

On the Chinese Revolution

Trotsky's Reply to the Letter of the Chinese Opposition Group

Dear Comrades:

On December 20 I received your letter of November 15: it took 35 days from Shanghai to Constantinople. For my reply to reach you, at least as many days must be allowed. Nothing can be done about it: neither air mail nor radio are yet at the service of the Opposition's cause.

The most important thing in your letter is the announcement that you have published a platform of the Chinese Opposition. You should immediately translate it at least into a European language. The whole International Opposition must have the possibility of knowing this highly important document. I will await your platform with the greatest impatience.

In your letter, you pose two questions connected with the platform: the Constituent Assembly and the United States of Asia. The second question is entirely new; I must put off my reply until I can devote a special article to it. On the question of the Constituent Assembly, I will answer in a few words:

The Constituent Assembly in China

The political task of the Chinese Communist Party, weakened and driven into illegality, is to mobilize not only the workers but also the broad social layers of the city and the country against the bourgeois-military dictatorship. It is to this end that the simplest and most natural slogan under present conditions, the Constituent Assembly, must serve. A tireless agitation must be carried on under this slogan, in correlation with other slogans of the democratic revolution: the transfer of the land to the poor peasants, the eight-hour day, the independence of China, the right of self-determination for the people that constitute it.

The agitation must be supplemented by a propaganda that will make at least the most advanced sections of the proletariat understand that the road leading to the Constituent Assembly can only pass through the insurrection against the military usurper and the seizure of power by the popular masses.

The government that will issue from the victorious revolution of the workers and peasants can be nothing but a government of the dictatorship of proletariat, leading behind it the majority of the exploited and oppressed people. But the difference must be clearly understood between the general revolutionary perspective which we must tirelessly develop in articles and in theoretical and propaganda speeches and the present political slogan under which we can, beginning today, mobilize the masses by actually opposing them to the regime of the military dictatorship. Such a central political slogan is the slogan of the Constituent Assembly.

This slogan is dealt with briefly in the draft of the platform of the Chinese Opposition, drawn up in Constantinople by some Chinese and foreign comrades. My young friend N., I know, has transmitted this draft to you. With all the greater impatience do I await your platform so as to be able to judge, documents in hand, if there are differences between you and comrade N. and if the separate existence of two groups is justified. Up to the time that I am able to become acquainted with the facts and documents, I am obliged to refrain from formulating any judgement on this important question.

Stalinist Impotence and Violence

You report that the Chinese Stalinists have fired on an Oppositionist in the streets of Canton. Monstrous as this act may be, I do not consider it impossible. In his "Testament," Lenin accused Stalin personally of having a tendency to abuse power, that is, of violence. Since then, this trait has developed monstrously in the apparatus of the Russian Communist Party and has been extended to the Communist International. Naturally, the dictatorship of the proletariat is inconceivable without the use of force, against certain parts of the proletariat itself as well. The workers State, however, also requires that workers' democracy exercise the most vigilant control in order to know who, how and in whose name violence is employed. This question presents itself in an entirely different manner in the bourgeois countries where the revolutionary party constitutes only a small minority of the working class and where it is obliged to fight in order to gain the majority. Under such conditions, the use of violence against ideological opponents—who are not strike-breakers, or provocateurs or fascists attacking treacherously, but ide-

ological opponents, honest social democratic workers included—is an enormous crime and madness that must inevitably turn upon the revolutionary party itself. In the bitter struggle that Bolshevism conducted against the Narodniki and the Mensheviks for the 15 years that preceded the October revolution, there was never a question of employing methods of physical violence. As for individual terror, we Marxists rejected it even with regard to the czarist satraps. Nevertheless, in recent times the Communist parties or rather their apparatus people, have resorted more and more frequently to the disruption of meetings and to other methods of the mechanical suppression of adversaries, notably the Left Opposition. Many bureaucrats are sincerely convinced that this is what real Bolshevism consists of. They avenge themselves on other proletarian groups for their impotence towards the capitalist state, and thereby transform the bourgeois policy into an arbiter between us.

It is difficult to imagine the depravity engendered by this combination of impotence and violence. The youth becomes more and more accustomed to thinking that the fist is a surer weapon than argument. That is, a political cynicism is cultivated, which prepares individuals better than anything else for passing over into the fascist camp. An implacable struggle must be conducted against the brutal and disloyal methods of Stalinism, by denouncing them in the press and in meetings, and by cultivating among the workers a hatred and contempt for all these pseudo-revolutionists who, instead of appealing to the brain, take a crack at the skull.

As for the Tchen Du-Hsiu group, I am pretty well acquainted with the policy it followed in the years of the revolution: it was the policy of Stalin-Bucharin-Martinov, that is, in essence, a policy of Right Menshevism. Comrade N. wrote me, however, that Tchen Du-Hsiu, basing himself on the experience of the revolution, has come considerably closer to our position. It goes without saying that this can only be welcomed. In your letter, however, you categorically dispute this information of comrade N. You even contend that Tchen Du-Hsiu has not separated himself from the policy of Stalin, which presents a mixture of opportunism and adventurism. But here again, I have up to now read only one program-declaration of Tchen Du-Hsiu. I am therefore in no position to express myself on this question.

In other respects, I conceive a solidarity in principle in the Chinese question only on the basis of clear replies to the following questions:

So far as the first period of the revolution is concerned:

1. Did the leading role of the "national" Chinese bourgeoisie follow from the anti-imperialist character of the Chinese revolution (Stalin-Bucharin)?

2. Was the slogan of the "bloc of four classes"—the big bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, the peasantry and the proletariat (Stalin-Bucharin)—correct, even for a single instant?

3. Were the entry of the Chinese Communist Party in to the Kuo Min Tang and the admission of the latter into the Communist International (resolution of the Political Bureau of the Russian Communist Party) admissible?

Wages Decline

Wages are also in a bad way, the state department reports. Payroll totals fell off 4.3% in manufacturing though showing slight gains in other industries, chiefly department stores and mail order houses that profit by the orgy of Christmas spending on the part of the comfortable classes. But normal manufacturing was impaired by widespread shutdowns or layoffs.

"The volume of unemployment is con-

4. Was it admissible, in the interests of the Northern Campaign, to curb the agrarian revolution (telegraphic directives in the name of the Political Bureau of the Russian Communist Party)?

5. Was it admissible to renounce the slogan of Soviets, from the moment that the broad movement of workers and peasants developed, that is, in 1925-27 (Stalin-Bucharin)?

6. Was the Stalinist slogan of a "workers and peasants" party, that is, the old slogan of the Russian Narodniki, acceptable for China, even for an instant?

So far as the second period is concerned:

7. Was the resolution of the Communist International which said that the crushing of the workers and peasants movement by the Kuo Min Tang of the right and left signified a "transition of the revolution to a higher stage" (Stalin-Bucharin), correct?

8. Under these conditions, was the slogan of insurrection, issued by the Communist International, correct?

9. Was the tactic of guerilla warfare, recommended by Ho-Lun and Ye Tin, and approved by the C. I., at the moment of the political ebb-tide of the workers and peasants, correct?

10. Was the organization of the Canton uprising by the agents of the C. I. correct?

So far as the past in general is concerned:

11. Was the struggle of the C. I. in 1924-27 against the Opposition in the Chinese question a struggle of Leninism against Trotskyism or, on the contrary, a struggle of Menshevism against Bolshevism?

12. Was the struggle of the C. I. against the Opposition in 1927-28 a struggle of Bolshevism against "liquidationism" or, on the contrary, a struggle of adventurism against Bolshevism?

So far as the future is concerned:

13. Under the present conditions of victorious counter-revolution, is the mobilization of the Chinese masses under democratic slogans, notably that of the Constituent Assembly, necessary, as the Opposition believes, or is there any ground for being limited to the abstract propaganda of the slogan of Soviets, as the C. I. has decided?

14. Has the slogan of the "workers and peasants democratic dictatorship" still a revolutionary content, as the C. I. thinks, or is it necessary on the contrary to sweep away this masked formula of the Kuo Min Tang and to explain that the victory of the alliance of the workers and peasants can only end in China in the dictatorship of the proletariat?

15. Is the theory of socialism in one country applicable to China, or, on the contrary, can the Chinese revolution triumph and accomplish its tasks to the very end only as a chain of the world revolution?

These are, in my opinion, the principle questions to which the platform of the Chinese Opposition must necessarily give a reply. These questions have a great importance for the whole International. The epoch of reaction that China is now passing through must become, as it has always been in history, an epoch of theoretical pre-occupation. What characterizes the young Chinese revolutionists at the present time is the passion to understand, to study, to embrace the question in its entirety. The idealless bureaucracy, the Chinese vanguard of the proletariat will produce from its ranks a pleiade of notable Marxists who will render service to the whole International.

With Opposition greetings,

L. D. TROTSKY

Prinkipo, December 22, 1929

Hoover Prosperity Invisible in State of Illinois

CHICAGO—Figures of the Illinois department of labor do not show much hope of Hoover prosperity coming to this important industrial state. There were almost two applicants for every job listed, the ratio being 181 jobseekers for every 100 available jobs. A year ago there were only 14 applicants. Both figures apply to November, the latest month officially available. In October 1929 the ratio was 147 applicants for every 100 jobs.

Wages Decline

Wages are also in a bad way, the state department reports. Payroll totals fell off 4.3% in manufacturing though showing slight gains in other industries, chiefly department stores and mail order houses that profit by the orgy of Christmas spending on the part of the comfortable classes. But normal manufacturing was impaired by widespread shutdowns or layoffs.

"The volume of unemployment is con-

siderable," the department asserts on the basis of its free employment service. Corn-husking machinery caused an unusually light demand for farm labor during the month. With road work also slacker the department says that "a large volume of common labor is idle, presenting a serious unemployment problem in practically every large city of the state."

The average weekly earnings of male workers in all Illinois industries were \$32.21 in November. Females earned \$18.94 a week on the average. In manufacturing the average was over a dollar lower, being \$31.14 for males and \$17.08 for female workers.

If a man were employed 50 weeks a year in Illinois this would give him \$1,610.50 at the average rate, which is far below even the government's minimum decency standard as worked out by the U. S. bureau of labor statistics.

Mummery in Labor Unions

Very few workers are conscious of the destructive influence of secret and ritualistic work in their union meetings. The altar, with its open bible in the center of the lodge room, the chaplain with his reading of the prayer at the opening and closing, the juggling of pass words, signs and counter-signs, creates a stifling and depressing atmosphere of solemn mummery in workers' meetings. This is especially true in the division and lodge rooms of the Railroad Brotherhoods, where ritualistic mummery is practiced under the influence and support of the official bureaucrats who figure that it is a harmless way to spend their time when together. The officials know that as long as they can induce and compel the workers to practice these useless ceremonies at their meetings, it will naturally help to keep their minds and attention away from more serious and important problems, such as organization, amalgamation, labor party instead of labor lobby, repeal of gag laws and lowering of official salaries, etc.

Bosses are Wiser

What would be thought of corporation officials if they would open their meetings with altar, prayer, ritual, pass word, grips, signs and countersigns as the workers do in the Railroad Brotherhoods and many other labor organizations? It would be thought that they were crazy, wouldn't it?

Our useless and overpaid craft officials are also anxious to keep so many gag laws in our labor constitutions as they can, so as to stifle every impulse towards change that may place their fat meal ticket in jeopardy. Section 84, page 73, of the constitution of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers is a typical example of the kind of gag laws that are considered most precious by the labor fakers. This law forbids every member and local union in the B. of L. E. from printing anything concerning the Brotherhood or its leadership. Think of such ignorance enforced on the workers. It is this gag law which now protects the B. of L. E. officials from the wrath of the membership. It is section 84 that protects the officials in their game of robbing the membership by levying five dollar monthly assessments on the members without being compelled to render a definite account of the proceeds.

Lengthy obligations, incorporated in the rituals, administered to applications for membership, also contain a lot of gag rules which are practically hidden from the rank and file.

Militant Twice Expelled

The writer of this article has on two different occasions seen these gag laws in practical operation by the B. of L. E. bureaucrats and their henchmen in the ranks. In 1919, Grand Chief Warren S. Stone used Section 84 in ordering me expelled from Division 369 of the B. of L. E. because I published two articles on amalgamation which he refused to publish in the B. of L. E. Journal. Ten years later, in 1929, I was again expelled by Stone's successor in office, Alvanley Johnston, aided by his tools in Division 369, for spreading literature pointing out the injustice of the five dollar special assessment without the rendition of a definite account to the membership as to where the proceeds of this special assessment are going and why we are paying it. This time the obligation was brought into play as I had not violated Section 84. The obligation not only forbids the printing of literature but also forbids the giving out of literature pertaining to the Brotherhood. Thus, gag rule in the B. of L. E. is complete.

A systematic and organized fight must be carried on by the militant section of the labor movement against these gag laws. Raise these questions at your local and union meetings and at conventions. Send in amendments to the constitution calling for the repeal of gag laws like Section 84 and the abolition of obligations and secret work. Obligations and gag laws are always used by useless and crooked officials to protect themselves against the intelligence of the masses while in office. They never operate against the official bureaucrats. The B. of L. E. situation shows this plainly.

Obligations, gag laws and secret mummery belong in the garbage can, not in workers meetings.

—C. R. HEDLUND