

A Letter To The Italian Left Communists By L. D. TROTSKY

(To the Adherents of Comrade Bordiga)

Dear Comrades!

I have just become acquainted with the contents of the document, "Platform of the Left" which, though issued in 1926, has just come into my hands. I have also read your letter addressed to me in No. 20 of *Prometeo*, as well as several leading articles in this paper, this having given me the opportunity, after a very long interruption, to refresh my meager knowledge of the Italian language. This document, as well as the articles and speeches of comrade Bordiga, aside from my personal acquaintance with him, permit me, to a certain extent, to pass judgement upon your basic idea as well as on the degree of your solidarity with us. Although, in order to reply to this last question, not only are the principle theses of importance, but your political orientation towards the events of the day as well. (The Sino-Russian conflict has brought this home clearly to us once again.) Yet I believe that our solidarity at least, goes quite far. If I do not express myself categorically at the present time, it is solely because I wish to permit time and the course of events to substantiate our ideological closeness and our mutual understanding. I hope that they will be completely and lastingly confirmed.

"The Platform of the Left" (1926) made a great impression on me. I believe that it is one of the best documents of the International Opposition, and which, in many points, retains its importance yet,

Particularly important, especially for France, is that the platform lays the most stress, in respect to the revolutionary politics of the proletariat, on the question of the nature of the party and the basic principles of its strategy and tactics. During the past few years we have seen how, in France, the Opposition has served, for a number of well-known revolutionaries, merely as a stage in the evolution from Marxism to Syndicalism, to Trade Unionism, or simply to scepticism. Almost all of them stumbled on the question of the party.

The Nature of the Party

You are evidently familiar with the brochure of Loriot wherein he demonstrates his complete lack of understanding of the nature of the Party and its historic function in relation to the class and falls into the theory of passive trade unionism, which has nothing in common with the ideas of the proletarian revolution. Unfortunately, this brochure, which represents a distinctly backward step in the working class movement is today still being propagated by the *Revolutions Proletarienne* group.

The decline in the ideological level of the revolutionary movement during the past five or six years has left its mark on the Monatte group. This group, which, between 1917 and 1923, approached close to Marxism and Bolshevism, has since taken a series of backward steps towards syndicalism. All this is no longer the aggressive syndicalism of the beginning of this century which constituted a step forward in the French working class movement. No, this is a relatively waiting syndicalism, negatively passive, which almost always degenerates into pure trade unionism. And this is not surprising. Whatever progressivism was present in pre-war syndicalism has now been absorbed into Communism. Monatte's chief shortcoming is his false attitude towards the Party, and connected with that, his fetishism of the "trade union organization", which he takes as an end in itself, independent of its directing concepts. Nevertheless, if the two French "General Trade Unions" would unite today, and even if tomorrow they would draw into their ranks the entire French working class, that would not for one instant do away with the question of the directing ideas of the syndicalist struggles, its methods, the linking up of the immediate tasks with those of a general character, i. e., the question of the Party.

The Syndicalist League, led by Monatte is in itself an embryo party; it recruits its members, not on a trade union basis, but on an ideological basis, on the basis of a particular platform, and seeks to influence the trade unions from without or, when possible, to subordinate them to its ideological influence. These are the indices of a party. But the Syndicalist League is a party without a finished constitution, having no definite form, which is clear in neither theory nor program, which has not become conscious of itself, which hides its true nature, and so deprives itself of all possibility for development.

Souvarine, in the course of the struggle against the bureaucracy and disloyalty of the apparatus of the C. I., has likewise come to a denial of the political action of the Party itself, though by a different route. While proclaiming the death of the International and its French section, he at the same time considers the existence of the Opposition to be useless since, according to him, the political conditions are unsuitable. In other words, he denies the necessity for the existence of the Party—which always, and under all circumstances, represents the revolutionary interests of the proletariat.

These are the reasons why I attach such importance to our solidarity on the questions of the Party, its historic role, its unceasing activity, its duty to struggle in order to insure its influence in all phases of the working class movement. On this question a Bolshevik, i. e., a revolutionary Marxist trained in the school of Lenin, can make no concessions.

Theoretical Perversions of Stalinism

On several points, the Platform, of 1926 gives some excellent formulations which still hold true today. It states with absolute clearness that the so-called "autonomous peasant parties inevitably fall under the influence of the counter-revolution" (p. 36). One can fearlessly say, that in the present epoch, there have been and can be no exceptions to this rule. Where the peasantry does not follow the proletariat, they follow the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. Despite the experiences of Russia and China, Radek, Smilga and Preobrazhensky have not yet realized that it is on just this point that they tripped up. Your platform reproaches Radek for "open concessions to the German nationalists". To that must be added the indefensible concessions to the Chinese nationalists, the idealization of Sun-Yat-Senism, and the justification of the subordination of the Communist party to a bourgeois party. Your platform correctly stresses, in connection with the struggle of colonial peoples, the necessity for the absolute independence of the Communist party. Failure to keep sight of this essential rule leads to the most disastrous consequences as was demonstrated in the criminal subordination of the Chinese Communist party to the Kuomintang.

The disastrous tactics of the Anglo-Russian Committee, which, it goes without saying, has received the complete support of the present leadership of the Italian Communist party, resulted from the desire to rapidly pass from the insignificant Communist party into the large trade unions. Zinoviev openly expressed this idea at the Fifth Congress of the International. Stalin, Bukharin, Tomsky have sustained these same illusions. With what results? The British reformists were strengthened, and the British Communist party was extremely weakened. That is what results from playing with the concept of the Party. Such a game does not remain forever unpunished.

Within the Soviet Republic we note another form of weakening and destruction of the Communist party: in order to divest it of its proper individuality and independence, it is artificially diluted into the large spiritless mass who are terror-

ized by the governmental apparatus. This explains why the Opposition which has gathered and educated new revolutionary cadres numbered only in the thousands is in actuality the Bolshevik party, while the Stalin faction which carries on formally in the name of a Party of 1,500,000 members, and of a Communist youth of 2,000,000 strong, in reality undermines and destroys the Party.

The Class Character of the U. S. S. R.

I note with satisfaction, on the basis of your letter published in *Prometeo* that you are in complete accord with the Opposition on the question of the definition of the social nature of the Soviet State. On this question, the ultra-Leftists (see *L'Ouvrier Communiste*, No. 1) reveal with absolute clearness their complete break with the fundamentals of Marxism.

The question of the class character of a social regime rests on the question of its political structure which in turn falls back on the degree of bureaucracy and administration. As far as they are concerned, the question of the ownership of the means of production does not exist. In democratic America, as well as in Fascist Italy, those who are accused of preparing the expropriation of the factories, the shops and mines of the capitalists—are shot or fastened to the electric chair. In the Soviet Republic even today—under the Stalinist bureaucracy—the engineers who attempt to prepare the restitution of the shops, the factories and the mines to their former owners are shot. How can one fail to distinguish this fundamental difference which actually defines the class character of the social regime? Nevertheless, I shall not expound too lengthily upon this question, to which I devoted my recent brochure (*The Defense of the U. S. S. R. and the Opposition*) (Published serially in the *Militant*, Vol. II, No. 21, Vol. III, No. 4, incl.—Eds.) directed against certain French and German ultra-Leftists who, it is true, do not go as far as your Italian sectarians, but who, for just this reason, can be more dangerous.

The Analogy of Thermidor

On the question of Thermidor, you make certain reservations as regards the correctness of the analogy between the Russian Revolution and the French Revolution. I believe that this observation rests on a misunderstanding. In order to judge of the correctness of historic analogy, we must clearly determine its content and limits. Not to have recourse to analogies with revolutions of the past, would be to completely abandon the historical experience of mankind. The experiences of today are always different from those of yesterday. Nevertheless, one cannot learn from yesterday's experiences except through analogies.

The remarkable brochure of Engels on the Peasant War is based completely upon an analogy between the Reformation of the Sixteenth century and the Revolution of 1848. In order to temper the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Marx heated his iron in the fire of 1793. In 1903 Lenin defined the Social-democratic revolutionary as a Jacobin loosely tied with the mass movements. At that time I objected to him in an academic manner that Jacobinism and scientific socialism rest on different classes and make use of different methods. Considered in itself this is evidently correct. But Lenin did not identify the plebeians of Paris with the modern proletariat and Rousseau's theory with that of Marx.

He laid down as conclusive only the general features of the two revolutions: the most oppressed masses who had nothing to lose but their chains; the most revolutionary organizations which supported themselves on the masses and which, in the struggle against the forces of the former society, set up a revolutionary dic-

tatorship. Was this analogy correct? Completely. Historically, it has proven very fruitful. Within the same limits, the analogy with Thermidor is fruitful and justifiable. What was the distinctive feature of the French Thermidor? It was the first stage of the victorious counter-revolution. After the Thermidor, the Jacobins could no longer have (if they could have in a general manner) regained power except by means of their own uprising. Thus, the stage of Thermidor has, in a certain sense, a distinctive character. But the counter-revolution was not yet completed that is, the real masters of the situation were not yet in power; for that the next stage was necessary.

What is Thermidor?

Finally, the complete victory of the counter-revolution, bringing with it the restoration of the monarchy, the indemnification of feudal landlords, etc., was assured by the foreign intervention and the victory over Napoleon. In Hungary, after a short period of Soviet power, the counter-revolution was established completely after a single armed blow. Are we to expect a similar danger in the U. S. S. R.? Certainly not. But anyone can recognize open counter-revolution; it does not require any commentaries.

When we speak of Thermidor, we have in mind an underhand counter-revolution, clandestinely prepared, and which is accomplished in several stages. The first stage, which we call conditionally Thermidor, would signify the transfer of power to the hands of new "soviet" rulers—disguised factions within the leading party, as was the case with the Jacobins. The reign of these rulers, especially if they be weak, could not long prevail. Either, under favorable international conditions the revolution would return to the dictatorship of the proletariat, which would inevitably necessitate the use of revolutionary force; or, the victory of the big bourgeoisie, of finance capital, or even of monarchy would be achieved, the latter necessitating a supplementary revolution, or perhaps even two.

This is the substance of the analogy with Thermidor. Naturally, if we go beyond the permissible limitations of the analogy, if we orientate ourselves purely on the mechanical externals of events, on dramatic episodes, we can easily become lost and mislead others. But if we consider the class relationships, the analogy is no less profitable than, for example, the analogy which Engels drew between the Reformation and the Revolution of 1848.

The Stalinist Leadership of Italy

I have read recently the first issue of the publication which I have already mentioned—the *Communist Worker* (*L'Ouvrier Communiste*), obviously published by a group of Italian ultra-Leftists who have separated from your organization. Without other indications, this issue by itself would be sufficient proof that we are in a period of decadence and ideological confusion—the result that always follows major revolutionary defeats. The group publishing this paper seems to have undertaken to unite in one whole all the faults of out-of-date syndicalism, adventurism, left phrases, sectarianism and theoretical confusionism, while stamping it all with the mark of student carelessness and trouble-breeding quarrels. Two columns from this publication suffice to make it clear why this group broke with your organization, a Marxist organization; although it is rather amusing to see how they exert themselves to cover themselves with Marx and Engels.

As far as the official leadership of the Italian party is concerned, I had no opportunity to observe them except at the E. C. C. I. in the person of Ercoli. Of a relatively yielding temper and with a well-oiled tongue, Ercoli is fitted, above all others, to prepare an attorney's speech made to order on any subject, and is of

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