

On the Twelfth Anniversary of the Russian October

By L. D. Trotsky

The twelfth anniversary of October finds the Republic of the Soviets in a situation where the greatest successes are combined with the vastest difficulties, and the successes like the difficulties increase simultaneously. That is the essential feature of the situation, it is the great problem.

Industry has made and continues to make stupendous conquests, if they are judged on the capitalist scale. Agriculture in these last years has progressed much more slowly but its rise was indubitable. But, at the same time, we ascertain a wholly paradoxical fact: On the market, there is a very serious scarcity of merchandize which, in spite of the progress in general economy continues from year to year, attaining at certain periods a degree of extreme crisis. The most indispensable manufactured products are lacking despite the headlong progress of industry. And the insufficiency of agricultural products, even though the country has a preponderantly agricultural character, makes itself felt to a really intolerable point. What do these contradictions signify? They have two sorts of causes.

The essential causes lie in the objective situation of an economically backward country which found itself forced to be first to come to the dictatorship of the proletariat and to socialist construction. The causes of secondary order lie in the false policy of the leadership which suffers the influences of the petty bourgeoisie, which pursues a policy of circumstances, which is incapable of understanding the situation at the right time and of utilizing the economic and political resources of the dictatorship in the most rational manner.

The Soviet State does not pay interest on the old debts. It has no, or hardly any tribute to pay to the nobles, to the bankers to the manufacturers, etc. These two circumstances, and above all the second constitute a most important fund for the industrialization of the country.

The unification of the transport industry in one and the same management which is the workers' State, an absolute condition for an economy regulated by plan, has opened up inexhaustible possibilities for a rational application of forces and means, and consequently, for the acceleration of the economic growth of the country.

Such are the tremendous assets of the October revolution. The liabilities, which do not proceed from the revolution itself but from the conditions in which it was accomplished are these: The very low level of capitalist development of czarist Russia; the diffusion of an extremely backward peasant economy; the little culture of the masses of the people; finally, the isolation in which the Soviet Republic is found, hemmed in by a powerful and infinitely richer capitalist world.

The need of expending hundreds of millions annually for the maintenance of the army and the fleet is the most immediate and evident result of the hostile encirclement of the capitalist world.

Another consequence: The monopoly of foreign trade, which is imposed on the Soviet Republic just as imperiously as the army and the fleet. The abolition, or even only weakening of the monopoly of foreign trade (Stalin tried to attain that under the influence of Sokolnikov at the end of 1922) would not only mark a return of Russia to the path of capitalism, but the reduction of that country to a semi-colonial state.

But it must not be forgotten that the monopoly of foreign trade automatically excludes Russia from that international division of labor on the basis of which its capitalist evolution was accomplished. The immediate consequence, at a time when general economy has advanced, has been an extreme reduction in foreign trade. The rapid increase of the resources employed in the industrialization is therefore called forth, to a considerable extent, by the need for the Soviet Republic to produce all that bourgeois Russia received from the outside under much more advantageous conditions. If the socialist regime existed in other countries, the monopoly of foreign trade, of course, would not be necessary, and the U. S. S. R. would receive the products it lacks from more developed countries under incomparably more advantageous conditions than those it was used to when it was a bourgeois Russia. But in the present situation the monopoly of foreign trade, absolutely indispensable to protect

industry quite simply for the defense of the country. Thence, the general percentage of the growth of industry being very high, a chronic insufficiency of manufactured products.

Peasant economy, very scattered by a past tradition, became still more so following upon the October Revolution, in the measure that it had to be after a democratic agrarian revolution.

The diffusion of the agricultural enterprises would have created serious difficulties for the socialist transformation of rural economy in Russia, even in case the proletariat were in power in a more advanced country. These difficulties are much more considerable now that the country of the October Revolution is left entirely to itself. However, the extremely slow rhythm of the socialist transformation of village economy brings on more extended partition of peasant enterprises and is the cause, consequently, of a strengthening of their consuming powers. That is one of the reasons why agricultural products happen to be lacking.

The high cost of industrial products has no less a significance. That is the price industry must pay for its passage from a backward technique to a higher technique, and at the same time it must incessantly assure new investments in industrial branches that have become indispensable as a result of the regime of the monopoly of foreign trade. In other words: The village pays a heavy tribute to socialist industry.

The peasant class makes a serious distinction between the democratic agrarian revolution accomplished by the Bolsheviks and the foundation of a socialist revolution that they have laid. The lands of the State and the landlords are in the power of the peasants; it is a democratic revolution worth about half a billion rubles to the latter, by delivering them from the necessity of paying farm rent. But the peasants pay, as a result of the diversion of prices ("the scissors"), a much greater sum which is set down to the profit of State industry. Thus, the balance of the two revolutions, the democratic and the proletarian, united in October, shows, even now, a minus for the peasant class that can be estimated at several hundreds of millions of rubles. That is the incontestable and most important fact for him who wishes to estimate not only the economic situation but the political situation of the country. This fact must be considered plainly. It springs, at bottom, from the strained relations that exist between the peasant class and the government of the Soviets.

The increasing abatement of rural economy, the persistent scattering of its means, the "scissors" of agricultural prices and industrial prices, in a word, the economic difficulties that are manifest in the village, favor the growth of the power of the Kulaks and the progress of their influence in the country out of proportion to the number of these Kulaks and the material resources at their command. The grain surpluses that belong primarily to upper sections permit them to enslave the poor, to speculate in the sales made to the petty bourgeois elements of the city, and so these surpluses are excluded from the general trade of the State. Grain is lacking not only for export but for home needs. Exports being extremely reduced, the necessity arises not only of giving up the importation of manufactured products but of limiting to the last degree the importation of machinery and industrial raw materials, and in that case the slightest progress of industrialization must be paid for by an extreme tension of economic resources.

Thus is explained essentially, why, with a restoration of economy and a very rapid growth of industrialization, the Soviet Republic does not emerge from the regime of "the queue", a regime that constitutes the most vivid argument against the theory of socialism in one country.

But "the queue" is also an argument against the official practices in economy. Here we pass from the objective causes to the subjective causes, that is to say, primarily to the policy of the leadership. It is beyond doubt that a leadership, even the most correct and perspicacious, could

*"The queue" is now in effect so as to attain objects and products of primary need, and is based in the stage

not lead the U. S. S. R. to a building of socialism within the national framework if it remained closed to world economy by the monopoly of foreign trade. If the proletarian revolution in the advanced capitalist countries were set back a few dozen years, the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Soviet Republic would inevitably fall, succumbing under the economic contradictions, in their pure form, or as a result of a military intervention. In the language of politics, this means that the fate of the Soviet Republic, in the general conditions that we have characterized above, is determined as much by the internal economic direction as by the direction given to the revolutionary struggle of the international proletariat. And, in the end, it is precisely this last factor that must determine everything.

A correct economic direction in the U. S. S. R. is the utilization of the resources and the possibility by means of which socialist progress is accompanied by a genuine and tangible improvement of the condition of the working masses. At this moment, it is not at all a question, practically, of "surpassing" all of world economy—a task which would be fantastic—but of consolidating the industrial bases of the proletarian dictatorship and of improving the condition of the workers, by strengthening the first political principle of the dictatorship, that is, the alliance of the proletariat with the non-exploiting peasants.

A correct policy in the U. S. S. R. must make the dictatorship last as long as possible under the conditions of isolation in which the country finds itself. A correct policy of the Communist International must, as much as possible, bring closer the victory of the proletariat in the advanced countries. At a certain point these two lines must merge. It is only on this condition that the present Soviet regime, full of contradictions, will have the possibility, without any Thermidor, without counter-revolution, without new revolutions, of developing itself into a socialist society on a basis that will go on widening, which must finally, extend over the whole globe.

Time, which is one of the most important factors in politics in general, has a decisive character when it is a question of the fate of the U. S. S. R. Now, the present leadership, since 1923, has done everything to let time pass by without profiting by it. The years 1923, 1924 and 1925 were devoted to the struggle against "super-industrialization": By that was meant a demand of the Opposition aiming to accelerate industrial development; these years were employed in fighting against the principle of a general plan and against economic forecasts. If industrialization then advanced more quickly, it was by empirical means, by jerks, by brutal methods that crushed everything along the road, and from that the expenses of construction have been multiplied, the condition of the working masses has become more difficult.

It is six years ago that the Opposition demanded the elaboration of a five year plan. This demand was met with ridicule at the time, entirely in the spirit of a small boss who dreads to face great problems and broad perspectives. That is what we called Menshevism in economy. In April 1927, Stalin declared, for example, that the hydro-electric station of Dnieper was just as little necessary to the country as a phonograph to a moujik (poor peasant), and at the same time he denied absolutely that the rhythm of our economic revolution depended on world development.

The five year plan has come after a delay of five years. The errors, the transformations and the corrections of the last years took place without any general plan, and it is for this sole reason that the leadership learned so very little from them. One cannot neglect to say here that the first draft was thoroughly imbued with the most niggardly spirit of minimalism, with a great economic timidity. This draft was mercilessly criticized in the Platform of the Opposition. It is only under the action of our criticism which corresponds to the keenest needs of economic development, that the five year plan was remade from one end to the other in the course of the year.

All the grounds invoked against "super-industrialization" were suddenly rejected. The apparatus, which had worked for several years in the spirit of economic

Menshevism received the order to regard as heresy all that had been considered holy scripture only the day before, and as a set-off to transform into official figures the heresies that were called "Trotskyism" only yesterday. The apparatus—Communists and specialists—were not at all prepared for this: They had been educated in a wholly different spirit. The first attempts at resistance or timid protestations were mercilessly punished. And how could it be otherwise? To allow explanations would be to disclose that the leadership was bankrupt, having lost all the principles of its theory. This time again the apparatus submitted silently. To him* who directed the elaboration of the plan, this formula is attributed: "It is better to stand up for a rapid development than to lay (in prison) for a less rapid development."**

If the new plan were elaborated under blows, it is not hard to imagine, when it is a question of applying it, what resistance it will encounter from the apparatus, nine-tenths of which is more to the Right than the official Right. The Left Wing, from whose platform the essential ideas of the new five year plan have been copied, remains under the hail of repression and calumny. The apparatus lives in expectation of new changes and rights-about-face, not deciding even to call to its aid the union of poor peasants. The Party is placed each time before an accomplished fact. The apparatus has no confidence in it and fears it. Under these conditions, no one sees in the new five year plan the expression of a considered and more or less assured course to the Left. No one, unless it be the capitulators.

As much must be said of the policy of the Communist International. From the alliance with Chiang Kai-Shek, from the theory of the "Bloc of four classes", from the slogan of workers' and peasants' Parties, from amicable collaboration with the General Council of the British Trade Unions that crushed the General Strike, the Communist International in twenty-four hours has arrived at the slogan: No agreements with the reformists, fight against social pacifism for the possession of the streets. The new acute angle of this zig-zag is founded on the theory of the "third period" which can be said to be specifically calculated to spread illusions, to provoke adventures and to prepare a new evolution, as usual, towards the Right.

The twelfth anniversary of the October Revolution takes place at a time when the Soviet Republic and the International are in the greatest difficulties and contradictions that show, by way of opposites, the correctness of the Marxist theory of the socialist revolution. With Lenin, we entered into the October Revolution, profoundly convinced that the revolution in Russia could not have a finished character, independent of the other countries. We estimated that this revolution could only be the first link of the world revolution and that the fate of this link depended upon the destinies of the whole chain. We remain today on this position. The progress its contradictions, and the progress would be inevitably absorbed by the contradictions if the Republic of the Soviets were not supported later on by the successes of an international revolution.

The exclusion from the Party and the rigorous persecutions exercised against the revolutionary wing in the Soviet Republic are the political expression of the contradictions of a proletarian revolution isolated in a backward country. Paradoxical though the fact may be that the Bessedovskys—and they are innumerable—are the first to expel the Rakovskys, and that on the first occasion they pass over to the Whites, the fact is no less logical for it.

Spinoza said: "Not to laugh, not to weep, but to understand." To understand, in order to continue the fight for the October Revolution.

The thirteenth year will mark an aggravation of the contradictions. The Party deprived of forces and strangled, can be suddenly surprised. At the first great difficulty that arises, the Bessedovskys of all kinds will raise their heads. The Central apparatus will show that it is only an apparatus and nothing more. The proletariat

*The reference is to Rykov, who reported on the plan.

**A play on words in the original which loses its point in translation.

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