

A Visit to the Island of Prinkipo

Prinkipo is the old Greek name for the Isle of Princes, about two hours by boat from Constantinople. It was given this name because princes of the ancient realm who incurred the displeasure of the ruling autocrat were dispatched to the tiny island in the Ser of Marmora as exiles and prisoners. The nationalistic Turks, having overthrown the yoke of Greek domination, proceeded to remove all relics of that hated regime even to the extent of changing the old Greek names: Constantinople has become Stambul, and the Isle of Princes has become Buyuk-Ada, or Grand Island.

The name of the island has been changed but it remains a place of exile. There is no longer a single prince imprisoned on it. But for that the island is now reserved for a different kind of exile, for the Bolshevik who has incurred the displeasure of the ruling regime in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. By gentlemanly arrangement between Stalin and Kemal Pasha, Buyuk-Ada has become the fourth place of exile for Leon Trotsky, his wife and son.

Trotsky's Health

We did not visit comrade Trotsky as a newspaper correspondent, seeking sensations and so we have no journalistic sensations to report. As it is, there are plenty of reporters and writers who knock on the door every other day to ask: "May I see M. Trotsky about his views on religion?" or "What does M. Trotsky think of modern art?" or "Will M. Trotsky write a reply for us to Floyd Gibbons' 'Red Napoleon'?" or "Can we get a statement from the report that M. Trotsky is on his death bed?" or any number of similar questions. Yet, out of all these personal questions, so to say, the one about his health recurs most frequently; there have been so many conflicting reports on this point that it will be worth while to state matters accurately.

Comrade Trotsky is not on his death bed, that goes without saying. He is usually quite vigorous and works with customary diligence. Unfortunately, the accumulation of certain maladies, made more acute by his exile in Alma-Ata and the absence of proper medical attention, makes him subject from time to time to malarial attacks and headaches of some severity, gout, and most alarming of all, to trouble with his heart. What is needed is treatment by a specialist as well as a climate and environment for a cure. Thus far, every effort has been made to prevent him from obtaining the necessary attention. It has been a concerted effort of Stalin and Kemal Pasha on the one hand, and all the bourgeois countries of Europe "democracies" and dictatorships, on the other. The much-advertized right of asylum is obviously extended to the Bessedovskys but not to Bolsheviks.

During our brief stay, we talked at some length about the situation in Russia and about the movement in the United States. Trotsky had just finished writing his articles on the new course in Soviet economy and the prospects for the Five Year plan. Just about the same time, the news began to arrive from Russia reporting the latest turn begun by Stalin towards the moderation of the Plan. The question arose: How is it that Stalin, and even Bucharin of late, after having conducted a furious campaign for years against the Opposition by accusing it of being "super-industrialist", finally adopted and began to carry out a plan for industrialization and collectivization which, at least on the face of it, was far more radical than any previously proposed by the Opposition? Comrade Trotsky explained it in this way:

Stalin and the Five Year Plan

The requirements of the economic situation that developed in the country after the presentation of the Platform and Countertheses of the Opposition, and the latter's subsequent expulsion from the Party, soon demanded the formulation of a much more radical and far-reaching program than had originally been conceived. The Centrist faction of Stalin, which had first adopted the timid and worthless plan of Rykov, rejected it under the pressure of the situ-

ation and proceeded with a Five Year plan of considerably greater breadth. The startling successes of the first year—startling to the Centrists who never really believed such a rapid tempo possible—not only demonstrated the enormous latent possibilities for industrial development under a proletarian dictatorship (nationalization of industry, banks, etc., etc.), but immediately produced an extreme boldness born precisely out of Centrism's previous timidity. Almost overnight, the initial successes of the Plan gave rise to the wildest kind of exaggerations. The Kulak was going to be liquidated as a class. The Five Year Plan was to be realized in four years—or three and a half, or three as some said. Agrarian collectivization was now definitely accomplished in half of Russia. The N. E. P. was to be abolished. Socialism was being completed in isolated Russia. These were only a few—and among the mildest—exaggerations contained in the Soviet press, and repeated in the official Communist press abroad. The achievements of the first year were utilized to "prove" that the entire Opposition platform was bankrupt, the previous accusations of "super-industrialism" were converted into "Trotskyist pessimism", and on these foundations, a number of capitulations were realized out of the ranks of the Left.

But the very first signs of difficulties transformed the cocksure braggarts of Centrism back again into timid, cautious bureaucrats. The rapid pace of collectivization and industrialization ran its head into the brick wall of a proletarian state isolated in a sea of capitalist world economy, proving not in abstract theory but in cold practice, the absolutely untenable position of Stalin's and Bucharin's theory of national socialism. A crisis began to develop in agriculture, exactly along the lines indicated by the Opposition. Stalin forthwith sounded the retreat. So long as uninterrupted progress had been made, Stalin sedulously cultivated what he now, when obstacles were encountered, sought to unburden responsibility for: "Dizziness of success".

The Danger of a Retreat

That a retreat was necessary was already evident. It was already proposed by comrade Trotsky to ward off an impending crisis in the country, the danger of which is by no means averted yet. At the same time he raised a warning against the retreat going too far. It now becomes increasingly clear that Stalin who is on the road leading away from the recent ultra-Left zig-zag in Russia will not come to a halt until he has reached the other extreme and accepted the original program of the Right wing. That is now the great danger in the Russian situation.

It is equally clear that Stalin will not be able to gain the support of the whole Party for this new bureaucratic turn about face. In the zig-zag to the Left, mass forces were of necessity unleashed which it will not be easily possible to put in chains again. The proletarian core of the Party will resist the sharp turn to the Right which has already begun. That is why comrade Trotsky spoke with the greatest confidence of the re-formation of a strong Left Opposition inside the Communist Party.

It is in connection with the big journalistic bluff and exaggerations about the Five Year Plan and the capitulation of many Oppositionists who pleaded the "successes of socialist construction" as their pretext for leaving the Opposition, that a humorous but pointed conversation took place. A copy of the New York Nation had arrived one morning, containing an article, "Russia's New Revolution", written by Louis Fischer, one of the innumerable liberal journalists commuting between New York and Moscow and earning a livelihood by writing publicity for the Stalin faction.

We showed Trotsky a passage in the article which read: "Stalin's ultra-radical, revolutionary policy has won the hearts of the Trotskyists, and they have come rushing back from Siberian, Caucasian and Volgan exile to participate in the pressing business of reconstruction. They have come back humbly, with clipped wings, acknowledging Stalin's talents and Trotsky's mistakes..."

Stalin, my ex-Trotskyist friends tell me, had done more than they wanted of him, and more even than they expected of Trotsky."

"You see," we said jokingly while Trotsky was scanning the paragraph, "everybody is saying that Stalin has gone much further than you ever proposed."

"That's true," he replied immediately. "When a man has a boil on his neck, a capable surgeon will simply lance the boil. A shoemaker will go much further and sever the man's head from his shoulders. Yes, there is no doubt that Stalin has also gone 'much further' than I proposed!"

—And the capitulators? Would they play any considerable role in the resurgence of the Opposition within the Party? Comrade Trotsky does not believe they will.

"The revolution is a great devourer of people," he said. "It has burned out these men, used them up, exhausted them. They cannot even play an important part in the Centrist faction. It must not be forgotten that these men are not newcomers in the movement. On the contrary, many of them have gone through two, three revolutions. They spent a large part of their lives in czarist prisons and exiles. They were the militants who organized and led the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 and for years afterwards. They passed through the rigorous years of the civil war and intervention, then through the period of reaction after the death of Lenin, and finally through prison or exile under Stalin. They have lived through the intensest years of history. Very few have come out of them unscathed to one degree or another. The others have been burned out or the revolutionary fires in them quenched."

The "Old Bolsheviks"

Of course this phenomenon is chiefly noticeable and widespread in the ranks of the ruling apparatus. Trotsky mentioned one name after another of comrades in the most prominent Party and Soviet positions, all of them imbued with the profoundest hatred for the "permanent revolution". That formula runs against the grain of every self-contented bureaucrat who has squeezed his bottom firmly into a chair after the consolidation of the revolution's initial victories. All of them have sought to put themselves beyond criticism by the religious title of "Old Bolsheviks" or the "Old Guard". Yet the overwhelming majority of the members of the present Central Committee of the Russian Party are men who, inside or outside of Lenin's Party before the revolution, never went beyond the conception of revolutionary democrats or Mensheviks. Trotsky recounted an incident which adequately characterizes the "Old Bolshevikism" of nine-tenths of the present Party spokesmen.

It was during a meeting of the Party Central Control Commission, where Trotsky was being "tried" and his "non-Bolshevik past" brought out against him. During his speech, he quoted from an issue of the *Social Democrat*, a journal edited and published in Yakutsk jointly by the Mensheviks and a number of now prominent "Old Bolsheviks": Ordjonikidze, Petrovsky (of the Ukraine), and the peerless Yaroslavsky. This paper was issued not in 1905, nor in 1912 or 1914, but in 1917, after the Kerensky revolution and on the eve of the October uprising!

He read from some of the articles written by these "old Guardsmen", all of which were penetrated by the most vulgar kind of bourgeois democratic notions conceivable. The Kerensky revolution—if only it would introduce a few reforms—was hailed as the great people's democratic government. When Trotsky mentioned the trio of "Bolsheviks" who wrote these articles, there was a sensation even in the Control Commission. Yaroslavsky tried to bluster and bluff it out, but the blunter Ordjonikidze simply replied: "Well, what of that? We wrote lots of stupid things in those days."

"Yes," said Trotsky, "but I would let my arms and legs be cut off and my head taken from my shoulders if in all of my writings you could find anything half so bad as this!" A little while later, the copy

of the paper from which Trotsky had quoted, which he had found after considerable effort, was stolen from his room. The Yaroslavskies, so meticulous about the literary records, real and forged, of comrade Trotsky, had no intention of letting their own shameful records lie around where Oppositionists could make use of them. Fortunately, the protocol of the Control Commission still records the damning excerpts—unless that too has been put into the furnace reserved for everything embarrassing to the Stalinist regime! It is precisely such types that are now doing the job of corrupting a whole generation of revolutionists with their shoddy substitute for Leninism.

A considerable part of our conversation was devoted to the situation in the United States and the perspectives for the movement here. He asked about very detail of our work, our numerical strength, the circulation of the Militant, our work in the trade unions, the influence of the Party, the strength of the Lovestone faction, etc., etc. The establishment of the weekly Militant, which he follows closely, he considers the greatest achievement of the American Opposition. When we spoke of the difficulties of the paper, to which every labor and revolutionary journal is subject, he even wrote to the American comrades urging that the greatest efforts be exerted to maintain and strengthen the weekly.

On the "Farmer-Labor Party"

Trotsky does not know the American situation as well as he does, let us say, the Russian, or even the French, but he is very far from being unacquainted with it. Of the American Party leaders, he is "best" acquainted with Pepper. He told of how Pepper came to him during the days of the great "farmer-labor party boom" in the United States, and tried to convince him that the revolution in this country would come about by winning over the revolutionary farmers, allying the Communist Party with the petty bourgeoisie and neutralizing the working class! The question of a farmer-labor party (i. e., a party of two classes) had come up then for the first time in the Political Bureau of the Party in Moscow. Everybody spoke hesitantly or tentatively about it. Stalin even said: "I am sure that if Vladimir Ilyich were present he would be for it." Trotsky intervened immediately and spoke sharply and at length against the whole idea. Kamenev who has a flair for the Left in a theoretical discussion, picked up the thread right away and as a result of the subsequent decision, the American Party was, in part at least, dragged by the hair out of the opportunist swamp into which Pepper had led it.

Trotsky outlined—we repeat them here briefly—his ideas of the perspectives for developments in this country. "In my work on the Russian revolution of 1905," he said, "I remarked on the fact that Marx had written that capitalism passes from feudalism to the guild system to the factory. In Russia, however, we never knew the guild system, with the possible exception of the 'kustari'. Or one might compare the development of the working class in England and Germany with that in Russia. In the first two countries, the proletariat has gone through a long period of parliamentary experience. In Russia, on the other hand, there was very little of a parliamentary system for the workers. That is, the Russian proletariat learned its parliamentary history from an abridged handbook."

"In many respects, the history of the development of the United States is akin to that of the Russian working class. It is nowhere written, and theoretically it cannot be substantiated, that the American workers will perforce have to pass through the school of reformism for a long period of time. They live and develop in another period, their coming to maturity is taking place under different circumstances than that of the English working class, for instance. That is, the stage of a labor party or a powerful socialist party is by no means inevitable. The rapidity of the development of the American workers, of course, also depends to a large extent upon the degree of preparedness of the Communist movement and its clarity. The socialist party in the United States need by no means