

The Danger of Thermidor

An Analysis of the Significance of Stalin's Latest Speech

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says, "to buy and sell at will". From whom and to whom? To and from the one who owns the right prices, whether it be the state, a private dealer, or a foreign capitalist. The peasant strike for the freedom of internal trade leads immediately to the demand for the abolition of the monopoly of foreign trade. That is the logic of the mistakes of the Five Year Plan.

In his speech Stalin gave the summary. As to this we shall speak in a separate article. But in planned economy the statistical balance sheet corresponds to the economic balance sheet only in case the plan is correct. A plan full of mistakes, on the contrary, can compromise or even annul the greatest successes. The Five Year Plan has brought enormous gains in technique and in production. But its economic results are extraordinarily contradictory. As far as the political balance-sheet is concerned, it shows an open and very great deficit. But politics is condensed, concentrated economy. Politics is decisive. A socialist construction, which drives a wedge between the worker and the peasant and sows dissatisfaction among the proletariat is a lying construction. No figures can change this objective estimation. The real balance is not given on the pages of the newspapers, but in the fields of the peasants. In the bars of the kollektives, in the warehouses of the factories, in the dining-rooms of the workers and finally, in the heads of the workers and of the peasants.

Through all its zig-zags, its delays, its forward-leaps, bureaucratic Centrism has not strengthened the dictatorship of the proletariat, but on the contrary, has increased the danger of Thermidor. Only towards can fear to name this result out loud. Facts are stronger than words. In order to struggle against inimical forces, we must call them by their right names. We must also call those responsible by their names; Stalin and his clique.

Why do we speak precisely of Thermidor? Because it is the best known and most complete historical example of a masked counter-revolution which still contains the outward forms and the ritual of the revolution, but which already changes the class content of the state. Here the clever ones will interrupt us, to show their cleverness. "In 18th century France, it was a question of a bourgeois revolution, in 20th century Russia, of a proletarian revolution; social conditions have changed considerably, the world situation has changed, etc., etc." With such commonplace any Philistine takes on an appearance of extraordinary profundity. For us too, the difference between the October revolution and the Jacobin revolution is no mystery. But that is no reason for turning one's back on history. Lenin wrote in 1903 that the Bolsheviks are Jacobins who are inseparably bound up with the working class. At that time I replied to Lenin explaining in detail the difference between Marxist and Jacobin. My remarks, correct in themselves, completely failed of their purpose. Lenin knew well that Marxist and Jacobin are not the same thing, but it was necessary for a definite reason for him to point out the features which they have in common. Without such methods one can learn absolutely nothing from history.

In the same sense in which Lenin called the Bolsheviks the proletarian Jacobins, we can detect in the reaction against the dictatorship of the proletariat, features of Thermidor. Not every counter-revolution can be compared with Thermidor neither; Kornilov, nor Koltchak, nor Lenin, nor Wrangel had anything in common with Thermidor. In all these cases it was a question of an armed struggle of capitalists and landowners to restore their domination. This danger was repulsed by the proletarian state. Can this danger rise up again? As an independent factor—scarcely. The Russian big bourgeoisie has been destroyed to the roots. The surviving remains could appear on the stage only as the tail-end of a foreign military intervention or of Thermidor.

Of all the past counter-revolutionary movements in the Soviet Union, the Kronstadt rebellion of March 1921 is the closest to Thermidor in type. All the proletarian elements of the Kronstadt garrison had been removed during the three preceding years for the purposes of Soviet construction and the civil war; the best of them had been destroyed. On the ships and in the barracks remained only the immature, half-starved peasant elements. Many of these sailors considered themselves as Bolsheviks, but they did not want the Commune; they were for the Soviets, but without Communists. It was the rebellion of the injured, dissatisfied peasantry, which had lost its patience, against the dictatorship of the proletariat. If the petty bourgeoisie had won, it would have shown its bankruptcy the next day, and its place could only have been taken by the big bourgeoisie. Under the conditions of the present day, that is, of the 20th and not of the 18th century, years would not have been necessary for this; months, even weeks, would have sufficed. The petty bourgeois counter-revolution, which still honestly regards itself as revolution, which does not want the domination of capitalism, but inevitably prepares it—that is Thermidor.

In the Soviet Union, only the peasantry can become a Thermidorian power. For this it is necessary that it seriously separate itself from the proletariat. The destruction of the normal relation between city and village, the administrative collectivization, the compulsory expropriation of agricultural products, confront the peasantry with the Soviet state now no less sharply than in the winter of 1920-21. It is true that the prolet-

ariat is now numerically much stronger; therein lies the success of industrialization. But the proletariat is completely deprived of an active, watchful Party, capable of action. The apparent Party is without a Marxist leadership. On the other hand, the peasantry has acquired an organization for resistance against the Soviet state, in the form of the kollektives. The abolition of the "smytchka" which was beginning to be formed, threatens to break the political alliance between proletariat and peasantry. Precisely therein lies the source of the danger of Thermidor.

We must not represent the matter to ourselves in such a way, that the break must be marked by a very exact social line; on the one side the peasants, on the other, the workers. The peasant masses surround and interlock with the proletariat from all sides. In the proletariat itself there are millions who have just come from the village. Finally, the open mistakes of the policies of the leadership, the shipwreck of bureaucratic adventurism, the absence of a clear orientation, the absolute choking-off of workers' democracy—all this makes even the genuine worker accessible to the pressure of petty-bourgeois ideology. therein lies the second source of danger of Thermidor.

But we also must not think that the line of fracture will have to go somewhere between the party on the one hand, and the peasantry and a part of the working class on the other. No—the line of Thermidor would inevitably have to pass through the party itself. In his will, Lenin wrote, "Our party is supported by two classes. For this reason, an upset of its stability is possible, and if no agreement between both classes can exist, the breakdown of the party is inevitable.... In such a case, no measures could prevent a split (of the party—L. S.); but I confidently expect such a possibility will prove too remote, such an event too improbable, to need to be discussed". Lenin in those days expressed the certainty that ten to twenty years of correct policy toward the peasantry would assure the victory of the proletarian revolution on the world scale. Precisely for this reason he thought—and we all did too—that the perspectives of Thermidor were not only far off, but also highly improbable.

Of the ten to twenty years indicated by Lenin, ten have already passed. On the line of the international revolution, the Communist during this period has respected only defeats. Today, in spite of the exceptionally favorable objective conditions, Communism and consequently the international revolution is weaker than at the time when Lenin wrote his will. In addition, the danger of a split between the two classes on which the dictatorship in the USSR rests, has been extraordinarily acute.

In spite of the great difficulties, there is nothing in the economic situation of the country which cannot be repaired. But something is needed to do the repairing—a party is needed. But a party in the true sense of the word does not exist. There is an organization, which formally includes millions and millions of members and candidates. Both members and candidates have no rights. In the tight limits of the party there are in fact the terrorized elements of two parties, the proletarian and the Thermidorian. Above them rises the bureaucracy. It bears the responsibility for the mistakes in economic policy, for the undermining of the "smytchka". It bears a still heavier responsibility for choking the party. At the same time, as through its policy it confronts hostilely the peasantry and the state, it has politically disarmed and split up the proletariat. Not only do the workers physically wander from one factory to another, but politically too they find no permanent place.

It would be false to assume that the line of the Thermidorian split must pass between the Stalinist apparatus and the

Right wing of the party. No—it must pass through the apparatus itself. What percentage of Bessedovskys and Agabekovs does it contain? That, even the betrayers of tomorrow do not know. All depends on the relation of forces outside of the apparatus. It needs only a sufficient blow from the petty bourgeoisie for the bureaucratic Thermidorians to recognize themselves and to leap over the wall that separates them from the class enemy. Therein lies the third source of danger of Thermidor.

But, someone from the Stalinists or their admirers will say, "Don't you see that the C. C. is preparing to purge the party of the Right wingers? Just this proves that Stalin is taking measures against Thermidor". "No", we will answer, "the bureaucratic 'purging' only facilitates the work of Thermidor." The new purging, like all those that have preceded it in the course of the past ten years, will be directed primarily against the Left Opposition, and in general against the thinking and the most critical proletarian elements. In spite of the official slogan, "The main danger is to the Right"—Rykov too repeats this formulation now—prisons and places of exiles are being filled primarily with Left Oppositionists. Still, even when the blows fall on the Right wing they do not strengthen the Party but weaken it. Among the Right wing, besides the truly Thermidorian elements, there are hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, who are profound enemies of a capitalist restoration, but who demand the revision of the whole policy from the standpoint of the working masses in city and village. The program of these Right wingers is confused. They can for a time support Thermidor; but they can also support the revivification of the party by the revolutionary way. The Stalinist bureaucracy prevents them from understanding the situation. Through its "purging" it endeavors first of all to choke off critical thinking. Thereby it only strengthens the Right wing.

And who will do the purging? In Paris, Bessedovsky led the commission that "purged" Rakovsky. Let us never forget this. Since then the demoralization of the apparatus has gone further. In all the letters which we receive from the USSR, the most tragic note is this: "No one has confidence in another; everyone is afraid that a class enemy with a party card is next to him. Leader than anyone else, the careerists, the adventurers, the Bessedovskys and the Agabekovs will shout about the necessity for a purging. But who will purge the party of these purgers? Not the apparatus, but only the irreconcilable enemies of the absolutism of the apparatus.

Is the situation hopeless? Such words do not belong to our vocabulary. The struggle will decide. On the side of the proletarian revolution, there are many historical possibilities, negative ones; the dreadful decay of capitalism, the raging quarrels of the imperialists, the bankruptcy of reformism, as well as positive ones: the hardened cadres of the Bolshevik-Leninists, understanding the course of development, clear perspectives. The struggle will decide. The danger has grown and has come nearer—that is absolutely unquestionable. But the poison of Thermidor carries within itself too the elements of the antidote. The more immediate and the nearer the danger, the stronger becomes the need of resistance. The more the Stalinist bureaucracy loses its head, and the more its omnipotence proves to be only apparent power, the louder will be the demands of the advanced workers for a Bolshevik leadership.

The last speech of Stalin—we come back to this—means a turn to the Right. Every phrase of his bureaucratic boasting is only a concealed recognition of the falsehood of the whole "general line", which has brought the dictatorship nearer to Thermidor. The diseases and dangers will be treated by Stalin through a new bureaucratic zig-zag amidst redoubled bureaucratic terror. A redoubled struggle against Stalinism will be our answer.

Prinkipo, January 11, 1933
—LEON TROTSKY.

Hitler in Power; Civil War Starts

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Hitler today is in a better position than the Hitler of several months ago. Hitler out of office has only his own forces at his disposal, the "illegal" detachments of black reaction. Hitler in office has the masses of demoralized petty bourgeoisie, students, and duped proletarians who compose his forces. Hitler in office has the opportunity of really creating a powerful military force. It is not yet too late to smash Hitler and Fascism—too late to smash Hitler and Fascism—that way to the still undefeated working class of Germany. The decisive battle is still ahead. But it is now clear beyond dispute that the warnings of the International Left Opposition, the demand it made that Hitlerism be smashed before it reached the seats of power—were justified a thousand times over. Had the slogan of the Left Opposition for a genuine united front of the Communists, socialists and the trade unions, been realized in life at the right time, many, many months ago, the Fascist monster would have been crushed like an eggshell and the revolutionary movement of the proletariat would have been far ahead on the road to victory.

Who bears the responsibility for the rise to power of Fascism? It is high time to draw the balance sheet and draw it completely.

Above all and in the first place, the leadership of the yellow social democracy. The course embarked upon in August 1914 has been crowned with the triumph of Hitlerism. It is the social democracy which first turned the masses into the slaughter house of the world war in the name of the imperialist fatherland. It is the social democracy, still in the service of the ruling class, which defended the monarchy until the last moment, when Scheidemann proclaimed the republic from the balcony of the Reichstag only in order to restrain the forces of the social revolution. It is the social democracy which sent Noske to Kiel to prevent the insurrectionary sailors from proclaiming the Red republic. It is in the name of the social democracy that Noske the Bloodhound martyred the Berlin working class during the heroic days of the Spartacan uprising in 1919. It is the social democracy which sent Hoersing to slaughter the workers of Central Germany in 1921. It is the social democracy which joined with the reaction in 1923 to strangle the rising revolutionary movement in Saxony and Thuringia.

It is the social democracy which dragged its followers down to the lowest depths of degradation, giving active or "tolerant" support to one reactionary regime after another. It is the social democracy which made possible Bruening of the Emergency Decrees. It is the social democracy which dragged the workers into the shameful policy of the "lesser evil", during which it seated in the presidential chair the present patron of Hitler—Paul von Hindenburg, generalissimo of the Kaiser's imperial armies during the war, and candidate of the social democratic "Iron Front", "bulwark of the Republic against Fascism" in 1931.

At every stage of its development in the past years, the social democracy paved the road for the march to power of Fascism, by dividing the ranks of the working class, by tying it to the chariot of the bourgeoisie, by bringing demoralization and confusion into the proletariat, by weakening it physically and morally so that its power of resistance to Fascism was appreciably lessened. Hitler will reward it for its services with the same contemptuous kick which its Italian colleagues received from Mussolini for their equally invaluable services to Fascism.

Stalinist Blunders

But the social democracy has not been the only force in the ranks of the proletariat that has served the interests of Fascism. It must be said straight out that without the criminal blundering of the Stalinist leadership of the Communist International and of the German Com-

Fate of World Revolution in Balance

munist Party, the Fascist hordes would not today be in the favorable position they actually occupy. The party had the matchless opportunity of mobilizing the masses of the German proletariat around the militant banner of the class struggle. It stubbornly refused to seize the opportunity. The Left Opposition was the very first to sound the alarm signal that Fascism threatened, that it had to be crushed by the united front of all the workers' organizations. We demanded that the Communist party initiate the movement for a real united front of all the workers to smash the Brown Shirts. Our demands fell on the deaf ears of the Stalinist bureaucracy. The latter operated on the theory of the "third period" and "social Fascism". No better assistance could have been offered to the Fascists on the one hand, and the Social democratic leaders on the other. Instead of building a solid front with their class brothers in the social democracy, the Communists were forced by the Stalinist leadership to enter into an indecent nationalistic competition with the Nazis.

The party reconstructed its program to read a "program of national and social emancipation". It allowed itself to be poisoned by the "national-Bolshevism" and anti-Semitism of the Lieutenant Scheringers. It alienated itself from the socialist masses by its criminal support of the Fascist referendum in Prussia. While the Fascists were gaining victory after victory, the party confined itself to the sterile ultimatum policy of demanding that the socialist workers concede in advance the leadership of the Communist party or else there would be no united front. The minds of the class conscious militants were hopelessly befuddled by the irresponsible Stalinist declarations that the Bruening regime was already the victory of Fascism, then, that the von Papen regime and finally the von Schleicher regime, were all the rule of the Fascism. In this manner, the vigilance of the proletariat was relaxed, its attention was diverted from the real danger, its strength was not mobilized and consolidated. When the elections showed a momentary decline of Fascism several months ago, the bureaucracy became intoxicated with its purely parliamentary successes and the parliamentary decline of the Nazis, and announced with smug self-contentment that the acute Fascist danger was at an end. The parliamentary cretins in the Stalinist ranks did not, in this case, rise above the level of their socialist brothers-under-the-skin.

The Maryland Leader, socialist organ, proclaimed in its headlines in November: "Hitler Through in Germany". The Stalinist press rang with the same refrain. At that time we warned the bureaucratic optimists in the columns of the Militant (November 12, 1932) not to "roar with vicarious pride over the party's gains in Germany as if the loss of two million Fascist votes and almost a million socialist votes had settled the whole problem". We emphasized how erroneous was the idea "that the Fascist danger to the German proletariat is now eliminated or even definitely on the decline. Such a conclusion can be drawn only by those for whom the class struggle begins at the ballot box and ends with a parliamentary mandate".

Unbelievable as it might appear, the Daily Worker, as late as last Monday, that is, on the very day of Hitler's appointment to the Chancellorship, declared that "the tactics pursued by von Schleicher of splitting the Hitler party, have also caused widespread disintegration in the ranks of the National Socialist party, with several of Hitler's chief lieutenants breaking away from their allegiance to him" (Our emphasis). Both Schleicher and von Papen did indeed negotiate with some of Hitler's lieuten-

ants, but only in the hope of drawing Hitler into a cabinet in an entirely subordinated position. Hitler was too wise to fall into the snare, and that is why all the "breaking away" of some lieutenants had no appreciable significance. The Daily Worker merely mistook Hitler's strength, his plan of campaign for the taking over of the government, for the "widespread disintegration" of Fascism! This is the way in which the Stalinists put the masses on the alert against the Fascist danger. This is how they refuted the thousand-times-over corroborated analyses of comrade Trotsky and the Left Opposition!

The news dispatches, which are so annoyingly inadequate and unclear, declare that the Communist and social democratic parties have formed a united front in Berlin, with eight socialists and seven Communists on the Committee of Action to resist Hitlerism; also, that the Communist party has issued the call for a general strike. It is still too early to comment on the exact nature or significance of these reports, for the superficiality and unreliability of the bourgeois press is only too well known.

United Front Imperative

But it is not too early to declare that unless a genuine united front of the Communist party, the social democracy, the socialist trade unions, the Reichsbanner and the Communist Red Front Fighters, is immediately formed, unless the Communists immediately take the initiative in calling for this united front and compel the social democratic leaders to enter into it—the results will be catastrophic not only for the German working class, but for the working class movement of the whole world, for the Communist International, and the Soviet Union!

A crushing defeat for the working class of Germany means a crushing defeat of the Communist party, for it is the first organization against which the attacks of the brigands of Hitler's shock troop detachments—assisted by the armed forces of the state—will be directed. A mortal blow at the German Communist Party, means the breaking of the backbone of the Communist International, and for this calamity we declare that the Stalinist leadership of the International will have been primarily responsible. A lasting triumph of Fascism in Germany, furthermore, is inconceivable without an armed attack upon the Soviet Union. Fascism in Germany can maintain itself in the face of chauvinist France only if it becomes the vanguard of the imperialist intervention against the arch-enemy of imperialism—the Soviet Union. The consequences of a Fascist triumph are thus, it is easy to see, of far-reaching historical import for the whole ensuing period.

That is why the Left Opposition cries out today more loudly than ever: The Communist International must speak out in the language of Lenin, in defense of the international proletarian revolution, in defense of the German working class. It must speak out for the mobilization of the world proletariat to crush the monster of Fascism in Germany. It must speak out to say how this is to be done, for it can be done successfully in only one way: by the establishment of a Leninist united front of the whole German proletariat.

To smash Fascism is an obligation and task of the workers everywhere. Upon the class conscious militants and the Communist workers in this country, devolves the solemn duty of joining with the Left Opposition to force that turn in party policy which is now so absolutely imperative, without which the worst calamities are ahead. Our call to the party to form the united front to smash Fascism before it took the governmental helm—was not heeded, and the proletariat in Germany and the rest of the world has been set back accordingly. Today again we repeat: It is not too late! But the time to act is now!

The fate of the German working class, of the Communist International, of the Soviet Union, of the world revolution, hangs in the balance!

—MAX SHACHTMAN.

Shall the Revolutionary Students Be Organized Into Separate Movements

DISCUSSION ARTICLE

The existence for some time now of the National Students League in the United States, organized through the instrumentality of the Communist party and YCL, requires from the Left Opposition a fundamental statement of its attitude toward the NSL. Can the Communists stand by quietly when there is formed an independent students' organization, with its own programmatic policy? Moreover, can Communists assist in, and be responsible for, the formation of such independent student organizations?

The recent activities of the NSL and its assumption of various roles in the class struggle bring this question sharply to the forefront and demand a clear enunciation of policy on our part. The organization recently of the Students League of Canada only adds to the need for clarification on the question. The writer presents his views here in sketch form in order to initiate a discussion which will speed the adoption of a position by the Left Opposition. Communists in principle, must oppose, in our opinion, the formation of an independent or separate organization of either the students or the intellectuals. This position, which has been the principle position of the Communists and the Young Communist International in the years adopted at the second congress of the Y. C. L., requires no revision today.

Role of Students

The students have no independent role

to play in society and require no separate organization. The division of the students may be roughly made into rich, middle class or petit-bourgeois and proletarian students. Even so, the particular social, economic and political positions of these groupings in society negate any idea that these groups can have an independent role in the class struggle as student groups. Our concern here is mainly with the proletarian students who have historically no interests separate and apart from the industrial proletariat, from the working class as such. The proletarian students to be at all effective in the labor movement, must link themselves organizationally and politically with the vanguard of the revolutionary movement—the Communist party and the YCL, and conduct such activities as they are able to on a Communist program. The Communist student would necessarily, therefore, direct his energies primarily among the proletarian students.

The matter becomes even clearer when it is seen that the National Students League and the Students League of Canada are not formed on the basis of a "broad" student organization which supposedly might appeal to all classes of students for the preservation of student rights and needs on the campus, or conduct "general propaganda" and education for liberal, socialist or revolutionary ideas. Both Student Leagues, on the contrary, recognize the weakness of such

a position and make their appeal on a "revolutionary" or even "Communist" basis. In fact, they regard themselves as Communist student organizations. The Spark, official organ of the Students League of Canada, is most clear and explicit on the matter of the character of its appeal to the student body. In the issue of December 1932, the Spark editorially says:

"...The majority of students...are not members of the proletariat, even though a good many come from working class homes. Because of this fact Marxism, however logical, can have no appeal to most university students for it is inimical to the interests of their class. Accordingly, the Students League has no illusions regarding the student body as a whole.... We only aim to attract the small number of students who see an identity between their interests and those of the working class and who are, therefore, willing to take an active part in the working class movement. After all, a few active members are far more valuable than is a passive recognition of the validity of our views from the majority of the student body—and again on this latter score we have no illusions." (Our emphasis).

What the Spark says is correct. But if there is this identity of interests between the students minority, that is, the proletarian students and the workers, then why a separate organization? What are those special tasks of so-called revolutionary or Communist student organizations which cannot better and more correctly be performed in the revolutionary political organization of the youth—the Young Communist League? In

our opinion, none; and such an independent student organization can only lead to confusion and malpractices in the revolutionary movement, and bring about just the opposite results from those intended, as will be shown.

The Communist Left Opposition particularly has every reason to reject the organization of separate students organizations. The Left Opposition, in its condemnation of the Stalinists, has stated often, and correctly, its opposition in principle to the creation of so-called "anti-imperialist" Leagues, "peasants' parties", "workers and peasants parties", labor or Farmer-Labor parties, etc., etc. We condemn the formation of these bodies on the ground that they usurp, or attempt to, the role legitimately and necessarily belonging to the Communist party, and, further, that every concession to the formation and activity of such organizations brings successive betrayals of the working class, emasculates and caricatures the revolutionary position, and weakens or destroys the Communist party or YCL. In short, the theoretical position of the Left Opposition, based on historical experiences, refuses to attribute an independent or revolutionary role to such hodge-podge bodies. Our attitude toward the NSL and the Students League of Canada must flow clearly from our fundamental position to analogous organizations in other fields. In the case of an independent students organization, the issue is even plainer.

The Left Opposition contends that the role of a "peasants' party", an "anti-imperialist League", a "four class Kuo Min Tang", a Labor party, etc., proves in every case to be false to, a betrayal of,

and reactionary in relation to the working class as a whole, and also, thereby, to the Communists and their organizations, the C. P. and YCL. In such cases, where "independent" organizations like the NSL pretend to a "revolutionary", even Communist position, they place themselves directly in the road of the genuine revolutionization of the proletarian students who, if they accept the revolutionary, the Communist position, should join the organization of their class, the YCL, and function actively therein in their allotted tasks. Wittingly or otherwise, the "revolutionary" position of the NSL, sponsored and organized by the YCL, actually forms a bulwark against—and not a bridge to—students joining the YCL. Yet what is demanded of them in the way of profession of belief and activity in the NSL that is not demanded of them in the YCL—minus the discipline required of a member of the YCL? Little or nothing, under ordinary circumstances.

It is demonstrated, not merely in theory but by numerous practices, that when the students or intellectuals undertake tasks, in lieu of no objection by others, which are not theirs historically and which they cannot properly execute—they bungled the job badly, confuse and mislead the workers, ignore the revolutionary position and, by default, usurp the role which only a C. P. or YCL can undertake. They are not to blame, since no one says they may, and, worse yet, the Communists themselves urge them on in their false steps.

MARTIN ABBERN.

(To be continued)