The Russian Opposition Replies to the Capitulators

By Christian Rakovsky

The departure of the capitulators from the Opposition served as an impetus to the formation of a crisis, which was ripening within the Opposition (mass arrests, provocations everywhere, solitary confinement, the hard material conditions of the exiles as a result of the reduction of the allowance by half, the banishment of L. Trotsky, etc., and on the other hand a certain division in the Opposition caused by the "Left course" of the Centrist Leadership.) Without the severe persecutions, the Left course would have pushed new sympathizers into the ranks of the Opposition because it would signify the intellectual bankruptcy of Centrism. But it is just as true to say that without the new course the persecutions would not have had the same effect, which they have now achieved. The "Left course" played the part of fig-leaf for a Centrist decay and opportunism.

Between Two Fires

It is superfluous to characterize the methods of persecution. We'll note only that it manifested itself not in open violence alone but also in depriving the Opposition of the elementary rights of correspondence, and in the "technical aid" of its own particular kind which the G. P. U. extended to the capitulators, reaching the point where the apparatus itself, at least in certain localities, distributed the documents of the capitulators. Some of the capitulators, staying with the Opposition, acted according to the instructions of the apparatus (Istchenko) or according to the preliminary agreement with it, negotiations between Preobrazhensky and Yaroslavsky, or Preobrazhensky and Ordjonikidze) that the "bombardment" of the Opposition will proceed from two shores: the Centrist and the Oppositionists'. The Opposition was caught between two fires. The famous "freedom of correspondence" actually amounted to a real freedom for the capitulators alone, and to an "abstract freedom" for the Leninist Opposition. It must be noticed also that even here a special differentiated postal policy was applied: the documents of the capitulators were not allowed to reach those comrades from whom a definite resistance could have been expected. Answers to the capitulators' documents were suppressed entirely.

The intellectual crisis had begun already a year ago last April. Preobrazhensky and Radek were the inciters of the "revaluation of values". The first with a certain consistency, the second, as usual, wriggling and making jumps from the very extreme Left position to the very extreme Right and back again. Radek, by the way, reproached Preobrazhensky for his negotiations with Yaroslavsky.

Preobrazhensky was writing and saying approximately the following: "The Centrists' leadership is beginning to fulfill one part of the Platform, its economic part; as far as the political part of the Platform goes—it will be realized by life itself. The Opposition has fulfilled its historical mission, it has exhausted its values. It ought to come back to the Party and rely on the natural course of events."

Thus the question of the interpretation of the Platform created two camps: the revolutionary Leninist camp fighting for the realization of its whole Platform, as formerly the Party fought for the whole program, and the opportunist capitulatory camp, which expressed its readiness to be satisfied with the "industrialization" and the collective farming policy, not giving a thought to the fact that without the realization of the political part of the Platform the whole socialist construction might fly up in the air.

Defects in the Opposition

The Opposition, which came out of the Party, is not free, in certain of its sections, from the defects and habits cultivated by the apparatus year after year. It is not free, first of all, from a certain dose of philistinism. The bureacratic atavism is especially hard to kill in those Oppositionists who used to stand closest to the leadership of the Party or the Soviet apparatus. It is infected partly with the fetichism of the Party book in contrast to loyalty to the Party itself, to its ideals, it historical task —loyalty inherent only in those who still want to fight further for the reformation of the Party. Finally, it is not free from that most injurious psychology of the falsifiers of Leninism, which was cultivated by the same apparatus. That is why each capitulator, running away from the Opposition, will not miss a chance to kick Trotsky with his small hoof, shod with the nails of the Yaroslavsky-Radek factory. In different conditions this inheritance of the apparatus would be easily outgrown. In the present conditions of heavy repression it comes out on the body of the Opposition in the form of an eruption of capitulators. The sifting out of those who did not think the Platform through to the end, who dream of quiet comfort, naively hiding it under the desire to take part in "grandiose fights" was inevitable. Moreover, this sifting out may have a salutary effect on the ranks of the Opposition. Those will stay in who do not regard the Platform as a sort of restaurant menu from which anyone can pick out a dish according to his own taste. The Platform was and remains the war-banner of Leninism, and only its complete realization can lead the Party and the proletarian land out of the blind alley into which they were herded by the Centrist leadership.

Those who understand that precisely the fight of the Opposition is that "grandiose fight" on the issue of which depends the future of socialist construction, the fate of the Soviet power, of the world revolution—those will not desert their posts.

As a leit-motif in the theses of the capitulators, the same thought was repeated again and again: We must return to the Party. One who does not know the story of our expulsion from the Party might think that we left it ourselves and voluntarily went into exile. To put the question that way means to transfer the responsibility for our being in exile and out of the Party from the Right-Centrist leadership to the Opposition.

We were in the Party and we wished to stay in it even when the Right-Centrist leadership denied the very necessity of drawing up any kind of a five-year plan, and calmly encouraged "the Kulaks growing into socialism". Still more do we wish to be in the Party now, when—even if only in one part of it—a Left turn is taking place, and when it has gigantic tasks before it to fulfill. But the question before us is of an entirely different order: Will we agree to go off the Leninist line to please Centrist Opportunism? The greatest enemy of the proletarian dictatorship—is a dishonest attitude towards one's convictions. If the Party leadership, imitating the Catholic church, which at his death-bed compels an atheist to be converted to Catholicism, extorts from the Oppositionists a recognition of imaginary mistakes and a denial of their own Leninist convictions, it loses, by this very fact, every right to be respected. The Oppositionist who changes his convictions over-night deserves only complete scorn. This practise developes a clamorous, light-minded sceptical attitude towards Leninism, the typical representative of which Radek has again become, generously scattering to the Right and to the Left his philistine aphorisms about "moderation". The types of Shchedrin* are eternal. They are reproduced by each epoch of social-political relations, with only their historical costumes changed.

Arguments of the Capitulators

One of the favorite methods of the capitulators is to sow panic by representing the present conditions in the country as "pre-Kronstadt conditions" (Preobrazhensky's expression). On his way to Moscow, at the Ishim station, Radek represented the struggle between the Rights and Centrists as similar to that which took place in the Convention on the eve of the 9th of Thermidor (French revolution). He said: "They are preparing arrests for each other." Radek pointed out also that the Rights might get hold of the majority in the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission, although out of approximately 300 members and candidates in the last Plenum, the Rights did not get more than a dozen votes. The same people who, in their declaration of July 13, assert that the Centrist leadership has completely prevented the back-sliding or the "rolling" (as they delicately express themselves so as to save the virginal modesty of the leadership) are now saying, in other circumstances, something altogether different. Which to believe? But even if we accept the first hypothesis, does it not follow from that, that we must sacrifice Leninism to Centrist opportunism? Of course not!

In the brief periods of his intellectual enlightment, Radek understood this perfectly. Last year, after the July plenum of the Central Committee, he wrote to Rakovsky in Astrachan that Stalin had completely surrendered his position, that the Rights will seize power, that Thermidor is on the threshold, that what the Leninist Opposition has got to do is to preserve the "theoretical heritage of Leninism." A political person must take into consideration the posible variations of events in the fututre, but his tactics would become risky adventurism if he were to base them only upon confused suppositions. The following small example shows how impermissable it is: I. N. Smirnov supposed that the C. C., in view of the difficult conditions in the country, would not demand from the trinity a capitulatory document. But seeing the negotiations slow up, Smirnow wrote a postal card on July 12: "I think, that the alleviation of the crisis (the harvest) played a definite part in it." The capitulators themselves, by the way, spread rumors about the conciliatory moods of the Centrist leadership towards the Rights, in connection with the above-mentioned harvest. It is doubtful if even those moods are lasting. The liquidation of the Right leaders, their removal from leading posts, seems to be a settled question.

*A famous Russian satirist of the late 1890's.

Concurrently with the drawing up of their declaration, Rakovsky, Okudjava and Kossior drew up an extensive principle thesis in which they characterize the conditions in the country and in the Party, define the meaning and tasks of the declaration of July 22. These theses, in manuscript form, received a wide dstribution among the exiles and in the country. After a considerable delay, the two copies of the concluding chapter of the thesis reached us. In view of its size we can only give extracts from it here.

Since some very "radical" critics saw in the declaration of Rakovsky almost a capitulation, we present here first of all that part of the theses in which Rakovsky characterizes the capitulators (Radek, Preobrazhensky, Smilga) and the tendency towards capitulation in general.

Radek is "Always Ready!"

The Centrist leadership cleared the way to the Left and to the right so as to maneuver itself. If it makes up its mind to a new swing to the Right, the removal of the Right leaders will insure it against the loss of power. Exactly in the same way, it is indispensable for it to remove the Left Opposition: to remove a political group which could stand at the head of the Left current in the party, and which is now fighting particularly against bureaucratic methods of rationalization at the expense of the working class. In answer to a question about Trotsky, Radek said at Ishim: "We may have to make concessions to the peasants, and Trotsky will accuse us of Thermidorianism." Does this mean that some kind of rumor has already reached Radek's trained ear, or is it that, wishing to please the hidden desires ofth e Centrist leadership, this political "Communist youth" shouts in advance: "Always ready!" No one can guarantee that in case of a new grain strike, the Centrist leadership will not jump from Article 107—against the Kulak—to the Neo-Nep. On the contrary, it is very probable that they will.

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The declaration of the trio on July 13, is a false and opportunist document. One part of it is a continuation of the work which the three have been conducted already last year, and especially in the latest months, spreading false notions about the opinions prevalent among the Opposition. By bringing the accusation against Trotsky and the Opposition, pretending that they assert that power is not in the hands of the working class, that Trotsky is "revising Leninism" and that the Opposition as a whole is going towards the creation of a new party, the three capitulators furnish, by this very fact, a new weapon to the party leadership for the further persecution of the Opposition. In its second part, thedeclaration of July 13 tries to rehabilitate not only the majority of the C. C. but also the whole past policy of the Right-Center bloc. The policy of the Right Center bloc, which promoted the strengthening of the class enemy, is now being presented as a "Leninist" policy; the policy of the Leninist Opposition, on the contrary, under the direct influence of which the line of the party, if even but partially, was straightened out—is presented as a "[illegible] part." With their declaration of July 13 the trio openly [illegible]

corruption of Leninism in which the majority is engaged. Instead of a Marxist discussion of the concrete changes that took place in the Soviet state during its existence (its economic, political and juridical institutions and in the relationships of classes in the country), the capitulators began a metaphysical argument about the "nature" and the "essence" of the proletarism dictatorship in general. They imitate the chaff-threshing metaphysicians, scholiasts and sophists against whom every page and line of the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin rebel. This, from the standpoint of historical materialism, good-for-nothing argument has nevertheless pursued a definite practical goal. Uncermoniously distorting the texts taken from the documents of their adversaries, replacing the terms "Centrism" and "Centrist leadership" with the terms "Soviet government" and "proletarian dictatorship", the capitulators intended to approach, step by step, to the point where they could call Centrism one hundred percent Leninism. To call such methods of polemics anything but theoretical forgery, is impossible.

What Radek & Co. Overlooked

In their document, the capitulators write: "We overlooked (!) the fact that the policy of the C. C. was and remains Leninist". How does it happen that it "was" Leninist, when it was one half enected by the Rights, against whom the capitulators call for a struggle in the same document? But you cannot demand from people who have acepted the road of intellectual capitulation to be logical. Even before the actual presentation of their declaration, the trio were getting the comrades in exile ready for their "evolution." Already in a letter from Radek to Barnaoul, on May 21, the word "Centrism" disappears and in its place appears a "Stalinist nucleus," which proves to be more Left than the workers' sector of the party. In the document "Questions and Answers"—a commentary on the draft of the declaration with which Preobrazhensky had left for Moscow—the term "Centrism" is already put in quotation marks. But while wearing out the front steps of the C. C., Preobrazhensky lost the quotation marks as well as the term itself, together with his draft of the declaration. Some people assert that there never was but one copy of that draft made. Probably Preobrazhensky did not want to leave any material traces of the swift metamorphoses to which his sociological "nature" was doomed. Neither was anything left of the heroic pose which Smilga, on the trip from Minusinnsk to Moscow, assumed against Centrism.

The basic issue between the capitulators and the Leninist Opposition was and remains Centrism. To those whose memory is short, it is necessary to recall how Centrism was defined by the Platform. Centrism, as its name testifies, represents a tendency "to sit on the fence": It does not consistently reflect either the interests of the proletariat or the interests of the bourgeoisie. Centrism is distinguished by its eclecticism. It introduced into Communism its own intellectual substitutes, like the building of socialism in one country, the development—without conflict—of socialist economy, making middle peasants out of the whole peasantry, and similar inventions. The Platform regarded as the basis of Centrism the "upravlentzy"—the party and Soviet bureaucracy, breaking away more and more from the working class and aspiring to life jobs, or according to Preobrazhensky in "Questions and Answers"—"hereditary" ones.

The third peculiarity of the apparatus-Centrist group consists, according to the Platform, in its desire to substitute itself for the party in seizing more and more power in its hands, in a haughty and scornful attitude towards the masses—especially towards the unskilled workers and farm hands, in intolerance of discussions and persecution of the Left Opposition ["Fire to the Left!"]

The Capitulators Turn to Slander

Powerless to fight the Leninist Opyosition with the aid of the Platform, seeing that it is impossible to acquire any considerable number of sympathizers by metaphysical tight-rope walking around the "essence" of power, the capitulators turned to slander—a favorite method of every theoretically beaten movement. They accused Trotsky of playig with the "idea" of a revolt and the "idea of a bloc with the Rights". It is a double hypocrisy when such accusations come from people who know the complete and enduring loyalty of Trotsky not only to the Soviet government but also to his enemies inthe party. On their part, accusations of this sort are

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