

Internationalism and the Theory of «Exceptionalism»

(Continued from Last Issue)

Only recently, March 8, 1930, Pravda expounded Stalin's unfortunate theory anew, in the sense that "socialism, as a social-economic formation", that is, as a definite order of productive relations, can be fully realized "on the national scale of the U.S.S.R." Quite another matter is "the complete victory of socialism in the sense of guaranteeing it from intervention of capitalist encirclement"—such a complete victory of socialism "actually demands the triumph of the proletarian revolution in several advanced countries". What abysmal decay of theoretical thought was needed for such sorry scholasticism to be expounded in a learned form on the pages of the central organ of Lenin's party! If we should assume for a minute the possibility of realizing socialism as a finished social system in the isolated frame of the U.S.S.R., then that would be the "complete victory"—what intervention could be talked of then? The socialist order presupposes high technique, high culture and high solidarity of the population. Since the U. S. S. R. at the moment of complete construction of socialism will have, it must be assumed, not less than 200, or perhaps even 250 million in population, then we ask: what intervention could be talked of then? What capitalist country, or coalition of countries would dare think of intervention under these circumstances? The only conceivable intervention could be on the part of the U.S.S.R. But would it be needed? It is doubtful. The example of a backward country which in the course of several "five year plans" constructed a mighty socialist society with independent forces would mean a death blow to world capitalism, and would reduce to a minimum, if not to zero, the costs of the world proletarian revolution. This is why the whole Stalinist conception leads in essence to the liquidation of the Communist International. And really, what could its historic significance be, if the fate of socialism is to be decided in the last resort... by the Gosplan (State Planning Commission) of the U. S. S. R.? In such a case the Comintern has as its task along with the illustrious "Friends of the Soviet Union", to guard the construction of socialism from interventions, that is, in essence, it is reduced to the role of a frontier guard.

The already mentioned* recent article attempts to prove the correctness of the Stalinist conception with the newest and freshest economic arguments: "...precisely now," the Pravda says, "when the socialist type of productive relations, besides industry, begins to take deeper root in agriculture through the growing Sokhoz (Soviet farms), through the gigantic growth in quantity and quality of the Kolkhoz (collective farm) movement, and the liquidation of the Kulak as a class based on complete collectivization, it shows more clearly the sorry bankruptcy of Trotsky-Zinoviev defeatism, which has meant in essence 'the Menshevik denial of the legitimacy of the October revolution' (Stalin)." (Pravda, March 8, 1930).

These lines are really remarkable, and not merely for their glib tone which covers a complete confusion of thought. Together with Stalin the author of the Pravda article condemns the "Trotskyist" conception "for denying the legitimacy of the October Revolution." But it was exactly on the basis of this conception, that is the theory of the permanent revolution, that the writer of these lines foretold the inevitability of the October Revolution, 13 years before it occurred. But Stalin? Already after the February Revolution, that is seven and eight months prior to the October overturn, he came forward as a vulgar revolutionary democrat. It was necessary that Lenin should arrive in Petrograd (April 3, 1917), with his merciless struggle and ridicule of the self-conceited "Old Bolsheviks", for Stalin carefully and noiselessly to climb over from his democratic to a socialist position. This inner "re-growth" of Stalin, which by the way has never been completed, took place, at any rate, not earlier than 12 years after we gave the basis for the "legitimacy" of the

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seizure of power by the working class of Russia before the beginning of the proletarian revolution in the West.

National Revolution and World Economies

But working out the theoretical prognosis of the October Revolution, we did not at all expect that, winning state power, the Russian proletariat would exclude the former empire of the czars from the world economic sphere. We Marxists know the role and significance of state power. It is not at all a passive reflection of economic processes, as the social-democratic servants of the bourgeois state fatalistically describe it. Power can have a gigantic significance, reactionary, as well as progressive, depending upon which class holds it in its hands. But the state power is nevertheless a weapon of superstructural order. The passing of power from the hands of czarism and the bourgeoisie into the hands of the proletariat, does not remove the processes, nor the laws of world economy. It is true that for a certain time after the October overturn the economic ties of the Soviet Union with the world market weakened. But it would be a monstrous mistake to generalize a phenomenon which was merely a short stage of the dialectical process. The world division of labor and the supra-national character of modern productive forces, not only remain, but will increase twofold and tenfold their significance for the Soviet Union, depending on the degree of its economic rise.

Each backward country adapting itself to capitalism, has gone through diverse stages of decreasing or increasing dependence on the other capitalist countries, but in general the tendency of capitalist development leads towards a colossal growth of world ties, which expresses itself in the growth of foreign trade, including, of course, trade with their capital as well. The dependence of England upon India has, of course, a qualitatively different character than the dependence of India upon England. But this difference is basically determined by the difference in the level of development of their productive forces, and not at all by the degree of their economic self-sufficiency. India is a colony, England a metropolis. But if today England should be subjected to an economic blockade, it would perish sooner than India. This is one of the convincing illustrations of the reality of world economy.

Capitalist development—not in the abstract formulae of the second volume of "Capital" which retain all their significance as a stage in analysis, but in historic reality—capitalist development took place and could only take place, by means of systematically widening its base. Consequently, in the process of its development, in the struggle with its internal contradictions, each national capitalism turns in a growing degree to the reserves of the "external market", that is, of world economy. The inevitable expansion growing out of the permanent internal crisis of capitalism, is its progressive force until it becomes fatal to it.

The October Revolution inherited from old Russia, besides the internal contradictions of capitalism, no less deep contradictions between capitalism as a whole and the pre-capitalist forms of production. These contradictions had and still have a material character, that is, they are hidden in the material relations between the city and the village in definite proportions or disproportions of various branches of industry and the economy of the people in general, etc. Some of these contradictions are rooted directly in the geographic and demographic conditions of the country, that is, they breed on the surplus, or the lack of one or another natural resources, and the historically created distribution of the masses of the people, etc. The strength of Soviet economy is in the nationalization of the means of production, and their planned direction. The weakness of Soviet economy, besides the weaknesses inherited from the past—is in its present post-October isolation, that is, in its inability to utilize the

resources of world economy not only on a socialist, but even on a capitalist basis—in the form of normal international credits, and generally "financing", which plays such a determining role for backward countries. In the meantime the contradictions of the capitalist and pre-capitalist past not only do not disappear of themselves, but, on the contrary, rise out of the accumulations of the years of decline and destruction, revive and sharpen together with the growth of Soviet economy, and for their removal, or even softening they demand at every step the bringing into circulation of the resources of the world market.

The Growth of Contradictions

To understand what is now happening in the gigantic territory which the October overturn aroused to new life, we must always picture to ourselves clearly that to the old contradictions which were recently revived by the economic successes, was added a new one, the mightiest contradiction: between the concentrated character of Soviet industry, which opens the possibility of hitherto unheard of tempos of development, and isolated Soviet economy, which excludes the possibility of a normal utilization of the reserves of world economy. The new contradiction added to the old ones, lends to the fact, that alongside of the exceptional successes, painful difficulties grow up. The latter find their most immediate and painful expression, felt daily by every worker and peasant, in the fact that the conditions of the toiling masses not only do not rise in relation to the rise of economy, but even worsen now as a result of the growing food difficulties. The sharp crises of Soviet economy are a reminder that the productive forces created by capitalism, are not adapted to a national framework and can be socialistically coordinated and harmonized only on an international scale. In other words, the crises of Soviet economy are not merely sicknesses of growth, a sort of illness of childhood but something immeasurably more significant, precisely the rigorous pull of the world market, that same one, "to which," according to Lenin's words, "we are subordinated to which we are tied, from which we cannot break away" (at the XI congress of the Party, March 27, 1922).

From this, however, the denial of the historical "legitimacy" of the October Revolution does not at all follow, a conclusion which smells of shameful philistinism. The seizure of power by the proletariat cannot be a simultaneous act. The political superstructure—and a revolution is related to "superstructure"—has its own dialectic, which breaks powerfully into the world economic process, but does not remove its deeper laws. The October Revolution is "legitimate" as the first stage in the world revolution, which inevitably drags out for decades. The interval between the first stage and the second turned out to be considerably longer than we expected. But it nevertheless remains an interval, and does not at all turn into a self-sufficient epoch of constructing a national socialist society.

Out of the two conceptions of the revolution have grown two leading lines on economic questions. The first rapid successes, which were completely unexpected by him inspired Stalin in the Fall of 1924 with the theory of socialism in one country as the crowning of a practical perspective for an isolated national economy. In the same period, Bucharin gave his famous formula that by fencing ourselves off from the world economy by a foreign trade monopoly, we can construct socialism "even at a snail's pace". This was the common formula of the Centrist-Right bloc. Stalin was then tirelessly expounding the idea that the tempo of our industrialization is our "internal business", having no relation to the world economy. Such a sort of national self-contentment, however, could not last long, for it was reflecting the first, very brief stage of economic revival, which inevitably revived our dependence on the world market. The first shocks of intra-state dependence, unexpected

ed by the national socialists, created an alarm, which in the next stage turned into a panic. To gain economic "independence" speedily with the aid of the fastest possible tempos of industrialization and collectivization!—this is the change that has taken place in the economic policy of national-socialism during the past two years. Crawling was substituted all along the line by adventurism. The theoretical base under both is the same: a national socialist conception.

The basic difficulties, as was shown above, result from the objective situation, first of all from the isolation of the Soviet Union. We shall not stop here to consider to what degree this objective situation is itself a result of the subjective mistakes of the leadership (the false policy in Germany in 1923, in Bulgaria and Estonia—in 1924, in England and Poland—in 1926, in China—in 1925-27, the present false strategy of the "third period", etc., etc.). But the sharpest convulsions in the U. S. S. R. are created by the fact that the present leadership tries to turn necessity into good fortune, and, from the political isolation of the workers' state, produces a program of an economically isolated socialist society. From this has resulted the attempt of complete socialist collectivization of peasant holdings on the basis of the pre-capitalist inventory—a most dangerous adventure which threatens to undermine the very possibility of collaboration between the proletariat and the peasantry.

The "Mad Gallop" and the Panicky Retreat

And it is remarkable: just at the moment when this began to appear in all its sharpness, Eucharin, yesterday's theoretician of the "snail's pace" composed a pathetic hymn to the present "mad gallop" of industrialization and collectivization. It is to be feared that this hymn will soon be declared the greatest heresy. For there are already new melodies in the air. Under the influence of the economic material, Stalin has been compelled to beat a retreat. Now the danger is that the adventurous offensive dictated by panic of yesterday will turn into a panic-stricken retreat. This sort of alternating stages result inevitably from the nature of national socialism.

A realistic program of an isolated workers' state, cannot set itself the aim of accomplishing "independence" from world economy, or even more, to construct a national socialist society in the "shortest time." The task is not to accomplish the abstract-maximum, but the optimum tempos that is: such that flow from the internal and world economic conditions, strength on the positions of the proletariat, prepare the national elements of the future international socialist society and at the same time, and before all systematically improve the living level of the proletariat, strengthening its union with the non-exploiting masses of the village. This perspective remains in force for the whole preparatory period, that is until the victorious revolution in the advanced countries will bring the Soviet Union out of its present isolated position.

Some of the thoughts expressed here are developed with greater detail in other works of the author, particularly in the "Criticism of the Draft Program of the Comintern". In the nearest future we hope to publish a pamphlet especially devoted to an evaluation of the present stage of economic development in the U. S. S. R. To these works we are obliged to direct the reader who seeks a closer acquaintance with the way in which the problems of the permanent revolution are posed today. But the considerations brought out above are sufficient, let us hope, to reveal the whole significance of the struggle of principles that was carried on in recent years, and is carried on now in the form of counterposing two theories: socialism in one country and the permanent revolution. Only this timely significance of the question justified the fact that we present here to foreign readers a book, which is largely devoted to a critical reestablishment of pre-revolutionary prognoses and theoretical disputes among the Russian Marxists. We could of course, have selected a different form of expounding the questions that in-

*This book is for sale by the The Militant at 35 cents a copy.

* See the Militant, May 10, 1930.