

On the International Right Wing

A Letter to Boris Souvarine by L. D. Trotsky

NOTE

The letter written by comrade Trotsky to Boris Souvarine deals essentially with the standpoint of the Leninist Opposition towards the Brandler-Thalheimer group in Germany. Nevertheless, all that is said in the letter applies with multiplied force to the Right Wing group now being formed inside and outside the Communist Party of the United States. The letter of comrade Trotsky, with which the Communist League of America (Opposition) is in thorough accord, will therefore also serve as a final reply to the present Stalinist leaders of the Party who are seeking to drown out the echoes of their many years of cooperation with the international Right Wing in the Comintern and its American section, the Lovestone group, by shouting at the top of their lungs that we are now "in alliance with Lovestone"... Every serious worker will realize the obvious impossibility of an alliance between the Leninist wing of the Communist movement and the Thermidorian Right Wing, in the fight against which the Opposition was born and developed, and will finally conquer.—Editor.

I received your letter of April 16th, which astonished me somewhat. You emphasize that you expected something else from me with regard to the foreign Opposition groups.

I should not express myself right away, but first observe study, gather groups and people who are able to think and act as Marxists. You reproach me with acting precipitately and warn me that I will surely repent not having left myself the time to observe, reflect and to discuss.

In your criticism, which I notice with pleasure, is made in a very friendly tone, there is displayed the entire incorrectness of your present attitude. You must be aware of the fact that up till now I have not expressed myself on a single one of the disputed internal questions that divide the French, German, Austrian and other Opposition groups. For the last year I have been too far apart from the life of the European Parties and I really need time to familiarize myself with general political conditions as well as with the Opposition groups. If I have nevertheless expressed myself on the latter, it was only with regard to those three questions that serve as fundamental questions of our period: The internal policies in the U.S.S.R., the leadership of the Chinese revolution and the Anglo-Russian Committee. Is it not strange that you propose that precisely in these three questions I should not be precipitate, that I should gain time, to inform myself and to reflect? At the same time you yourself do not relinquish your right to express yourself openly on these three questions and what is more in a sense directly opposed to the decisions that form the real basis of the Left, Leninist Opposition.

POSITION OF THE BRANDLER GROUP

I declared in the press that I was completely ready to correct or to change my estimation of the Brandler group or their like in case I am informed of any new facts or documents. The Brandler group then very obligingly sent me all the writings published by them. In *Arbeiter-Politik* of March 16 I found Thalheimer's report on the Russian discussion. As a matter of fact I did not need much time for study and reflection in order to establish that the Brandler-Thalheimer group stands on the other side of the barricades. Let us remember some facts:

1. In 1923 this group did not grasp the revolutionary situation, nor did it understand how to utilize it.
2. In 1924 Brandler endeavored to see the revolutionary situation immediately ahead of him and not behind him.
3. In 1925 he declared that there had been no revolutionary situation at all, only an overestimation on Trotsky's part.
4. In 1925-26-27 he was of the opinion that the course based on the Kulak, the Stalin-Bucharin course of that time, was correct.
5. In 1923-25 Thalheimer—as a member of the Program Commission—supported Bucharin against me in the essential program question (empty schema of national-capitalism, instead of the theory of the connection of world economy and world politics).
6. So far as I know, Brandler and Thalheimer never raised their voice against the theory of socialism in a single country.
7. Brandler and Thalheimer sought to attain the leadership of the Party by availing themselves of the protective coloration of Stalin (as Foster does in America).
8. In the question of the Chinese revolution Brandler and Thalheimer hobbled along behind the official leadership.
9. The same thing in the question of the Anglo-Russian Committee.

And so I have before me the experience of a six-year period. It must be known to you that in the condemnation of Brandler I was in no way precipitate.

After the frightful collapse of the German Revolution of 1923 I gave Brandler a qualified protection; I declared it undeserved to put him up as the scape-

goat when the responsibility for the catastrophe in Germany lay with the Zinoviev-Stalin leadership of the Comintern as a whole. I reached a negative estimation of Brandler only when I became convinced that he did not for a single moment want to, nor could he, learn from the great events. His retrospective estimation of the German situation of 1923 is quite similar to the criticism that the Mensheviks developed on the 1905 revolution in the years of the reaction. I had enough time to "reflect" on all this.

THALHEIMER ON THE RUSSIAN DISCUSSION

The whole report of Thalheimer on the Russian discussion can be summed up in one sentence: "Trotsky's program demands a stronger financial pressure on the peasantry." Thalheimer plays variations on this sentence in his whole report. Can there be a more shameful position for a Marxist? The real question begins for me with the negation of the peasantry as a whole. It is a question of the class struggle within the peasantry. The Opposition raised the demand to free forty to fifty percent of the peasantry from taxes entirely. Since 1923 the Opposition always warned that the retardation in industry would signify the price scissors and consequently also the strongest and most destructive exploitation of the lowest sections of the village by the Kulaks, the middlemen and the tradesmen.

The middle section of the peasantry presents a social protoplasm. Uninterruptedly and unalterably, it assumes certain forms in two directions: in the capitalist direction through the Kulaks, and in the socialist direction through the semi-proletarians and the agricultural workers. Whoever ignores this basic process, whoever speaks of the peasantry in general, whoever does not see that the "peasantry" has two hostile faces, is irretrievably lost. The problem of the Thermidor and Bonapartism is fundamentally the problem of the Kulaks. Whoever overlooks this problem, minimizes its significance by seeking to draw off attention to the questions of the Party regime, of bureaucracy, of dirty polemical methods and other phenomena and manifestations of the offensive of the Kulaks against the dictatorship of the proletariat, resembles a doctor who hunts for the symptoms without noticing the functional and organic disorders.

At the same time, Thalheimer repeats like a well-coached parrot that the demand presented by us for the secret ballot in the Party is—"Menshevism". He must surely know that the worker-members of the R. C. P. do not trust themselves to speak, to vote according to their conscience. They are afraid of the apparatus which transmits the pressure of the Kulak, of the official, of the specialist (technical specialist), of the petty-bourgeoisie, of the foreign bourgeoisie. Of course the Kulak also wants secret voting in the Soviets, for he too is troubled by the apparatus which still stands, as always, under the pressure of the workers. These are precisely the elements of the dual power, covered up by the Centrist bureaucracy which maneuvers between classes and just because of that continuously undermines the positions of the proletariat. The Mensheviks want secret voting for the Kulak and the petty-bourgeois in the Soviets—against the workers, against the Communists. I want secret voting for the worker-Bolsheviks in the Party—against the bureaucrats, against the Thermidorians. But since Thalheimer belongs to those who overlook the classes, he declares the demands of the Leninist-Opposition identical with the demands of the Mensheviks. With this nonsense he seeks to mask his purely bourgeois position in the peasant question.

THE SECRET BALLOT

Naturally the secret ballot in the Party will be utilized not only by the worker-Bolsheviks but also by their enemies who have penetrated the Party. In other words, the class struggle within the Communist Party, now suppressed under the lid of the Bonapartist apparatus, will make its way into the open. That is just what we want. The Party will see itself as it really is. That would mean a real self-cleansing of the Party—as a counterpoise to that bureaucratically falsified purging that the apparatus is again undertaking in the interest of its self-preservation. Only after the cleansing of the Party in the above-mentioned sense can the secret ballot be carried over into the trade unions. After a number of years of the bureaucratic levelling of the trade unions we will be able to establish only in this way how great the influence of the Mensheviks, the Social Revolutionaries and the White Guards is in reality. Without seriously fathoming the whole class it will be impossible to hold firmly to the real dictatorship of the proletariat. At present, the diseases have been driven inside to such an extent that extraordinary measures are necessary to bring them to the surface. One of these measures, not the only one, to be sure, should be precisely the demand for the secret ballot in the Party and then also in the trade unions.

So far as the Soviets are concerned, the question

will first be decided after the experiences in the Party and in the proletarian factory organizations.

In all the basic questions of the world revolution and the class struggle, Brandler and Thalheimer joined with Stalin-Bucharin, who, precisely in these questions (China, English trade unions, peasantry), were supported by the social democracy. Nevertheless, Thalheimer defines as Menshevism the demand for the secret ballot for the proletarian vanguard against the apparatus which is carrying out Menshevism with the methods of terror.

Can one imagine a more wretched bankruptcy of ideas? I do not doubt that there are many workers in and around the Brandler group who, sickened with the sordid management of Thaelmann and Co., leave their Party, but have not found their way to the right door. The Leninist-Opposition must help these workers to find their way in the situation. But this can only be achieved in an irreconcilable and relentless struggle against the political course of Brandler-Thalheimer and all those groups that solidarize with them or actually support them.

THE VACILLATORS

The Stalin course in the Comintern has not yet spoken its last word. We are only entering upon a series of crises, splits, groupings and convulsions. Many years of work stand before us. Not everyone will measure up to it. You speak of the vacillations of Radek, Smilga and Preobrazhenski. I know all that very well. They are vacillating not for the first day, not for the first month, not even for the first year. It was always noteworthy in the highest degree that these comrades vacillated or adopted an incorrect position in the basic questions of the international revolution. Radek defended the incorrect line in the question of China, the Anglo-Russian Committee, and up to 1927 he was doubtful if after all any other economic course than that of Stalin-Bucharin was possible. Preobrazhenski adopted a quite false position in the Chinese question as well as in the question of the Comintern program (conciliatory attitude towards national-socialism). Smilga, together with Radek, was against the withdrawal of the Communist Party from the Kuo Min Tang, against the slogan of the dictatorship of the Chinese proletariat during the revolutionary period and against the slogan of the legislative national assembly in the period of the counter-revolution. The present vacillations of the above-named comrades in the question of Party organization are the consequences of the confusion and halfness of their general theoretical and political attitude. It was ever thus and thus it shall ever be.

Lenin taught us not to fear the departure, the splitting off, the desertion even of very respectable, influential comrades. In the final analysis the correctly maintained political line decides. To be able to hold to a correct line in a period of political ebb, of the offensive of the bourgeoisie, the social democracy and the Right-Centrist bloc in the Comintern (these are manifestations of one and the same condition)—that is now the main duty of a proletarian revolutionary. The correct estimation of the epoch and its dynamic forces, the correct prevision of the morrow will force all the really revolutionary elements of the working class to regroup themselves and to unite around the Bolshevik banner. That is my opinion on all these questions. That is how I see the things.

I would be glad if you could associate yourself with the above-mentioned observations. That would give us the possibility of working together. I am quite aware of how useful such a collaboration would be for our cause.

Constantinople, April 25, 1929. L. D. TROTSKY.

The Rumor Factory

The Daily Worker and the Freiheit have both published stories about an alleged Trotskyist named Konikov from Boston, who is working with the Right Wing in the Independent Workmen's Circle against the Communists and the Left Wing. As the correspondents and scribblers of these Stalinist organs know perfectly well, the Konikov involved has nothing whatsoever to do with the Opposition, unless it is by virtue of the fact that he is the former husband of one of our Boston comrades, Dr. Antoinette Konikov. But the Freiheit and Worker writers have had enough experience writing in the past for the yellow Jewish Forward and the capitalist press to utilize this pretty trick against an inconvenient opponent...

Our Minneapolis comrades inform us that the Stalinists there are busily engaged in spreading the story that comrade Martin Abern has sold out, left the Natl. Committee of the Opposition and become organizer of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union in St. Louis, while comrade Max Shactman was made organizer for the A. C. W. in Cleveland. We hear that we have also joined first with the Muste group and secondly that we are in joint committees with the Lovestone faction. Really, after our "alliance" with the Hoover and the Austrian government, our "new alliances" should be considered a step forward!