

THE SOVIET UNION & THE 4TH INTERNATIONAL

How the Question is Posed

The break with the Communist International and the orientation toward the New International have posed anew the question of the social character of the U. S. S. R. Doesn't the collapse of the Communist International also mean at the same time the collapse of that state which emerged from the October Revolution? Here, indeed, in both instances one and the same ruling organization is concerned: the Stalinist apparatus. It had applied identical methods within the U. S. S. R. as in the international arena. We, Marxists, were never patrons of the double bookkeeping system of the Brandlerites according to which the policies of the Stalinists are impeccable in the U.S.S.R. but ruinous outside the boundaries of U.S.S.R.\* It is our conviction that they are equally ruinous in both instances. If so, isn't it then necessary to recognize the simultaneous collapse of the Communist International and the liquidation of the proletarian dictatorship in the U. S. S. R.?

At first sight such reasoning appears to be irrefutable. But it is erroneous. While the methods of the Stalinist bureaucracy are homogeneous in all spheres, the objective results of these methods depend upon external conditions, or to use the language of mechanics, the resistivity of the material. The Communist International represented an instrument that was intended for the overthrow of the capitalist system and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Soviet government represents an instrument for the preservation of conquests of an already accomplished overturn. The Communist parties of the West have no inherited capital. Their strength (in reality, their weakness) lies within themselves and only within themselves. Nine-tenths of the strength of the Stalinist apparatus lies not in itself but in the social changes wrought by the victorious revolution. Still, this consideration alone does not decide the question: but it does bear a great methodological significance. It shows us how and why the Stalinist apparatus could completely squander its meaning as the international revolutionary factor, and yet preserve a part of its progressive meaning as the gate-keeper of the social conquests of the proletarian revolution. This dual position—we may add—represents in itself one of the manifestations of the unevenness of historical development.

The correct policies of a workers' state are not reducible solely to national economic construction. If the revolution does not expand on the international arena along the proletarian spiral, it must immutably begin to contract along the bureaucratic spiral within the national framework. If the dictatorship of the proletariat does not become European and world-wide, it must head towards its own collapse. All this is entirely incontestable on a wide historical perspective. But everything revolves around the concrete historical periods. Can one say that the policies of the Stalinist bureaucracy have led already to the liquidation of the workers' state? That is the question now.

Against the assertion that the workers' state is apparently already liquidated there arises first and foremost the important methodological position of Marxism. The dictatorship of the proletariat was established by means of a political overturn and a civil war of three years. The class theory of society and historical experience both equally testify to the impossibility of the victory of the proletariat through peaceful methods, that is, without grandiose class battles, weapons in hand. How, in that case, is the imperceptible, "gradual", bourgeois counter-revolution conceivable? Until now, in any case, feudal as well as bourgeois counter-revolutions have never taken place "organically" but they have invariably required the intervention of military surgery. In the last analysis the theories of reformism, in so far as reformism generally has attained to theory, are always based upon the inability to understand that class antagonisms are profound and irreconcilable; hence, the perspective of a peaceful transformation of capitalism into socialism. The Marxian thesis relating to the catastrophic character of the transfer of power from the hands of one class into the hands of another applies not only to revolutionary periods, when history madly sweeps ahead, but also to the periods of counter-revolution when society rolls backwards. He who asserts that the Soviet government has been

\* Sage American Brandlerite (the Lovestone group) complicate the question; the economic policy of the Stalinists, if you please, is impeccable, but the political regime in the U. S. S. R. is bad; there is no democracy. It does not occur to these theoreticians to ask themselves why then does Stalin liquidate democracy when his economic policies are correct and successful? Isn't it out of fear that if proletarian democracy obtained, the party and the working class would express much too restlessly and violently their enthusiasm over his economic policies?

The Class Nature of the Soviet State - by Leon Trotsky

gradually changed from proletarian to bourgeois is only, so to speak, running backwards the film of reformism.

Our opponents may gainsay, this is a general methodological proposition and that no matter how important in itself it is nevertheless too abstract to solve the question. Truth is always concrete. The thesis of the irreconcilability of class contradictions should and must direct us in our analysis but cannot replace its results. One must probe deeply into the material content of the historical process itself.

We reply, it is true, a methodological argument does not exhaust the problem. But in any case it transfers the burden of proof to the opposing side. Critics, who consider themselves Marxists, must demonstrate in what manner the bourgeoisie that had lost power in a three years' struggle could resume this power without any battles. However, since our opponents make no attempt to invest their appraisal of the Soviet state with any sort of serious theoretical expression we shall try to perform this labor for them here.

"The Dictatorship over the Proletariat"

The most widespread, popular and at first sight irrefutable argument in favor of the non-proletarian character of the present Soviet state is based upon the reference to the strangulation of the liberties of proletarian organizations and to the almightiness of the bureaucracy. Is it really possible to identify the dictatorship of an apparatus, which has led to the dictatorship of a single person, with the dictatorship of the proletariat as a class? Isn't it clear that the dictatorship of the proletariat is excluded by the dictatorship over the proletariat?

Such enticing reasoning is constructed not upon a materialistic analysis of the process as it develops in reality but upon pure idealistic schemas, upon the Kantian norms. Certain noble "friends" of the revolution have provided themselves with a very radiant conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and they are completely prostrated in the face of the fact that the real dictatorship with all its heritage of class barbarism, with all its internal contradictions, with the mistakes and crimes of the leadership fails entirely to resemble that sleek image which they have provided. Disillusioned in their most beautiful emotions they turn their backs to the Soviet Union.

Where and in what books can one find a faultless prescription for a proletarian dictatorship? The dictatorship of a class does not mean by a long shot that its entire mass always participates in the management of the state. This we have seen, first of all, in the case of the propertied classes. The nobility ruled through the monarchy before which the noble stood on his knees. The dictatorship of the bourgeoisie took on comparatively developed democratic forms only under the conditions of capitalist upswing when the ruling class had nothing to fear. Before our own eyes, democracy has been supplanted in Germany by Hitler's autocracy, with all the traditional bourgeois parties smashed to smithereens. Today, the German bourgeoisie does not rule directly, politically it is placed under complete subjection to Hitler and his bands. Nevertheless, the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie remains inviolate in Germany, because all the conditions of its social hegemony have been preserved and strengthened. By expropriating the bourgeoisie politically Hitler saved it, even if temporarily, from economic expropriation. The fact that the bourgeoisie was compelled to resort to the Fascist regime testifies to the fact that its hegemony was endangered but not at all that it had fallen.

Anticipating our subsequent arguments, our opponents will hasten to refute: although the bourgeoisie, as an exploiting minority can also preserve its hegemony by means of a Fascist dictatorship, the proletariat building a socialist society must manage its government itself, directly drawing ever wider masses of the people into the task of government. In its general form, this argument is undebatable, but in the given case it merely means that the present Soviet dictatorship is a sick dictatorship. The frightful difficulties of Socialist construction in an isolated and backward country coupled with the false policies of the leadership—which in the last analysis also reflects the pressure of backwardness and isolation—have led to the result that the bureaucracy has expropriated the proletariat politically in order to guard its social conquests with its own methods. The anatomy of society is determined by its economic relation. So long as the forms of property that have been created by the October revolution are not overthrown, the proletariat remains the ruling class.

Dissertations upon "the dictatorship of the bureaucracy over the proletariat" without a much deeper analysis, that is, without a clear explanation of the social roots and the class limits of bureaucratic domination, boil down merely to high-faluting democratic phrases so extremely popular among the Mensheviks. One need not doubt that the overwhelming majority of Soviet workers are dissatisfied with the bureaucracy and that a considerable section, by no means the worst, hates it. However, it is not only due to repressions that this dissatisfaction does not assume violent mass forms: the workers fear that they will clear the field for the class enemy, if they overthrow the bureaucracy. The inter-relationships between the bureaucracy and the class are really much more complex than they appear to be to the frothy "democrats". The Soviet workers would have settled accounts with the despotism of the apparatus had other perspectives opened before them, had the Western horizon flamed not with the brown color of Fascism but with the red of revolution. So long as this does not happen, the proletariat with clenched teeth bears ("tolerates") the bureaucracy, and in this sense recognizes it as the bearer of the proletarian dictatorship. In a heart to heart conversation, no Soviet worker would be sparing of strong words addressed to the Stalinist bureaucracy. But not a single one of them would allow that the counter-revolution has already taken place. The proletariat is the spine of the Soviet state. But in so far as the function of governing is concentrated in the hands of an irresponsible bureaucracy we have before us an obviously sick state. Can it be cured? Will not further attempts at cures mean a fruitless expenditure of precious time? The question is badly put. By cures we understand not all sorts of artificial measures separate and apart from the world revolutionary movement but a further struggle under the banner of Marxism. Merciless criticism of the Stalinist bureaucracy, training the cadres of the New International, resurrecting the fighting capacity of the world proletarian vanguard—this is the essence of the "cure". It coincides with the fundamental direction of historical progress.

During the last few years—appropriately enough—our opponents have told us more than once that we "are losing time in vain" by occupying ourselves with curing the Comintern. We never promised anybody that we would cure the Comintern. We only refused, until the decisive test, to pronounce the sick as dead, or hopelessly ill. In any case, we did not waste a single day "curing" it. We formed revolutionary cadres, and what is no less important, we prepared the fundamental theoretical and programmatic positions of the new International.

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat as an Idealistic Norm

Messrs. "Kantian" sociologists (we apologize to the shade of Kant) often reach the conclusion that a "real" dictatorship, that is one which conforms to their ideal norms existed only in the days of the Paris Commune, or during the first period of the October revolution, up to the Brest-Litovsk peace or, at best, up to the NEP. This is indeed sharpshooting: aim a finger at the sky and hit the bull's eye! If Marx and Engels called the Paris Commune "the dictatorship of the proletariat" it was only because of the force of the possibilities lodged in it. But by itself the Commune was not yet the dictatorship of the proletariat. Having seized power, it hardly knew how to use it; instead of assuming the offensive, it waited; it remained isolated within the circle of Paris; it dared not touch the state bank; it did not and indeed could not put through the overturn in property relations because it did not wield power on a national scale. To this must be added Blanquist one-sidedness and Proudhonist prejudices which prevented even the leaders of the movement from completely understanding the Commune as the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The reference to the first period of the October revolution is not any more fortunate. Not only up to the Brest-Litovsk peace but even up to autumn of 1918, the social content of the revolution was restricted to a petty-bourgeois agrarian overturn and workers' control over production. This means that the revolution in its actions had not yet passed the boundaries of bourgeois society. During this first period soldiers' soviets ruled side by side with workers' soviets, and often elbowed them aside. Only toward the autumn of 1918, did the petty bourgeois soldier agrarian elemental wave recede a little to its shores and the workers went forward with the nationalization of the means of production. Only from this time can one speak of the in-

ception of a real dictatorship of the proletariat. But even here it is necessary to make certain large reservations. During those initial years the dictatorship was geographically confined to the old Moscow principality and was compelled to wage a three years' war along all the radii from Moscow to the periphery. This means that up to 1921, precisely up to the NEP that is, what went on was still the struggle to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat upon the national scale. And since, in the opinion of the pseudo-Marxist philistines, the dictatorship had disappeared with the beginning of the NEP, then it means that, in general, it had never existed. To these gentlemen the dictatorship of the proletariat is simply an imponderable concept, an ideal norm not to be realized upon our sinful planet. Small wonder that "theoreticians" of this stripe, insofar as they do not renounce altogether the very word dictatorship, strive to smear over the irreconcilable contradiction between the latter and bourgeois democracy.

Extremely characteristic, from the laboratory and not the political point of view, is the Parisian sect of "Communist-democrats" (Souvaine & Co.). The very name already implies a break with Marxism. In the critique of the Gotha program, Marx rejected the name social democracy in view of the fact that it places the revolutionary socialist struggle under the formal control of democracy. It is quite obvious that there is no difference in principle between "Communist democrats" and "socialist democrats", social democrats that is. There is no ahnd and fast partition between socialism and communism. Transgression begins only when socialism and communism as a movement or as a state is subordinated not to the actual course of the class struggle, not to the material conditions of the historical process but to the supra-social and supra-historical abstraction, "democracy" which in reality is a weapon of self-defense serving the bourgeoisie against the proletarian dictatorship. If during the epoch of the Gotha Program it was still possible to see in the word social democracy only an incorrect and non-scientific name for a proletarian party, whose spirit was healthy, then the entire subsequent history of bourgeois and "social" democracy turns the banner of "democratic communism (?) into the banner of an outright class betrayal".

Bonapartism

An opponent of the Urbahns type will say that there has been really no restoration of the bourgeois regime as yet but also there is no longer a workers' state; the present soviet regime is a supra-class or an inter-class Bonapartist government. In its own time we settled our accounts with this theory. Historically, Bonapartism was and remains the government of the bourgeoisie during periods of crises in bourgeois society. It is possible and it is necessary to distinguish between the "progressive" Bonapartism that consolidates the purely capitalistic conquests of bourgeois revolution and the Bonapartism of the decay of capitalist society, the convulsive Bonapartism of our epoch (von Papen—Schleicher, Dolfuss, and the candidate for Dutch Bonapartism, Colijn, etc.) Bonapartism always implies political veering between classes; but under Bonapartism in all its historical transmigrations there is preserved the one and the same social base; bourgeois property. Nothing is more absurd than to draw the conclusion of the classless character of the Bonapartist state from the Bonapartist waggling between classes or from the "supra-class" position of the Bonapartist gang. Monstrous nonsense! Bonapartism is only one of the varieties of capitalist hegemony.

If Urbahns wants to extend the concept of Bonapartism to include also the present soviet regime then we are ready to accept such a widened interpretation—under one condition: if the social content of the soviet "Bonapartism" will be defined with the requisite clarity. It is absolutely correct that the self-rule of the Soviet bureaucracy was built upon the soil of veering between class forces both internal as well as international. Insofar as the bureaucratic veering has been crowned by the personal plebiscitary regime of Stalin, it is possible to speak of soviet Bonapartism. But while the Bonapartism of both Bonapartes as well as their present pitiful followers has developed and is developing on the basis of a bourgeois regime, the Bonapartism of soviet bureaucracy has under it the soil of a soviet regime. Terminological innovations or historical analogies can serve as conveniences in one manner or another for analysis but they cannot change the social nature of the soviet state.

\* Those who are interested, if there are such, may become acquainted with the "platform" of "communist (!) democrats" themselves. From the viewpoint of the fundamentals of Marxism it is difficult to conceive of a more charlatanic document. (To be continued)

Discussion Articles

The NRA and the Corporate State

The NRA cannot be separated from Roosevelt's Administration, nor from his other "Acts" such as the economy bill, the banking laws, the revaluation of the dollar. Let us turn through the pages of history to find a similar bourgeois regime. We need to go back to the days when the Communists, Miami festo was written. Bourgeois Revolution had shaken Europe. The "spectre of Communism" had shown itself to a victorious bourgeoisie in France. A cruel, cynical "reformism" to meet "social evils" was put forward by the ruling bourgeoisie. National workshops, public work armies, thieving economies, and tactical financial reorganizations and moves, subsidies to the peasantry, etc., were the elements of a state policy designed to segmentate the lower classes and to strike additional blows at the defeated monarchy. Utopian Socialists, liberals, industrialists and financiers were each given "their part to do." The Second Republic of France raised itself up, on the gains of the nation's proletariat, artisans, and peasants. The two former classes, being socialized, were demanding a Social Republic! The capitalist met this new stage of its revolution that was promising to be socialist in character by its "low" reformism. The Roosevelt regime which has been swept into power upon the paper ballots of the lower classes who in a practical American manner are demanding precisely those things which only a Workers' Government can give (cheap government, a social dollar, government ownership of banks and trust in-

dustry, social insurance of all kinds, etc.) is meeting this popular awakening with a similar program of "Reforms." In France the policy bent back the plebeian revolt for the "Social Republic" in 1851 with the strength it had gained from its policy only, in turn to waste itself and fall to the "Third Empire" of counter-revolution. Example of 1851 Insurrection Trotsky has pointed out that the insurrection of the Parisian proletariat in 1851, an outburst of anger against the fraud, deceit, and cruelty of the Bourgeois reform government represented in the dynamics of the social revolution, the "July Days" which were a necessary prerequisite for the Paris Commune. Between these steps for power came the successful Kornilovad, the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. This was because, in the specific gravity of the social classes of France at that period, this form of reactionary state rule (for the property classes came to the fore) was the only one that was possible. How will it fare for the Roosevelt regime and the social class for whom he holds the staff of power! When the avalanche of paper ballots (as against the Frenchmen's guns) swept Hoover down it carried with him whole sections of the political system by which Finance Capital rules. The burst of the shock was taken off the dominant class by the fact that the traditional two party system allowed it to use its blackest, oldest, most reactionary Democratic Party as a "liberal" shock-absorber. This re-

ensuing difficulties and political consequences to its rule over the nation. This condition reflects itself in the state under stress of internal contradictions. Function of Imperialist State The Imperialist State begins to function from this manner of thought: the interests of the nation are the interests of Finance Capital, therefore the requirements of our international bankers (a bigger slice of the world market) demand that this and that internal contradiction, which will work itself out if given enough time, need to be solved now in the immediate future, in order that we can get our house in order for our next stab at the competitor powers. The difficulty may be over-capitalized, antiquated small industry and trade. The remedy is a plan similar to the NRA, which will establish a law of "fair practice" by which the stronger, more efficient plants will quickly ruin and eliminate the small inefficient workshops. This will speed up the natural process of elimination, and make the nation's economic power stronger more quickly. Or the case may be the exigencies of Imperialist War in which the whole nation's (that is its Finance Capital's) future is at stake. The remedy is to monopolize the banks, the railroads, the public utilities, and the munitions works, by establishing government ownership of some enterprises, government control of others, in order to regulate prices and the expenses of government money everywhere necessary. All warring powers applied some of these measures of "state capitalism" in the World War. Or the case may be that of a Capitalist nation caught in the crisis of democratic rule, when the exploited classes can no longer be held in leash by bribes or concessions and when the internal contradictions are augmented by external barriers to expansion. The Nation (finance capital) is in a state of "siege"!

JUST OFF THE PRESS! IN JEWISH THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL. AL AND THE SOVIET UNION (The Class Nature of the Soviet State) by LEON TROTSKY In this pamphlet comrade Trotsky discusses the problem that has been uppermost in the minds of all revolutionary workers, since the Left Opposition proclaimed the need of the Fourth International: The problem of the Soviet Union. Are we to build a new party in the Soviet Union? Do we proclaim that there is no longer a proletarian dictatorship in the U. S. S. R.? Are we for a new revolution to depose the rule of Stalinism? Also other questions having a bearing on the subject. 32 pp.—10c for single copies Bundles of 5 or more 7 cents order from U N S E R K A M F 126 East 16th St., New York. THE MILITANT Entered as a second class mail matter November 28, 1928, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y. Under the act of March 3, 1879. Published Weekly by the Communist League of America (Opposition) EDITORIAL BOARD Martin Abern James P. Cannon Max Shachtman Maurice Spector Arne Swaback Vol. VII, No. 1 Whole No. 205) SATURDAY, JANUARY 6, 1934 Subscription rate: \$1.00 per year Foreign \$1.50 2 cents per copy