

MY PART IN THE OCTOBER

By L. D. TROTSKY

The following is a chapter of the "Real Situation in Russia" by L. D. Trotsky, dealing with the falsification of the history of the Russian Revolution by the Stalin regime. This chapter is of special interest now in view of the celebration of the founding of the Red Army. The translation, including the notes, is by Max Eastman.

As to my participation in the October Revolution—in the notes to Volume 14 of the Complete Works of Lenin you read:

"After the majority of the Petersburg Soviet passed into the hands of the Bolsheviks, Trotsky was elected its president and in that position organized and led the insurrection of October 25:

How much is true here, and how much false, let the Bureau of Party History decide—if not the present one, then some future Bureau. Comrade Stalin has lately categorically denied the truth of this assertion. Thus:

"I have to say that Comrade Trotsky played no particular role in the October insurrection and could not do so, that being president of the Petrograd Soviet, he merely fulfilled the will of the corresponding party authority, which guided his every step."

And further:
"Comrade Trotsky played no particular role either in the party or the October insurrection, and could not do so, being a man comparatively new to our party in the October period." **

In giving this testimony, Stalin forgot that he himself said on the sixth of November, 1918; that, is on the first anniversary of the revolution, when facts and events were still too fresh in the minds of all. Even then Stalin had already begun that work in relation to me which he has now developed on such a grand scale. But he was then compelled to conduct it far more cautiously and underhandedly than he is now. Here is what he wrote then in Pravda *** under the title, "The Role of the Most Eminent Party Leaders":

"All the work of practical organization of the insurrection was conducted under the immediate leadership of the President of the Petrograd Soviet, Comrade Trotsky. It is possible to declare with certainty that the swift passing of the garrison to the side of the Soviet, and the bold execution of the work of the Military Revolutionary Committee, the party owes principally and above all to Comrade Trotsky."

These words, spoken by no means for the purpose of laudatory exaggeration—on the contrary, Stalin's goal was then wholly different, but I will not dwell on that—those words sound absolutely incredible today as coming from the lips of Stalin.

It was said long ago: A truthful man has this advantage, that even with a bad memory he never contradicts himself. A disloyal, unscrupulous, and dishonest man has always to remember what he said in the past, in order not to shame himself.

Comrade Stalin, with the help of the Yaroslavskies, is trying to construct a new history of the organization of the October insurrection based on the fact that the party created a "practical center for the organizational leadership of the insurrection," of which, it appears, Trotsky was not a member. Lenin was not a member of that committee. That fact alone demonstrates that the committee had only a subordinate organizational significance. It played no independent role whatever. The legend about this committee has been created today for the simple reason that Stalin was a member of it. Here is the membership: "Sverdlov, Stalin, Dzerzhinsky, Bubnov, Uritsky." However unpleasant it is to dig in the rubbish, it seems necessary for me, as a sufficiently close participant and witness of the events of that time, to testify as follows:

The role of Lenin, of course, needs no illumination. Sverdlov I often met, and I often turned to him for counsel, and for people to help me. Comrade Kamenev, who, as is well known, occupied a special position, the incorrectness of which he himself has long ago acknowledged,*** took never less a most active part in the events of the revolution. The decisive night, from the twenty-fifth to the twenty-sixth, Kamenev and I spent together in the quarters of the Military Revolutionary Committee, answering questions, and giving orders by telephone. But stretch my memory as I will, I cannot answer the question in just what

consisted, during those decisive days, the role of Stalin. It never once happened that I turned to him for advice or cooperation. He never showed the slightest initiative. He never advanced one independent proposal. This fact no "Marxist historian" of the new style can alter.

A Supplementary Insertion

Stalin and Yaroslavsky, as I said above, have wasted much effort these last months in proving that the organizational center created by the Party, consisting of Sverdlov, Stalin, Bubnov, Uritsky and Dzerzhinsky guided, so to speak, the whole course of the insurrection. Stalin has emphasized, every way he can, the fact that Trotsky was not a member of that center. But alas! through sheer carelessness on the part of Stalin's historians, in Pravda for November 2, 1927—that is, after the present letter was written—there appeared an accurate excerpt from the report of the Central Committee for the sixteenth to the twenty-ninth of October, 1917.

"The Central Committee creates a military revolutionary center with the following members, Sverdlov, Stalin, Bubnov, Uritsky, and Dzerzhinsky. THIS CENTER IS TO BE A CONSTITUENT PART OF THE REVOLUTIONARY SOVIET COMMITTEE."

The Revolutionary Soviet Committee is the Military Revolutionary Committee created by the Petrograd Soviet. No other Soviet organ for the leadership of the insurrection existed. Thus these five comrades, designated by the Central Committee, were required to enter as a supplement into the staff of that same Military Revolutionary Committee of which Trotsky was the president. Superfluous it would seem, for Trotsky to be introduced a second time into the staff of an organization of which he was already president! How hard it is, after all, to correct history after it is finished!

November, 11, 1927.

I wrote at Brest a short outline of the October Revolution. This book went through a great number of editions in various languages. Nobody ever told me that there is a flagrant omission in my book—namely that it nowhere points out the chief guide of the insurrection, "the military revolutionary centre," of which Stalin and Bubnov were members. If I so badly remember-

The Policy of the Leadership and Party Regime

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from the Soviet apparatus into the Party and gave the latter forms and dimensions which are unheard of, which are indefensible, in view of the role of political leadership the Party has to play.

The Stalinist Bureaucracy
On top of that the Centrist leadership has rzelized to Communist dogmas ("organizational principles of Leninism") the methods of command and compulsion, refining them to a degree rarely known in the history of bureaucratic virtuosity. With the aid of these demoralizing methods, making machines out of thinking Communists, killing the will, character and human dignity—the Centrist top succeeded in becoming an irreplaceable and inviolable oligarchy, substituting the Party and the class.

The capitulators do not like to talk any longer of the Party regime and Party bureaucracy. This seems to them now to be natural, as if it were part of the proletarian dictatorship. From the moment the capitulators decided to achieve a place under our Soviet bureaucratic sun, the Stalinist regime has become to them the very best of the best; a democratic, a workers' and a Party one. A particularly cynical apologist has become—Radek. With ease he threatens his former comrades with article 58; in his declaration of July 13, he tries to defend the methods of the leadership, which served to decompose the apparatus within the country and has done harm to the dictatorship outside the country. Those who talk about Party democracy (evidently Lenin is to be included) are nothing else but vulgar liberals, struggling for freedom in the abstract! Meantime the struggle with the class enemy, that regenerates and becomes more ugly, in the future too will be hin-

ed the history of the October insurrection, why did not somebody clear me up? Why was my book studied with impurity in all the party schools in the first years of the revolution?

Even in the year 1922 the Organization Bureau of the party seemed to think that I understood fairly well the history of the October Revolution. Here is a small but eloquent confirmation of that:

Moscow, May 24, 1922.

"No. 14302

To Comrade Trotsky:

"Excerpt from the report of the session of the Organization Bureau of the Central Committee for May 22, 1922, No. 21.

Commission Comrade Yakolev by the first of October to compose under the editorship of Comrade Trotsky, a textbook on the history of the October Revolution.

"Signed, Secretary of the Sub-Department of Propaganda"

That was in May 1922. And my book about the October Revolution having appeared before that time in many editions, was well known to the Organization Bureau—the head of which, at that period was already Stalin. Nevertheless the Organization Bureau considered it necessary to lay upon me the task of editing the school book of the October Revolution. How does this happen? It happens because the eyes of Stalin and the Stalinists were opened to "Trotskyism" only after the eyes of Lenin were closed forever.

* P. 482
** J. Stalin, "About Trotsky, Trotskyism or Leninism," pp. 68-69.

*** No. 241.
**** This is a mild reference to the fact that Kamenev and Zinoviev opposed the seizure of power in October, held negotiations against it, with the Mensheviks, and even made known in a non-Bolshevik paper the secret resolution of the Bolshevik central committee calling for the insurrection. They were denounced as "traitors", "deserters", "strikebreakers", etc., by Lenin in a long letter which I published in my "Since Lenin Died".

Zinoviev subsequently stated that the two greatest mistakes of his life were this opposition to Lenin in 1917 and his opposition to Trotsky in 1924. "I am working with Trotsky now for long," he said. That was two years ago, and he has since deserted again and is writing anti-Trotskyist articles at the behest of Stalin.—Trans.

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is the only newspaper in the United States that regularly publishes the writing of L. D. Trotsky, Ch. Rakovsky and other leaders of the Left Opposition of the Communist movement based upon the teachings of Marx and Lenin. In addition it is the only periodical in the English language in any part of the world that prints the correct estimation of world events based upon a Leninist conception.

THE MILITANT is the organ of those who want to reestablish the international Communist movement on the basis it was up till the death of Lenin. Published weekly, it is a powerful factor in mobilizing the working class along the correct ideological lines. Without its regular appearance the Left Opposition not only in America but throughout the world would sustain a severe loss.

In a recent letter, Comrade Trotsky asserted that La Verite the weekly organ of the French Left Opposition and THE MILITANT were the two best organs of the movement that is conducting a campaign for a return to Lenin's teachings. To enable THE MILITANT to continue publication, the immediate support of all its readers is necessary. A donation to its Sustaining Fund will enable it to continue to exist.

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A LETTER FROM ENGLAND

Helston, Cornwall, England

The Militant:
Dear Comrades:

Many thanks for your letter. Yes, I have had a serious turn for the worse. My heart is now in a state in which it may give out at any moment—the valves being worn out. For this reason I shall not be able to meet a comrade who is proposing to come from Paris to arrange for the distribution of the Russian Bulletin and to organize the Opposition in the Communist Party in England. This needs to be done badly. I have sent an address in North Shields, where a useful helper will be found, who has lived on the Tyne Side for a lifetime... I shall never be able to leave home again, and if the heart does not improve I am likely to be "out of it" very shortly.

The news that Comrade Trotsky's health is improving is the best you could possibly have sent me... I had noticed that his writing was as accurate in detail and as genuine as ever. Also, that the old humour was not wanting. His books and articles have energized me for years. Like most people in feeble health I am inclined to pessimism. Whenever I am at my worst, I invariably turn to some of Trotsky's writings and always with good results.

The workers who get the Militant cannot afford a cent for a copy. I will continue to pay whilst I can. The poverty on Tyneside is ghastly and unemployment is getting worse.

MILICENT SHOOTER