professional revolutionists.” The reformists who distinguish themselves from Lenin by saying that while they too are for a socialist party, they look upon it as a “servant” of the working class and not as its “master” or “dictator”; as a means of the “socialist education” of the working class in whose “ability to think for itself” they devoutly believe and not for the purpose of “ordering and controlling” it from above — are either hypocritical or inane. Their daily practice, inside the labour movement and in politics generally, would indicate that it is less the latter than the former.

The question of socialist consciousness which Lenin developed has wider implications. Wolfe sees in it only the source for establishing a new slavery for the working class, the Stalinist tyranny in the name of the “dictatorship of the proletariat”. The truth is not merely different, but in this case it is the exact opposite!

Workers' democracy and, indeed, that complete realisation of democracy which inaugurates the socialist society, are not only inseparable from Lenin's ideas on socialist consciousness but, without them, become empty words, unattainable hopes, illusions at worst.

What was the obvious meaning of Lenin's insistence that the specific role of the socialist movement was to “introduce” a socialist consciousness into the working class? What, for example, was the clear implication of Lenin's “Aside from the influence of the Social Democracy, there is no conscious activity of the workers,” which Wolfe quotes as a sample of the “dogma [which] was at the very core of 'Leninism' “... and from which “flowed an attitude toward the working class”? It should be obvious.

The “party of socialist theoreticians and professional revolutionaries” was not assigned thereby to trick the incurably blind and incurably stupid workers into lifting it to power so that it might establish a new kind of dictatorship over them. That makes no sense whatsoever. It was assigned the job of making the workers aware of the fundamental reasons for their exploited and subjected position under capitalism; of making the workers aware of their own class strength and having them rely only upon their class strength and independence; of assembling them in a revolutionary party of their own; of making them aware of their ability to free themselves from all class rule by setting up their own government as the bridge to socialist freedom.

Without a socialist consciousness, there would be working-class activity but the workers would continue to remain the ruled and never become the free. For the workers to rule themselves required conscious activity toward socialism.

What is Wolfe trying to convey with his suggestive prose? That Lenin dwelled so emphatically upon the need for the party to instill socialist consciousness or stimulate it in the working class because he did not believe in "its ability to think for itself, to learn from experience"? Or because he was sceptical about "its capacities and potentialities for self-rule"? Did Lenin expect to imbue the unable -to-think-and-lead proletariat with socialist conceptions by intravenous hypodermic injections? Or is Wolfe just a little... careless with his innuendoes?

Let us go further. Lenin knew — he referred to it often enough and nowadays it is especially necessary to emphasise and elaborate it — one of the most basic and decisive differences between the bourgeois revolution and the socialist revolution. One of the outstanding characteristics of the former was that it could be carried through without a clear ideology, without an unequivocally-formulated consciousness on the part of the bourgeoisie whose social system it was to establish. In fact, not only could it be carried out in this way, but generally speaking that is how it was carried out.

The greatest bourgeois revolution the French, was carried out by plebeians, without the bourgeoisie and in part against it; and it was consolidated by Napoleon, in part without the bourgeoisie and in part against it. In Germany it was carried out, that is, the supremacy of capitalism over feudalism was assured, in the Bismarckian or Junker-landlord way — again, in part without the bourgeoisie and in very large part against it. The passage from feudalism to capitalism in Japan is only another example of the same phenomenon. Yet, in all these and other cases, including those where the bourgeoisie was not raised to political power, the bourgeois revolution was nevertheless effected, consolidated, guaranteed. Why? As Lenin once wrote, in 1918:

*One of the main differences between the bourgeois and the socialist revolution consists in this, that for the bourgeois revolution which grows up out of feudalism the new economic organisations, which continually transform feudal society on all sides, gradually take form within the womb of the old society. The bourgeois revolution faced only one task: to throw off and destroy all the fetters of the former society. Every bourgeois revolution that fulfils this task, fulfils everything that is demanded of it: it strengthens the growth of capitalism.*

But if the bourgeois fetters upon production are thrown off and destroyed, that alone does not and cannot assure the growth of socialist production. Under capitalism, production is assured by the irrepressible tendency toward accumulation of capital which is dictated primarily, not by the will of the capitalist, but by the blindly-operating market as the automatic regulator of capitalist production. Socialist production is incompatible with market relations.

It is production for use and therefore planned production, not automatically regulated by a blind force. Given a certain level of development of the productive force available, everything then depends upon planning, that is, upon the conscious organisation of production and distribution by human beings.

Now, under capitalism, what and how much is produced is determined by the market, and the distribution of what is produced is determined basically by the relations between the class that owns the means of production and exchange and the class that is divorced from them. Overturn capitalism, and it is found that there is no market to determine what is produced and in what quantities, and there is no class that owns private property.

Until the distant day when all classes are completely abolished and socialism fully established, the conditions of production and distribution must necessarily be determined by politically-associated human beings — no longer by the blind market but by the state.

In other words, where the state becomes the repository of all the means of production and is in complete control of them, economy is for the first time subject to planned and conscious control by those who have the state in their hands. In this sense, politics determines economics! This may sound startling to Wolfe, as well as to all sorts of half-baked half Marxists But if this simple and irrefutable fact is not understood, then the whole idea of the working class taking power in order to organise a socialist society becomes absurd and even meaningless. In revolution, but above all and most decisively in

the socialist revolution, the relationship between economics and politics is not only reversed, turned upside-down, but it must be reversed!

But if politics now determines economics (again, within the limits of the given productive forces), or to put it differently, if the conditions of production and distribution are now determined by politically conscious individuals or groups, the question of the nature of the determining politics is immediately thrown open. What assurance is there that the politics will be socialist in nature, so that production relations are socialist or socialistic (by which is meant socialist in tendency or direction) and that distribution corresponds to them, so that what is produced is for the use of the people and not of a small privileged group?

To rely for that on the good will, the honourable intentions or the socialist past or professions of faith of a group of planners who hold the state power to the exclusion of the rest of the people, is naive, where it is not reactionary. In any case, it is not a socialist idea and certainly not Lenin's. A socialist development of the economy can be assured only by those who are to be its principal beneficiaries, the working class, and only if it has the power to make the decisions on production and distribution and to carry them out, hence only if it holds the power of the state. For politics now determines economics! And it cannot acquire this power or wield it unless it is permeated by a socialist consciousness, which means, among other things, an understanding of the decisive role it has to play in the new state, and therefore and only by that means, the role it has to play in assuring a socialist direction to the operation of the economy.

That is why Lenin, in distinguishing between bourgeois and socialist revolutions, underlined the fact that the Bolshevik revolution "found at hand" not socialist economic relations that had developed under capitalism as capitalist economic relations had developed under feudalism, but rather a democratic political factor: "victory depended solely upon whether already finished organisational forms of the movement were at hand that embraced millions. This finished form was the Soviets."

The same thought was in his mind when he urged that every cook should become an administrator, so that with everyone exercising the power of "bureaucrat" no one would be a bureaucrat. And the thought was even more pregnantly expressed in his famous saying that "Soviets plus electrification equal socialism." (It is impossible even to imagine Lenin saying that a totalitarian prison for the workers plus nationalized property equals a degenerated workers' state!)

The Soviets, before the Bolsheviks took power, were acclaimed by every Menshevik and Social Revolutionist as the "revolutionary democracy." That was right. What is more, the Soviets were a magnificent example of a spontaneous movement of the workers and peasants themselves, not set up by order of any party or according to its plan.

Wolfe finds that from Lenin's "dogma" about socialist consciousness "flowed" an attitude toward the working class which was uncommendable because, it would seem, it was most undemocratic and even contemptuous toward the working class, including "its 'spontaneous' movements such as might take place without orders and control from the party..." Like the Soviets of 1917, for example? Then how explain that every party in Russia, except the Bolsheviks, fought to keep the Soviets (the "revolutionary democracy") from taking over all power, and worked to keep them as a more or less decorative appendage to the never-elected but self-constituted Kerensky regime?

True to Lenin's "dogma", the Bolsheviks alone strove to imbue the Soviets with a genuinely socialist consciousness, which meant concretely that the workers (and even the peasants), more democratically and representatively organised in the Soviets than ever before or ever since in any other movement in any country of the world, should take command of the nation and therewith of their own destiny.

This example of what really was the "attitude" of Lenin and his party toward the "spontaneous" movements of the workers, their ability to think and learn for themselves, and their capacities and potentialities for self rule — not in some thesis or polemical article or speech, but in one of the most crucial periods of history is so outstanding, so overshadowing, so illuminating about Lenin's "conceptions" that Wolfe passes it by. We will not ask what this historian would have said about Lenin's "dogma" if the Bolshevik

attitude toward the “revolutionary democracy” in 1917 had been the same as, let us say, that of Kerensky. But we wonder what he will say in succeeding volumes about the Menshevik and SR “attitude” toward the Soviets and the “dogma” from which it “flowed”.

The revolution of 1917 was the decisive test for all political parties and groups. In spite of conservative trends in the ranks (all parties tend toward conservatism about some of their “dogmas”), Lenin showed that he had been able to build and hold together a party which proved, in this most critical hour, to be the only consistent champion of revolutionary democracy and revolutionary socialism, and the only “political machine” ready and able to lead both to victory. This is what brought Trotsky to the side of the Bolsheviks and caused him to “forget” his “Cassandra-like prevision” about how “the dictator will take the place of the Central Committee” and the party itself.

If Wolfe finds that Trotsky's prediction was “fatefully fulfilled by history”, it is primarily because of his method of separating the history of the conflict of social forces from specific political events, or worse, of simply ignoring the former. The fact is that whatever grounds there may have been or seemed to have been in 1903-04 for Trotsky to utter his warning, the main tendency of the development of Lenin's group or party, particularly from 1905 onwards, was in an entirely opposite one from that feared by Trotsky.

The apparatus did not replace the party, nor the Central Committee the apparatus, nor the dictator (Lenin!) the Central Committee. The inner-party democracy and freedom of opinion and discussion of the Bolsheviks as an illegal movement, it is worth repeating, can be matched, without apology, against the regime of virtually every other working-class organisation, legal or illegal, that ever existed.

Here, too, the decisive test was 1917 itself. At least, you would think so, on the basis of almost universal experience in such matters. A working-class movement which is suffering from a fatal disease — opportunism, let us say, or bureaucratism — does not usually reveal it, not clearly, at any rate, in normal periods, in periods of social calm or political decay. It shows it, and most disastrously for itself and its followers, in the most critical and troubled periods of society, above all in the crisis of war and the crisis of revolution. But precisely in the critical period of 1917, the Bolshevik party passed the test, and so well that Trotsky found it possible to abandon his early apprehensions about it.

Now, why didn't Lenin's conception of organisation, which was one of the “roots of Stalinism”, manifest itself in 1917 in a way that would cause the Bolshevik party to play a conservative or reactionary role in the revolution, to be a brake upon the workers and peasants? The question is of first-rate interest. Therefore, Wolfe passes it by.

Did the Bolshevik party measure up to its task early in 1917? Of course not! But that was not because Trotsky's prophecy about Lenin's conception of organisation had been fulfilled, fatefully or otherwise. It was an entirely different prophecy of Trotsky's that was fulfilled or almost. Years earlier, Trotsky had written that the Bolshevik formula of “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” had its revolutionary side, as opposed to the Menshevik conception of a revolution in which it would be the role of the proletariat to bring the bourgeoisie to power. But, he added, if the Bolsheviks persisted in this formula, the coming revolution would reveal its reactionary side, that is, that which inhibited the proletariat from carrying the democratic revolution through to proletarian power and the inauguration of socialist measures.

Steeped in Lenin's old formula, most of the party leaders in 1917 adopted a position which paralysed the revolutionary possibilities of the party. It took a further fight by Lenin, after his arrival in Russia in April, to effect that “rearmament” of the party which finally assured the victory in October. But, this “prophecy” of Trotsky's — or rather, Lenin's rearming of the party in the direction of Trotsky's theory — is regarded by Wolfe as one of the sources of Stalinism!

Important is the fact that Lenin did not replace the Central Committee by a dictator in any sense indicated by Trotsky. He enjoyed, justly, immense authority among the Bolsheviks, but he had won it and kept it to the end of his life by his intellectual ability and character as a leader and not by any dirty manipulation or usurpation.

In 1917, most of the party leadership opposed his famous "April Theses." He was not only unable to dictate to the others, but did not dream of it. He won them over, one by one, partly by the pressure of the party ranks whom he convinced and partly by convincing the leaders as well. In 1917, or before, when his point of view won, it was not because the dictator had replaced the Central Committee; and when his point of view lost, as was more than once the case, it was not because the apparatus had replaced the party.

Yet, the Bolshevik party did degenerate; Soviet democracy was replaced by a unique Bonapartist dictatorship. But the process did not conform with Trotsky's prediction, which Wolfe transforms into an abstraction raised to the nth power. Reading Wolfe, you would think that the Bolshevik party was a sort of supra-mundane evolving out of some purely internal mechanism, unaffected by the strains and influences exerted by terrestrial forces.

It is only necessary to read what the Bolsheviks said and wrote in the period of the revolutionary upsurge to see what their real attitude was toward Soviet and socialist democracy, what ideas of working-class self rule they sought with all their strength to instil into the Russian people. The bureaucracy rose not because of these ideas, but in spite of them.

The revolution was soon plunged into a fierce civil war, and if it had not been for the Bolsheviks, including their "machine", the Soviet power would not have lasted 48 hours, to be replaced, in all likelihood, not by bourgeois democrats but by the czarist reaction which Anglo-French imperialism was sponsoring.

Civil war, unfortunately, is not the ideal culture for the growth of the democratic bacillus. The days of War Communism were harsh and stringent. At the front and at home, command inevitably took the place of free discussion and voting. The tendency to bureaucratic command gripped and held not only Bolshevik leaders, but rank-and-file militants, Bolshevik and non-party, as well.

Even so, Soviet democracy could have been restored after the civil war if the accursed backwardness of Russia had been overcome rapidly by the aid which a successful revolution in the advanced West could have contributed on a grand scale. It could have been maintained if, to start with, the Menshevik and SR parties had allied themselves with the "revolutionary democracy" in the civil war and not with the monarchist reaction.

Russian Populists of the old days once exclaimed: "Never will history forgive the autocracy for making terrorists out of us." With far more justice the Bolsheviks might have declared: "Never will history forgive the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionists for joining the war against the Soviets and forcing us to substitute our party for the Soviets."

Soviet democracy might have been restored by another road, the re-democratisation of the Bolshevik Party itself. And here it is interesting to note that the big fight for party democracy was launched by an outstanding section of the Old Bolsheviks who rallied to Trotsky's position; in fact, by the time Zinoviev broke with Stalin and joined the Trotskyists, it can be said that the bulk of the militants who had been most thoroughly trained in the old school of Bolshevism and in Lenin's "conception of organisation", lined up against the Stalinist bureaucracy, which was represented primarily by comparatively recent members or by obscure personages who had never played an important part in the life of the party.

Well or badly, consistently or not, the old Bolshevik cadres resisted the rise of the new Stalinist bureaucracy. If they failed, it was not due to the overpowering force of Lenin's organisational principles, but to an overpowering force of a radically different kind.

In passing, Wolfe writes:

*Nineteen five and nineteen seventeen, the heroic years when the machine was unable to contain the flood of overflowing life, would bring Trotsky to the fore as the flaming tribune of the people, would show Lenin's ability to rise above the confining structure of his dogmas, and would relegate Stalin, the machine-man, to the background. But no people can live forever at fever heat and when that day was over and Lenin was dead the devoted machine-man's day would come. [\*\*]*

Just in passing! But these two sentences contain more insight than can be found in any two chapters of Wolfe's book. Revolutions are periods of turbulence precisely because the people are so free to choose their course and their leaders for themselves and so hard to control by a machine. Wolfe merely sets down the two deeply significant sentences and then goes on as though they were no more than a chance collection of words.

He seems to shy away from matters and statements of social importance spontaneously, without special effort, as if by instinct. But the sentences are important regardless of Wolfe. When the masses were free to choose democratically in the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, Trotsky and Lenin were lifted to power. (Their names can be used here as symbolic of Bolshevism as it really was.) And it is only when the masses were exhausted or apathetic or prostrate, that is, when revolution was succeeded by reaction, that the Stalinist counter-revolution could triumph over the masses and over the Bolshevik party.

THERE is the "core of Stalinism" indeed! The Stalinist bureaucracy did not grow out of an organic evolution of the Bolshevik party, as was implied by Trotsky's "prophecy". Its growth paralleled and required the destruction of that party. And its destruction, root and trunk and leaves and branch, until absolutely nothing is left of it today except the plagiarized name. This fact, too, is of such capital importance that the anti Bolshevik writers pass it by. Destroyed: the principles of Bolshevism, its program, its tradition, its history, its personnel down almost to the last man, including (how significant this is!) even those Bolsheviks who tried to capitulate to Stalinism, and yes, including even the big bulk of the original Stalinist faction of the old party! Preserved: the name of the party and a few renegades from the second and tenth ranks of the old Bolshevik party — that and nothing more.

The destruction of the Bolshevik party meant the destruction of socialist consciousness. The measure of the growth of the Bolshevik party was the growth of this consciousness among the workers it influenced; and in turn it grew among the workers to the extent that the party remained attached to the ideas which Lenin most conspicuously advocated. It is of tremendous interest that for the Stalinist faction to extend its initial victory inside the party apparatus (that's where its first victory occurred) to a victory inside the party generally, it had to flood the party.

The first big public step, so to speak, taken by the Stalinist bureaucracy was the notorious Lenin Levy organised right after Lenin's death. Hundreds of thousands of workers were almost liberally poured into the party. Who were they? Generally speaking, the more conservative workers and employees, people who had not shown any interest in joining the party in the tough days of the revolution and civil war but who could, in 1924-25, be persuaded to join it now that its power seemed consolidated, now that membership seemed to guarantee employment, privileges, a career.

Almost to a man they could be counted on by the bureaucracy in the fight against the Opposition, against the Bolsheviks, their principles, their revolutionary and socialist and democratic traditions. It was Stalin's first and least important step in literally dissolving Lenin's "machine" in order to substitute a despotic police regime that was utterly alien to it. This first step was typical of those that followed.

There is as much justification, then, for the theory that Stalinism was rooted in the Bolshevism which it extirpated, as there is, for example, in the kindred theory that the socialist movement, its methods and its theories in general form the roots of the fascist movement and its methods and theories.

The anti-Bolshevik democrat would feel outraged at seeing the latter argument put forward. He would declare indignantly that to explode such nonsense, nothing more is needed than the fact that Hitlerism crushed the socialist organisations, imprisoned or killed their leaders, outlawed their ideas, and so on and so forth. Yet the argument that Hitlerism had its authentic roots in the German Social Democratic Party is advanced in all coolness by so eminent an anti-socialist as Frederick von Hayek, and with the same reasoning, with the same analogies, with the same cavalier attitude toward decisive facts as is displayed by those who argue that Stalinism is rooted in Bolshevism.

Hayek is a defender of the capitalist status-quo-ante-state intervention and a sworn foe of socialism, and he has his means of discrediting its good name. The aim of the democratic or reformist anti-Bolsheviks is somewhat loftier, as it were, but the means they employ to discredit Bolshevism are in no essential different from Hayek's.

On the flyleaf of his book, Wolfe quotes, for his motto, the noble words of Albert Mathiez:

*The historian has a duty both to himself and to his readers. He has to a certain extent the cure of souls. He is accountable for the reputation of the mighty dead whom he conjures up and portrays. If he makes a mistakes, if he repeats slanders on those who are blameless or holds up profligates or schemers to admiration, he not only commits an evil action; he poisons and misleads the public mind.*

Mathiez devoted much of his great work to defending the great French Revolution and its Jacobins from detractors. The socialist today has the duty to defend the great Russian Revolution and its Jacobins in much the same spirit. As to how faithfully Wolfe has heeded the injunction of Mathiez, the reader of his book will judge for himself.

---

[\*\*] Then why the title "Three. Who Made a Revolution"? Up to now, only Stalinist forgers have presented Stalin as one those who outstandingly led the revolution. The facts presented by Wolfe show this to be a falsification and the above quotation confirms it. The title he gives his book is therefore utterly misleading. It would of course be very awkward to load a book with a title like "Two Who Made a Revolution and One Who Made a Counter-Revolution", but one merit it would have: it would be accurate.

NEW INTERNATIONAL  
July.August 1950