

The Checking of the Stalin-Thaelmann Policy Against Their Own Experience

From the Series of Articles in the Forthcoming Book 'The Only Road' :- by Leon Trotsky

Tactics can be checked in the critical and most responsible moments. The strength of Bolshevism rests upon this, that its slogans and methods find their supreme confirmation as soon as the course of events demands bold decisions. What value have principles which must be renounced as soon as the situation assumes a serious character?

Realistic policy bases itself upon the natural development of the class struggle. Sectarian policy endeavors to prescribe artificial regulations for the class struggle. The revolutionary situation signifies the highest accentuation of the class struggle. Just because of that, the realistic policy of Marxism, in the revolutionary situation, exercises a powerful force of attraction upon the mass. The sectarian policy, to the contrary, becomes all the weaker the more mighty is the impetus of events. The Blanquists and Proud-honists, taken by surprise by the events of the Paris Commune, did the opposite of what they had constantly preached. During the Russian revolution, the anarchists were forced to recognize the Soviets, that is, the organs of power. And so on without end.

The Comintern supports itself upon masses who were won over in the past by Marxism and fused together by the authority of the October revolution. Only, the policy of the present leading Stalin faction seeks to command the class struggle instead of investing it with political expression. This is the essential feature of *bureaucratism* and in this it coincides with *sectarianism* from which it distinguishes itself sharply in other features. Thanks to the strong apparatus, to the material means of the Soviet state and to the authority of the October revolution, the Stalinist bureaucracy has been able, in comparatively calm periods, to impose for a length of time artificial measures of restraint upon the proletarian vanguard. But to the degree that the class struggle condenses itself into civil war, the bureaucratic prescriptions come into increasing collision with unrelenting reality. Faced by sharp turns in the situation, the arrogant and inflated bureaucracy easily lands in a muddle. If it cannot command, it capitulates. The policy of the Thaelmann Central Committee in recent months will some day be studied as a model of the most pitiable and miserable headlessness.

Since the "Third Period" it was held to be inviolable that there could be no talk about agreements with the social democracy. It was not only inadmissible to assume the initiative in the united front, as the Third and Fourth World Congresses taught—but even proposals for common actions emanating from the social democracy had to be rejected. The reformist leaders are "sufficiently exposed." The experience of the past is sufficient. Instead of pursuing politics, the masses must be told history. To turn to the reformists with proposals means to acknowledge them capable of fighting. That alone would be Social-Fascism, etc. Thus intoned the ear-deafening melody of the ultra-Leftist harrel-organ in the last three-four years. And look: in the Prussian Landtag, the Communist fraction proposed on June 22, unexpected by all and by itself, an agreement with the social democracy and even with the Center. The same thing was repeated in Hessen. In face of the danger that the Præsidium of the Landtag might fall into the hands of the Nazis, all the consecrated principles flew to the devil. Isn't this astounding? And isn't it debasing?

To explain these goat-leaps, however, is not so difficult. As is known, many superficial liberals and radicals continue to joke their whole life long about religion and celestial powers, only to call for a priest when they face death or serious illness. So also in politics. The mark of Centrism is opportunism. Under the influence of external circumstances (tradition, mass pressure, political competition), Centrism is at certain times compelled to make a parade of radicalism. For this purpose it must overcome itself, violate its political nature. By spurring itself on with all its strength, it not infrequently lands at the extreme bourne of formal radicalism. But hardly does the hour of serious danger strike than the true nature of Centrism breaks out to the surface. In so delicate a question as the defense of the Soviet Union the Stalinist bureaucracy always built much more upon the bourgeois pacifists, English trade union bureaucrats and French radicals than upon the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. Scarcely did an external danger approach than the Stalinists promptly sacrificed not only their ultra-Leftist phrases but also the vital interests of the international revolution—in the name of amity with uncertain and false "friends" from the genus of lawyers, writers and simple drawing room heroes. United front from above? Under no circumstances! At the same time, however, the Top-Commissar for Ambiguous Affairs, Müntzenberg by name, fished around after the coat tails of all sorts of liberal jabberers and radical tripe "for the defense of the U. S. S. R."

The Stalinist bureaucracy in Germany, like in every other country—except in the Soviet Union—is extremely dissatisfied with the compromising leadership of Barbusse in the affair of the Anti-War Congress. On this field, Thälmann, Foster and others would prefer to be radical. Yet in their own national affairs, every one of them proceeds according to the same model as the Moscow authorities: at the approach of a serious danger they cast off the inflated, falsified radicalism in order to reveal their true, that is, their opportunistic nature.

Was the initiative of the Communist Landtag fraction, as such, false and inadmissible? We don't think so. The Bolsheviks more than once proposed to the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionists in 1917: "Take the power, we will support you against the bourgeoisie if it should resist." Compromises are admissible and, under certain conditions—obligatory. The whole

question lies in what aim the compromise shall subserve; how it looks to the masses; what its limits are. To confine the compromise to the Landtag or the Reichstag, to regard as an independent aim whether the president will be a social democrat or a Catholic democrat instead of a Fascist, means to sink completely into parliamentary cretinism. Completely different is the situation when the party sets itself the task of the systematic and planned struggle for the social democratic workers on the basis of the united front policy. A parliamentary agreement against Fascist predominance in the præsidium, etc., would in this case constitute merely one component part of the extra-parliamentary fighting agreement against Fascism. Naturally the Communist party would prefer to resolve the whole question at one blow outside of parliament. But preferences alone are not sufficient where the forces are lacking. The social democratic workers have demonstrated their faith in the magic power of proceed. The former mistakes of the Communist the July 31 vote. It is from this fact that we must party (Prussian referendum; etc.) extraordinarily facilitated the sabotage of the united front practised by the reformist leaders. A technical parliamentary agreement—or even only the proposal for such an agreement—must help free the Communist party from the accusation that it is collaborating with the Fascists against the social democracy. This is no independent action, but solely the clearing of the road to a fighting agreement or at least to the struggle for a fighting agreement of the mass organizations.

The difference between the two lines is entirely obvious. The joint struggle with the social democratic organizations can, and in its unfoldment it must, assume a revolutionary character. The possibility for an approach to the social democratic masses can and must be paid for, under certain conditions, even with parliamentary agreements at the top. But for a Bolshevik, this is merely the *admission price*. The Stalinist bureaucracy acts in the opposite manner: it not only rejects fighting agreements, but still worse, it maliciously destroys those agreements which arise from below. At the same time, it proposes to the social democratic deputies a parliamentary accord. This means that at the moment of danger it declares its own ultra-Leftist theory and praxis to be worthless; only it does not replace it with the policy of revolutionary Marxism but with an unprincipled parliamentary combination in the spirit of the "lesser evil".

We will indeed be told, the Prussian and Hessian episodes were a mistake of the deputies and were made good again by the Central Committee. In the first place, a decision so important in principle should not have been taken without the Central Committee: the mistake falls back completely upon the latter as well; in the second place: how explain that the "steel-hard", "consistent", "Bolshevist" policy, after months of blustering and screeching, of polemic, of vilification and expulsions, at once gives way at the critical moment to an opportunistic "mistake"?

But the matter is not confined to the Landtag. Thälmann-Remmele have absolutely renounced themselves and their own school in a much more responsible and critical question. On the eve of July 20, the Central Committee of the Communist party adopted the following decision:

"The Communist party, before the proletarian public, addresses to the S. P. D. to the A. D. G. B. and to the Afa-Bund the question if they are prepared to carry out, together with the Communist party, the general strike for the proletarian demands."

This so important and unexpected decision was made public by the Central Committee in its circular letter of July 26 without any commentary. Can a mere annihilating judgment be made of its whole preceding policy? The approach to the reformist summits with the proposal of joint actions was but yesterday declared to be social-Fascist and counter-revolutionary. Because of this question Communists were expelled. On this ground the struggle against "Trotskyism" was conducted. How then was this Central Committee suddenly able, at one stroke, on the eve of July 20, to bow before what it had the day before banished? And to what tragic state has the bureaucracy brought the party when the Central Committee could dare to come before it with its amazing decision without explaining or justifying it!

The policy is tested upon such turns. The Central Committee of the German Communist Party in reality demonstrated to the whole world on the eve of July 20: "Up to this moment our course was good for nothing." An involuntary but completely correct admission. Unfortunately, even the proposal of July 20, which overthrew the preceding policy, could in no case yield a positive result. An appeal to the summits—independently of the present answer of these summits—can be come of revolutionary significance only when it has been previously prepared from below, that is, when it is based upon the whole policy in its totality. But the Stalinist bureaucracy repeated to the social democratic workers, day in and day out: "We Communists reject any connection with the S. P. D. leaders" (see "Antworten von Thälmann"). The unprepared, unexpected, unmotivated proposal of July 20 was suitable only for exposing the Communist leadership by revealing its inconsistency, lack of seriousness, inclination to panic and adventurist leaps.

The policy of the Centrist bureaucracy helps the adversary and enemy at every step. Even when the mighty pressure of events drives a new hundred thousand workers under the Communist banner, it takes place in spite of the Stalin-Thälmann policy. Precisely because of this the coming day of the party is in no way assured.

—L. TROTSKY.

An Open Letter to John J. Watt

(Continued from page 1)
4. I disagreed with your criticism of the West Frankfort Miners March. I admit that the march was not organized properly, but nevertheless, the miners have accomplished more by the West Frankfort march than they would if their march on Lewis-Walker was wholly successful.

5. I disagreed with your criticism of the separate local agreements that are being signed by the P. M. U. I also believe in district and national agreements, but, under the present conditions and circumstances the local agreements is the best tactic for the present time.

6. I did not think that it is the proper thing to waste the miners' time with a lot of documents from the United Mine Workers Journal, the Illinois Miner, the Congressional Record and the Declaration of Independence, but that at this time it is necessary to rally the miners on clearly defined class issues in conscientious opposition to the power which stands against them as their master and receives its most polished embodiment in the Lewises, Walkers, the Socialist party, etc.

It was after my reply that you went completely wild.

1. You accused me of trying to break up the Socialist party.

2. You defended the Socialist party when you said that "Hindmarsh just slipped in unawares into the Socialist party but that the Communist party had ever worse elements."

3. You accused the Communists as splitters, disrupters.

4. You accused me of trying to prevent you from speaking before the Socialist party local branch.

This whole matter would have a ring of comedy, if it didn't have some political significance. I will sum up the whole matter as follows:

Watt and the Opposition

1. You know yourself that it is not true when you accused me of trying to prevent you from speaking at the Socialist party local. The first time that I heard of your speaking at the Socialist party local was Friday night at the Slavic Hall before the Most-Happgood meeting, when you yourself told me, I told you then that we ought to take this matter up after the meeting and you agreed. At our meeting on Cook St., I proposed that you speak on the mining situation as a member of the Left Opposition and bring out the Left Opposition policy for the miners' fight. You refused to do this saying that it is too late as you had prepared other matter. You said that you would not support the Communist party in the next election because the party had nominated Foster for president.

Now in my opinion I had a right to ask you to speak as a member of the Left Opposition and on the policies of the Left Opposition for the miners' fight. You had time and time considered yourself a supporter of the Left Opposition. The Left Opposition is a Marxian group and the first fundamental test of a Marxist as Lenin put it, is:

"Upon what rests the discipline of a revolutionary party of the proletariat? HOW IS IT TESTED? How is it reinforced, strengthened? Firstly, by the consciousness of the proletarian vanguard and by its devotion to the revolution, by its steadiness, spirit of self-

sacrifice and heroism. "The problem here and everywhere always consists in the ability to apply the general and fundamental principles of Communism to the specific relations between classes and parties, to specific conditions in the objective development toward Communism—conditions that are peculiar to every separate country and which one must be able to study, understand and point out.

Where Is 7th World Congress

(Continued from page 1)

year. Even the Fifth Congress took place less than two years after the Fourth—on June 17, 1924.

Between the Fifth and the Sixth Congress (which was opened on July 17, 1928), four years elapsed, during which the Left Opposition throughout the world was crushed by the bureaucracy and even the leadership elected regularly at the Fifth Congress was illegally wiped out.

But now, more than four years have passed since the last World Congress, four years of tremendous significance, replete with important struggles and problems left unsolved or badly solved. And not the slightest indication is given by the Comintern leadership that a Seventh Congress is even being considered. Yet it is one of the most urgent requirements of the present world situation.

The eighth point of section II of the "Constitution and Rules of the Communist International", adopted by the Congress in 1928, reads as follows:

"The World Congress shall be convened once every two years."

Why has this important point been contemptuously ignored? Why has a period during which at least two World Congresses should have been held—been allowed to pass by without calling even one? Is the Stalinist bureaucracy bent upon destroying even the formal existence of the Communist International, as it has been engaged in overtime work to destroy it politically and organizationally?

Let the Communist workers reflect on this vital question and join us in the demand for the convening of the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern. Not a Congress of automatons and office clerks, bureaucratically called together and ordered about, without any significance to themselves or anyone else—but a Leninist Congress, adequately prepared in advance, with a previously published agenda to be discussed openly and democratically in the ranks of the party, with the free selection of the delegations, and with the active participation of the Left Opposition!

Without these conditions, a World Congress would be an even worse tragedy than the recent "Plenums" of the Comintern which have passed like ships in the night, unnoticed and unremembered.

The Seventh Congress of the Comintern must be convened immediately, in the spirit of Lenin and Trotsky. The cowardly, fatal silence and indifference of the bureaucracy must be broken. It can be tolerated only at the cost of a dreadful calamity for world Communism!

"We carry on the class struggle against the labor aristocracy in the name of the working-class in order to gain them on our side. And we do battle against the opportunist and social-democrat leaders to achieve the same object.

"The attitude of a political party towards its errors is one of the most important and surest criteria of the seriousness of the party and how it fulfills in practise its obligations towards its class and towards the laboring masses. To admit a mistake openly, to disclose its reasons, to analyze the surroundings which created it, to study attentively the means for correcting this mistake—these are the signs of a serious party, this means educating and training the class and consequently the masses.

"Our theory is not a dogma, but a manual of action, said Marx and Engels, and the greatest crime of 'patented' Marxists as Karl Kautsky, Otto Bauer, etc., is that they have not understood this, that they were unable to apply it in the most important moments of the proletarian revolution."

—(From Infantile Sickness—LENIN)

These quotations of Lenin's are the very essence for an understanding of what Communism is. And as a member of the Left Opposition, I have tried to apply them in my work among the working class to the best of my ability to organize the Communist movement on the basis of a Marxian policy and to strengthen the working class in its struggle for the overthrow of capitalism, but in order to do this correctly it is necessary to fuse oneself to a Marxian group which is the only organization that can give the correct leadership.

2. Imagine a man who has expressed his sympathy with a Communist group as the files of the Militant will show, coming to speak before a Socialist party local and ending his speech with the reading of the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence is not a guide of action for the working-class in their fight against the capitalist system. Marxism is that guide.

Which Party?

8. You said before the S. P. meeting that the working class must organize politically into an organization to abolish the capitalist system. But that assertion means nothing, the workers demand a program of action now and WHAT PARTY. Do you believe that the workers should join the Socialist party that accepts such men as Oscar Ameringer, Jack Hindmarsh, Adolph Germer, Jack Reid, etc., and which is part and parcel of the Second International and that such a party will give correct leadership to the working class? Or do you believe that the Left Opposition, with comrade Trotsky as our leader can give the correct leadership to the working class? A militant leader of the working class always takes a decisive stand on all problems pertaining to the working-class and I am sure that you will do the same.

Finally, I don't want you to think that there is anything personal in this whole affair. I'm not like the Stalinists. We both have gone through many battles as friends and comrades for quite a number of years and I know we will go through many more, and so we can be frank and ask each other just where we stand politically. I am,

Yours for Ours,

JOSEPH ANGELO.

On the Proletarian Revolution in the United States

(Continued from last issue)

The needs of the Negro, Mulatto, Asiatic, Mexican and foreign born workers cannot be solved by first taking steps toward democratic demands, as in Russia, and then proceeding to the socialist demands. Only by direct steps to socialist demands, to socialist reorganization can we solve the problems of the American workers. If the proletarian revolution does not move with speed towards socialist demands we will be lost.

The exclusion of a bourgeois stage, no matter how short, as the first stage of the Proletarian Revolution is made necessary by the dialectics of history. This excludes and condemns the road Stalinism is following in the United States. The party under Centrist leadership advances the following slogans for the United States: "Workers and Farmers Government"; "Agrarian revolution in the South"; "National liberation of the Negroes in the South"; "Self-determination for the Negroes in the South", etc. These Stalinist slogans are driving in the direction, not of a proletarian revolution, they are driving in the direction of a bourgeois first stage of the proletarian revolution. National liberation and self-determination for the colonies, etc., is another question entirely.

In backward countries, Stalinism skips over democratic demands and economic needs and sees no need for such preparation in the class struggle toward revolution. But when Stalinism arrives face to face with the revolution in backward countries it does not intend to establish a Dictatorship of the Proletariat, but instead intends to establish a "Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Peasantry."

In advanced capitalist countries Stalinism swings to the other wrong extreme. It skips back to what economic conditions have already surpassed and presents slogans that can only be classed under bourgeois democratic demands and not socialist demands.

We are discussing programmatic slogans, not tactical slogans. In this case,

what must our slogans drive at? Our tactical slogans must coordinate the special grievances of the class and of sections of the class with our programmatic slogans, our goal. The special forms of exploitation and suppression of the Negro, Asiatic, Mexican and foreign born workers can only be solved by socialist measures in the first stage of the coming revolution—the Proletarian Revolution. The slogans Stalinism presents are not special tactical slogans but programmatic slogans. They lead in the wrong direction.

Once we brush aside the wrong programmatic slogans of Stalinism for the coming American revolution we will be able to proceed to the pressing tactical slogans to coordinate the problems of the Negro race, the other subjected races, as well as other classes who will be our allies.

The Left Opposition must lead the way in formulating the correct tactical and strategic problems for the coming revolution. The first in order is: to correct the wrong programmatic slogans and then follow up with proper tactical slogans leading up to the revolution.

The proletarian revolution in America will establish a dictatorship. What will be the form of the Soviets? It will not be a "Workers and Farmers Government." It will not be the result of a "People's Revolution." In America, the form of the Soviets will right at the beginning be at a higher level than the form of the Soviets established in Russia in 1917. In Russia the overwhelming majority of the people are peasants and in America the overwhelming majority are workers. This reflects the different stages of the two countries in economic development. This lays the basis for different forms of Soviets. The existence of the Soviet Union is another powerful factor favoring the coming revolution in America. Workers' Councils will be established on a higher plane in America and will usher in a higher type of proletarian democracy at the start. Our Soviets will lay a much stronger

foundation for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in America, much stronger than we had in the first stage of the Soviets in Russia after October. The strength of the class dictatorship lays the basis for the higher class democracy. Class democracy and "democracy" under a classless society are two different things. Just as capitalist "democracy" and workers' democracy are the different expressions of different systems. In order to win the American workers to Communism it is necessary to explain the differences in the two forms of Soviets. Only in this manner can we really clear up the question of content and give a proper answer to the question of our Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

On the continent it may be possible for one of the lesser countries to overthrow its exploiters before we do. Unless we give them support unequalled in the past the new Soviets will not be able to hold out against the American imperialists. This does not mean that the reactionary, non-revolutionary theory must be advanced—that we must not strike for power in these countries—because we cannot hold out. With proper support from the world proletariat and the Soviet Union they can hold out and extend the revolution. The struggle for power always means the struggle against world capitalism at this stage of the class war.

On the other hand, a successful revolution in the United States will carry with it the continent, extending far down into Latin America. This opens a broad perspective and confirms the theory of the permanent revolution. The revolution in the United States will flow over the continent in revolutionary storms which will wipe out the capitalists and their flunkies. The slogan for the United States—For a "Proletarian Revolution" leads directly to extension of civil war on the continent and to the slogan of the "All-American Soviet Republic." If the Soviet Union can withstand the coming storms, and the Left Opposition must see to it that our fatherland does in spite of the stranglehold Stalinism has on the world revolutionary movement, we can say the world proletariat has before it not only the realization of the Soviet United States of Europe, not only of the All-American Soviet Republic, but also of the World Soviet.

—HUGO OEHLER.