

The Slogan of the National Assembly in China

By L. D. TROTSKY

(China has been and will continue to be one of the touchstones of Marxist theory and Leninist strategy in the Communist International. The Stalin regime has brought an incredible amount of confusion into the ranks of the Communists regarding the character, the perspectives and the slogans of the Chinese revolution. This important contribution by Trotsky on the slogan of the Constituent Assembly was written in reply to some questions of the Chinese comrades but it is of universal concern to all proletarian revolutionaries. —Editors.)

It seems to me that our Chinese friends support too much of metaphysics and even some scholasticism into the question of political slogans of democracy.

The "delicacies" begin with the name: Constituent Assembly or National Assembly. In Russia until the revolution we used the slogan of Constituent Assembly, because it most clearly emphasized our break with the past. But you write that in Chinese it is difficult to formulate this slogan. If so, it remains to adopt the slogan of the National Assembly. For the consciousness of the masses the contents of this slogan will depend, firstly, in the implication the revolutionary agitation will give it, and secondly, on the events. You ask: "Is it possible to carry on agitation for a Constituent Assembly while denying that it can be accomplished?" But why should we decide beforehand that it cannot be accomplished? Of course the masses will follow the slogan only if they consider it feasible. Who will accomplish it, and how will it be accomplished? Here only suppositions are possible. In case of the further weakening of the military-Kuomintang regime and the growth of discontent among the masses, particularly in the cities, it is possible that an attempt will be made by a part of the Kuomintang together with a "third party" to convene something on the style of a National Assembly. Of course, they will as much as possible cut into the rights of the more oppressed classes and layers. Will we Communists, go into such a curtailed and manipulated National Assembly? If we will not be strong enough to replace it, that is to take over power, we will, of course, go in. Such a stage would in no way weaken us. On the contrary, it would help us gather and develop the forces of the proletarian vanguard. Inside the pseudo-assembly, and particularly on the outside of it, we would carry on our agitation for a new and more democratic assembly. In case of a revolutionary mass movement we would simultaneously build Soviets. It is very possible that in such an event the petty-bourgeois parties would convene a comparatively more democratic National Assembly, as a dam against the Soviets. Would we participate in such a sort of representation? Of course we would participate. Again, if we would not be strong enough to replace the assembly with a higher form of government, that is the Soviets. But such a possibility reveals itself only at the highest point of revolutionary ascent. But as it is presently, we have not as yet approached the beginning.

Even if the Soviets were a fact—which is not the case in China at present—this in itself would not be cause enough for the abandonment of the slogan of the National Assembly. The majority in the Soviets may be (and at the beginning will certainly be) in the hands of conciliatory and Centrist parties and organizations. We will be interested to have these parties exposed in the open forum of the National Assembly. By this method the majority of the Soviets will be won over to our side sooner, and much more certainly. When our conquest of the majority will become a reality, we will counter-pose the program of the Soviets against the program of the National Assembly, we will gather the majority of the country around the banner of the Soviets, which will give us the possibility, in deed and not on paper, to replace the National Assembly, this parliamentary-democratic institution, by Soviets, as the organ of the revolutionary class dictatorship.

The Constituent Assembly in Russia

In Russia, the Constituent Assembly existed only for one day. Why? Because it made its appearance too late, when the Soviet power was already in existence, and came into conflict with it. In this conflict, the Constituent Assembly represented the

yesterday of the Revolution. But let us suppose that the bourgeois provisional government had been sufficiently decisive to convene the Constituent Assembly in March or April (1917). Was it possible? Naturally it was. The Cadets were busy with legal trickery to drag out the convening of the Constituent Assembly in the hope that the revolutionary wave would subside. The Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries took their cue from the Cadets. If the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries would have had a little more revolutionary drive in them they could have convened the Constituent Assembly in a few weeks. Would we Bolsheviks have participated in the elections and in the Assembly itself? Undoubtedly, for it was we who demanded all the time the speediest convening of the Constituent Assembly. Would the course of the revolution have changed to the disadvantage of the proletariat by an early convening of the Assembly? Not at all. Perhaps you remember that the representatives of the Russian possessing classes and following them also the conciliators were postponing all the important questions of the revolution "until the Constituent Assembly", at the same time also dragging out the convening of it. This gave the landowners and capitalists a possibility to mask to a certain extent their property interests in the agrarian question, industrial, etc. If the Constituent Assembly would have convened let us say in April 1917 then all the social questions would have been raised before them. The possessing classes would have been compelled to show their cards, the treacherous role of the conciliators would have been apparent, the Bolshevik faction of the Constituent Assembly would have acquired the greatest popularity and have assisted the Soviets to elect a Bolshevik majority. Under these circumstances the Constituent Assembly would have existed not

one day but possibly several months but that would have enriched the political experiences of the laboring masses and not only would not have retarded the proletarian revolution but would rather have accelerated it. This in itself would have been of greatest significance. If the second revolution would have occurred not in October but let us say in July or August the army at the front would have been less exhausted and weakened and the peace with the Hohenzollerns might have been more favorable to us. Even if we should assume that the proletarian revolution would not come a single day sooner because of the Constituent Assembly, the school of revolutionary parliamentarism would not have passed without leaving its trace on the political level of the masses and this would have made our tasks the day after the October Revolution much easier.

A Slogan to Mobilize the Masses

Is this sort of a variant possible in China? It is not excluded. To imagine and expect that the Communist Party of China can make the jump from the present conditions of the rule of the unbridled bourgeois military cliques, the oppression and dismemberment of the working class, and the extraordinary low ebb of the peasant movement to the seizure of power—this would be to believe in miracles. In practice this leads to guerilla adventurism, to which the Comintern now lends its covert support. We must condemn this policy and guard the revolutionary workers from it.

The political mobilization of the proletariat and following it the peasant masses is the first task that must be solved in conjunction with the present circumstances. And these are the circumstances of the military-bourgeois counter revolution, the power of the suppressed masses is in their number. When they awaken they strive to express their strength of numbers in pol-

itics through the medium of the universal suffrage. The handful of Communists know even today that universal suffrage is an instrument of bourgeois rule and that they can liquidate this rule only through the medium of the proletarian dictatorship. In this spirit you can educate beforehand the proletarian vanguard. But the millions of the toiling masses can come to the dictatorship of the proletariat only on the basis of their own political experience and the National Assembly would be a progressive step on this road. This is why we come out for this slogan in conjunction with four other slogans of the democratic revolution: the transfer of the land to the peasant poor; the eight hour work-day; the independence of China; the right of self-determination of the nationalities included in the territory of China.

It is understood that we cannot deny also such a perspective—it is theoretically admissible—that the Chinese proletariat leading the peasant masses and supporting itself on the Soviets will come to power before the achievement of the National Assembly in one or another form. But for the immediate period this is at any rate improbable, because it presupposes the existence of a powerful and centralized revolutionary party of the proletariat. But in its absence what other forces will unite the revolutionary masses of your gigantic country? In the meantime it is our misfortune that there is no strong centralized Communist Party in China as yet. It first has to be formed. The struggle for democracy is the precisely necessary condition for that. The slogan of the National Assembly would unite the scattered provincial movements and uprisings, give them political unity and create the basis for welding together the Communist Party as an all-national leader of the proletariat and the entire toiling mass.

That is why the slogan of the National Assembly (on the basis of the universal, direct equal and secret ballot) must be raised as forcefully as possible and a courageous decisive struggle developed around it. A month sooner or later the sterility of the purely negative position of the Comintern and the official leadership of the Chinese Communist Party will mercilessly expose itself. This will happen the sooner, the more decisively the Left Communist Opposition will unfold and develop its campaign for the slogans of democracy. In this case the inevitable crash of the policy of the Comintern will greatly strengthen the Left Opposition and will help it become the decisive force in the Chinese proletariat.

April 2, 1930

The Economic Crisis

American capitalism has been unable to overcome the serious depressions in agriculture and in the coal, oil, textile, shipping and other industries, nor will it be able to prevent the coming decline in iron and steel and automobile industries.

The rapid increase in brokerage loans, in face of an average trading volume of more than five million shares a day, presages the beginning of the end of the "bull" market far more profoundly than the price fall of June 1928. The fact that rates for stock-market had to be doubled and quadrupled, has caused the more realistic of the bourgeois economists to be very cautious in their predictions for the coming year.

The fate of American imperialism, we repeat, is now bound up with its dependence on world economy. Conversely the situation in Europe is directly linked with the development of American national economy. The United States will seek to use Europe as a shield to take the blows of its own difficulties. This will in turn create such situations in Europe, above all in Germany, where with proper revolutionary leadership, a new wave of proletarian revolt will be initiated, or the relations between England and America will come to the breaking point. This rapidly materializing process will change the correlation of forces in the United States in favor of the revolutionary proletariat, by undermining the base of the American labor aristocracy.

— FROM THE PLATFORM OF THE COMMUNIST OPPOSITION ADOPTED (CHICAGO) MAY 20, 1929.

In the International Opposition

Pertinent Questions to the Prometeo Group

Dear Comrades:

A few months ago you addressed to me an open letter to which I then replied. Now it seems to me the time has come to address an open letter to your group.

In Paris a preliminary conference of the International Left Opposition was recently held. This conference is a serious step forward because it was made possible only in consequence of lengthy preparatory work of an ideological character. Your group, before the eyes of which this work was being developed, did not consider it possible to participate in this conference. This extremely important fact of absenteeism prompts me to ask you the following questions:

1.) Do you assume that Communism can have a national character? This, for example, is the position of Urbahns, who, while repeating the ritualistic formulas of internationalism, created a purely German sect having no connections in the whole world and consequently deprived of revolutionary perspective. Therefore do you regard yourselves as a national current or part of an international current?

2.) If in your answer to this question you state that you are fully satisfied with your isolated national existence then there would be no room for any further questions. But I have no doubt that you consider yourselves internationalists. In this case the second question looms up: to what particular international current do you belong? There are now three basic currents in international Communism: the Centrist, the Right and the Left (Leninist). Besides these there are different kinds of ultra-Left offshoots who grope about between Marxism and anarchism. Until now we thought that you stood nearest to the Left Opposition. Your hesitancy we ascribed to your possible desire to orientate yourselves in the development of the Left Opposition. This hesitancy cannot be maintained forever. Life is not stagnant either in Italy or in the rest of the world. In order to join the International Left there is no need whatever for false "monolithism" in the spirit of the Stalinist bureaucracy. What is needed is actual solidarity on the basic questions of revolutionary strategy that has stood the test of the past few years.

Particular tactical disagreements are absolutely unavoidable and can be no obstacle for close common work in the framework of an international organization. Wherein do your disagreements with the Left Opposition consist? Are they of a principled or of an episodic character? You must reply to this clearly and precisely.

3.) Your absence from the preliminary international conference can be interpreted that there are disagreements of principle that divide you from the Left Opposition. If this be so a third question crops up: why don't you proceed with the organization of an international faction of your own current? After all you cannot conceive that revolutionary principles adaptable for the whole world are not applicable to Italy or vice versa. The passive-conciliatory attitude towards the Left Opposition combined with reluctance to join it and the refusal to participate in the life of the Communist vanguard of other countries is characteristic of national socialism or national Communism and has nothing in common with Marxist Communism.

Your reply to these questions is of serious consequence not only from the international but first of all from the Italian point of view in so far as these two viewpoints can be in any way set off against one another. The illegal character of the Italian Communist Party makes it difficult to follow up developments. Nevertheless there can be no doubt that within the framework of the Italian Communist Party there are besides the official faction, your group and the group of Rights (Tasca), numerous revolutionary elements who have not yet openly formulated their positions. Under these circumstances you are among the indefinite elements. Meanwhile precisely the illegal existence of the Party demands with double force the full principled clarity of the leading groups. Your reply will help speed up the ideological crystallization within the Italian proletarian vanguard.

It is needless to say that the Russian Opposition would be happy to learn of your decision to join the International Left.

With Communist Greetings,

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Prinkipo, April 22, 1930.