

# An Open Letter to the Members of the C. P. S. U. (b)

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Dear Comrades:

The present letter is promoted by a feeling of the greatest anxiety over the future of the Soviet Union and the destinies of the proletarian dictatorship. The policy of the present leadership, that is, of the narrow group of Stalin, is leading the country at full speed towards the most dangerous crisis and the worst catastrophes.

Everything that served for years to combat the Opposition, under the pretext that it would not admit it—the question of the "smytchka," a correct policy towards the peasant,—has suddenly been forgotten, or rather transformed into its opposite. The most elementary principles of Marxism are trampled under foot. This has been particularly marked in the question of collectivization. Under the direct effect of the purely administrative measures in 1928 and 1929, in the struggle for bread, the collectivization has attained proportions that nobody had ever foreseen and which find no justification in the real state of the means of production. From that flows without fail the perspective of the collapse of most of the kolkhoz, the institution of profound internal dissensions and the endangering for a long time of the productive forces of rural economy which are already so diminished for the moment.

## Kulak and Kholkhoz

But even the minority of kolkhoz that have vitality, while constituting incontestable progress, is not yet equivalent to "socialism." With their present means of production and the conditions of market economy that accompany them, the kolkhoz will unfailingly cease to emerge from their ranks a new layer of peasant-exploiters. The destruction of the Kulak class outside of the kolkhoz is not only powerless to revive the economic progress of the peasant class but it is not even able to prevent the birth of the Kulak inside the kolkhoz. This truth will be demonstrated primarily in the arts that achieve the best economic successes. By proclaiming that the kolkhoz are socialist enterprises, the present leadership furnishes by that very fact an excellent camouflage for the Kulaks within the kolkhoz. It goes without saying that it doesn't do this deliberately but the misfortune is that its whole policy has always been that way: it thinks of nothing, foresees nothing dragging behind the tail of events and flinging itself from one extreme into the other.

To back up technically, no matter how little, the "generalized" collectivization, one is now forced to augment sharply the production program for agricultural implements. But this production depends in turn upon a series of other industrial branches. The plan of production, without this, had already reached a very high degree of tension. Even admitting that the new production program for agricultural implements could be realized—which is far from certain—the present tempo of collectivization will still exceed considerably the material possibilities.

One must never lose sight of the fact that the collectivization was not born out of a broad test that should have been made of the superiorities of collective economy over individual economy, but exclusively of administrative measures in the struggle for bread. These measures, in turn, were necessitated by the defective economic policy towards the poor peasant and towards the Kulak. It is true that the fundamental difficulties of socialist construction are outside the power of the leadership. They lie in the impossibility of establishing the socialist society in a single country, which is, moreover, a particularly backward country. But that is precisely why one must demand of the leadership a clear understanding of all the factors of evolution, and to know how to determine in time what lies within the realm of the possible and of the impossible. Within these limits, the realization of certain successes on the road of socialist construction is a perfectly possible thing, particularly the maintenance of the dictatorship of the proletariat up to the time of the revolutionary victory in the advanced countries. Unfortunately the Centrist leadership shows a fatal incapacity not only in evaluating exactly the internal resources of the dictatorship but to grasp their interdependence upon the active forces

of the world conjuncture.

The first five year plan elaborated in 1925 foresaw a growth of industry from 9 to 10 percent per year. Under the pressure of the criticisms of the Opposition based on the living experience of facts, the five year plan was completely revised and the co-efficient of growth raised to 20 percent. But from that moment on, the leadership, taking alarm at its own spirit of indecision, no longer knew any restraint. Behind the prescribed tempos were verified by experience, before the first successes were guaranteed, before the conditions of the workers were improved, the Stalinist leadership launched the new slogan: "The five year plan in four years!"

At the same time, the production program for agricultural implements adopted a still more accelerated tempo. As for the collectivization of the small peasant holdings which constituted, by themselves, the most dangerous and slowest task—it left far behind it all the other economic problems. As has frequently happened in history, "chvostism" (being at the tail of events) gave way directly to its opposite—adventurism. But never before had this metamorphosis attained such a scale. And above all, never before had the historical stake been so important, namely: the very fate of the October revolution.

## The Threatening Crisis

Economics cannot be violated. The accelerated pace which outstrips the existing possibilities soon leads to the creation of imaginary resources where there are no real ones. That bears the name of paper money inflation. All the symptoms of it already there and they are at the same time the symptoms of a threatening economic crisis. Before it reaches its explosive form it is already pressing heavily upon the daily existence of the masses, causing a rise in prices or preventing their reduction.

The problem of the distribution of the revenues of the collectives between the immediate daily needs and the needs of accumulation, that is, of an extended production, constitutes the basic problem of socialist construction, a problem intimately bound up with that of the mutual relations between the working class and the peasantry as well as between the different layers within the peasant class itself. These problems cannot be solved a priori, that is, bureaucratically. It is a matter of the daily life of the masses, and these masses themselves must have the possibility to bring "correctives" to the economic programs a priori. That is the place where the economic questions are indissolubly welded to those of the Party regime, the trade unions and the Soviets.

As has already been said, the fundamental causes for the existing contradictions are inherent in the state of isolation of the Soviet Union.

But instead of attenuating them, the policy of the present leadership only accentuates them. There is a basic defeat in the whole economic plan. This plan should have had its aim to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat and its union with the peasant class with the aid of adequate and internally harmonized economic tempos, based on the estimate of the vital necessities of the masses in the present period which is a period of preparation and transition, and that up to the next stage on the road of the world revolution. Instead of this, the plan set itself an unrealizable, utopian and economically reactionary aim, namely: to profit by our backward situation and our poverty in order to construct "in the briefest time" an isolated, independent socialist society. Previously, it had considered that this task was realizable only at a "snail's pace" (Bucharin). Now, the leadership, fleeing the inconveniences of the prolonged delays rushes headlong at a "mad gallop" (the same Bucharin, restored).

In the name of adventurist tempos, whose cadences vary in the very course of execution, which they have not even troubled to harmonize or to check up, and which often undermine each other, the workers' strength suffers the most violent pressure

at the very moment when the existence level of the working classes is manifestly being depressed. The abrupt leaps of the industrialization lower the quality of the products which in turn rebound at the expense of the consumer and endangers tomorrow's production.

That is how on the plan for industry, as well as on that of rural economy or that of finances, the present leadership is leading the country to painful crises and political catastrophes.

At the very moment these lines are written, the first signs reach us of the retreat that has just been begun. First an article by Stalin, then a new circular of the Central Committee. Caught in the claws of additional contradictions for which he bears the direct responsibility, Stalin, generous with words, warns against the "dizziness from success," his wisdom reducing itself to remarking that one should not collectivize what is only fit for "back-yard poultry." That's just where the trouble is! As though the utopian-reactionary character of the "generalized collectivization" held only because of the fact of a premature collectivization of domestic fowls and not at all of having wanted to force the creation of large farms while lacking the technical bases which alone could have assured the predominance of these large farms over the small ones.

## The Stalinist Retreat

The circular of the Central Committee already goes much further than Stalin's article. In retreat, just as in offensive, the Centrist leadership unfailingly drags along behind the tail of organic processes and their repercussion in the apparatus. After the "collectivization" had embraced—only within a few months of time!—more than half of the peasant class, the leaders suddenly perceived that the "well-known" (!) recommendation of Lenin is being violated concerning the indispensable character of the free distribution that must preside over all socialization. The circular at the same time profits by the occasion presented to accuse the "executors" of having equally violated "the code of the artel of rural economy" published by the Central Executive Committee. Now this code appeared only quite recently, that is, after the collectivization had already embraced more than fifty percent of the peasants' holdings. And moreover, this code—something far more important—is full of contradictions and gaps because it deliberately ignores all differentiation among the collectivized peasants, presenting matters as if outside of the especially excluded Kulaks, the remainder of the peasant class constituted a homogeneous mass. The whole policy of collectivization amounts to the policy of the ostrich. The circular of March 15 charges the unfortunate "executors" with all the mortal sins up to treating them (in the name of the Central Committee!) as "dangerous zealots," thus shifting "rudely and disloyally," as is the custom, the mistakes of the leadership on to the inferior agents who took seriously the slogan of the liquidation of the classes "in the briefest time." After the impotent and gross circular of March 15 the unlucky "executors," and following them, the entire Party, find themselves definitely driven into an impasse. And now? More than half of the immense peasant ocean is already socialized. What share in this result, falls upon the "dangerous zealots?" Five percent or is it forty? In other words, does the character of the collectivization accomplished, seen as a whole, rest upon an economic or a purely bureaucratic foundation? The circular does not reply to this fundamental question. Yet the reply is not only obvious but merciless for the "general line" of the leadership.

But the retreat will not halt at these first manifestations, not in the field of economic policy any more than in relation to the internal life of the Party. This time blindness of the leadership has been demonstrated outwardly in too striking a manner. The Party will have to stand the gaff. The de-Kulakization, the collectivization in mass, the bureaucratic transformation of the artels into communes—all these pro-

cesses, still encouraged yesterday without any restraint, are today checked in full swing. Of course, a diplomatic and administrative maneuver can sometimes assume a character of brutality; but abrupt turns reverberating to the vital foundations of 25,000,000 peasant holdings and flinging them Left to Right for a whole year cannot pass with impunity for the Party. Short-sighted, Centrist and bureaucratic adventurism will come out of this experience irremediably compromised.

A correct policy in the U. S. S. R. is conceivable only in harmony with an international policy of the proletarian vanguard. The leadership of the Communist International has fallen to a much lower level than the leadership of the Russian Communist Party.

## The Theory of the "Third Period"

Since 1923, the Communist International has not rid itself of its tragic ways which undermine the organization and weaken its influence upon the working class. Dragging at the tail of events and stumbling each time against their echoes, the leadership of the C. I. for these seven years has constantly had an opportunist policy during the phases of revolutionary high tide and a policy of putchism during the phases of ebb tide. The most recent years, after the Chinese revolution had been lost thanks to the leadership of Stalin-Bucharin, after the saboteurs of English trade unionism had succeeded with the aid of the blind bureaucracy of Moscow, in stamping down the uprising of the revolutionary masses, the leadership of the C. I. has proclaimed the event of the "third period" as a period of direct revolutionary struggle. Since then, that is for two years, the aspect of world revolution has been systematically falsified by deforming it in the spirit required by "the third period". Revolutionary policy reposing upon the real state of the class struggle gives way to a policy of fireworks.

Now it happens that the years of follies of the C. I. were the years of the reinforcement of the social democracy. A new generation of workers had come forward; a generation that did not live through the treason of the social democracy during the war, but which has, on the other hand, known the indecision of the Communist Parties during these six or seven years. Hoping to attract this whole mass and to kill two birds with one stone, the Sixth Congress adopted the theory of "social fascism". As if one could conquer the power of the enemy by means of magic formulae.

In resolving to confuse the democratic bodyguard, the C. I. has rendered the social democracy a signal service. In the countries where fascism presents a real force, such as Italy, then Austria and Germany, the social democracy has not found it very difficult to show the masses not only the difference but the antagonism that there is between it and fascism. By the same token, it absolves itself from showing that it is not the democratic servant of capitalism. The whole political struggle is thus transposed to an artificial plane, and that to the greatest profit to the social democracy.

Having thus erected a wall between it and the social democratic masses, the Communist bureaucracy has in actuality ceased all struggle against the social democracy, reducing its task to tumultuous mobilizations of that small working class minority over which Communist influence extends. That is what the "Red Days" serve for.

The work within the trade unions is invested with the same character. Referring to the indubitable necessity of utilizing the economic conflicts for revolutionizing the masses and preparing the general strike and uprising, the Communist bureaucracy, under the lash of the theory of the "Third Period", applies an adventurist tactic which can lead only to defeats. The study of the concrete conditions of the struggle by strikes gives way to quotations taken from the latest directives... from Manuilsky or Molotov. The political utilization (the "politization") of strikes is most frequently reduced to substituting sham slogans behind the back of the disoriented masses. For the Party bureaucracy, above all other prob-