

The Life of the Exiled and Imprisoned Russian Opposition

By N. MARKIN

The Fifteenth Congress of the C.P.S.U. (December 1927) placed the Opposition outside of the ranks of the Party and sanctioned the state repressive measures taken against it. In the course of 1928 thousands of Oppositionists were arrested and sent into exile. Despite all that, the curve of development of the Opposition for the entire year of 1928 was vigorously on the ascendant. At the beginning of 1929 the G.P.U. ferociously ransacked the Opposition organizations all over the U.S.S.R. Simultaneously the repression not only increased in quantity but also achieved a new quality: the creation of Solitaries; depriving the deported of their work, transferring them to unhealthy places, reducing their maintenance by half; the expulsion of comrade Trotsky; general provocation and so on. In the economic and political domain, the year 1929 was characterized by the accentuation of the Left zig-zag of Centrism, necessitated by the kulak grain strikes in 1928.

The Crisis in the Opposition

The combined influence of these two factors, the ruthless repression and a certain division brought about by the Left turn of Centrism—placed the Opposition before a grave crisis in the summer of 1929. A wave of capitulation passed over the places of deportation. In August 1929 comrade Rakovsky and others made their well known declaration. This declaration was an attempt to realize a united front with the Party. It established certain modifications of the official course, and based on these, expressed anew the desire to defend and to struggle for its ideas within the frame work of the Party, underlining at the same time that the only serious guarantee for the turn was a change of regime in the Party. Rakovsky's declaration—as was evident—was rejected. This served as an additional test of the Party regime by showing the Opposition elements who were seriously doubtful, all the superficiality and the insincerity of Centrism's Leftward turn. The August declaration of Rakovsky brought into circulation extensive theses and submitted the policy of Centrism to a profound and compact criticism. The response of the apparatus to the declaration of Rakovsky forced the Opposition to declare again and precisely that it will not only continue, but enlarge and intensify its factional work.

In the same period comrades Rakovsky and Trotsky again put forth the question of the Party as the central problem of the revolution. Certain capitulators have deluded themselves (and deluded others) with pseudodialectic arguments, in the sense that the correction of the economic line will of itself entail an improvement of the regime in the Party. "It is an absurdity," comrade Trotsky wrote to the Russian comrades, "to believe that the Five Year Plan can modify automatically the regime of the Party. On the contrary, the change of regime in the Party is not only the premise of ultimate successes, but also a certain guarantee against the dangers which grow more rapidly than the successes." And on several later occasions: "The Party regime constitutes a mortal danger precisely towards economy." Rakovsky and other Russian Opposition comrades wrote in the same vein.

However, the Left course of Centrism began, toward 1930, to transform itself into an ultra-Left policy which expressed itself in the "industrialization course", and "complete collectivization." The Left Opposition did not allow itself to be carried away by the Stalinist "dizziness." On the question of our attitude towards the new ultra-Left course, it reinforced its cohesion, while holding to its previous strategy of collectivization and industrialization. The Russian Opposition launched the tactical slogan: Slow down! Retreat! This slogan was unanimously approved by the Russian Left Opposition. Later on, the new course was replaced by a still newer one, in which the elements of adventurist leaps were joined with those of panicky retreat. It is in such a situation that the Sixteenth Congress met, and brought about a new aggravation of the Party regime. "The preparation of Bonapartism insofar as it concerns the Party, has been accomplished. In the Party the plebiscitary regime has been definitely installed," comrade Trotsky wrote to the U. S. S. R.

For the Opposition, the preparation of the Congress expressed itself in a mad reinforcement of reprisals*. The Opposition presented to the Congress a declaration ("of the 7": Rakovsky, Muralov, Kossior, Kasparova, Grunstein, Zinzadze, Aussem.) All these comrades are Opposition leaders and among the oldest members of the Party. Some time before this declaration to the C.C., to the C.C.C. and to all the members of the Party, a long principle declaration called "The April declaration of the 4": Rakovsky, Kossior, Kasparova, and Muralov. Around this declaration a vast polemic developed in the deportation camps and in secret (in the U.S.S.R.)

The Ideological Life of the Opposition

It must be said that from the day of its birth, the Opposition in deportation began to live an intense ideological life. Not only are timely economic, political, tactical and strategical questions profoundly studied and heatedly discussed, but even the most abstract problems of philosophy. The Solitaries have become revolutionary universities. Numerous serious Marxist works have been produced by the pens of deported Oppositionists. The ideological level of the Russian Opposition cadres may be considered, without any exaggeration, as exceptional. In ridding themselves of the capitulatory ballast, in gaining cohesion under the fire of repression, it is the firmest and most valiant revolutionists who have remained in the deportation.

During this current year, the exchange of ideas has been rendered very difficult by an almost complete postal blockade. That is why the study of questions often does not emerge from the limits of the isolated centers of the deportation.

Certain differences—though not of principle—have been provoked by the following theses in Rakovsky's April declaration: "Before the Party is posed the question of supplying the country with food stuffs and with agricultural raw materials by reinforcing the construction of the Soviet farms, at the same time maintaining the rhythm of industrial development." Some of the comrades found a contradiction to the slogan of "retreat" in these theses. Their argument can be summed up in this: "It is our duty to subject the bureaucratic rhythms to a merciless criticism and not to maintain them. The period of ultra-Left adventurism in the Centrist policy of industrialization is not yet at an end."

On the other hand, the comrades who supported the theses of comrade Rakovsky countered with the following argument: "The period in which the articles and letters of Trotsky and Rakovsky (which called for beating a retreat and not for maintaining the rhythms) belong, is distinct from the period of the declaration . . . In the present period, after the collapse of the 'complete collectivization', it is collectivization itself which is in danger. Not only is the 'five-year plan in four years' threatened but the realization of the 'five-year plan altogether, and to support the slogan of a relaxation of the rhythm in such a situation is profoundly wrong." The Editors of the *Bulletin of the Russian Opposition* have not had the opportunity to express themselves fundamentally on this question, since it had not yet received the April Declaration at that time. They simply stressed that "it is of course understood that we are for the 'maximum rhythms' provided they are economically and politically possible," and that it is not this question—despite all its seriousness—which is of decisive importance at present but rather that of the "methods of economic direction and of the life of the Party with whose aid the rhythms have been elaborated, realized and checked."

The Social Nature of the State

Another question which has provoked a broad discussion is that of the social character and perspectives of the Soviet state, and the question which is bound up with this, namely, of the social essence of the Soviet bureaucracy (or of the degree of the divorce between the bureaucracy and the masses, as some of the comrades pose the question), a phenomenon hitherto unknown in history and which has consequently not been analyzed as yet by Marxist thought. To what degree can the bur-

*We will not stop at this question, which has been sufficiently illuminated in the Opposition publications.

eaucracy be considered as a class, as an embryo of a class? Can it become a class? Such are the questions which are at the center of the analysis and discussion on the Soviet system. Evidently, it is not a question of a rigid, that is to say, of a metaphysical formula, but of the analysis of perspectives and the orientation of living processes. According to the Moscow correspondent of the *Russian Bulletin*, this tendency is indicated by comrade Rakovsky "as being the possible line of transformation of the proletarian state into a bureaucratic state with Communist vestiges."

"The great merit," writes the same correspondent, "of the documents written by comrade Rakovsky since 1928, is the profound penetration and entirely concrete analysis of his process. The new declaration in question, in enhancing this analysis and extending it to the new supplement of the Soviet bureaucracy—the nascent collective farm bureaucracy—interested in preserving the current state of affairs, not only establishes that bureaucratic atrophy threatens to denature the social content of the Soviet system in the U.S.S.R., but outlines in broad strokes the characteristics of the bureaucratic order which can follow the Soviet order, while remaining in the domain of real phenomena."

Concerning the bureaucracy, comrade Rakovsky writes: "Under our very eyes, there has been formed, and is still being formed, a large class of rulers which has its own interior groupings, multiplied by means of premeditated cooptation, direct or indirect (bureaucratic promotion, fictitious system of elections). The basic support of this original class is a sort, an original sort, of private property, namely, the possession of State power. The bureaucracy possess the state as private property" wrote Marx ("Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law").

The colony of deportees at X . . . formulates the question as follows: "We are of the opinion that the bureaucracy is not a class and will never become one. We believe that the bureaucracy, the leading stratum of society, will degenerate that it is the germ of a class which will not be bureaucratic at all . . . The bureaucracy is the germ of a capitalist class which dominates the state and possesses the means of productive collectively."

The Slogan of a Coalition C. C.

Difference in tactics, and partially in principle, were evoked by another question. In one of his letters in May, Rakovsky issued the slogan of a coalition Central Committee (Left, Center and Right). Unfortunately, the inadequacy of our information does not permit us to summarize the opinions on this point. A comrade writes: "I believe that this slogan has a foundation (economy is balked, all the factions must take this fact into account and join in following a single tactical line in spite of the diversity of their strategical lines. This slogan can become popular among the masses. It is another question to know if there are any reasons for being optimistic about its possible realization. The general secretary (Stalin) will not join the coalition, and with Party opinion dispersed, it may not be able to exert enough pressure. However, these considerations are not a decisive argument against the slogan. We must work and fight for its realization. In this way we will point out the concrete road—naturally, an imperfect road, but the situation allows of no better one—for the concrete abolition of the political monopoly of the Centrists."

Let us quote an extract from the theses of an authorized comrade, now incarcerated in Solitary:

"The present state of the proletarian dictatorship can be characterized above all by the extreme nature of the bureaucratic degeneration of its apparatus and, so to speak, by the bureaucratic envelopment of the proletarian dictatorship."

The theses say that the economic organs, "seized by panic before the growing elements of catastrophe, seek to overtake this delay by incessantly exceeding the predetermined projects, above all, by excessive increase of the exploitation of the workers and the lowering of their living level. . . . As a result of the super-industrialization, the condition of the workers is worsening. The workers are obliged to adapt themselves to a reduction in real wages and the exhaustion of physical efforts."

The theses define the policy of Centrism in the country in the following manner: "The political consequences of the peasant policy conducted, can throw back the Sovietization of the country for many years and make us return to the old times of War Communism. The whole policy will be discredited, and the most irremediable discredit will affect in principle, even the policy of collectivization and industrialization, that is all the teachings of Lenin."

"The principal misfortune," the theses say finally, "consists in the fact that, while there is a possibility of a reaction, and sometimes even of a decisive influence on the direction of policy by organizing the resistance of the Opposition in the proletarian sector of the Party to the sliding of Centrism to the Right, with the existing regime this resistance cannot take a sufficiently active form to permit making a radical end to this policy of the Right and ultra-Left leaps, and to realize the reformation of the Party leadership."

The Opposition's Growth

The above-quoted theses touch the decisive problem of the Russian Opposition, consequently, the future of the proletarian dictatorship in the U.S.S.R. All the facts show the sympathy existing in the working class towards our ideas, but the weakness of the Opposition organization prevents the crystallization of these sentiments and their necessary development. "Interest towards us is undoubtedly growing, we are weak, although we have numerous supporters." In August, we heard from Kharkov: "One feels that a certain additional push is needed, a new experience, so that what is covered with ashes will flame up again. The work must be organized in a more regular and systematic manner, the Bulletin made to appear more regularly, and we need a well functioning internal organization. On this point, comrades in various sections believe that this push is not far off."

In one of his last letters to the Russian Oppositionists comrade Trotsky raises the question in the following way: "Since the mass of the Party is definitely dispersed, then the sole means of heightening the chances for the development of the October revolution and Lenin's Party by the Reformist road, requires the creation of a well-functioning centralized organization of the Bolshevik-Leninists, armed with sufficient technical means for reacting systematically upon the dispersed public opinion of the Party . . . A half-passive policy in the future would mean, not to mention other things, the gradual physical destruction of our best cadres."

The principal obstacle on this road is obviously the repression and above all provocation. The G. P. U. floods not only our isolated groups of deportees but also the prisons with provocateurs. Provocation is Stalin's main weapon against the Opposition. At the same time, as we have said, the ground for the development of the Left Opposition is very favorable. Facts like the election of a worker Oppositionist as chairman of the factory council, the refusal of the workers to elect another in spite of the rabid pressure of the apparatus, and finally his arrest by the G.P.U. (Mechanical Shops, Kharhov), the successful organization of collections among the workers on the Moscow-Kazan railway, upon their own initiative, for aid to the deportees and their families, the steady torrent of new deportees, the almost daily arrests of new Oppositionists, generally still members of the Party—all this proves that the Opposition is not stifled. And in spite of the incessant arrests, the G. P. U. cannot exhaust the reserves of the Opposition, since they are steadily renewed.

New Deportations

A special and very characteristic phenomenon is the arrest of capitulators, that is, of former Oppositionists who signed the declaration of Radek or Smirnov. Capitulators imprisoned and deported a second time are not isolated cases, but constitute a large phenomenon of their type. It shows, on one hand, that among the capitulators, after the return to Moscow, there is manifested again "relapses into Trotskyism", and on the other, the great fear of the apparatus even for the cadavers of the Opposition—the capitulators.

In recent letters (October), the comrades communicate that these phenomena not only do not cease, but on the contrary increase. Capitulators are mentioned who arrived in deportation in September or October, that is, more than a year after their capitulation.