

Leon Trotsky Writes on Stalin's Latest Speech

A New Zig-zag and the New Dangers

EDITORIAL NOTES

BERNARD SHAW ON RUSSIA

The Russian revolution is making its way in the world. After fourteen years it has received the honor of a ten-day inspection by George Bernard Shaw and Lady Astor, and that in itself—as Amos and Andy would say—is "somethin'".

But if you will pardon us for saying so we are not entirely satisfied with the report. When Shaw sums up his conclusions with the advice to young men in the Western countries to "go to Russia and settle there", we beg leave to break into the happy party with an objection.

Russia is not a separate planet, which can develop a socialist society while the Western countries are surrendered to capitalism. Russia is bound up inseparably with them. The struggle for socialism is not a national but an international struggle—as Marx and Engels said.

No matter how it is camouflaged with big talk about working for socialism, emigration to Soviet Russia represents—in 99 cases out of 100—a flight from the class struggle at home. On the part of so-called revolutionists it is little less than desertion.

out of the very nature of the system and cannot be exercised. If we take the most probable development of the next future—a further deepening of the economic crisis then it becomes obvious that the stop-gap policy of state and municipal relief "for the Winter" will fall to pieces.

They will do this all the sooner if the class movement of the workers presses upon them, organized and menacing. The prospect that the ruling class will resort to this remedial measure in any case does not in any way argue against the necessity of a working class fight for unemployment insurance.

In the last resort the reformists, who are shouting now for unemployment insurance, will support a law which gives the shadow without the substance. It will be the duty of the Communists to organize the masses for a fight to compensate the unemployed millions with an insurance relief which will afford them an existence under the conditions which capitalism has forced upon them.

(Continued from Last Issue)

SOCIALIST ENTHUSIASM AND PIECE WORK Nine-tenths of the new program of Stalin amounts to the re-establishment of piece work. All the rest, in the meantime, has an extremely confused character and, in part, only serves to mask the turn to the Right.

Stalin makes his new turn depend upon the "new epoch" and the "new tasks" which require "new methods". But that is too crude a deception. We have seen, in a whole series of questions of the world labor movement that the turns of the Stalinist bureaucracy flowed in no way from the changes in the world situation but, on the contrary, they were very often accomplished in opposition to these changes and flowed from the preceding errors of the bureaucracy itself.

We believe the same thing today. We were told that at the third year of the Five Year Plan, the Soviet Union had entered into socialism. If this was right, we should have witnessed a tendency towards the gradual equalization of wages. This tendency should have justified itself and be supported more and more by socialist emulation and by shock brigades. Absurd as it may appear, it was nevertheless we, the Left Opposition, who were accused by the Stalinist bureaucracy of lack of confidence in the socialist enthusiasm of the Russian workers.

—J. P. C.

is to say what is," declares our platform draft.

The proletarian revolution has no need of the bureaucratic hotch-potch of idealism. We want the truth.

To be sure, the enemy will rejoice over the obscure sides of this truth. It is obvious that it will seize upon certain elements of our criticism, like it seizes upon certain sections of Stalin's revelations today. When the enemy uses fragments of truths in order to weave a system of falsehood it is not serious.

Heroic enthusiasm can draw behind it the masses for relatively short historical periods.

A small minority is capable of manifesting enthusiasm for a whole historical epoch: it is upon this that is based the idea of a revolutionary party as the selection of the best elements from the class.

Socialist construction is a task for decades. One cannot guarantee the solution of this task except by the systematic raising of the material and cultural standard of living of the masses. That is the principal condition, more important than the gain in time in the construction of a Dnieprostroy, of a Turksib or of a Kuzbas, because with the fall in the physical and moral energy of the proletariat, all the gigantic enterprises may remain without a tomorrow.

Stalin relishes his bearers with quotations from Marx and Lenin, according to which the differentiation of wages is inevitable for the period of the passage to socialism.

Tomorrow Stalin will quote to us Marx and Lenin to show that during the passage to socialism the small producer of commodities, the peasant, inevitably gives birth to the kulak. These general truths are indisputable, it is precisely who recalled them during the "dizziness" which, unfortunately, is not yet at an end today. But it is precisely the Stalinist bureaucracy which contrary to us, posed for itself as a practical task the liquidation of the kulak, that is, of the differentiation of the peasantry, within the limits of the Five Year Plan in four years.

On July 7, Pravda quoted the following lines from the organ of the People's Commissariat for Labor: "The development of technique and the growth of the role of transports of electrification, etc. narrow the field of piece work." Is this not a Marxist truth? But Pravda calls this truth a "Trotskyist assertion". This strange conflict between the official organ of the People's Commissariat for Labor and the official organ of the Central Committee of the party is explained by the fact that the second number of Questions of Labor appeared before Stalin's speech, while No. 185 of Pravda appeared two days after the speech.

Piece work wages are not in principle contradiction with the conditions of transitional Soviet economy; it would be stupid doctrinarianism to oppose them. But the abrupt turn towards piece work and the extreme accentuation of the capitalist features of this system present today, in the summer of 1931, at the end of the third year of the Five Year Plan after the uninterrupted successes, after we have "entered into socialism", one of the harshest blows against the workers, from the material as well as from the moral point of view.

That the old method of wages was had from every point of view, has been obvious to us for a long time. One cannot work out a rational, living and progressive system of wages without the collaboration of the masses themselves. The trade union bureaucracy is no better than any other bureaucracy. Collective contracts and wage scales are elaborated in the offices and imposed upon the workers like all the other decisions of the infallible center.

Miners' Strike Is Called Off

(Continued from Page 1)

once but many times, from the very inception and during the course of the strike? Speaking of the danger of having the N. M. U. movement separated from the Kentucky movement, from the Keeney movement in West Virginia and the rank and file rebellion in Illinois, we issued the "warning that unless swift and resolute measures were taken to overcome the prevailing disunity, the strikes would be threatened with the poison of slow disintegration and defeat."

Three weeks before that, making the same imperatively needed proposal we said: "Strike while the iron is hot. . . The worst thing the Left wing can do is to grow intoxicated with an inflated idea of its own strength or position. It is not leading the whole miners' movement but only a part of it. It can win its way to leadership if it pursues the right policy now—and not after the strike in the 'self-critical' articles of the press. The Left wing dares not be deceived by cheap phrases, by boasting, by ruinous self-contentment with the big achievement it can legitimately record now. . . Will the party have to draw up its balance sheet when the coal strike is concluded with the limping apologetic remark that 'a small measure of organizational success was secured'?"

The party "strategists" rejected these proposals with a lofty contempt. These people who make a profession out of being wrong on every important question were too infernally wise to adopt the course we proposed. Their policy of isolation was advanced as vastly superior to ours. The vials of scorn were poured upon the "counter-revolutionary Trotskyists" who, "together" with the Lovestonites "wait for the return of the 'good old united front' with the 'progressives' [and] unite in labelling the real united front from below of the workers as 'sectarianism' (Browder, August Communist)."

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strike was not its wrong policy but . . . lack of relief.

The final outcome of the strike says more than we can say to controvert the cheap bragadoocio of these Stalinist stalwarts. The counterposed policies have been tested. The bureaucratic, meaningless "united front from below" failed to give the N. M. U. a solid foothold in the other movements. The strike was not extended, but narrowed down to the point where it had to be called off, which in turn, will have the gravest effects on the West Virginia strike.

By superior force, by the apparatus strength which has been granted them through the usurpation of the International Communist movement by the Stalinist faction, by misrepresentation and demagoguery in the press under their control—the Stalinist agents in the United States succeeded in suppressing our proposals during the strike, in preventing the Left wing from adopting the only course that could lead to a successful issue. Let them be proud of their short-lived triumph over the "counter-revolutionary Trotskyists". They won their victory at the cost of the movement to which they dealt such brutal blows, and no revolutionist will find in such a victory a source of rejoicing.

Fortunately for the movement as a whole even the heavy blows inflicted upon it by Stalinism are not yet mortal. The vitality of the workers' movement is still strong enough antidote to the corrosion of the bureaucrats. The miners' movement is not dead—far from it. It will experience a resurgence, and that in short order. The next explosion in the coal fields may take place in Colorado, where Rockefeller has again cut deeply into the wage scale. It may break out elsewhere. In any case, the Communists and the Left wing must be on the watch and adequately prepared. The miners need a revolutionary leadership which is capable of leading; the Lewis machine or the various timid and treacherous reformist movements offer the miners no way out at all.

—THE MILITANT.

The trade unions must fulfill their functions on the basis of genuine election, submitting everything to the control of the trade union members giving accountings, bearing the responsibility at every degree of the hierarchical scale. An article must be inserted into the Penal Code punishing as an offense against the state any persecution, direct or indirect, open or concealed, of a worker for his criticism, for his independent proposals, for a vote." How vengeful are these words today!

But the sharpness of the present turn towards piece work is the result not of a system of wages, but of a more profound reason of the lack of material wealth to satisfy the needs of the workers. The wrong method of the plan the incorrect adjustment in the course of its realization, the absence of genuine control of the masses, the absence of the party, the struggle for abstract figures of the plan in the name of prestige, the administrative commandment under the lash, bragadoocio, blustering, the stifling of criticism—all these combined have led to a false distribution of the forces and the means and has created—in view of the extremely rapid growth of the number of workers—the intolerable contracting of the real wage funds. That is why the workers do not feel at ease. That is why they run from one factory to the other.

The excessive pressure on the one hand and the degeneration of the trade unions on the other, have provoked the anarchic rejection called the fluctuation of labor forces. Stalin has shown us the enormous extent of this reaction. "You will find few enterprises," he says, "where the personnel is not renewed every half a year, and even every quarter by at least thirty to forty percent." There is the threatening extent attained by the disease which the bureaucracy has sought to bring to an end. The shifting from one factory to another, from one town to another, means moreover the enormous waste of productive forces, the needless loss of time for the shifting itself as well as for the adaptation to the new working conditions. That is the principal reason for the fall in returns and the increase in the net costs. But the greatest danger of the fluctuation—in the hunt for fortune!—consists of the moral wear and tear on the proletariat.

The mere aggravation of piece work settles nothing. It can only create a stratum of more favored workers. The tendency toward creating a labor bureaucracy in the factories could not correspond better to the procedure of the Stalinist bureaucracy. From this angle, piece work is a purely political means. As a panacea, it completes the evolution of Stalinism. The tradition of Bolshevism is a tradition of struggle against the aristocratic castes within the working class. On this basis is erected the structure of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The program of the Stalinist bureaucracy leads it inexorably to the necessity of supporting itself upon the ever more privileged labor aristocracy. Here lies hidden the immediate political danger for the dictatorship of the proletariat!

A PERSONAL REVELATION

The new policy is decreed in the same way as the old policy: as a personal revelation. Stalin informs us that the interrupted working week was introduced "too precipitately and without the preparation of appropriate measures". What were the results? Stalin is compelled to point them out: "lack of a spirit of accountability for the work, neglected maintenance of machinery, considerable accidents to the machines and absence of stimulation for raising the productivity". Stalin generalizes it all in a single phrase: "Nobody is accountable for anything". A terrific avowal, or rather a disavowal of his own policy—"Nobody is accountable for anything"—that always happens when a single individual wants to be accountable for everybody.

The uninterrupted week was introduced too precipitately. But who introduced it? The General Secretary. Was the interrupted week discussed among the working masses before its introduction? Not at all. Everything was prepared secretly. The masses accepted the interrupted week "with enthusiasm", according to the official communications. And are things happening differently now? Just yesterday, all these calamities of which Stalin speaks today were not dealt with at all in the press. We have already said and written more than once that among the Stalinist bureaucracy everything proceeds marvelously five minutes before everything begins to proceed very badly. In enumerating the disastrous results of the bureaucratic interrupted week Stalin touches in passing upon the most ticklish and the most dangerous question. It is beyond doubt—he says—that our directors understand all this very well. But they hold their tongues. Why? From all evidence, because they are afraid of the truth. But since when have Bolsheviks begun to fear the truth? Since the Stalinist apparatus, by its lack of ideas and principles, stifled the Bolshevik-Leninist faction. Precisely since that moment! The directors, according to Stalin, "fear the truth." What a perfidious formula! It is not the truth they fear; they are afraid of falling victim for the truth because Rakovsky, Sosnovsky, Muralov, Eltsin, Gruenstein, Kasparova, Kossior and together with them, hundreds and thousands of the best Bolsheviks—the very ones who do not fear

the truth and know how to defend it—populate the prisons of Stalin and the places of deportation and exile. There lies the knot of the problem of the party.

After having crushed the Left Opposition, the Stalinist bureaucracy has stifled the party. It no longer exists, this animated, sensitive, supple and flexible organization which lived the life of the masses, which saw all, which criticized which generalized, which signaled the dangers in time and collectively elaborated the new roads. "Now that the Centralist bureaucracy has strangled the party," says the draft platform of the International Left Opposition, "that is, has remained without eyes and ears, it moved along gropingly and determines its path under the direct pushes of the classes, oscillating between opportunism and adventurism." Even more within the apparatus itself, the fear of the lower functionary for the superior functionary has reached such a point that nobody dares any longer to look facts in the face and to point them out to the superiors. At the lower rungs, they acquiesce in everything asked of them at the higher rungs and the latter regard it as the voice of the ranks themselves. In order to work out the measures for applying the new policy, the Plenum of the Central Control Commission has been convoked. They seek to give this event an exceptional significance, for this time not only the members of the C. C. C. are called, but also the representatives of the regional organs and of a series of rank and file organizations. In other words, the superior functionaries call to their aid the inferiors. Both are united by subordination and mutual responsibility. And this council of functionaries is represented as the supreme expression of democracy!

Does not the new abrupt turn justify the convocation of an extraordinary congress of the party? But the regime of personal revelations (each time after a delay of a few years) does not tolerate the regime of party democracy, nor the existence of the party itself. Then are the "Bolsheviks really afraid of the truth?" The name of the Bolshevik who today most fears the truth is Stalin. Otherwise he would not fear to consult the congress, that is the party, in this new abrupt turn in policy.

In recent months, we have received a number of letters which relate conversations which our correspondents have had with party bureaucrats at various degrees of ossification. They are for the most part terribly frightened people. They see and understand a great deal, but their will is broken. Their philosophy is the philosophy of adaptation. Here is what they say most frequently: "You speak of the party regime. To be sure, it is very heavy. Everybody feels it. But you must know that it cannot be otherwise. Without an iron hand we would not overcome the difficulties. Your criticism of Stalin's mistakes is right on the whole, and the events have confirmed it. We have no illusions about Stalin. Of course, he will never set the Thames on fire: from the intellectual point of view, he is a mediocre man, with an inadequate theoretical preparation without broad perspectives. We frequently feel these defects on our own backs. But he has indispensable positive qualities: firmness, tenacity, perseverance. Besides, he is entirely bound up with the apparatus. And whatever you may say, the apparatus now is everything." Thus speak many bureaucrats. It seems to them that the stifling of the party, painful though it is, is justified by the circumstances and later . . . oh well! later socialism will come and will change everything.

Here lies the fundamental mistake. Socialism is no ready-made system which can spring full panoplied from a head, even the most gifted one. The task of the rightful division of the forces and means of production can only be solved by means of constant criticism, by verification by the ideological struggle of the various groupings within the proletariat. If we reject formal democracy which, in the framework of capitalism, means to hand over the keys to the enemy armed to the teeth, we affirm, on the other hand, that without class democracy we will not only not succeed in building socialism but we will not even maintain the dictatorship of the proletariat. Stalin's zig-zags cost more dearly every time. Only fools and blind men can believe that socialism can be vouchsafed from above, that it can be introduced by the bureaucratic way. Louder than ever before, we warn the advanced workers of the U. S. S. R. and of the whole world: The new zig-zag of Stalin, regardless of the manner in which it will develop in the next period will lead inevitably to new and still sharper contradictions at the next stage. We must begin with the revival of proletarian democracy. That is now the decisive link in the whole chain. The problems of economy must be put for discussion in their full scope before the party and the trade unions. For this it is necessary that the Bolsheviks cease to fear to speak the truth. This can be attained only by removing the chains from those who fought and still fight for the right to speak the truth. The Left Opposition (Bolshevik-Leninists) must be re-admitted to the party. A discussion must be opened on the fundamental questions of economic and politics. A new party congress must be prepared upon the basis of party democracy!

—L. TROTSKY. Kadiyok, July 15, 1931

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