

The Period of Right-Centrist Down-Sliding in the C. I.

by L. D. TROTSKY

The policy of the most important Communist Parties, decided upon at the Fifth Congress, very soon showed itself to be completely inadequate. The mistakes of the specious "Leftism" which hampers the development of the Communist Parties, later gave the impetus to new empirical zig-zag deviations, and those to an accelerated sliding down towards the Right. When people are burned by hot milk, they begin to blow cold on water, too. The "Left" Central Committees of a whole series of Parties were just as violently overthrown as they had been formed before the Fifth Congress. The adventurist Leftism made way for an open opportunism of a Right-Centrist type. To comprehend the character and the tempo of this organizational Rightward swing, it must be recalled that Stalin, the leader of this swing, back in September 1924, characterized the passing of Party leadership to Maslow, Ruth Fischer, Treint, Suzanne Girault and others, as the expression of the Bolshevization and as an answer to the demands of the Bolshevik workers who, on their way to the revolution "want to have revolutionary leaders" too.

Stalin wrote, "the last half year is noteworthy in the respect that it brought a fundamental reversal in the life of the Communist Parties of the West, in the sense that the social democratic remnants were liquidated, the Party cadres Bolshevized and an isolation of the opportunist elements took place." (Pravda, September 20, 1924).

But only ten months later the true "Bolsheviks" and "revolutionary leaders" were declared social democrats and renegades, removed from Party leadership and thrown out of the Party.

Despite this panicky character of the amputation of leaders, very often through rude and disloyal mechanical means of the apparatus, a somewhat rigid ideological dividing line between the ultra-Left policy and the period of opportunist down-sliding that followed it, can nevertheless be drawn.

The Revisionism of Stalin and Bucharin

In the questions of industry and agriculture in the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, of the colonial bourgeoisie, of the "peasant" parties in the capitalist countries, of socialism in one country, of the role of the Party in the proletarian revolution, the revisionist theories already appeared in fullest bloom in 1924-25. They cloaked themselves with the banner of the struggle against "Trotskyism" and found their plainest, most distinct opportunist expression in the resolutions of the April conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1925.

Taken as a whole, the course to the Right represents the attempt at a half-blind, purely empirical and belated adaptation to the retardation of the revolution caused by the defeat of 1923. The original attitude of Bucharin, as has already been mentioned, was founded in the "permanent" development of the revolution, and that in the literal, purely mechanical sense of this word. Bucharin granted no "breathing spaces", interruptions or defeats of any kind and considered it a revolutionary duty to continue the "offensive" under all circumstances.

In the above quoted—in its way programmatic—article of Stalin "On the International Situation", which presents the very first entry by Stalin into international questions, we are shown that the second author of the draft also professed the very same purely mechanical "Left" conception in the first period of the struggle against "Trotskyism". For this conception, only a "decay" of the social democracy, a "Leftward turn" of the workers, a "growth" of the Communist Parties and an "approach" of the revolution, existed always and unalterably. But the one who could look about him and discern things was and is a "liquidator". This new "tendency" needed a year and a half in order to observe something new after the change in the situation in Europe in 1923, so as then to transform itself in panic into its opposite. The leadership orientated itself, without any syn-

The following section represents chapter eight from the larger work of L. D. Trotsky entitled, "Revolutionary Strategy and Tactics in the Imperialist Epoch", which will be published soon in book form by the Communist League. "Revolutionary Strategy and Tactics in the Imperialist Epoch", at the same time represents the third section of the document, "The Criticism of the Draft Program of the Communist International" which was presented to the 6th Congress of the Comintern on behalf of the Russian Opposition.

The entire book was suppressed from the delegates to the 6th Congress, in violation of the statutes of the Communist International. The Program Commission of the Congress was permitted to read only two of the sections of comrade Trotsky's historic document, and then compelled to return them to the archives. But this particular section "Revolutionary Strategy and Tactics in the Imperialist Epoch", which presents an exhaustive analysis of the strategy and tactics of the Communist movement in this period, was totally suppressed from the entire Congress. The Communist League has obtained a copy of it, along with other documents mentioned in another column, of which this chapter is now presented to our readers. This entire book will appear shortly in book form at popular prices.—Ed.

thetic understanding of our epoch and its inner tendencies, only after the feelings (Stalin) and filled the fragments of conclusions thus received every time with scholastic schemas (Bucharin). The political line as a whole, therefore, represents a chain of zig-zags; the ideological bond, a kaleidoscope of schemata that have the tendency to lead every fragment of the Stalinist zig-zag to absurdity.

The Sixth Congress would act correctly if it were to decide to elect a special commission which would have the task to gather all those theories that were created by Bucharin, for instance—only for motivating the various stages of the Anglo-Russian Committee. This commission would have to put these theories together chronologically and bring them into a system so as to attempt to draw a malarial curve of the ideas contained in them. That would become one of the most instructive strategical diagrams. The same also holds for the Chinese revolution, the economic development of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics and also every less important question. Blind empiricism, sometimes scholasticism, that is the course that still awaits its condemnation. The effects of this course showed themselves more fully in the three most important questions: In the internal policy of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, in the Chinese revolution and in the question of the Anglo-Russian Committee. In the same direction, even if not so obvious and less fatal with regard to the consequences, this course of the Comintern was also reflected in all the other political questions.

So far as the internal questions of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics are concerned, a sufficiently detailed characterization of the policy of down-sliding is given in the Platform of the Bolshevik-Leninists (Opposition). We must limit ourselves here with a reference to this Platform. This Platform, moreover, now receives an apparently unexpected confirmation by the fact that all the attempts of the present leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to free itself from the consequences of the policy of the years 1923 to 1928 are motivated through nearly literal quotations from this Platform, whose authors and adherents are dispersed in the prisons and in exile. The fact, however, that the present leadership has recourse to the Platform only in sections and particles, without connecting one end with the other, makes the new Left turn extremely unsteady and hopeless, but at the same time gives the Platform, as the generalizing expression of a real Leninist course, an all the greater value.

The question of the Chinese revolution is dealt with in the Platform insufficiently, not concretely and in part is positively false (Zinoviev). In consideration of the decisive importance of this question for the Comintern we are obliged to subject it to a more detailed investigation in a special section (III).

So far as the Anglo-Russian Committee is concerned, the third most important question from the strategical experiences of the Comintern in the last years, there still remains for us, after all that has already been said by the Opposition in a series of articles, speeches and theses, to sum up the results here briefly.

The Results of the Anglo-Russian Committee

The point of departure of the Anglo-Russian Committee, as we have already seen, lay in the impatient endeavor to leap over the young and too slowly developing Communist Party. The circumstances gave the whole experiment a false character already even before the general strike.

The Anglo-Russian Committee was perceived, not perhaps as only a purely episodic bloc of leaders that would unfailingly have to be and would be torn demonstratively at the first serious test in order to compromise the General Council. No, in it, not only Stalin, Bucharin, Tomsky and others, but also Zinoviev saw a long-lived "friendship", a weapon for the systematic revolutionization of the English working masses, and if not the gate, at least its threshold, over which the revolution of the English proletariat would stride. The Anglo-Russian Committee became transformed—the further the greater—from an episodic understanding to an untouchable principle that stood above the real class struggle. That became obvious at the time of the general strike.

The entry of the mass movement into the open revolutionary stage threw even those liberal labor politicians who had become somewhat Left back into the camp of the bourgeois reaction. They betrayed the general strike openly and consciously and then also undermined and betrayed the miners' strike. The possibility of betrayal is always imbedded in reformism. That does not mean of course that reformism and betrayal are one and the same at every moment. Agreements can be temporarily made with the reformists, if they make a step forward. But to keep up a bloc with them when they commit treason shortly before the development of a movement, signifies a criminal neglect and carelessness towards the traitors and a yelling of betrayal.

The general strike had the task of exercising a united pressure upon the employers and the state with the power of the five million workers, for the question of mining was becoming the most important question of State policy. Thanks to the betrayal of the leadership, the strike was already strangled in the first stage. It was a very strong illusion, still to believe after that, that an isolated economic struggle of the mine workers alone would achieve that which the General Strike did not achieve.

That is where the power of the General Council lay. It aimed with cold calculation at the defeat of the mine workers, in the course of which considerable sections of the workers would be convinced of the "correctness" and the "common sense" of the Judas directions of the General Council.

The Role of the Russian Unions in the Bloc

The retention of the friendship bloc with the General Council, with simultaneous support of the lingering economic strike of the mine workers, against which the General Council came forward, was to some extent calculated to create the possibility for the head of the trade unions to come out of this heaviest test with the lightest possible loss of confidence.

The role of the Russian trade unions here, from the revolutionary standpoint, was a very unfavorable and positively pitiful one. Of course, a support of the economic strike, even an isolated one, was absolutely necessary. There can be no two opinions on that among revolutionaries. Yet this support should have borne not only a financial, but also a revolutionary-political character. The All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions should have declared openly to the English Mine Workers Union and the whole English working class, that the mine workers' strike could count seriously upon success only if, by its stubbornness, its tenacity and its impetus, it could prepare the way for a new outbreak of the General Strike. That would have been achieved, however, only by an open direct struggle against the General Council, that agency of the government and the mining employers. The struggle to transform the economic strike into a political strike signified, therefore, an intense political and organizational war against the General Council. The first step to such a war had to be the break with the Anglo-Russian Committee which had become a reactionary hindrance, a chain on the feet of the working class.

No revolutionary who weighs his words will maintain that a victory would have been assured along this direction. Yet the victory on the whole was only possible on this road. A defeat on such a road, which can lead later to victory, would ripen lessons, that is, implant the revolutionary idea in the working class in the meantime. Whereas, the mere financial support of the lingering and inextricable trade union strike (trade union strike—in its methods; revolutionary-political—in its aim) only meant grist to the mill of the General Council, which could await calmly until the crumbling of the strike was forced through starvation and it was thereby proved that it "was right". It was not of course easy for the General Council to await this end as an open strike-breaker for several months. Precisely for this very critical period did the General Council need the Anglo-Russian Committee as its political protection from the masses. In this manner the questions of the mortal class struggle between English capital and the proletariat, between the General Council and the mine workers, were, so to speak, transformed into questions of a friendly discussion—between the two allies of the bloc, the English General Council and the All Russian Central Council of Trade Unions on the subject of which of the two roads was better: the road of an agreement or the road of an isolated economic struggle. The inevitable outcome of the strike was the agreement, that is, the tragic decision of the friendly "discussion" in favor of the General Council.

The Bloc with the General Council and «Stabilization»

The entire policy of the Anglo-Russian Committee, as a result of its false line, was from beginning to end only an aid to the General Council, a support and a strengthening of it. Even the long financial support with which the strike was sustained by the great self-sacrifice on the part of the Russian working class, did not serve the mine workers or the English Communist Party, but only the same General Council. And, as a result of this greatest revolutionary movement in England since the time of Chartism, no growth of the English Communist Party, while the General Council sits in the saddle even more firmly than before the General Strike.

These are the results of this unique "strategical maneuver".

The obstinacy with which the retention of the bloc with the General Council was advocated, which was converted to direct servility at the disgraceful Berlin session in April, 1927, was likewise motivated by reference to the "stabilization". During a retardation in the revolutionary development, one is forced to cling to Purcell, you see. This argument, which appeared to be very convincing, perhaps to a Soviet official or a trade unionist of the type of a Melnitchansky, forms in reality a perfect example of blind empiricism—

(Continued on Page 8)