

Internationalism and the Theory of «Exceptionalism»

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PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION OF "THE PERMANENT REVOLUTION"

As this book goes to press in the English language, the whole thinking part of the international working class and in a sense—the whole of "civilized" humanity, listens with particularly keen interest to the resoundings of the economic turn taking place on the major part of the former czarist empire. The greatest attention in this connection is aroused by the problem of collectivizing the peasant holdings. And no wonder: in this sphere the break with the past assumes a particularly absorbing character. But a correct evaluation of collectivization is unthinkable without a general conception of the socialist revolution. And here again, but already on a higher stage, we convince ourselves that in the sphere of Marxian theory there is nothing unrelated to practical activity. The most remote, and it would seem, "abstract" disagreements, if they are thought out to the end, will sooner or later always appear in practice, and this latter will not forgive a single theoretical mistake.

The collectivization of peasant holdings is, it is understood, a necessary and essential part of the socialist transformation of society. The volume and tempo of collectivization, however, is not only determined by the government's will but, in the final analysis by the economic factors: by the height of the country's economic level, the correlation between industry and agriculture and

and will by no means ever reach the position of the British Labor Party or the German social democracy

"It is not at all permanently established that the United States will be last in the order of revolutionary primacy, condemned to reach its proletarian revolution only after the countries of Europe and Asia. A situation, a combination of forces is possible in which the order is changed and the tempo of development in the United States enormously accelerated. But for that it is necessary to prepare".

It is the task of the Left Opposition to aid in this preparation, to set the revolutionary movement in the United States upon the path indicated by the guide we already have in Marxist thought, enriched and verified by the experiences of modern history.

On the train leaving Paris, after the conclusion of the international conference of the Opposition we unexpectedly came face to face with an American comrade still a member of the Party, who was returning to the States. We spoke of the trip to Turkey and he told us confidentially of a conversation he had had a little while ago with Eisenstein, the well-known Russian movie director who was then in Paris. Eisenstein had directed the film "Ten Days That Shook the World", a record of the October uprising in Russia. As is quite natural, Lenin and Trotsky—that is, actors taking their parts—featured prominently in most of the scenes. When the film was shown in the United States, many comrades will recall that while Lenin was to be seen, there was not a sign of Trotsky throughout the picture. To all the intents and purposes of that picture, Trotsky might have been in South Africa when the Russian revolution took place. What had happened between the time of the original production and its public showings? Eisenstein told my friend the story:

He was called in to the office of the Sovkino (the Russian film trust) and the chairman said to him: "Eisenstein, art is art, but politics is politics. And you'll have to cut Trotsky out of the picture!" That is how "Ten Days That Shook the World" was saved from the menace of Trotskyism.

That is another task of the Opposition, a task which is part and parcel of the work of preparing the revolutionary Marxists not only in the United States but everywhere else: To re-tell the true history of the Russian revolution, to excavate the truth from under the garbage of filthy lies with which the apparatus men have covered it for without an accurate knowledge of the past and what it has to teach us, there will never be an adequate preparation for our future.—M. S.

consequently by the technical resources of industry itself.

Industrialization and Socialism

Industrialization is the moving factor of the whole newest culture and, by that itself, the single plausible basis of socialism. In the conditions of the Soviet Union industrialization means first of all the strengthening of the base of the proletariat as a ruling class. Simultaneously it creates the material-technical pre-condition for the collectivization of agriculture. The tempos of both these processes are interdependent. The proletariat is interested in the highest tempo for both processes, in so far as the new society that is being created can thus guard itself best from external danger, and at the same time create a source for the systematic raising of the material level of the toiling masses.

However, the tempos that can be accomplished are limited by the general material and cultural level of the country, by the mutual relationship between the city and village and in the pressing needs of the masses, who can sacrifice their today for the sake of tomorrow, only within certain limits. The optimum, that is the best, most advantageous tempos are those that give swift development to industry not only for the given moment, but secure the necessary stability of the social order of the dictatorship, that is, first of all the strengthening of the unity of the workers and peasants, preparing by that itself the possibility of further successes.

From this point of view the general historical criterion from the angle of which the party and government leadership directs the economic development in a planned order is of decisive significance. Here two basic variations are possible: a. the course described above of economic strengthening of the proletarian dictatorship in a single country until further victories of the international proletarian revolution (the viewpoint of the Left Opposition); b. the course of constructing an isolated national socialist society, and that "in the shortest historical time" (the present official viewpoint).

These are two absolutely different, and in the final analysis, contrary theoretical conceptions of socialism. From them flow a different strategy and different tactics.

In the limits of this preface we cannot consider anew the question of building socialism in one country. Other of our works are devoted to this particularly "The Criticism of the Draft Program of the Comintern".* Here we limit ourselves to the most basic elements of the question. Let us recall, first of all, that the theory of socialism in one country was first formulated by Stalin in the Fall of 1924, in complete contradiction not only to the whole tradition of Marxism and the school of Lenin, but even to what Stalin wrote in the Spring of that same year, 1924. From the standpoint of principle the abandonment of Marxism by the Stalinist "school" in the question of socialist construction is no less significant than, for example, the break of the German Social Democracy with Marxism in the question of war and patriotism, in the Fall of 1914, that is exactly ten years before the Stalinist turn. This comparison has no accidental character. Stalin's "mistake," as well as the "mistake" of the German Social-Democracy is national-socialism.

Marxism and World Economy

Marxism follows from world economy, not as a sum of national parts, but as a mighty independent reality, which is created by the international division of labor and by the world market, dominating powerfully in the present epoch over national markets. The productive forces of capitalist society have long ago outgrown national limits. The imperialist war was one of the expressions of this fact. In the productive-technical respect socialist society must represent a higher stage compared to capitalism. To aim at the construction of a nationally-enclosed socialist society would mean, in spite of all temporary successes, to pull the productive forces backward even as compared to capitalism. To attempt, independent of geographic, cultural and his-

torical conditions of the country's development, making up a part of the world's whole, to realize a self-sufficient proportionality of all the branches of economy in a national frame, means to pursue a reactionary utopia. If the heralds and supporters of this theory nevertheless participate in the international revolutionary struggle (with what success—is a different question), it is because as hopeless eclectics, they mechanically combine abstract internationalism with reactionary-utopian-socialism. The most finished expression of this eclecticism is the program of the Comintern adopted at the Sixth Congress.

To expose completely one of the main theoretical mistakes, lying at the base of the national-socialist conception, we can do nothing better than to quote the recently published speech of Stalin, devoted to the internal questions of American Communism.** "It would be wrong," says Stalin against one of the American factions, "not to take into consideration the specific peculiarities of American capitalism. The Communist Party must consider them in its work. But it would be still more wrong to base the activity of the Communist Party on these specific features, for the foundation of activity of every Communist Party, the American included, on which it must base itself, are the common features of capitalism, the same basically for all countries, and not the specific features in the given country. It is not on this that the internationalism of the Communist Parties exists. The specific features are merely supplementary to the general features." (Bolshevik, Number 1, 1930, page 8, emphasis ours.)

These lines leave nothing to be desired in the way of clarity. Under the guise of giving an economic foundation to internationalism, Stalin gives in reality the foundation of national-socialism. It is false that the specific features are "merely supplementary to the general features" like a wart on a face. In reality the national peculiarities are an original unity of the basic features of the world process. This originality may have a decisive significance for the revolutionary strategy for years. It is sufficient to recall the fact that the proletariat of a backward country has come to power many years before the proletariat of the advanced countries. This one historic lesson shows that in spite of Stalin, it is absolutely wrong to base the activity of the Communist Parties on some "common features", that is on the abstract type of national capitalism. It is false to the roots that it is on this "that the internationalism of the Communist Parties exists." In reality it exists on the inconsistency of a national state, which has long outlived itself, and acts as a brake on the development of the productive forces. National capitalism not only cannot be reconstructed, but cannot even be conceived of as anything but a part of world economy.

The economic peculiarities of different countries is not of a secondary character: It is enough to compare England and India, the United States and Brazil. But the specific features of national economy, no matter how big, enter, and that in an increasing measure with their component parts into the higher reality, which is called world economy, and on which, in the final analysis, the internationalism of the Communist Parties is founded.

The Law of Uneven Development

Stalin's characterization of the national peculiarities, as a simple "supplement" to the common type, is in crying and by no means accidental contradiction to Stalin's understanding (that is, his lack of understanding) of the law of the uneven development of capitalism. This law, as is known, is declared by Stalin as basic, most important and universal. With the help of the law of uneven development, turned by

** This speech was delivered on May 6, 1929, was first published at the beginning of 1930, and under such circumstances that it acquires a "programmatically" significance.

him into an abstraction, Stalin attempts to solve all the riddles of existence. But it is shocking: he does not notice that national originality is the most common and, so to say, summed-up product of the uneven historic development. It is only necessary to understand this unevenness correctly, to take it in its full measure, extending it also to the pre-capitalist past. A faster or slower development of productive forces; an extended or, on the contrary, a contracted character of whole historic epochs; for example, of the middle ages, the guild system, enlightened absolutism, parliamentarism; the uneven development of the different branches of economy, different classes, different social institutions, different sides of culture—all these lie at the basis of national "peculiarities". Originality of a national-social type is the crystallization of the unevenness of its formation. The October revolution arose, as one of the grandest manifestations of the unevenness of the historic process. The theory of the permanent revolution, which gave the prognosis of the October overturn, supported itself, by that alone, on the law of uneven historic development, not in its abstract form, but in its material crystallization, in the form of the social and political originality of Russia.

Stalin introduced the law of uneven development not in order opportunely to foresee the seizure of power by the proletariat of a backward country, but in order, after the fact, in 1924 to hang on to the victorious proletariat the task of constructing a national socialist society. But it is precisely here that the law of uneven development has nothing to do with the matter, for it does not substitute and does not remove the laws of world economy; on the contrary, it is subordinated to them.

Fetishizing the law of uneven development, Stalin declares it sufficient as a basis for national-socialism, not as a type that is common to all countries, but exceptional, Messianic, purely Russian. To construct an independent socialist society is possible, according to Stalin, only in Russia. By this alone he puts the national peculiarities of Russia not only above the "common features" of all the capitalist nations, but also above world economy as a whole. Here is where the fatal gap opens in the whole of Stalin's conception. The originality of the U. S. S. R. is so mighty that it makes possible the construction of its own socialism within its limits, independent of what may happen with the rest of humanity. As for other countries to which the Messianic seal has not been affixed, their originality is only "supplementary" to the common features, only a wart on the face. "It would be wrong," Stalin teaches, "to base the activities of the Communist Parties on these specific features." This moral holds good for the American Communist Party, the British South African and Serbian, but...not for the Russian, whose activity is based not on the "common features", but precisely on the "peculiarities". From here flows the dual strategy of the Comintern throughout: while the U. S. S. R. "liquidates the classes" and constructs national socialism, the proletariat of all the other countries, completely independent of actual national conditions, is obligated to simultaneous action according to the calendar (First of August, March Sixth, etc.). Messianic nationalism is supplemented by bureaucratically-abstract internationalism. This duality runs through the whole program of the Comintern, depriving it of any kind of principled significance.

If we take England and India as two different poles of capitalist types, we must state that the internationalism of the British and Hindu proletariat does not at all rest on the sameness of conditions, tasks and methods, but on their unbreakable mutual dependence. The successes of the liberation movement in India require a revolutionary movement in England, and the other way around. Neither in India, nor in England is it possible to construct an independent socialist society. Both of them will have to enter as parts into a higher whole. In this and only in this is the uncrushable foundation of Marxian internationalism.

(To Be Continued)