

# STALIN AS A THEORETICIAN

## The Peasant's Balance Sheet of the Democratic and Socialist Revolutions

By L. D. TROTSKY

"... the appearance of comrade Stalin at the conference of the Marxist agronomists—was epochal in the history of the Communist Academe. As a consequence of what Stalin said, we had to review all our plans and revise them in the direction of what Stalin said. The appearance of comrade Stalin gave a tremendous impetus to our work."

—(Pokrovsky, at the 16th Congress)

In his programmatic report to the conference of the Marxist agronomists (December 27, 1929), Stalin spoke at length about the "Trotsky-Zinoviev Opposition" considering "that the October revolution, as a matter of fact, did not give anything to the peasantry". It is probable that even to the respectful auditors, this invention seemed too crude. For the sake of clarity, however, we should quote these words more fully: "I have in mind," said Stalin, "the theory that the October revolution gave the peasantry less (?) than the February revolution, that the October revolution, as a matter of fact, gave nothing to the peasantry." The invention of this "theory" is attributed by Stalin to one of the Soviet statistical economists, Groman, a known former Menshevik, after which he adds: "But this theory was seized by the Trotsky-Zinoviev Opposition and utilized against the Party." Groman's theory regarding the February and October revolutions is quite unknown to us. But Groman is of no account here altogether. He is dragged in merely to cover up the traces.

In what way could the February revolution give the peasantry more than the October? What did the February revolution give the peasant in general, with the exception of the superficial and therefore absolutely uncertain liquidation of the monarchy? The bureaucratic apparatus remained what it was. The land was not given to the peasant by the February revolution. But it did give him a continuation of the war and the certainty of a continued growth of inflation. Perhaps Stalin knows of some other gifts of the February revolution to the peasant? To us, they are unknown. The reason why the February revolution had to give way to the October is because it completely deceived the peasant.

The alleged theory of the Opposition on the advantages of the February revolution over the October is connected by Stalin with the theory "regarding the so-called scissors". By this he completely betrays the sources and aims of his chicanery. Stalin polemicizes, as I will soon show, against me. Only for the convenience of his operations, for camouflaging his cruder distortions, he hides behind Groman and the anonymous "Trotsky-Zinoviev Opposition" in general.

The real essence of the question lies in the following. At the 12th Congress of the Party (in the spring of 1923) I demonstrated for the first time the threatening gap between industrial and agricultural prices. In my report, this phenomenon was for the first time called the "price scissors". I warned that the continual lagging of industry would spread apart this scissors and that they might sever the threads connecting the proletariat and the peasantry.

In February 1927, at the Plenum of the Central Committee, while considering the question of the policy on prices, I attempted for the one thousand and first time to prove that general phrases like "the face to the village" merely avoided the essence of the matter, and that from the standpoint of the "Smytchka" (alliance) with the peasant, the problem can be solved fundamentally by correlating the prices of agricultural and industrial products. The trouble with the peasant is that it is difficult for him to see far ahead. But he sees very well what is under his feet, he distinctly remembers the yesterdays, and he can draw the balance under his exchange of products with the city, which, at any given moment, is the balance-sheet of the revolution to him.

The expropriation of the landowners,

erated the peasant from the payment of a sum amounting to from five to six hundred million rubles (about \$275,000,000—Ed.). This is a clear and irrefutable gain for the peasantry through the October—and not the February—revolution.

But alongside of this tremendous plus, the peasant distinctly discerns the minus which this same October revolution has brought him. This minus consists of the excessive rise in prices of industrial products as compared with those prevailing before the war. It is understood that if in Russia capitalism had maintained itself the price scissors would undoubtedly have existed—this is an international phenomenon. But in the first place, the peasant does not know this. And in the second, nowhere did this scissors spread to the extent that it did in the Soviet Union. The great losses of the peasantry due to prices are of a temporary nature, reflecting the period of "primitive accumulation" of state industry. It is as though the proletarian state borrows from the peasantry in order to repay him a hundred-fold later on.

But all this relates to the sphere of theoretical considerations and historical predictions. The thoughts of the peasant, however, are empirical and based on facts as they appear at the moment. "The October revolution liberated me from the payment of half a billion rubles in land rents," reflects the peasant. "I am thankful to the Bolsheviks. But state industry takes away from me much more than the capitalists took. Here is where there is something wrong with the Communists." In other words, the peasant draws the balance sheet of the October revolution through combining its two fundamental stages: the agrarian-democratic ("Bolshevik") and the industrial-socialist ("Communist"). According to the first, a distinct and incontestable plus; according to the second, so far still a distinct minus, and to date a minus considerably greater than the plus. The passive balance of the October revolution, which is the basis of all the misunderstandings between the peasant and the Soviet power, is in turn most intimately bound up with the isolated position of the Soviet Union in world economy.

Almost three years after the old disputes, Stalin, to his misfortune, returns to the question. Because he is fated to repeat what others have left behind them, and at the same time to be anxious about his own "independence," he is compelled to look back apprehensively at the yesterday of the "Trotskyist Opposition" and . . . cover up the traces. At the time the "scissors" between the city and the village was first spoken of, Stalin completely failed to understand it for five years (1923-28), he saw the danger in industry going too far ahead instead of lagging behind; in order to cover it up somehow, he mumbles something incoherent in his report about "bourgeois prejudices (!!) regarding the so-called scissors". Why is this a prejudice? Wherein is it bourgeois? But Stalin is under no obligation to answer these questions, for there is nobody who would dare ask them.

If the February revolution had given land to the peasantry, the October revolution with its price scissors could not have maintained itself for two years. To put it more correctly: the October revolution could not have taken place if the February revolution had been capable of solving the basic, agrarian-democratic problems by liquidating private ownership of land.

We indirectly recalled above that in the first years after the October the peasant obstinately endeavored to contrast the Communist to the Bolsheviks. The latter he approved of—precisely because they made the land revolution with a determination never before known. But the same peasant was dissatisfied with the Communists, who having taken into their own hands the factories and mills, supplied commodities at high prices. In other words, the peasant very resolutely approved of the agrarian revolution of the Bolsheviks but manifested alarm, doubt, and sometimes even open hostility towards the first steps of the socialist revolution. Very soon, however, the peasant had to understand that Bolshevik

and Communist are one and the same Party,

In February 1927, this question was raised by me at the Plenum of the Central Committee in the following manner:

The liquidation of the landowners opened up large credits for us with the peasants, political as well as economic. But these credits are not permanent and are not inexhaustible. The question is decided by the correlation of prices. Only the acceleration of industrialization on the one hand, and the collectivization of peasant economy on the other, can produce a more favorable correlation of prices for the village. Should the contrary be the case, the advantages of the agrarian revolution will be entirely concentrated in the hands of the Kulak, and the scissors will hurt the peasant poor most painfully. The differentiation in the middle peasantry will be accelerated. There can be but one result. The crumbling of the dictatorship of the proletariat. "This year," I said, "only eight billion rubles worth of commodities (in retail prices) will be released for the domestic market . . . the village will pay for its smaller half of the commodities about four billion rubles. Let us accept the retail industrial index as twice the pre-war prices figure, as Mikoyan has reported . . . The balance (of the peasant): 'The agrarian-democratic revolution brought me aside from everything else, five hundred million rubles a year (the liquidation of rents and the lowering of taxes). The socialist revolution has more than covered this profit by a two billion ruble deficit. It is clear that the balance is reduced to a deficit of one and a half billion.'"

Nobody objected by as much as a word at this session, but Yakovlev, the present People's Commissar of Agriculture, though at that time only a clerk for special statistical assignments, was given the job of up-setting my calculations at all costs. Yakovlev did all he could. With all the legitimate and illegitimate corrections and qualifications, Yakovlev was compelled the following day to admit that the balance-sheet of the October revolution for the village is, on the whole, still reduced to a minus. Let us once more produce an actual quotation:

"... The gain from a reduction of direct taxes compared with the pre-war days is equal to approximately 630,000,000 rubles . . . In the last year the peasantry lost around a billion rubles as a consequence of its purchase of manufactured commodities not according to the index of the peasant income but according to the retail index of these commodities. The unfavorable balance is equal to about 400,000,000 rubles."

It is clear that Yakovlev's calculations essentially confirmed my opinion: The peasant realized a big profit through the democratic revolution made by the Bolsheviks but so far he suffers a loss which far exceeds the profit. I estimated the passive balance at a billion and a half. Yakovlev—at less than a half a billion. I still consider that my figure, which made not pretension to precision, was closer to reality than Yakovlev's. The difference between the two figures is in itself very considerable. But it does not change my basic conclusion. The acuteness of the grain collecting difficulties was a confirmation of my calculations as the more disquieting ones. It is really absurd to think that the grain strike of the upper layers of the village was caused by purely political motives, that is, by the hostility of the Kulak towards the Soviet power. The Kulak is incapable of such "idealism". If he did not furnish the grain for sale, it was because the exchange became disadvantageous as a result of the price scissors. That is why the Kulak succeeded in bringing into the orbit of his influence the middle peasant as well.

These calculations have a rough, so to speak inclusive, character. The component parts of the balance sheet can and should be separated in relation to the three basic sections of the peasantry; the Kulaks, the middle peasants and the poor peasants. However, in that period—the beginning of 1927—the official statistics, inspired by Yakovlev, ignored or deliberately minimized the differentiation in the village, and the policy of Stalin-Rykov-Bucharin was direct-

ed towards protecting the "powerful" peasant and fighting against the "shiftless" poor peasant. In this way, the passive balance was especially onerous upon the lower sections of the peasantry in the village.

Nevertheless, where did Stalin get his contrasting of the February and October revolutions, the reader will ask. It is a legitimate question. The contrast I made between the agrarian-democratic and the industrial-socialist revolutions, Stalin, who is absolutely incapable of theoretical, that is, of abstract thought, vaguely understood in his own fashion: He simply decided that the democratic-revolution—means the February revolution. Here we must pause, because Stalin and his colleagues' old, traditional failure to understand the mutual relations between the democratic and socialist revolutions, which lies at the basis of their whole struggle against the theory of the permanent revolution, has already succeeded in doing great damage, particularly in China and India, and remains a source of fatal errors to this day. The February 1917 revolution was greeted by Stalin essentially as a Left democrat, and not as a revolutionary proletarian internationalist. He showed this vividly by his whole conduct up to the time Lenin arrived. The February revolution to Stalin was and, as we see, still remains a "democratic" revolution par excellence. He stood for the support of the first provisional government which was headed by the national liberal landowner, Prince Lvov, had as its war minister the national conservative manufacturer, Gutchkov, and the liberal, Milukov, as minister of foreign affairs. Formulating the necessity of supporting the bourgeois landowning provisional government, at a Party conference, March 29, 1917, Stalin declared: "The power has been divided between two organs, not one of which has the complete mastery. The roles have been divided. The Soviet has actually taken the initiative in revolutionary transformations; the Soviet—is the revolutionary leader of the rebellious people, the organ which builds up the provisional government. The provisional government has actually taken the role of the consolidator of the conquests of the revolutionary people . . . Insofar as the provisional government consolidates the advances of the revolution—to that extent we should support it."

The "February" bourgeois, landowning and thoroughly counter-revolutionary government was for Stalin not a class enemy but a collaborator with whom a division of labor had to be established. The workers and peasants would make the "conquests", the bourgeoisie would "consolidate" them. All of them together would make up the "democratic revolution". The formula of the Mensheviks, was at the same time also the formula of Stalin. All this was spoken of by Stalin a month after the February revolution when the character of the provisional government should have been clear even to a blind man, no longer on the basis of Marxist foresight but on the basis of political experience.

As the whole further course of events demonstrated, Lenin in 1917 did not really convince Stalin but elbowed him aside. The whole future struggle of Stalin against the permanent revolution was constructed upon the mechanical separation of the democratic revolution and socialist construction. Stalin has not yet understood that the October revolution was first a democratic revolution, and that only because of this was it able to realize the dictatorship of the proletariat. The balance between the democratic and socialist conquests of the October revolution which I drew was simply adapted by Stalin to his own conception. After this, he puts the question: "Is it true that the peasants did not get anything out of the October revolution?" And after saying that "thanks to the October revolution the peasants were liberated from the oppression of the landowners" (this was never heard of before, you see!) Stalin concludes that: "How can it be said after this that the October revolution did not give anything to the peasants?"

How can it be said after this—we ask—that this "theoretician" has even a grain of theoretical conscience?

(To Be Continued)