

The Defense of the Soviet Union and the Opposition

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That the present-day Martinovs conceal themselves in the shreds of Bolshevik quotations of the year 1905, the quotations with which Stalin, Kamenev, Rykov and others covered themselves in 1917 against Lenin, is a masquerade that can deceive only idiots or illiterates*. The Comintern, under the leadership of Martinov-Bucharin-Stalin, carried on in China with a furious howling against the permanent revolution. That is now the fundamental question for the countries of the East, and consequently also one of the essential questions for the West. Has comrade Urbahns an opinion in this question? No, he has none. He hides behind separate words, or what is worse yet, behind Radek's article, which he prints "at all events".

Thermidor or Party Rehearsal of Thermidor?

If things are in a bad way with comrade Urbahns with regard to the Chinese revolution, they are still worse, if that were possible, with regard to the Russian revolution. I mean primarily the question of the Thermidor and therefore also the question of the class character of the Soviet state. The formula of Thermidor, like every historical analogy, is naturally a conditional one. When I employed* this formula for the first time against Zinoviev-Stalin, I immediately emphasized that it is conditional. Nevertheless it is entirely legitimate, in spite of the difference between the epochs and the class structures. Thermidor signals the first victorious stage of the counter-revolution, that is, the direct passage of power from one class to another, which is necessarily accompanied by civil war; but it remains concealed politically by the fact that the struggle is conducted between fractions of a yesterday still united party. In France, Thermidor was preceded by a period of reaction which developed while the Plebeians, the lowest section of the city, still held the power in their hands. The Thermidor completed this process of preparation of the reaction by a political catastrophe, in the course of which the plebeians lost the power. In this way, Thermidor does not signify a period of reaction general, that is, of ebb, of running off rails, of the weakening of the revolutionary positions, but it has a much more precise significance: it indicates the direct transfer of power from one class to another, after which the revolutionary class reconquers power in no other way than an armed uprising. For the latter, again new revolutionary situation is necessary, the appearance of which depends upon complicated internal and international issues.

In 1923, the Marxist Opposition already established the beginning of a new chapter in the revolution, a chapter of ideological and political recession which, in respective, could signify the Thermidor. It is then that we employed the word for the first time. Had the revolution triumphed in Germany at the end of 1923—which was entirely possible—the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia would have been purified and consolidated without internal convulsions. But the German revolution ended with one of the most frightful capitulations in the history of the working class. The defeat of the German revolution gave a powerful impetus to all the processes of reaction in the Soviet republic. Thence the struggle in the Party against the "permanent revolution" and against "Trotskyism", the creation of the theory of socialism in a single country, etc. The ultra-Leftists in Germany did not understand this turn of events. With one hand they supported the reaction, in the Russian Communist Party, with the other they carried on a formally aggressive policy in Germany, ignoring the defeat of the German revolution and the beginning

*Martinov was for twenty years long (1903-23) the principal theoretician of Menshevism. He joined the Bolshevik Party, when Lenin was already ill and the campaign against Trotskyism had begun. In 1923, Martinov accused the October revolution prior to the N.E.P. of Trotskyism. Now he is the principal theoretician of the Comintern. He remains what he was. But he covers his old, fundamental line with quotations from Lenin. For the selection and forging of such quotations there exist several factories.

of its recession. Like the Centrists in the R. C. P., the ultra-Leftists in Germany Maslow, Fischer, Urbahns) concealed their erroneous policy behind the struggle against "Trotskyism" which they represented as "liquidationism", just because they considered the revolutionary situation not behind them but ahead of them. In this case, "Trotskyism" was called the ability to estimate the situation correctly distinguishing the periods. Be it said in passing that it would be very useful if Urbahns had finally drawn the theoretical balance of this whole struggle, for it is precisely this struggle that deadened the minds of the German workers and prepared the victory of the idealless officials, adventurers and careerists.

The false "ultra-Left" course of 1924-25 still further weakened the positions of the European proletariat and thereby accelerated the reactionary down-sliding in the Soviet republic. The expulsion of the Opposition from the Party, the arrests, the deportations were only further stages in this process. They marked an ever greater weakening of the party and consequently also declining power of resistance of the proletariat in the Soviet republic. Nevertheless, it did not by far signify that the counter-revolutionary coup d'Etat had already been accomplished, that is, that power had passed from the hands of the proletariat into the hands of another class.

The fact that the Soviet proletariat was unable to prevent the organizational destruction of the Opposition was naturally a very alarming symptom. On the other hand, however, Stalin was compelled, simultaneous with the crushing of the Left Opposition, to commit plagiarisms from its Platform in every field, to direct the fire to the Right and to transform the inner-party maneuver into a sharp and prolonged zig-zag to the Left. In spite of everything this shows what powers of pressure the proletariat still possesses and how dependent upon it is the state apparatus. The Russian Opposition must continue to base its policy upon this fundamental fact, a policy which is one of reform and not of revolution.

Even before the organizational crushing of the Opposition, we said and wrote repeatedly that after the Left is cut off, the Right wing would present its bill to Stalin. The elements that supported Stalin in the struggle against us would exert a pressure with redoubled force as soon as the Left barriers were let down. That is just what we predicted. We formulated it as follows: "The Thermidorian tail will strike a blow at the Thermidor head." This has already happened and will still be repeated. I do not mean Bucharin-Tomsky here, but the deep-going Thermidorian forces of which the Rights in the party are only the pale shadows.

In spite of the organizational demolition on the Opposition and the weakening of the proletariat, the pressure of its class interests together with the pressure of the ideas of the Opposition proved themselves sufficiently powerful to compel the Centrist apparatus to make a prolonged zig-zag that created the political pre-conditions for the latest capitulations. The composition of the capitulators is naturally very varied, but the leading role is played by those who formerly imagined the process of down-sliding as proceeding in a straight line and were prepared, at every new stage, to proclaim: Thermidor is completed. The Zinovievist, Sefarov, on the eve of our expulsion from the party, cried out, first in Berlin and then in Moscow: "It is five minutes to twelve!" that is, five minutes before Thermidor. Five minutes ticked off and Sefarov capitulated. Radek, before Sefarov, intended, on the occasion of Zinoviev's and my expulsion from the Central Committee, to proclaim that Thermidor was here. I tried to show him that this was only the Party rehearsal of Thermidor, perhaps not even the general rehearsal, at any rate it was not the Thermidor, that is, not the counter-revolutionary overthrow accomplished by the classes. Since 1926, Smilga was of the opinion that the then policy of Stalin-Bucharin ("enrich yourselves", the Anglo-Russian Committee) the Kuo Min Tang led only in one direction, to the Right, that the October revolution had exhausted its internal resources and that aid could come only from the outside, something upon which he based no hopes at all. He wrote theses on this theme. The possibility of a break between the Centrists and the Right, and of a swing

of the Centrists towards the Left under the pressure of the internal forces, was entirely absent in his calculations. On the question of the Thermidor and two parties, Radek and Smilga represented the extreme "Left" position in the Opposition, and that is why events took them by surprise and why they capitulated so easily.

These brief particulars should make it clear to the reader that Urbahns' mistake as to whether "Trotsky goes far enough in the question of Thermidor" or "does not go far enough" (Urbahns' formulation), contains nothing new: we discussed this whole group of questions long ago and revised them at every new stage.

On May 26, 1928, I wrote from Alma-Ata to the exiled comrade Michail Okoudjava, one of the old Georgian Bolsheviks: "In so far as the new course of Stalin sets itself tasks, he undoubtedly endeavors to approach our position. In politics, however, what is decisive is not only the what but also the how and the who. The fundamental struggles that will decide the fate of the revolution are still before us. . . We were always of the opinion and we have said more than once that the process of political odwalsiding of the leading faction could not be envisaged as a constantly descending curve. Even the down-sliding does not take place in a vacuum but in a class society with profound internal friction. The masses of the party are not a unit, rather they form, for the most part, the raw material of politics. Under the pressure of class blows from the Right and from the Left, processes of differentiation are inevitable. The grave events of the recent period in party history, whose consequences we suffer, are only the overture to the further development of events. Just as the overture of an opera anticipates the musical theme of the whole opera and gives a condensed expression of it, so our political "overtures" have anticipated the melodies that must develop to their full extent in the future, to the accompaniment of trumpets, double-basses, drums and other instruments of serious class music. The development of events confirms with unmistakable certainty the fact that we were correct not only as against the turncoats and weather vanes of the type of Zinoviev, Kamenev, Piatakov, etc., but also against our dear friends of the "Left", the ultra-Left muddle-heads, insofar as they are inclined to take the overture for the opera itself, that is to assume that the fundamental processes in the Party and the state are already at an end, and the Thermidor, which they heard about for the first time from us, is an accomplished fact. . ."

Comrade Urbahns, does this not hit the nail on the head?

Urbahns' Mistake in the Question of Thermidor

The source of a whole series of false conclusions of comrade Urbahns lies in the fact that he considers Thermidor an accomplished fact. It is true that he does not draw all the conclusions from this, but the few that he has already drawn, in the event that they were definitely affirmed, are enough to ruin the cause of the Leninbund.

In an article devoted to my expulsion from the U. S. S. R., *Die Fahne des Kommunismus* wrote that the "Stalinist domination can no longer be considered the representative of the working class and must therefore be fought by all means," (February 1, 1929). The expulsion of Trotsky from the country was made equivalent in this article, to the guillotining of Robespierre and his companions. In other words, Thermidor was declared to be an accomplished fact. Were this declaration dictated only by the heat of the moment, it would not be worth while dwelling upon it. The political struggle is inconceivable without exaggerations, isolated mistakes in perspective, etc. What must be considered is not the details, but the basic line. Unfortunately, the leadership of the Leninbund persistently attempts to transform the mistake into a basic line. Volkswille of February 11 prints a resolution on the situation in Russia in connection with my expulsion. The resolution says plainly: "That is the Thermidor" (*Das ist der Thermidor*) and the Stalinist regime for all liberties, so that it may find itself at the top in the approaching conflicts with the open counter-revolution." The editorial of *Volkswille* of February 13 says that "with the expulsion of Trotsky the final balance is drawn under the revolution of 1917." It is not astonishing that Urbahns, having adopted such a position, is ever more frequently obliged to declare that he is not "one hundred percent" in agreement with the Russian Opposition because it "does not go far enough". Alas! Urbahns himself continues to go far . . . along the road of his original mistake.

Of a very important analogy with Thermidor in the class sense, Urbahns (like Radek) has made a formal, and partially personal analogy. Radek said: The expulsion of the Opposition from the Central Committee is equivalent to the elimination of the Robespierist group from the government. The guillotine or exile to Alma-Ata is only a question of technique. Urbahns says: The smashing of the Opposition and the expulsion of Trotsky is equivalent to the guillotining of the group of Robespierre. The broad historical analogy is replaced here by an arbitrary and cheap comparison of a personal and episodic character.

The Russian revolution of the twentieth century is immeasurably broader and deeper than the French revolution of the eighteenth century. The revolutionary class on which the October revolution bases itself is infinitely larger, more homogeneous, more compact and more resolute than the plebeians of the French cities. The leadership of the October revolution, in all its currents, is more experienced and penetrating than the leading groups of the French revolution were or could be. Finally, the political, economic, social and cultural changes that the Bolshevik dictatorship has accomplished are incomparably profounder than the changes that the Jacobins made. If it was impossible to tear power from the hands of the plebeians without a civil war, although they were weakened by the growth of class antagonisms and the bureaucratization of the Jacobins—the Thermidor was a civil war in which the sans-culottes suffered defeat—how then can it be assumed or believed that power can pass from the Russian proletariat to the bourgeoisie in a peaceful tranquil, imperceptible, bureaucratic manner? Such a conception of Thermidor is nothing but an inverted reformism.

The means of production that formerly belonged to the capitalists are today still in the hands of the Soviet state. The land is nationalized. The exploiting elements are still excluded from the Soviets and the army. The monopoly of foreign trade still exists for protection against the economic intervention of capitalism. These are not small matters. Still more: By the power of its attack, the Opposition has compelled the Centrists to deliver blows against the Thermidorian class forces and the expression of their tendencies in the Party—even if they were not mortal blows and naturally not decisive ones. One must not close his eyes to this. In general, the policy of the ostrich is a bad policy.

The Stalinist zig-zag to the Left is just as little a "final balance" under the Thermidorian danger as the expulsion of the Oppositionists was the "final balance" drawn under the October revolution. The struggle goes on, the classes have not yet spoken their final word. Centrism remains. Bolsheviks must remain Bolsheviks. Capitulators merit only contempt. And the ultra-Left muddleheads must be called to order.

On May 1, 1928, *Arbeiterstimme*, organ of the Austrian Communist Opposition (comrade Frey's group), developed the following thoughts in an article entitled "In Spite of Stalin Soviet Russia is a Proletarian State":

"There are political questions that act as infallible touchstones. For the Left Communist Oppositions, which appear today in all possible groupings and shadings, there is also such a touchstone: the question of the proletarian character of Soviet Russia. . . There are Left Communist Opposition elements who, indignant at the policy of Stalin in all its forms, throw out the baby with the bath. In certain minds, for example, the idea is beginning to take form that should the policy of Stalin persist, then Soviet Russia will be transformed in a purely evolutionary manner into a bourgeois state. . . All the degeneration in Soviet Russia is the result of the undermining work with which the bourgeoisie is occupied with in which it is seconded, objectively speaking, by the Stalinist course. In this manner, the bourgeoisie seeks to prepare the overthrow of the