

# The Theory of Stalinism and the Revolution in Spain.

By MAX SHACHTMAN

One of the surest marks of the philistine in the revolutionary movement is his contempt for the theories which underlie it. No more dangerous philistine inside the movement can be imagined than the one who conceals this contempt under the thin cover of a vulgar "practicalism". He who protests, "Yes, yes, theory may be all right, but we must be practical," will always lead the workers into the opportunist morass. As for the Marxist, to whom the word "practise" has an infinitely more serious connotation, he is guided by Lenin's terse axiom: Without revolutionary theory—no revolutionary practise.

One of the most highly perfected types of superficial "practical people" is Stalin. In his image, there has been created a whole school which permeates and poisons the life and thought of the official Communist movement today. It is no accident that Stalin called the invaluable theoretical discussion which shaped Bolshevism in its struggle against Menshevism and other petty bourgeois tendencies, "a storm in a water glass" (1911). Again, it is characteristic of Stalin and his school that, in the struggle against the Bolshevik-Leninists (Opposition) within the party, they constantly derided the latter as "émigrés" (with special reference to Trotsky, of course, but unwittingly to Lenin as well!), in contrast to those "practical people" who, like Stalin, remained in Russia between the first two revolutions and conducted the work at home while the others "theorized" abroad. This attitude is in the very nature of tendency which Stalin represents—Centrism, which, having no distinct theoretical foundation of its own, finds a substitute for it in the scraps it borrows from the stark opportunism of the Right wing and the Marxian principles of the Left wing, and fuses into a formless, eclectic mass.

## The National-Socialist Conception

The eclecticism of the Stalinist faction the world over is most clearly expressed in the combination of the theory of socialism in one country and the mechanical, lifeless, bureaucratic internationalism which it has foisted upon all the parties of the Comintern. That Centrism holds so tenaciously to the "theory" of national socialism does not at all refute our contention that it is thoroughly imbued with a profound scorn for Marxian theory. The nationalist conception of Stalin-Bucharin arose and achieved its dominant position in the Communist movement only because of the retardation of the world revolution, because a period of reaction set in after the proletarian defeats in 1923-1924, as a reaction against the revolutionary perspectives which flowed from a Marxian evaluation of our epoch.

For some seven years now, the Left Opposition has conducted an intransigent struggle against this conception. Nobody initiated into the elements of Marxism has been able to defend it. That is why the official "defense" of the Stalinist version of national socialism begins and ends, in the Communist party, with the summary organizational suppression of those who oppose it. Unofficially, it is confidentially "defended" in this way: "It is true that as a 'theory' it does not hold water from a Marxian point of view; but it nevertheless gives the Russian working class a practical perspective towards which to strive."

To this disgraceful cynicism, which pretends to believe that at its worst the idea can do no particular harm, the Opposition has replied: Ideas do not live in the clouds. They are shaped by conditions and events. But in turn, they help to shape events. The idea that a classless socialist society can be established within the boundaries of one country alone (and in agricultural Russia at that) providing only that it is guaranteed against military intervention has already had far-reaching historical consequences of disastrous dimensions. From this idea flowed not only our ruinous alliance with such "anti-interventionists" as Purcell and Co., and with such "fighters against imperialism" as Chiang Kai-Shek, but, in the long run, something even more pernicious. The international Communist movement is being transformed from a militant instrument of working class offensive into a far-flung system of frontier guards for the U. S. S. R., from the organization of the world revolution into a pacifist defense organization.

The recent years of revolutionary history have unfortunately given more than one sorry instance of this humiliating conversion. Today, the official attitude of the Stalinist bureaucracy towards the revolutionary events in Spain contribute further proof of the reactionary effects of the theory of socialism in one country.

Wherein lies the immense revolutionary significance of the events in Spain? In a few words it is this: Under the surface of the victory of the republicans over the mon-

archists lie the threat to both of them of the permanent revolution, that is, of the revolutionary proletariat coming to power at the head of the popular masses. Given a resolute Communist party in Spain, imbued with the audacity that inspired Lenin, Trotsky and the Russian Bolsheviks in 1917, the Spanish Kerenskys and Tchernovs can be turned out and the revolutionary Soviet régime established in their place. A successful proletarian revolt in Spain, which is an "absurdity" only to such people as regarded a Bolshevik victory absurd in the early part of 1917, would not only be of incalculable assistance to the Soviet Union, but would give a mighty impulsion to the international proletarian revolution, primarily in Europe. From this standpoint, the events in Spain must arouse the greatest enthusiasm among revolutionists, who look upon today not only as the continuation of yesterday but as the beginning of tomorrow.

It is true that the proletarian tomorrow has been retarded in Spain by the bureaucratic régime, the ignorance and downright neglect of Stalinism. The Molotovs, who discover revolutionary situations where there are none, who declared almost two years ago that it was France which was entering "with both feet into an era of great revolutionary events", are naturally taken completely unawares by revolutionary events which break out in reality, and not merely in bureaucratic fantasy. The same Molotovs, Kussinens, Manuilskys, and other shadows of Stalin, conduct themselves with such brilliant strategical wisdom and a display of the qualities of leadership, that when a revolutionary situation actually arises, they either tie the Communist party to the chariot of the enemy (to Chiang Kai-Shek in China, to Purcell in England, to Pilsudsky in Poland), or else carry on in such a manner that the official Communist party is totally unprepared to play any decisive rôle in the situation (July 1927 events in Vienna, the present day in Spain). A revolutionary situation of first magnitude in Spain—and an insignificant Communist party! That is how Stalinism rewards the Communist International for its long toleration of Centrist rule. But even the barriers set up by Stalinism are not insurmountable. In the heat of revolutionary struggle, a Communist party can be forged and tempered with unusual rapidity.

To what extent, in what sense will the ruling bureaucracy contribute towards this end? It has already given a provisional reply to this question. In it is expressed in the crassest manner the reactionary significance of the theory of socialism in one country. The "practical people" now appear on the scene as onlookers from afar who are anxious and disturbed by the revolutionary events in Spain because they

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who declared that the Political Bureau no longer exists, but only a group of four: Stalin, Molotov (?), Kaganovitch and Ordjonikidze. But Syrzov submitted right away. They tell how, during the transfer of the affairs of the People's Commissariat of the R. S. F. S. R. (to Sulimov), he broke out into sobs and generally acted like a milk-sop. He said while whimpering that all his political actions ought to be considered the result of his sick condition, that his nerves are upset, that he needs a cure, etc. . . .

It is extremely interesting to recall the declaration made by Stalin in a conversation with Lominadze at the time the latter enjoyed his full confidence; "The Communist International represents nothing by itself and is kept up only by the aid of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Withdraw the support and nothing will remain of the Comintern". This assertion is extraordinarily cynical, even for Stalin! Lominadze used it in the factional struggle. Stalin, of course, denies the whole conversation.

The last declaration of repentance by Bucharin, which, as is known, was more or less accepted by the Central Committee, and for criticism of which Bogushevsky, the ever-servile bootlicker, was covered with abuse, was preceded by the following events. At one of the meetings of the Central Committee, where he was thoroughly riddled, Bucharin left weeping, and then turned in the declaration demanded of him. In party circles the rumor obstinately persists, and it is very close to the truth, that Bucharin threatened the Political Bureau to commit suicide if the persecutions were not called

off. This, it appears, produced a certain effect.

I have recently had the occasion to speak with a provincial member of the Central Control Commission, an old friend. He declared flatly that the majority of the members of the C. C. C. were in their very hearts with Bucharin's position, and that they consider the present situation in the party catastrophic. "Bucharin is right; as for Stalin, he is ruining the country," those are his actual words. And they are completely overwhelmed by the organizational measures taken against Rykov and Bucharin. The state of nervous panic of these members of the C. C. C. is obvious from the fact that after having interrupted the conversation in the middle of the sentence, he held his head and ran out of the room. Another, more outstanding member of the C. C. C. expressed himself, according to my friend, in the following way: "Before, it was Trotsky who was right against Stalin; now it's Bucharin."

A highly esteemed member of the C. C. C. replies to the question, "What does he think of the Syrzov-Lominadze faction?" by saying, "In general, I don't do any more thinking." Further, during the discussion at the Central Committee plenum on the Bucharin question, a very spicy detail was revealed about Millutin. He kept on interrupting Bucharin with insolent remarks: "Tell us rather about yourself," and so on. Bucharin could contain himself no longer and retorted: "And you'd better tell us how you were first in our ranks. The party knows nothing about it, does it?" That is how it was revealed that Millutin fell directly from the followers of Bucharin into the rank of his traducers. That is how the ardor of his over-anxious zeal is to be explained.

more dangerous.

"Paradoxically enough, it appears that Moscow is not overdelighted by this circumstance—in fact it may almost be said that if the Spanish revolution 'swings Left', as Moscow now expects, Moscow will be more embarrassed than pleased. One would naturally have expected Pravda to salute the chance of a Spanish proletariat's struggle for power with loud and glowing enthusiasm and to appeal to the Spanish people to support and encourage their Spanish comrades.

"Instead of that, Pravda's first reaction was a dismal editorial, stale as a damp squib. For, first, the Soviet Union is excessively and perhaps unduly nervous about a war danger and 'views with alarm' any event anywhere that may upset the European status quo [so!]. The Soviet anxiety may be exaggerated, but it is quite natural in view of the fact that this country is in the position of a rider crossing a dangerous ford, where a sudden cloud-burst might sweep him and his steed away.

"Secondly, the Kremlin's policy today stands much more on the success of socialist construction in Russia than upon world revolution. The Bolsheviks do not much like to admit it, but it is a fact as a consequence of the Kremlin's previous conflict with Leon Trotsky, who declared the existence of a genuine socialist state in a capitalist world impossible.

"The Kremlin exiled Trotsky and set out to prove that he was wrong, which led to the concentration of Soviet effort upon the economic development embodied in the five-year plan. These two reasons help to explain Pravda's embarrassment."

A clearer presentation of the case could hardly be requested. The difference between the conceptions of socialism in one country and of revolutionary internationalism stands revealed not only in theory but also in practise. Tested in the retort of the Spanish events, it gives the following obvious result: To Stalinism, the first conception expresses itself concretely in setting up socialist progress in one country against revolutionary progress in others, in a pacifist degeneration of Communism; to the Marxian wing of the movement (the Left Opposition), the strengthening of the socialist sector in the country where the proletariat has seized power is not only essential "in itself", but more than that, it is inseparable from the advance of the revolution in other countries and is directly dependent upon it.

## An Objection Answered

There only remains to answer in advance—and it is not difficult to do it—the "objection" which it is also not difficult to foresee. Unable to refute the argument on its own merits, our Centrists will take refuge behind the declaration that the quotations made above are taken from Duranty, a bourgeois correspondent, in the New York Times, a bourgeois paper. The objection is not worth a copper, and is insincere to boot, for the objectors know better than we what value should be attributed to Duranty's dispatches. Whoever has been to the Soviet Union and understood the mechanism of the Stalin apparatus, especially of its information system, knows that Duranty occupies one of the most important steps on the backstairs of the Kremlin today. For that matter, merely to have read his daily dispatches for the last few years should suffice to indicate conclusively that he accurately describes the policy of the C. P. S. U. in domestic and international affairs from the intimate point of view of the Stalin faction.

In the upper circles, at least, of the American Communist Party he is tacitly regarded as an entirely authentic spokesman of the ruling régime. It is from a faithful study of his dispatches that the party leaders receive their first intimations regarding new policies and new winds in the Soviet Union, and they act in strict accordance with them, quite confident that the official information that comes later on will conform in every essential with Duranty's outlines. It is to be expected that the scribes of the party press will assume a comical posture of righteousness and indignation because we quote Duranty as an authentic representative of Stalin. The posture will be especially ridiculous to anybody who knows the editorial workings of the Daily Worker and Freiheit intimately. Aside from the two or three lines received once in a while by "Inprecor cable", the current Russian news of these two party dailies is composed almost exclusively of badly re-written copies of Duranty's dispatches. The latter are the first to be clipped by the editor and handed to a hack to be re-written, sometimes as a "special report to the Daily Worker". We hope that this anticipatory reply will save us the pain of witnessing another parade of outraged virtue by the journalistic Tartuffes of the party.