

The Draft Program of the Comintern

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS ISSUE

The Soviet appears mostly and primarily in connection with strikes which have the perspectives of revolutionary development, but are in the given moment limited merely to economic demands. The masses must feel and understand while in action that the Soviet is THEIR organization, that it marshals the forces for a struggle for resistance, for self-defense and for an offensive. They can feel and understand this not on a one day experiment and in general not through one act, but on the experience of several weeks, months and perhaps years, with intermissions or without. Therefore, only an epigonian bureaucratic leadership can restrain the rising and mutinous masses from the creation of Soviets in conditions when the country is passing through big and revolutionary upheavals and when the working class and the poor peasants have before them the prospect of capturing power, even if only in one of the later phases and even if that prospect can be appreciated in the given phase only by a small minority. That was always our conception of the Soviets. We valued the Soviet as that broad and flexible organizational form which is understood by the masses who have just awakened in their very first phase of revolutionary action and which is capable of uniting the working class in its entirety, regardless as to how large a section of it has in the given phase already grown to the point of understanding the tasks of capturing power.

Is any further documentary evidence necessary? Here, for instance, is what Lenin wrote about the Soviets in the epoch of the first revolution:

"The R. S. D. L. P."—that was then the name of the party—"has never refused to utilize at MOMENTS OF GREATER OR SMALLER REVOLUTIONARY UNREST certain non-party organizations such as Soviets of workers' deputies for the strengthening of the influence of the Social Democrats on the working class and the consolidation of the Social Democratic labor movement". (Volume 13, page 215. [Our emphasis].)

One could cite such quotations from Lenin without number.

In contradistinction to this the epigones have converted the Soviets into a parading organizational uniform which the Party puts on the proletariat on the eve of the capture of power. But here we find that Soviets cannot be improvised in 24 hours, by order, with the direct object of an armed insurrection. Such experiments must unavoidably become of a fictitious character and the absence of the most necessary conditions for the capture of power be masqueraded by the external ceremonial of the Soviet system. That is what happened in Canton where the Soviet was simply appointed to perform the ritual. That is where the epigonian formulation of the question leads to.

In the polemics on the Chinese events the Opposition was accused of the following alleged crying contradiction. Whereas at the beginning of 1926 the Opposition advanced the slogan of Soviets for China, its representatives spoke against the slogan of Soviets for Germany in the Autumn of 1923. On no other point perhaps has scholastic political thought been expressed so glaringly as on this. Yes, we demanded for China a TIMELY start for the creation of Soviets as INDEPENDENT organizations of workers and peasants, ON THE BASIS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY UNREST. The chief significance of the Soviets was to be that of SETTING UP THE WORKERS AND PEASANTS AGAINST THE KUOMINTANG AND BOURGEOISIE and its Left Kuomintang agency. The slogan of Soviets in China first of all meant the break-up of the suicidal, shameful "Alliance of Four Classes" and the withdrawal of the Communist Party from the Kuomintang. The center of gravity consequently lay not in vague organizational forms, but in a class political line.

In the Autumn of 1923 in Germany it was a question of organizational form only. As a result of the extreme passivity, backwardness, and tardiness of the leadership of the Comintern and the Communist Party of Germany, the moment for a timely call for the organization of Soviets was missed and the factory committees had occupied in the labor movement of Germany by the Autumn of 1923 the place which, provided there had been a correct and daring poli-

A Criticism of Fundamentals

By L. D. Trotsky

cy on the part of the Communist Party, would have no doubt been much more successfully occupied by Soviets.

The acuteness of the situation had at the time reached its highest degree. It was clear that to lose further time would mean definitely to miss the revolutionary situation. The uprising was finally put on the agenda with very little time left. To advance the slogan of Soviets under such conditions would have been the greatest doctrinarism conceivable. The Soviet is not a talisman which has the power to save everything. In the situation such as had then developed the creation of Soviets in a hurry would only have duplicated the factory committees. It would have become necessary to deprive the latter of their revolutionary functions and to pass them over to the newly created Soviets which would have been absolutely without any activity. And when? In conditions when each day counted. This would have meant to substitute for revolutionary action a vicious and most harmful game in organizational gew-gaw.

Max Comes Clean

"My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves are ready for me . . . My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart . . . If I wait, the grave is mine house. I have made my bed in the darkness. I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister. And where is now my hope? as for my hope, who shall see it? They shall go down to the bars of the pit, when our rest together is the dust."—THE BOOK OF JOB, CHAP. XVII.

We have no special objections to any one of the Party bureaucrats going to Canossa in bare feet, following the "open address" of the Comintern. We don't protest even when a humble sinner wallops himself on the hind quarters from time to time as he drags his calloused belly along the ground. But the way in which it is being done by Max Bedacht in the Daily Worker, is a bit too much for the most hardened stomach and should be suppressed by the authorities as an obscene public display of masochistic self-flagellation inclined to arouse lewd and lascivious tendencies in the youth and in general present a menace to law and order. Between groans, Bedacht manages to gasp:

"Whenever and wherever a consciousness of this monstrous reality dawned upon us, we put our Party conscience to sleep with a soothing argument of identity of group and Party interest in our case.

"Spurred on by my factually corrupt logic, I have there helped to embody in document after document, in speech after speech, the monstrous idea that the Comintern plans to break up our Party because it is determined to break up 'my' faction.

"The feeling gradually grew in me that to put my will against the will of my World Party is a presumption not growing out of revolutionary, but out of petty bourgeois logic.

"The source of our error certainly was petty bourgeois opportunism. Was the Comintern justified in condemning us for our unprincipled factionalism, and is the conscious eradication of this factionalism a necessary prerequisite for the preparation of the Party for its serious tasks in this period? Of course it is.

"Thus the corruption of our own logic, wrought by six years of factional strife led us to a systematic negation of every important decision of the C. I. Can we hope to free ourselves from this corruption if we do not, first of all recognize its existence and acknowledge the justice of the C. I. criticisms?

"A rejection of the criticism . . . would transform the culprit from a Communist into petty bourgeois opportunism, a petty bourgeois politician and a rotten diplomat."

Translated from Bedachtian into American, this means: "What a scoundrel I have been! For six years I've been most unbolty scamp and wastrel. There was nothing too dirty for me. Up to the very last minute I sinned like a rake. I never went to mass or confessional. I corrupted the Party and was myself as corrupt as they come. I was a petty bourgeois politician; I was a right winger; I committed deviations with sinful glee; I chortled gaily at every new crime of my buddies, Lovestone and Giffow and me. In general, I was a pretty low dog.

"But now, comrades and brethren, I've seen the light. Oh, how I've seen the light! And praise the Lord, I am atoning for my sins! I wear a hair shirt next to my tender skin. I have shaved my head clean. I sleep on barbed wire mattresses. I'm going to fast longer than Terence McSwiney. I'm beating my breast

That the organizational form of a Soviet can be of gigantic importance, this is irrefutable, provided, however, that it reflects a correct political line and in proper time. It can, on the other hand be of no less negative importance if it is converted into a fiction, a talisman, a bagatelle. The creation at the very last moment of German Soviets in the Autumn of 1923 would have added nothing politically, it would only have caused organizational confusion. What happened in Canton is even still worse. The Soviet which was created in a hurry to perform the ritual was merely a masquerade for the adventurist putsch. That is why we found out after it was all over that the Canton Soviet was just one of those old Chinese dragons—simply drawn on paper. The policy of wire-pulling and paper dragons is not our policy. We were against the improvising of Soviets by telegraph in Germany in September 1923. We were for the creation of Soviets in China in 1926. We were against masquerade Soviets in Canton in 1927. There is nothing contradictory in that. In that we see a deep integral understanding of the dynamics of the revolutionary movement and its organizational forms.

The question of the role and significance of the Soviets which has been distorted and confused and overshadowed by the theory and practice of recent years, has not been illuminated in the least in the draft program.

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till my ribs are caved in, and I howl "Peccavi, peccavi, I have sinned" until my throat burns. . . I tear whole pieces of flesh out of my body. I throw myself to the lions and beg them to bite chunks out of my bleeding frame.

"The truth is, confidentially speaking, that I have to go through this rigorous treatment—and do even more—to keep my post as leader of the Party and show the boys in the ranks that if it's self-criticism they want, I'm the lad who can give it to them in two daily shifts of twelve hours each. It's a hard job, and I want all and sundry to cooperate with me in cleansing an infested body.

"So come along, fellows! Take a few cracks at me! Punch me in the nose. Sock me in the teeth. BBat me in the jaw. Bite off my ear. Hit me in the solar plexus. Throw stones at me and cover me with grime. Step violently on my toes. Kick my well-bruised bottom with hob-nailed boots. I take all comers and promise no resistance. Lay it on thick!

Well, we too are for self-criticism, but we are against self-flagellation. It would have been better for Bedacht to play the role not of a Job and Jeremiah rolled into one, but a naive, coy and sad Gretchen who wistfully regrets her seduction by Don Juan Lovestone or Bertraw D. Faust. The role of a fragile Gretchen might be a somewhat difficult one for Max, but he would at least be more amusing and certainly less painful.

THE EXPELLED

We print here the names of an additional number of comrades who have been expelled from the Party in Canada or the United States by the Stalinist bureaucrats. Despite the attempts of the opportunists to conceal their corrupt course by fake "unity" maneuvers and unprincipled combinations of Party officials at the top, workers in the Party continue to read and study the position of the Communist Opposition and take a stand on the principle questions raised by it. The names of the comrades recently expelled are as follows:

GUELPH, ONTARIO (Canada)

ALBERT J. FARLEY

CHICAGO

DAN POLLIN

A. BORNSTEIN

FANNIE MINUK

ROBERT GARVER

H. P. CLAUSEN

JOSEPH R. BOOTH

JOSEPH GODDISS

DETROIT

HARRY HOFF

BOSTON

SAM FRIEDMAN

We are further informed that a group of comrades in Montreal, Canada, have been expelled by the Stalinists for supporting the Opposition. Their names will be published later.

MASS MEETING IN BOSTON

BOSTON.—Max Shachtman, member of the national committee of the Communist League of America (Opposition) will speak here on Friday, June 21, 1929, at 7:30 p. m., at 62 Chambers Street, on the program of the Communist Opposition and the work of the recently concluded national conference. All workers are invited to attend and bring their friend. Ticket: are obtainable at Shapiro's Book Store, 7 Beach Street, Boston. The meeting is held under the auspices of the Boston Communist League. (Opposition).