

The Defense of the Soviet Union and the Opposition

Continued from Last Issue

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Not Centrism in General, but a Certain Kind of Centrism

The article in the organ of the Leninsbund, analyzed by us, endeavors to attack our standpoint from another side. "While Centrism," the author objects, "is a current and a tendency inside the working class it differs only in degree from the other current and tendency in the working class reformism. Both serve, even if differently, the class enemy." (*Fahne des Kommunismus*, No. 31, page 246.)

This sounds very convincing. In reality, however, the Marxist truth has been transformed here into an abstraction, and consequently, into a falsehood. It is not enough to say that Centrism in general or reformism in general constitute currents with the working class. One must investigate what functions are fulfilled by a certain Centrism in a certain working class in a certain country and at a certain epoch. Truth is always concrete.

In Russia, Centrism is in power. In England, it is reformism that now governs. Both of them—Urbahns teaches us—are currents within the working class that differ only in degree (graduell); both serve, even if differently, the class enemy. Very well, let us take note of that. What tactic follows from this, for example, in case of war? Must the Communists in Russia be defeatists like the Communists in England? Or should they be partisans of national defense in both countries, not unconditionally, to be sure but with certain reservations? Defeatism and defense of the fatherland are lines of class policy and cannot be influenced by "secondary differences" between Russian Centrism and English reformism. But here, perhaps, a number of things will occur to comrade Urbahns himself and alarm him... In England, the factories, railroads, the land belong to the exploiters; the State owns colonies, that is, it is a slave-holding state; the reformists therefore consequently defend the existing bourgeois state—defend it not very skilfully nor very cleverly; the bourgeoisie regards them half distrustfully, half contemptuously keeps them under a jealous surveillance, hoots at them and is ready to run them off at any moment. But at any rate the English reformists who are in power defend the domestic and foreign interests of capital. The same holds true of course, for the German social democracy.

Now, what does Centrism in the Soviet Union defend? It defends a social order produced by the political and economic expropriation of the bourgeoisie. It defends it very badly, very unskilfully, arousing distrust and disappointment in the proletariat (which does not, unfortunately, possess the experience of the British bourgeoisie), weakens the dictatorship, helps the forces of Thermidor, but as a result of the objective situation, Stalinist Centrism nevertheless represents a proletarian and not imperialist regime. That is not, comrade Urbahns, a difference of "degree", it is a difference between two class orders. They are the two sides of the historical barricade. Whoever loses sight of this fundamental difference is lost to the revolution.

«A Kerenskyism Upside Down»

Then what is the meaning, Urbahns replies, to your own words, according to which the Stalin period is a Kerensky period upside down? Improbable as it may seem, it is nevertheless precisely out of this formula that Urbahns endeavors to draw the conclusion that the Thermidor is already an accomplished fact. In reality, it is precisely the contrary that flows quite clearly from my formula. The Kerensky period was a form of bourgeois domination in the period of the impending proletarian revolution. It was a vacillating, irresolute, uncertain form of domination, but domination of the bourgeoisie nevertheless. For the proletariat to attain power, neither more nor less than armed insurrection, than the October revolution, was required.

If Stalinism is a Kerenskyism upside down, it means that ruling Centrism, on the road to Thermidor, constitutes the last form of the domination of the proletariat weakened by internal and external contradictions, by mistakes of its leadership, by lack of its own activity. But it is nevertheless a form of proletarian domination. The centrists can be replaced only by the Bolsheviks or Thermidorians. Is any other interpretation possible?

Still I recall that one is conceivable. From my formula: "a Kerensky period upside down", the Stalinists drew the conclusion that the Opposition is preparing an armed insurrection against domination of the Centrists, just as, in days gone by, we prepared the uprising against the Kerensky. But this is an obvious knavish interpretation, not dictated by Marxism but by the needs of the G. P. U., and it has not the faintest connection with criticism. Precisely because Centrism is a Kerensky period upside down, it is the bourgeoisie and not the proletariat that needs an armed uprising for the seizure of power. Precisely because the Thermidor is not yet accomplished, the proletariat can still realize its tasks by deep-going internal reforms in the Soviet state, in the trade unions and above all in the party.

Proletarian or Bourgeois State?

It must be acknowledged that in the article on Thermidor examined by us a half-step backward is made. But this does not improve matters much. Is Soviet Russia a bourgeois state? The article answers: no. "Have we still a proletarian dictatorship in Russia?" The article again answers: no. Then what have we? A classless state? A government above classes? To this, the article replies: In Russia we have a government which "apparently mediates between the classes, but in reality represents the interests of the economically stronger class." (No. 32, page 246. My emphasis (L.T.) Without saying directly which class it considers the "stronger" the article nevertheless leaves no doubt that it refers to the bourgeoisie. But a government that apparently mediates between the classes and in reality embodies the interests of the bourgeoisie, is a bourgeois government. Instead of declaring this openly, the author has recourse to circumlocutions which do not bespeak intellectual frankness. There are no governments standing above the classes. With regard to the proletarian revolution, Thermidor marks the passage of power from the hands of the proletariat to the hands of the bourgeoisie. It can signify nothing else. If Thermidor is accomplished then Russia is a bourgeois state.

Is it true, however, that the bourgeoisie is the "economically stronger class" in the Soviet Republic? No, that is a plain absurdity. The author of the article evidently does not consider that in making this contention, he burles, not Stalin, but the October revolution. If the bourgeoisie is already economically stronger than the proletariat, if the relation of forces shifts in its favor "with gigantic strides" (mit riesenschritten), as the article contends, then it is absurd to speak of the maintenance of the proletarian dictatorship, even if it has lasted as a survival up to this day. Fortunately, however, the presentation of the Soviet bourgeoisie as the economically stronger class is nothing but a phantom.

Urbahns will reply to us that the article refers not only to the Russian but to the international bourgeoisie. That does not improve the matter at all. The international bourgeoisie is economically incomparably stronger than the Soviet state—that is incontestable. That is why the theory of socialism in one country is a vulgar, national-reformist utopia. But we pose the question quite differently. The role of the world proletariat in production and politics constitutes one of the most important factors in the relation of forces. The struggle develops on a world scale and it is in this struggle that the fate of the October Revolution is decided. Do the ultra-Leftists think this struggle is hopeless? Let them say so! The extent to which the relation of forces in the world will change depends, to a certain degree, upon us also. By declaring, openly or covertly, that present-day Soviet Russia is a bourgeois state, and refusing, entirely or three-quarters, to support it against world imperialism, the ultra-Leftists bring grist to the mill of the bourgeoisie.

What distinguishes the Soviet Republic of Stalin from that of Lenin is neither a bourgeois power nor a power above classes but the elements of dual power. The analysis of the situation was long ago presented by the Russian Opposition. By its policy, the Centrist power has given tremendous aid to the bourgeoisie to define itself and create the unofficial levers of

its power, its channels of influence. But as in every serious class struggle, the dispute is over the ownership of the means of production. Has this problem already been settled in favor of the bourgeoisie? To make such contentions, one must either have lost his head entirely or never have had one. The ultra-Leftists simply "abstract" the social-economic content of the revolution. They are absorbed with the shell and ignore the kernel. Of course, if the shell is damaged, and it is, the kernel is also threatened. The whole activity of the Opposition is imbued with this idea. But between this and closing one's eyes to the social-economic kernel of the Soviet republic, there is a deep abyss. The most important means of production that were conquered by the proletariat on November 7, 1917, still remain in the hands of the workers' state. Ultra-Leftists, this must not be forgotten!

What Would the Policy Have to Be if Thermidor Were Now Accomplished?

If Thermidor is accomplished, if the bourgeoisie is already the "economically stronger class", it means that economic development has finally been switched from the socialist to the capitalist rails. But then one must have the courage to draw the corresponding tactical conclusions.

What significance can restrictive laws against land leasing, hiring of labor, etc., have if economic development in its entirety is on the path of capitalism? These restrictions are only a petty bourgeois, reactionary utopia, an absurd hindrance to the development of productive forces. A Marxist must call things by their name and recognize the necessity of an abolition of reactionary restrictions.

What significance has the monopoly of foreign trade from the viewpoint of capitalist development? A purely reactionary one. It hampers the free influx of goods and capital and prevents Russia from becoming a part of the system of blood circulation of world economy. A Marxist must recognize the necessity of abolishing the monopoly of foreign trade.

The same can be said of the method of planned economy in general. They have the right of existence only from the standpoint of a socialist perspective.

The Russian Opposition, however, demanded and still demands more systematic restrictive measures against capitalist enrichment; it wants the maintenance and strengthening of the foreign trade monopoly and the greatest possible development of planned economy. This economic platform has a sense only in connection with the struggle against the degeneration of the party and other organizations of the proletariat. But it is enough to assume that Thermidor is accomplished for the very bases of the Opposition to become nonsense. Urbahns is silent on all this. He does not peck on a moment with the interdependence of the essential elements of the problem. But for that he consoles himself and others by declaring that he is not in "one hundred percent" agreement with the Russian Opposition. A poor consolation!

For Proletarian or for Bourgeois Democracy?

If Urbahns and his partisans do not draw all the conclusions from the "accomplished" Thermidor, they do draw some of them. We have already read above that they believe the Russian proletariat must reconquer "all liberties". But here also, the ultra-Leftists stop irresolutely before the threshold. They do not explain what liberties are involved and in general, they touch upon the theme only in passing. Why?

In the struggle against Stalinist bureaucratism which reflects and facilitates the pressure of the enemy classes, the Russian Opposition demands democracy in the party, trade unions and the Soviets on a proletarian basis. It mercilessly exposes the execrable falsification of democracy which, under the name of "self-criticism", corrodes and decays the very bases of the revolutionary consciousness of the proletarian vanguard. But for the Opposition, the struggle for party democracy has a meaning only on the basis of a recognition of the proletarian dictatorship. It would be Don Quixoterie, not to say idioecy, to

fight for democracy in a party that is realizing the power of an enemy class. In such a case, one could speak not of a class democracy in the party and the Soviets, but of "general" (that is, bourgeois) democracy in the country—against the ruling party and its dictatorship. The Mensheviks have repeatedly accused the Opposition of "not going far enough", because it does not demand democracy in the country. But the Mensheviks and we stand on different sides of the barricade, and at the present time—in view of the Thermidorian danger—more irreconcilable and hostile than ever. We are fighting for proletarian democracy in order to protect the land of the October revolution from the "liberties" of bourgeois democracy, that is, from capitalism.

It is only from this point of view that the question of the secret ballot should be considered. This demand of the Russian Opposition has as its aim to give the proletarian nucleus the possibility of gaining prevalence first in the party and then in the trade unions, so as, with the aid of these two levers to insure its class position in the Soviets. Comrade Urbahns and a few of his closest partisans, however, sought to interpret the demand of the Opposition, which remains entirely within the framework of the dictatorship regime, as a general democratic slogan. A monstrous error! These two positions have nothing in common with each other and are mortally counter-posed.

Speaking indefinitely of "liberties" in general, Urbahns called one of these liberties by name, and it was freedom of organization. In the opinion of the ultra-Left, the Soviet proletariat must win "freedom of organization". It is incontestable that Stalinist bureaucratism holds the trade unions by the throat, now—with the zig-zag to the Left—more firmly than ever. That the trade union organizations must have the possibility to defend the interests of the workers against the growing adulterations of the regime of the dictatorship, this the Opposition long ago declared both in words and deeds. But one must take into exact account the aims and methods of struggle against the Centrist bureaucracy. It is not a question here of conquering the "freedom of organization" against a hostile class state, but of the struggle for such a regime under which the trade unions—inside the framework of the dictatorship—will enjoy the necessary freedom to improve in words and deeds, their own state. In other words, it is a matter of the "liberty" enjoyed for example, by the powerful alliances of industrialists and agrarians in their capitalist state, upon which they exert pressure with all means, and, as is known, not without success; but it is not at all a matter of "liberty" that the proletarian organizations have or strive to get in the bourgeois state. That is far from the same thing!

Freedom of organization signifies the "freedom" (we know which) to carry on the class struggle in a society whose economy is founded upon capitalist anarchy, while its politics are squeezed into the framework of so-called democracy. Socialism, on the other hand, is not only inconceivable without a planned economy in the narrow sense of the word but also without the systemizing of all social relations. One of the most important elements of socialist economy is the regulation of wages, and in general, the relations of the worker to production and the state. The role that must be played by the trade unions in this regulation we have pointed out above. But this role has nothing in common with the role of the trade unions in the bourgeois states, where the "freedom of organization" is not only a reflection but also an active element of capitalist anarchy. It is enough to recall the economic role of the strike of the English coal miners in 1926. It is not for nothing that the capitalists, together with the reformists, are now carrying on a desperate and hopeless struggle for industrial peace.

To Be continued



DETROIT (FP)—Two women charged with accosting in the court of Judge Frank Murphy laid their condition to unemployment. One was the mother of four children; the only way in which she could get food and clothing for the little ones was to sell her body. The other was an unemployed waitress.