

# ON THE SITUATION IN RUSSIA - - A Letter to a Comrade - - by L. D. TROTSKY

Alma-Ata, October 21, 1928.

Dear Comrades:—

I am writing to you in advance of the October plenary session, or at least before the news of the session has reached Alma-Ata. I have nothing new to tell you. I merely wish to summarize what I have already said, and to give you the criteria by which to judge the impending session.

It is reported that Zinoviev said that Stalin had triumphed in June. From the political point of view that is absurd. Centrism weakened itself politically by the October compromise. The right and the left wings made a gain. But the development of the apparatus has its own logic, which so far has not coincided with the general shifts of power in the Party and the working class, and is even contrary to it.

By surrendering his political position Stalin split the right wing. He "broke loose" from it (temporarily) Kalinin and Voroshilov, who are wholeheartedly for the new proprietors and the new order, but who hitherto have been afraid of being left face to face with Rykov, Bucharin, and Tomsky as leaders.

The situation from the point of view of the apparatus is bad enough for the Right. Stalin attacks organizationally, after he has retreated politically and assured himself of his majority. It suffices to note that Molotov's candidacy for the post of actual chairman of the Comintern (in place of Bucharin) is already regarded as a serious question. Yes, yes, we once jokingly suggested that Stalin would put Mechlis in as chairman of the Comintern. The reality is not far from the jest. Kaganovich must replace Uglanov, against whom charges are pending in the Central Control Committee. (Incitement of a youth-comrade against Stalin.) But the real situation of the Right appears in the fact that—according to a Moscow story—Bucharin is running down the back-stairs to Kamenev and promising to "swap Stalin and Molotov for Kamenev and Zinoviev". Kamenev of course would declare himself ready for this operation, but he understands that Bucharin's political promises are worth no more than his economic prognoses. Out of sheer insolence the leader of the Comintern, the almighty Pooh-bah, would not run to the men who were expelled from the Party only yesterday, while he is really afraid of his own shadow.

What is Stalin thinking? It is not difficult to guess. If I get out of these difficulties by means of centrist measures, then I will call the Right capitalists, and drop them a peg or two lower in the organization. If, on the other hand, the situation gets worse, then I will steer to the Right myself, that is, I will weaken the Right faction by robbing them politically. I will declare that they have invented the disagreements, that they are trying to split the Party, and thus put them a peg lower. If these Right measures do not work, I will make my Right allies responsible for the failure, will again steer a course to the Left by giving Kamenev and Zinoviev a little longer leash—since they are waiting docilely like whipped dogs . . . And then we shall see . . . That is Stalin's scheme. Its strength lies in the apparatus. Its mortal weakness, that it counts without the host, i. e., without the classes. But as long as the classes are silent, Stalin's scheme will work.

If the main outlines of Stalin's plan are already visible from afar, they are certainly clear to the Right. That is why the Rights are so very much excited. They do not want to admit that they are already partly defeated. But they are very much afraid that if they attack, Stalin will wipe them out at one blow.

## THE METHOD OF STALIN

Stalin's method was very clear during the congress. The number of hours Bucharin spoke at the congress was in inverse ratio to his influence, which is declining from day to day. In the first place, the Right policy of the U.S.S.R. is distasteful to the foreign party-bureaucrats in view of the radicalization of the masses and the pressure of the Opposition. In the second place, the apparatus is in the hands of Stalin, and in the Comintern the religion of the apparatus is no weaker than in the C.P.S.U. During the congress the absent Stalin took three-fourths if not nine-tenths of the assembled apparatus-men away from Bucharin. It was not necessary for Stalin to be present. He had nothing to say. The bargaining was done for him by the impersonal mechanism of power. It is evident that the Rights, whether they wish to or not, are forced to jump into the cold water—that is, they must endeavor to carry their fight against Stalin outside

of the apparatus. This explains the publication of a certain article by Bucharin, "Observations of an Economist". That was the courage of despair. It is possible that Rykov and Tomsky sent Bucharin out as a scouting party. (The article is not only a product of theoretical weakness, but also of complete political impotence.) This move has done the Right nothing but harm. The "genuine" Right Wing, determined to carry the struggle outside the boundaries of the bureaucratic hen-coop, had to crouch: "New proprietors, unite; or the Socialists will rob you!" Such appeals have been heard before in the struggle against the Opposition, but then they sounded somewhat contemptibly ambiguous. But the Right, in order to oppose itself clearly to the Center, had to howl this out with full throats, like the Black Hundreds, like Thermidorians. But for this Bucharin still lacks the strength. He has put his toe into the cold water, but he is afraid to plunge in. He stands and shivers . . . with fear. And Rykov and Tomsky watch from afar, to see what will happen, in order at the proper moment to disappear into the bushes. This is the disposition of the most important actors on the bureaucratic stage.

One may say that all this is not very important. But that would be false. Naturally, if the classes should speak out loud, if the proletariat should pass over to a political attack, the disposition of these apparatus actors would lose nine-tenths of its meaning, and they would shift their position sharply to one side or the other. But we are considering here a not yet completed epoch, the epoch of the omnipotence of the apparatus with a growing dual power in the country. Stalin and Rykov and Bucharin are the government. And the government is not playing a very weighty role. It is necessary to study the disposition of the bureaucratic players more closely, but from the standpoint of class rather than from that of the apparatus.

## THE POSITION OF THE RIGHT WING

How can the Right danger "really" materialize? That is a question of great importance. The main thing is that the Right wing has its chief support outside of the Party. The Right Wing is more weakly represented in the apparatus than the Center, but in contrast to the Centrists it has a solid class support in the country. But how can the strength of the Right Wing nevertheless actually materialize? In other words, how can the new proprietors come to power? At first glance, it seems reassuring that the political parties of the possessing class are shattered, that the new proprietors are suppressed, that the Right Wing inside the Party, fearing the proletarian nucleus and still constrained by the past, cannot decide to rely openly upon the new proprietors. Naturally, this is all an advantage that we inherit from the past, but it is by no means an absolute guarantee. The conditions necessary for a materialization of the Thermidor can develop in a comparatively short time.

We have already more than once called attention to the fact that the victorious bourgeois counter-revolution must take the form of Fascism or Bonapartism, but absolutely cannot take the form of bourgeois democracy of which the soft-headed Mensheviks dream. Kamenev has never understood that to this day. In his recent conversation with our comrades, Kamenev described the situation in the country as if after a certain period "Kerensky" would stand at the threshold. Decidedly not. If one must mention Kerensky, then it would be better to say that right now, under the Centrist regime, the country is compelled to pass through a "Kerensky period upside down."

The function of the historic Kerensky period consisted in this: that on its back the power of the bourgeoisie passed over to the proletariat. The historic role of the Stalin period consists in this: that upon its back the power is gliding over from the proletariat to the bourgeoisie; in general the post-Lenin leadership is unwinding the October film in a reverse direction. And the Stalin period is this same Kerensky period moving toward the Right. In a country which has been shaken by the greatest revolution the bourgeois order cannot possibly assume a democratic form. For victory, and for the maintenance of this victory, the bourgeoisie must have a supreme and purely military concentration of power, lifting itself above the classes, but having as its immediate point of support the Kulak. That is Bonapartism. The Thermidor is only a stage on the road to Bonapartism. This stage does not have to be realized completely. The counter-

revolution can "jump over" one or another step. In a Thermidorian, and still more in a completely Bonapartist overthrow, the army plays a great role—in the second case, the decisive role. For this reason, we must follow with the greatest attention the processes that are taking place in the army.

## THE THREAT OF BONAPARTISM

We must not forget that in the June report to the Moscow conference of Party workers, the Right "leader," referring to his friend Klim, said: "If you undertake any more extraordinary measures, the army will answer with an insurrection." That is a very significant formulation—half prophecy and half threat. Indeed it may be three-quarters threat. But who is making the threat? The new property holders through the commanding apparatus of the army. The apparatus through Klim. Here you have also, so to speak, the Bonapartist candidate Klim. It would be extremely naive to object that he would make a very diminutive Bonaparte. There have been different Bonapartes. There was not only Napoleon I, but also Napoleon III, who was a very pitiable specimen. When the possessing classes find it necessary, they will make, to use a Stalinist expression, "a prince out of a gutter-snipe". Yes, events can develop in such a way that Klim (one of these Klims) may spring forth as a "prince". That will be a third kind of Bonaparte. But that would not prevent him from destroying the revolution. They say that Klim has gone over from a Right position to the Right Center, and is supporting "the master." But such combinations at the top are formed and can be torn apart in twenty-four hours by an impetus from without. Moreover, it does not have to be Klim. If he won't do it, then Budenny. We have no lack of Bonapartes. The master says: "These cadres can only be swept away by a civil war." Klim adds: "If you workers growl too much, remember that a great power stands behind me." Both these statements are elements of Bonapartism. In the first case speaks the Party-state-apparatus, which considers itself higher than all, higher even than the army. In the second case speaks the Military apparatus, which tomorrow will feel compelled to "put the civil arm in its place."

A bloodless victory of the Party apparatus of the Centrists over the Right would not do away with the Thermidorian-Bonapartist perspective, but would only change and postpone it. An independent victory of the Centrists without the Opposition, without the masses, can only succeed through an increased repression, through a further narrowing of the mass-basis of Centrism, through a further consolidation of the Centrist faction with the apparatus of governmental repression and, finally, with the commanding apparatus of the army, in which the Party life is long ago extinct, since no one is permitted to hold other opinions there than those which Bubnov is ordered to propagate. As a result of these consolidations, will the master himself eventually mount the white horse, or will he be found lying under Klim's horse? From the class standpoint that is a quite unimportant question.

We thus come to the conclusion that a "victory" of the Right would lead directly along the Thermidorian-Bonapartist road, a "victory" of the Centrists would lead zig-zag along the same road. Is there any real difference? In the final historic consequence there is no difference. Centrism presents only a variety of conciliation (in the given case, with the new proprietors, with the bourgeois society, which is attempting to form itself anew) but this only as the final historic consequence. At the present stage, however, Centrism reflects on a much larger scale the broad strata of the "superior" workers. The Right has its roots in the new, and chiefly the peasant, proprietorship. It would be a very crude mistake to ignore this struggle between them.

The Centrists do not want to break openly with the workers. They fear this break much more than the Right, which above all does not want to offend the property holders. Just this relation between the upper levels of the working class and the new proprietors is the basis of the grouping in the apparatus, no matter how confusing the cross-currents in the Party, no matter how great may become the "difficulties" between personalities (Stalin, Bucharin, Rykov, Tomsky.). We must distinguish the two groupings in order to follow the separate stages of the struggle, in order to understand the meaning of the struggle and its limitations. This struggle has of itself no great significance, but it breaks the bureaucratic fetters, brings the hidden to light, impels the masses to think, and widens the arena of their activities.

## Foreword

The letter written to a comrade by L. D. Trotsky which we publish on these pages formed one of the bases for which one hundred and fifty Bolshevik fighters were arrested on January 23, 1929 in Moscow for the "illegal publication of counter-revolutionary documents". It is our misfortune and the dishonor of the revolutionary movement that the writings of comrade Trotsky, which comprise some of the keenest and most brilliant Marxist-Leninist writings of our time, must be secretly circulated in the Soviet Union, and that for their distribution revolutionary workers are being persecuted.

The official reports say that the one hundred and fifty workers were given a secret trial, found guilty, and imprisoned—exiled to unknown places. Such an absolutely unheard of procedure in the Soviet Union will only strengthen the enemies of the revolution. Not even the genuine counter-revolutionary Social Revolutionaries in 1922 or of the inveterate enemy of the Soviets, Savinkov, were given secret trials. The working class of Russia was permitted to participate because the Bolshevik prosecutors were able to pilory them as counter-revolutionaries. In the case of the 150 Oppositionists, Stalin's machine HAD to conduct a secret, hurried "trial" because they feared the resentment of the workers.

The letter of comrade Trotsky exposes with knife-like sharpness the factors and forces in the present struggle in the Soviet Union and the Party and lays bare, further, the reasons for the reactionary hysteria of Stalin and the progress of the Leninist Opposition. — Ed.

The July plenum was the most important moment in the retreat of the Centrists. But it would be stupid to think that this is the last stage of the struggle, that the Centrists have finally capitulated, and that henceforward the Right enjoys a position of "monopoly." No, under the pressure of contradictions in the struggle, the revolution also will inexorably break through and play no small role in the history of the Party.

But from this one can by no means infer that the Centrists in their struggle with the Right wish to rely upon the Opposition. The Centrists fear the Opposition more than they fear the Right. The Centrists struggle with the Right, but steal from their program. To say that a bloc with one or another part of the present Center would never and in no circumstances be possible, would be ridiculous doctrinairism. Many of the present Centrists will still move to the Left. If anyone had told us in 1924 that we would form a bloc with the Zinoviev people, few would have believed it. But it happened that the struggle of the Leningrad Centrists against the attack of the Kulaks brought them to a bloc with us, and to the adoption of our platform. Similar zig-zags are not impossible with the ruling Centrists of today, if the class regime compels them to break openly and definitely with the Right, and if circumstances make them obedient. Such historical possibilities are not to be excluded. They can become steps on the way of a further development and strengthening of the Bolshevik line, just as did the bloc with the Zinoviev people. But it would be losing one's head entirely to steer a course at present toward a bloc with the Centrists as they now are, instead of systematically, uncompromisingly, implacably opposing to the Centrists the proletarian nucleus of the Party. In the long run these two tendencies will obliterate the difference between the overwhelming majority of the Opposition and its small minority which is given to "dreaming" how beautiful it would be, if a nice bloc should be formed with the thoughtful Centrists, which would diminish the difficulties and the dangers in the development of the Party and the State. But alas, the too rich experience of the past testifies that such a supposedly more economical course will cost much more, and that those who summon us to this course are slipping into Centrism itself. The bureaucratic apparatus struggle of the Centrists with the Right can be employed as a starting point for a thorough-going Party reform, only if there is a decisive interference of the masses. Only the Opposition can organize this interference of the masses, since the Opposition is politically independent of both the Right and the Centrists, and owing to this independence is able to make use of every stage of the struggle between them.

## THE "ADVICE" OF THE CAPITULATORS

A few words, in this connection, upon the advice and counsel of our new friend Kamenev (in the above-mentioned conversation). . . Kamenev, you know, finds that "L.T." should hand in a document in which he would say: Call us, we will work together. But L.T. is a self-willed man . . . etc., etc. Kamenev is really not so naively good-natured and of course does not himself believe in what he says. He knows perfectly well that such a declaration would not alter the legal position of the Opposition, it would merely give it a political blow which would lower it to the level of the Zinoviev people. The latter have won themselves a disgraceful half-amnesty which denies them all political life whatever. And this, only thanks to their breaking away from us. Kamenev understands this very well. His conversations and his coquetry have only one goal, to frighten Stalin, who is already maltreating a little too contemptuously his future "allies."

Kamenev wants to raise his own price, in order at a new opportunity to betray us again, but under conditions more favorable for himself. In the end, however, only complete dough heads could yield to his blandishment. Among us there will be no two opinions upon this. Especially noticeable is Kamenev's sorrow over my "frequent" and "harsh" attacks upon his capitulation. "People must work together." "We should not revive old quarrels." "It is too bad that a split has arisen."

Kamenev sines well—with coloratura. That he sines without fear of Yaroslavl, testifies to the weakening hold of the apparatus and to the growing chances of the Opposition. We put this in our books on the credit side. But only one inference can be made from it: we must strike twice as hard, three times, ten times as hard, against the capitulators.

## APPLYING THE OPPOSITION PLATFORM

The question of introducing the masses into the struggle is above all a question of mobilizing the working class in all spheres of the domestic and international life, beginning with the simplest and most pressing problems. In a series of letters we find suggestions that the Opposition lacks a "platform" on the "labor question." What does this mean exactly? Is our platform obsolete? The "labor section" of our platform was drawn up with particular exactitude and concreteness. I'm afraid that the application of it is simply being forgotten. It seems as if many comrades have forgotten the platform. They do not apply it, they do not seek counsel in it, and for that reason are always demanding new documents. You must study it again, and apply it. Every act of a Bolshevik-Leninist must proceed from the platform; if possible accurate quotations which apply to the given question must be adduced. These over no matter what question of the day, little or big, must begin with a quotation from the platform. This document was built out of a vast collective experience, during which all formulations were accurately thought out and discussed. The application of the platform to all questions will have a great influence in the direction of discipline, especially among the youth. It stands to reason that gaps can appear in the platform, obsolete sentences or erroneous particulars which need changing, correcting, or completing. But we must formulate these corrections and completions clearly and accurately, and thus act upon the platform itself.

The application of the platform in every given stage and to every concrete question, (as for instance the wage-scale campaign which now stands upon the order of the day) has naturally always its own difficulties, which can be solved only with the participation of the comrades on the spot; in the factory and in the various trades. Our most important guiding idea, the decisive criterion in this field, is the increase of real wages. As to the exhorting of this increase, negotiations must be carried on with the managers, with the Soviet, Party and trade unions organs. A strike is, as the resolution of the Eleventh Party Congress declared, the extreme measure but absolutely not an illegal, anti-Party or anti-Soviet measure. The participation of the Bolshevik-Leninists in strikes, and in the leadership of strikes, may be indicated as the Party duty of Bolshevik-Leninists, when all other means for safeguarding the legal, that is the actually realizable, demands of the masses have been exhausted. How far these actual realizations can go, may be determined, as we have already said, by negotiations in which the workers' representative hears the explanations and also actually examines the books. Who shall conduct these negotiations? That depends upon the dissatisfaction and the attacking power of the worker.

When opportunities arise, the Bolshevik-Leninists will demand the election of special commissions and delegations to conduct the negotiations with the trade union, with the Party Committee of the province, and to visit the editorial offices of the papers, and when all else fails, the highest authorities. With written declarations and an accurate report upon the workers' complaints, they should appear before the factory meetings. The mood of the workers is such as to demand upon our side the greatest determination and activity. We alone can lead the suppressed dissatisfaction into the correct Soviet and Party channels. The present passivity of the masses, due to many causes, testifies in part to a wavering and indecisiveness of the masses themselves, since many of the old ways and means have disappointed, and new ones have not yet been found.

## THE MASSES AT THE CROSS ROADS

This standing at the cross roads can naturally not last long. A new crystallization process must take place in the masses, and it may under certain conditions go forward with dizzying speed. And around what pole will this process take place—the bureaucratic? No, that is impossible. If we are not the pole around which everything turns in this process, then it will be the Mensheviks, the Social Revolutionaries, the Anarchists. And that will mean that the October Revolution is finally crushed. Only the Bolshevik-Leninists can protect the Revolution against this, since they boldly go to the masses, and where it is necessary overthrow the boundaries which the bureaucrats have set up.

Going to the masses does not mean remaining passive before their spontaneous power as the Democratic Centralists plan to do. They would break their necks with their Putsch policy, which would

be only half bad, or they would unwittingly help the enemy to break the neck of the Revolution, which would be much worse. The policy of the last five years has created anew in the working masses an anti-Soviet mood, partly not yet formulated, partly already formulated—that is, directed toward private property. The activity of the masses must be so mobilized that within the masses a differentiation along the class line goes continually forward. To the anti-Soviet voices which are especially well formulated, conscious, malicious, we must react much more sensitively and decisively than the apparatus does. At every new outbreak of dissatisfaction we must first of all unmask the Mensheviks, the Social Revolutionaries, the Anarchists, in so far as they have put their oar in. We can and must react to such attempts of the agents of the bourgeoisie with a direct appeal to the workers.

We need not doubt that with the growth of our activity and our influence upon the left wing of the working class, the attempts of elements alien to us, and even our class enemies, to snuggle up to us and even clothe themselves in our colors, will grow more frequent. We must be on our guard, and denounce these elements publicly whenever possible. It is necessary that we steer, upon all issues, a perfectly accurate course, so that the masses can know where we are, and where we are not.

This is especially so with regard to the Democratic Centrals. You will remember that even in our ranks there were individual comrades who looked upon the question of Democratic Centralism from a sentimental standpoint. ("They are pretty good fellows, just the same"). Some of them did not want to see the distinctions in our political line. It is worth remarking that precisely those comrades who yesterday were still proposing a complete union with the Democratic Centrals, stand today upon the conciliatory wing, and rave and shout against "Democratic Centralism" in our own ranks, often understanding by Democratic Centralism the development of our principle line. Although it is annoying to lose time upon secondary questions, we must nevertheless occupy ourselves a little with these Democratic Centrals, in order to be clear as to the sectarian character of their policy and the adventurism founded on it. Since the "leaders" of Democratic Centralism whom we have until now left to themselves (and in that we have been right), have talked themselves out to the end, they have given us good weapons against themselves. We will take away the best elements from them with the help of their own documents, especially with the letters of V. Smirnov. We must not neglect even the smallest wound; otherwise poison threatens the whole organism. We will take away the workers with a courageous and determined policy in the weightiest questions, upon the one side, and with a campaign of clarification on the other.

## THE SLOGAN OF THE SECRET BALLOT

All the material I have received testifies that the slogan of the secret vote in the Party and the trade unions can and must be issued. Self-criticism has evolved to the point of half-comedy and half-provocation. That is clear to everyone. We must in our transitional slogans—our partial slogans, so to speak—give expression to the mood of the workers and their not yet very audible wish to get rid of pressure from above . . . "Why didn't you vote against it?" . . . "If there had been a secret ballot, it would have been different." That is to be heard everywhere.

Whether it will come to the secret ballot or whether intolerable contradictions will be solved in some shorter way, "jumping over" certain stages, is a special question. But for the given moment, the slogan of the secret ballot is a life question in the Party and the trade unions, since it gives to the fact of bureaucratic pressure, that is, class pressure upon the workers through the apparatus, a general expression. The slogan of the secret ballot is at the present stage the best expression for the struggle now beginning against the dual power. The open ballot was introduced in its time so that the enemy could not vote against the proletarian dictatorship. The element of dual power in the country has brought it about that the workers cannot vote for the dictatorship, through fear before the pressure of the bourgeoisie reflected through the apparatus. That is the gist of the matter. The apparatus-man stands on the tribune and watches the hands of the voters, or the worker's wife nuzzles him by the sleeve: "Better not vote." In these circumstances, to say that the secret ballot supports passivity and undecisiveness, is a surrender to idealistic doctrinairism.

Continued on page 6