

The Trial of the Russian Mensheviks

THE REAL DISPOSITION OF THE FIGURES ON THE POLITICAL SCENE

The connection of the Mensheviks with the wreckers on the one hand and with the imperialist bourgeoisie on the other, is not something unexplored. The discovery of this connection, irrefutably confirmed by the avowals of the members of the Menshevik center, has, however, a great demonstrative significance because it proves in a particularly striking manner that a policy, in spite of all the democratic abstractions with which one wants to cover it, is inevitably filled with a class content and embodies the interests of this class. One cannot go towards "pure" democracy without going towards capitalism. One cannot go towards capitalism without becoming the agent of the imperialist bourgeoisie. By its class content, the rôle of the Mensheviks in the U. S. S. R. is in no way distinguished from the rôle of the Labor party in Great Britain, of the social democrats in Germany. The form and the methods are different, the essence is the same. The struggle against the social democracy is a struggle against the democratic wing of socialism.

There is, however, in the trial of the Mensheviks a circumstance which may appear secondary at first sight or even escape our attention but which in reality clarifies in a harsh light the political disposition of the figures on the scene. All the accused are of an age varying from 45 to 56 years; only two, the youngest of them, are 39 and 41 years old. We find before us representatives of the elder generation of the Mensheviks, of the founders of Menshevism, of its theoretical and practical leaders in the first revolution, in the years of the reaction, during the war period, in the months of the February revolution and during the first years of the Bolshevik régime. Yet there is an interruption in their presence in the party which coincides with a certain period of the Soviet régime. All the 14 Mensheviks, with one possible exception, broke their connections with the Menshevik party for a number of years ranging from three to nine, and the majority of them worked in this period in Soviet institutions on the basis of the official course and not in accordance with the directions of the Menshevik center. During the period which runs from 1923-1924 and 1926-1927, almost nobody among the accused had any connections, not even formal ones, with the Menshevik party and with its center abroad. The reestablishment of the official Menshevik organization was effected on the initiative of the accused only three years ago.

WHO ARE THE MENSHEVIK DEFENDANTS?

The first figure in this trial is Groman. His contact with the Menshevik party, whose most prominent economist he was, was broken in 1922, that is, at the time when, with Lenin ill and turned away little by little from the work, the preparations were begun in the apparatus for a whispered, but intensive struggle against "Trotskyism". Groman returned to the ranks of the Mensheviks in 1926. Ginsburg, after having inspired the All-Union Council of National Economy for a number of years, returned to the ranks of the Mensheviks after an interlude of six years in 1927, just like the other pillar of the A.-U. C. N. E., Sokolovsky. The others came back in 1918, some only in 1929. "The Bureau of the Union", that is, the Central Committee of the Mensheviks in Russia, was finally constituted, according to the indictment, at the beginning of 1928. The significance of this date will stand out before us in all its clarity by quoting the following passage from the indictment: "The evolution from the positions of peace in 1924 to the positions of armed insurrection within the country and armed intervention from without is the evolution of the Menshevik social democracy during the period from 1924 to 1930."

Now all is clear. It is precisely during the years when the Stalinist bureaucracy conducted an ever more "armed" struggle against the Left Opposition that the Mensheviks disarmed, or broke finally with their party, considering that what was necessary would happen without them, or else occupied themselves with peaceful politics, with cabinet politics which also served as a foundation for their hopes in the bourgeois evolution of the Bolsheviks. The pogrom against the Left Opposition was the preliminary condition for the conciliation of the Mensheviks with the Stalinist régime. This is the principal fact registered clearly but precisely in the indictment of February 23, 1931.

When did Stalin's course to the Left begin? On February 15, 1928, when it was for the first time decreed openly in the leader of Pravda. The Bureau of the Union was definitely formed, as we know, at the beginning of 1928. The political turns

By LEON TROTSKY

of both processes coincide completely. At the very moment when the Stalinist bureaucracy, out of fear of the Opposition which was submitted to pogroms but not vanquished, saw itself obliged to make an abrupt turn to the Left the Mensheviks rallied around the banner of the struggle for the overturn of the Soviet régime.

The indictment in the affair of the sabotaging specialists established on the basis of the dispositions of the accused that, during the period between 1923-1928, the essential work of the sabotaging engineers in the State Planning Commission, in the A.-U. C. N. E. and in the other directing economic centers, consisted of artificially slowing down the rhythms of industrialization and collectivization. It is precisely upon the basis of the technical and economic data of Ramzin and Osatchi on the one hand, and of Groman, of Ginsburg and of Sokolovsky on the other, that the Central Committee conducted a furious attack upon the "super-industrializers" for the defense of the pseudo-Leninist line. As to the rhythms of industrialization, the principal defendant, Ramzin, declared: "The principal organs which decided these questions were entirely in the hands of the Industrial party." The Mensheviks only served the industrial center abroad. In his struggle against the Opposition, Stalin was only the loud-speaker of the two parties: of the Menshevik party and of the Industrial party.

Beginning with 1928, according to the avowals of Ramzin and the others, the legal sabotage, in the form of the artificial slowing down of the rhythms of industrialization, became impossible because of the too abrupt turn of the official policy. It was at this very moment that the Menshevik "Bureau of the Union" was formed, which completed an abrupt turn in the meth-

ods of struggle of the Mensheviks against the Soviet power. The Bureau drew closer in this work to the central revolutionary specialists and the emigrant bourgeoisie.

THE TWO FUNDAMENTAL LINES

There exist only two firm and serious lines: the line of the imperialist bourgeoisie and the line of the revolutionary proletariat. Menshevism is the democratic mask of the first line. Stalinism is the Centrist deformation of the second. In the heat of the struggle against the consistent revolutionary proletariat faction, the Centrists found themselves in a bloc, not formal but all the more efficacious, with the Mensheviks; thus, unconsciously, the Centrists did what the Mensheviks did consciously, that is, they realized the tasks of the capitalist general staff abroad. Beginning with the moment when the Centrists, under the pressure of the Left Opposition, leaned abruptly to the Left—early in 1928—the Mensheviks made an abrupt turn in the spirit of an open bloc with the world bourgeoisie. That is the real and incontestable disposition of the principal figures on the political scene.

The Ramzins, the Osatchis, as well as the Mensheviks, have confessed. The question of knowing to what extent these confessions are sincere is not of great interest to us. It is, however, beyond doubt that the next trial will reveal the transgressions of the saboteurs guilty of the disordered acceleration of disproportionate rhythms in the complete collectivization, in the administrative dekulakization; the trial will show that if the Menshevik economists, in the years 1923-1928 saw, and with reason, the path to the bourgeois degeneration of the Soviet system in the retardation of industrialization, many of them beginning with 1928, became veritable super-industrializers so as to prepare, by means of economic adventurism, the political downfall of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Illinois Miners Convention

(Continued from page 1)

suiting the miners, conducted like a putsch on a small scale, and concluded in the miserable defeat, to which its whole conception doomed it in advance; for the false, sectarian course pursued at the time of last year's miners' convention, which the N. M. U. boycotted against the urgent appeal of the Left Opposition to see that the Left wing was represented there to prevent its unchallenged domination by Fishwick, Farrington, Germer, Walker, Howat and Co. In discrediting itself—and this is worst of all—Stalinism has succeeded also in besmirching to a large extent the banner of Communism and the cause of the Left wing as a whole.

Heavily and disastrously as the past weighs upon the Left wing, it is yet possible to repair the evil done, providing that a new course is charted and helmsmen put at the wheel who know their business and are imbued with an awareness of their responsibilities in the movement. The miners who represent the best and most consistent of the Communists among the miners, Left Oppositionists and Left wing militants like Joe Angelo, Gerry Allard, John Watt, Ed Morgan and others, are fighting to reestablish the strength and prestige once enjoyed by our movement in Southern Illinois. And in the face of their activities, the Muste straddlers, running true to form, are trying to put every obstacle in the path of the real Left wing militants. "You men are too red. You'll get the movement in bad." That is how the Musteites approach the activities of the Communists whom they fear only less than they fear to arouse any fundamental conflict with the labor bureaucracy whose come-ons they are.

The active presence of the Musteites, before, during and after the St. Louis convention demands an ever increasing attentiveness on the part of the Left wing workers. The latter must be in the forefront to prevent a repetition of the black year when the "progressives" raised such vain hopes in Fishwick's diplomatic maneuver and helped him to betray the miners. Now more than ever is a correct policy the imperative need in the situation. Such a policy has been advanced by the Left Opposition. We elaborated it in our last issue, and proposed to the party and the Left wing to adopt it. In a few words it was this: the miners have begun to revolt against their treacherous leaders of yesterday; the pseudo-progressives are seeking to capitalize the situation; the Left wing must penetrate the movement and guide it properly, towards the end of consolidating the miners on a national scale into a powerful class struggle union, embodying the new militant forces and those grouped in and about the National Miners

Union.

Torn between their dislike to adopt this course of action mainly because the Left Opposition proposed it, and the pressure which the facts of life exert, the Stalinist bureaucracy is "solving" the problem in characteristic fashion. That is, it militates against the possibility of progress by paying homage to the incoherent philosophy of "social fascism"; it yields to the compulsion of events and our criticism by borrowing from our proposals; it fuses the two incompatible standpoints and leaves a loophole open for the inevitable "self-criticism", i. e., the sport of fixing the blame for the defeat prepared by the Fosters, Bedachts and Browders upon the shoulders of the lower functionaries and the ranks.

True, such a course, or multiplicity of courses, does not add to the clarity that is so essential; it only makes confusion worse confounded and reveals the thorough bankruptcy of the Stalinist statemen.

Confusion Instead of Policy

In the Daily Worker of April 14, the whole movement is dismissed as nothing more nor less than this: "We shall have in the mining industry a pure and simple social fascism."

In Illinois itself, the National Miners Union of the Illinois District, whose strength begins and ends with its post office box address, has issued a leaflet which repeats the same radically blundering policy which the official party pursued last year: to boycott the new movement, to boycott the St. Louis conference, and to substitute activity in this movement with a bare, unheeded call to the miners to join the N. M. U. "Do not send delegates to Howat's convention April 15!" it writes with double emphasis. "Organize N. M. U. locals in every mine!"

Then, to raise the confusion to untouched peaks, Foster himself proceeds to lay down the laws and to select in advance the scapegoats who are destined to be "self-criticized" for the disaster. Writing in the Daily Worker of April 9, he goes through the obligatory ritual of denouncing "Watt, Angelo and their handful of Trotskyists working under the leadership [so!] of Muste", in order to cover up the mortifying fact that a few paragraphs later he is compelled to repudiate (not by name, of course, at least not as yet) the Illinois party members, and to borrow plaudits from the program of the same confounded Trotskyites (again not by name). He continues:

"The course that the miners should take at the Illinois convention [but the N. M. U. leaflet a few days before said: Do not send delegates to Howat's convention!] is clear. First of all they should clean out Howat and his gang. . . . The miners must repudiate

What about the N. M. U. miners are streaming en mas

"Secondly, at the convention [to which the miners should not send delegates, according to the N. M. U.] the miners should take charge of their movement [not their's, Foster; it is the movement of pure and simple social fascism] themselves. They should elect a rank and file committee to head the organization" [What organization—the N. M. U. or a new one?].

"Thirdly, the miners of the Illinois convention [again: to which the miners must send no delegates!] should then develop a united front with the National Miners Union. Such a united front, based upon the elementary demands of the miners would lead to a real solidification of the workers' ranks and lay the basis for effective struggle."

But that is precisely what the Left Opposition proposed over a year ago at the time of the Fishwick-Lewis split! And even more to the point: that is just what we proposed weeks ago, when the revolt was at its inception and when the party deliberately ignored it, thinking to solve the need of a policy towards it by the artifice of suppressing all news of the movement in the columns of its press! Again, it must be asked of Foster and all the other Hathaways, what happens to the more "simple" demand made by the Illinois N. M. U. that the miners join their organization outright, without the bothersome united front business?

Foster concludes his article with the significant remark: "In Illinois the N. M. U. made many serious mistakes during the strike of a year and a half ago." Here the N. M. U. is not merely palmed off as a pseudonym for the Fosters, who were primarily responsible for the disastrous blunders, just as they are today, but the ground is laid for repeating the disgraceful sport of shifting responsibility (a few months or weeks hence) for the party leaders' confusionism to the shoulders of the rank and file "in Illinois".

The Left Wing Must Act

In any case, necessary as it is, the Left wing dares not wait until the Stalinist high priests decide which of their many policies is right and who is "responsible for the wrong policy" or for the "wrong application of the policy". It must carry on now and strike while the iron is hot. The miners of four or five of the most important coal districts are moving ahead progressively, seeking for a way out of the swamp of misery into which the Lewises the Fishwicks, the Howats and their associates have led them in the past. The scholarly Messiahs of the Muste university are running to the head of the column to head off the militant movement, to divert it along a by-path that leads back to the reactionary swamp. The big Stalinist artists at sleight-of-hand are jerking rabbits of all colors out of the bag. They stand now on one foot, now on the other. The Left Opposition, through its militants like Joe Angelo and others, is exerting every effort to help the miners' movement find its way. It is attempting to rally again the Left wing and Communist fighters in the mine fields who once constituted such a powerful factor in the progress of the miners.

The St. Louis conference, regardless of its size at the moment, can be made a point of departure for a new epoch of advance, not only for the miners but for the American labor movement as a whole. Blunders now will prove trebly disastrous. Cowardice of self-constituted leaders, indecision, the policy of trafficking with the interests of the coal miners, is more than ever condemnable. The miners are marching, and the Left wing must march loyally with them, assisting them in every way, clearing the road for them, giving them courage and foresight, and investing their movement with vitality and resoluteness. If the advanced Left wing militants tread this road they will find themselves supported not only by those who in the past have fought with the revolutionary wing, not only by the Communist miners active in the movement today, but also by the bulk of the miners as a whole. —M. S.

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