

# The Defense of the Soviet Union and the Opposition

## Groupings in the Left Opposition

We have established three fundamental currents in International Communism: the Right, the Centrist and the Left (Marxist). This classification does not, however, exhaust the question, since it leaves the ultra-Leftists unconsidered. But they exist, carry on activity, make mistakes and threaten to compromise the cause of the Opposition.

It is true that there are no longer any, or hardly any, ultra-Leftists of that naive-revolutionary, "aggressive" type to which Lenin devoted his well-known book. Nor have many ultra-Leftists of the spirit of 1924-25 (Maslow and others) remained in the Opposition. The experiences of the defeats did not pass by without effect. But far from all of the former ultra-Leftists assimilated the lessons of these years. Some liberated themselves from prejudices and preserved the revolutionary spirit. Others lost the revolutionary spirit and preserved the prejudices. Nevertheless there have remained not a few ultra-Leftists poisoned with scepticism. They freely proclaim a formal radicalism in all those cases where it puts them under no obligation. In practical questions they incline largely to opportunism.

If reformism is an irreconcilable enemy, then ultra-Leftism is the internal disease that impedes the struggle with the enemy. We must be freed of it at any cost.

For many months I attempted, by letters, to attain clarity from the National Committee of the Leninbund on the fundamental questions of Communist policy. Nothing came of it. The differences of opinion proved to be too great. There is no other way than to bring them out into the open and submit them to a serious examination. All the more so since the beginning of such a discussion has already been made by the editorial board of the journal of the Leninbund, when, in connection with the conflict between China and the Soviet Union, not only serious but positively decisive differences of opinion resulted in the Left Communist Opposition. In connection with this question, groupings have already arisen. Personal shiftings will of course, also follow. One group of comrades, who have adopted a false standpoint, will correct it. Others on the contrary, will deepen their mistakes to the extreme, that is, they will end with the complete surrender of the Marxist position. That is how it always happens with deep-going differences when the as yet undefined differences of opinion are controlled by great events.

Every evil also has its virtue. There is too much spiritual stagnation and routine in the various Opposition groups. Exhaustive scrutiny of the great political events makes it possible for the vital elements and groups of the Opposition to find their right place more easily and to accelerate thereby the spiritual crystallization process around the real, and not the imaginary axis.

## Formalism instead of Marxism

In the question of the conflict between China and the Soviet Union we have two fundamental viewpoints that are bound up with the most important problems of the international revolution and of Marxist method.

The most consummate expression of its kind of the formal-Leftist viewpoint was given by Louzon\*. According to his whole manner of thought, it was also easiest for him. Louzon is no Marxist, but a formalist. He handles geography, technique, statistics much better than the materialist dialectic of class society. A great deal can frequently be learned from his articles, only one cannot learn anything politically from them. Louzon is much more occupied by abstract, national "justice" than by the real struggle for the liberation of the oppressed peoples. Louzon points out in detail that the Chinese Eastern Railway was built by czarism for the purpose of robbery and plunder. He shows on the map that this railway runs through Manchuria. He proves by statistical data that Manchuria has been colonized by Chinese peasants for the last decades. In this way, we have a Russian railway on Chinese soil next to the railways of the imperialist states. Where does the difference lie? asks Louzon. There is no difference, or practically none—he concludes. The treaty of 1924 was an imperialist treaty. Lenin would surely have returned the railway to China. Louzon knows this quite definitely.

In order to demonstrate whether a pol-

\*Louzon is one of the editors of *La Revolution Proletarienne*, organ of the Syndicalist League of France.

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icy bears an imperialist character, it is enough, according to Louzon, to establish: "What people lives in this province?" If Northern Manchuria is populated by Russians—then the policy of the czar and the Soviet Union is legitimate; but if it is populated by Chinese, then this policy means nothing else but robbery and subjugation." (*Revolution Proletarienne*, August 1, 1929). To read these lines one cannot believe his eyes. The policy of the czar and the policy of the workers' state are considered exclusively from the national viewpoint and then completely identified. Louzon declares the policy of the czar in the Russian regions to be legitimate (legitimate). For us, however, the policy of the czar was no less criminal, thievish and enslaving in Siberia than in Manchuria. The policy of the Bolsheviks, whether good or bad, carries out the same principles in Manchuria, in Siberia and in Moscow. Comrade Louzon! Apart from nations there are still classes. The national problem outside of class relations is a fiction, a lie and a noose for the proletariat.

Louzon's method is not Marxism but naked schematism. It finds its punishment in the fact that the social democratic papers almost without exception develop the same line of thought and come to a similar conclusion. The decision of the Second International, made under the direction of Otto Bauer, covers itself precisely with Louzon's ideas. And how could it possibly be otherwise? Social democracy is necessarily formalistic. It feeds upon analogies between Fascism and Communism. To it, all those who "deny" or violate democracy are equal. Its highest criterion (in words) is "democracy", which the reformists place above the classes. That is exactly how Louzon proceeds with the principle of national self-determination. That is all the more remarkable since Louzon, as a syndicalist, is rather inclined to repudiate democracy formally. But it frequently happens with the formalists that they reject the whole only to bow to the part. National self-determination is an element of democracy. The struggle for this right, as for democracy in general, plays a great role in the life of the people, especially in the life of the proletariat. Whoever does not understand how to utilize the institutions and forms of democracy, among them also parliamentarism, in the interests of the proletariat, is a poor revolutionary. But from the proletarian standpoint, neither democracy as a whole, nor national self-determination as an essential part of it, stands above the classes, nor does it form a higher criterion of revolutionary policy. That is why we regard the social democratic analogy between Fascism and Bolshevism as a swindle. On the same grounds, we also characterize as a gross error the comparison, on the basis of the laws of symmetry, of the treaty between Soviet Russia and China of 1924 with the imperialist treaties.

To whom would Louzon have wished to give the Chinese Eastern Railway in 1924? To the Peking government? But this government had neither arms with which to take it nor legs with which to reach it. The Peking government was a pure fiction. Marshal Tchang Tso-Lin, the leader of the Chun Chu-sen, the dictator and hangman of Manchuria, the paid agent of Japan, the mortal foe of the national revolutionary movement which broke out violently in 1925 and transformed itself in 1926 into an expedition of the South against the North, and finally against Tchang Tso-Lin—he was a reality. To surrender the railway to the Manchurian Marshal would mean, in reality, to enter into an alliance with him against the Chinese revolution which was developing. That would have been better in no respect than the delivery of cannon and munitions to White Poland in 1920 during its war with the Soviet Republic. That would be no fulfillment of revolutionary duty, but the most disgraceful treason to the Chinese revolution, the real one that is being accomplished by classes, and not its abstract shadow that lives in the head of Louzon and formalists like him.

Lost in contradictions, Louzon goes so far in his contentions as to reprove the Soviet government for the fact that, on September 20, 1924, it signed a treaty with Tchang Tso-Lin, "the most reactionary of all militarists that ever ruled in China." True, the most reactionary. Instead of concluding a treaty with him, which protected the railway from this worst reactionary, we should rather according to Louzon, simply have made him a gift of it.

Of course the treaty of 1924, which abolished all the imperialist privileges of Russia, gave no absolute guarantees

against Tchang Tso-Lin, for the latter had troops in Manchuria while the Soviet troops were a great distance away. But however far they may have been, they existed. Tchang Tso-Lin sometimes took the offensive, sometimes he beat a retreat. He demanded, for example, that the railway unquestionably convey his counter-revolutionary troops, but basing itself upon the treaty, the railway made all sorts of difficulties for him. He arrested the director of the railway, but then beat a retreat. Quite rightly he did not rely upon his forces alone. But Japan, for various reasons, decided not to support him openly and remained on the watch. All together, this was a great gain for the Chinese revolution which developed from the South to the North.

## Revolutionary Aid or Imperialist Intervention

So as to illuminate even more glaringly the barrenness of Louzon's formalism, we would like to consider the question from another side. It is well known that the imperialists, in order to intrench themselves in a backward country, frequently arm one tribe against the other, one province against the others, one class against the others. That is how, for example, the United States systematically proceeds in cutting its road to South America. On the other hand it is well known that the Soviet government rendered far-reaching aid to the Chinese national revolutionary army from the first days of its formation, especially during its campaign from the South to the North. The social democrats of the whole world howled with the bourgeoisie over the military "intervention" of the Soviet Union in China and wanted to see in it only the revolutionary veiling of the old policy of czarist imperialism. Does Louzon agree with that or not? This question is also directed to all of Louzon's imitators. We Bolsheviks, on the contrary, believe that the aid rendered the Chinese revolution—through ideas, men, money, arms—was the elementary duty of the Soviet government. That the Stalin-Bucharin leadership inflicted political injuries upon the Chinese revolution that far outweighed the value of the material support, is a special point we will yet speak of. The Mensheviks accuse the Soviet government of imperialism, not because of the Menshevik line of Stalin-Bucharin in the question but because of the intervention in Chinese affairs and the aid rendered the Chinese revolution. Was this intervention a crime or a service of the Soviet government, comrade Louzon? It is really hard for me to speak here of a service, for the intervention was only the fulfillment of an elementary duty which arose as much out of the interests of the Russian revolution as the Chinese. Now I ask: Could the Soviet government, while it assisted the South with its left hand, hand over the Chinese Eastern Railway to the North with its right hand, to the North against which the war was directed?

Our answer will be: Since the Soviet government could not transfer its railway from the North to the South in order to facilitate for the revolution the attack against the militarists of the North, it had to retain the railway firmly in its hands in order thereby to prevent the imperialists and militarists from transforming it into a weapon against the Chinese revolution. That is how we understand revolutionary duty in the genuine struggle for the genuine right of national self-determination of China.

At the same time there was still another task. The policy towards the railway had to be so fashioned that the Chinese masses, at least its advanced sections, could clearly understand the liberating aims and tasks of the Soviet government with regard to China. I have already spoken of this when I cited the decisions, formulated by me and adopted in April 1926, of the Commission of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party. The essence of those decisions was: We regard the Chinese Eastern Railway as a weapon of the world revolution. More directly: of the Russian and the Chinese revolutions. World imperialism can of course, directly or indirectly, openly or concealedly, tear the railway from us. So as to avoid serious consequences, we might reach the point of having to surrender the railway to imperialism, as we were compelled to sign the Brest-Litovsk peace. But so long as we have the power and possibility, we will protect it from imperialism and hold it ready to be handed over to the victorious Chinese revolution. Towards this end, we

are already establishing schools for the Chinese railwaymen, striving to train them not only technically but also politically.

That is precisely what arouses the wrath of the Chinese reactionaries. Reuter's Telegraphic Agency carried the following declaration of Wang, the present Chinese Foreign Minister: "The only path for China is the unification of all nations to resistance against Red Imperialism, otherwise China will perish in the clutches of Communism". It is not, as we see, a question of imperialism as such. On the contrary, the Chinese government appeals to imperialism against "Red Imperialism", which it identifies with the peril of Communism. Can one wish for a clearer, more precise, more deliberate formulation?

Louzon sought to demonstrate that the sympathies of the imperialist states are on the side of the Soviet government and against China. In reality, he only showed that the attitude of the imperialists towards the Soviet republic is a conflicting one in certain questions. Where imperialism bases itself upon the inviolable right of property, it is compelled to concede this right to the Soviet state as well. Were this not the case, then even trade, for example, between the Soviet republic and the capitalist countries would be impossible. But should it come to war, then the occasion for the war, that is, the issue of the possession of the railway would fade into the background. The imperialists would consider the question only from the standpoint of the struggle against the danger that they call "Red Imperialism", that is against the international proletarian revolution.

In this connection, it is not superfluous to recall the conduct of the White emigrants in the Far East. Even the New York Times wrote: "Here (in Washington governmental circles) the possibility is conceded that the White Russians may have provoked the incidents (the clashes at the border) on the Chinese side, which would hardly have happened otherwise" (August 17). According to Louzon, it is a question of China's national right to self-determination. Chiang Kai-Shek embodies democratic progress, the Moscow government—imperialist dominion. The White emigrants are nevertheless, for some reason or other, on the side of the right to national self-determination of China and against Russian imperialism. Doesn't this fact alone show what a hopeless mess Louzon got himself into by supplanting class politics with geography and ethnography. The White bandits who kill Red Army men at the Chinese frontiers are much more at home, in their fashion, in politics than Louzon. They do not get tangled up in secondary matters, but reduce the question to its essence: the struggle of the world bourgeoisie against the revolution.

## Pacifism instead of Bolshevism

By giving up the class standpoint in favor of the abstract, national standpoint, the Ultra-Leftists necessarily slide down the revolutionary to the purely pacifist position. Louzon tells how the Soviet troops captured the Siberian railway, and how then the "Red Army in conformity with the anti-imperialist policy of Lenin, carefully (seignement) called a halt before China's frontiers; no attempt was made to re-occupy the territory of the Chinese Eastern Railway." (*Revolution Proletarienne*, page 228). So then, the highest duty of the proletarian revolution consists in this: carefully to lower its standards before national frontiers. That is where the essence lay, according to Louzon, of Lenin's anti-imperialist policy! One is ashamed to read this philosophy of the "revolution in one country". The Red Army called a halt before the frontier of China because it was not strong enough to cross this frontier and face the inevitable attack of Japanese imperialism. Had the Red Army been strong enough for such an attack, it would have had the duty to undertake it. Its abandonment of the revolutionary attack upon the forces of imperialism would have been a surrender of the interests of the Chinese workers and peasants and the proletarian world revolution and would not have meant the fulfillment of Leninist policy, but only a shameful betrayal of the ABC of Marxism. Wherein lies the misfortune of Louzon and his like? In the fact that he substitutes national-pacifist for international-revolutionary policy. That has nothing in common with Lenin.

TO BE CONTINUED

Max Shachtman will speak on the Hoover Program at the open forum of the N. Y. Communist League branch on Saturday, December 21, 8 p. m. at the Millant Hall, 25 Third Avenue, Room 4. All workers cordially invited.