

The New Constitution of the U.S.S.R.

BY LEON TROTSKY

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course be strong and consistent in the struggle against terrorists and wreckers of public property. . . . "Wargo: "a Soviet power"—without Soviets; a proletarian dictatorship—without the proletariat, and, in addition to that, a dictatorship not against the bourgeoisie, but against . . . terrorists and thieves. At all events, the party program never forsook such a type of state. . . .

Molotov's promise to do "not infrequently" without those extreme measures which might prove unnecessary is not worth much, and is self-evident; but it loses all its value alongside of the reference to the enemies of law and order, who are precisely the ones that make it impossible to renounce emergency measures. Whence, however, arise these enemies of law and order, these terrorists and thieves, and, moreover, in such threatening numbers as would justify the preservation of a dictatorship in a classless society? Here we must come to the assistance of Molotov. At the dawn of the Soviet power the terrorist acts were perpetrated by the S. R.'s and the Whites in the atmosphere of the still unfinished civil war. When the former ruling classes lost all their hopes, terrorism disappeared as well. Kulak terror, traces of which are observable even now, was always local in character, and supplemented the partisan war against the Soviet regime. This is not what Molotov has in mind. The new terror does not lean upon either the old ruling classes or the kulak. The terrorists of recent years are recruited exclusively from among the Soviet youth, from the ranks of the Y.C.L. and of the party. While utterly impotent to solve those tasks which it sets itself, individual terror is, however, of the greatest symptomatic impor-

tance because it characterizes the sharpness of the antagonism between the bureaucracy and the wide masses of the people, especially, the younger generation. Terrorism is the tragic supplement of Bonapartism. Each individual bureaucrat is afraid of the terror; but the bureaucracy as a whole successfully exploits it for the justification of its political monopoly. Stalin and Molotov did not discover any gunpowder in this field either.

Worst of all, however, is the fact, that it is absolutely impossible to gather, either from the interviews or from the commentaries, the social nature of the state for which the new constitution is being prepared. The Soviet system used to be officially considered as the expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat. But if the classes have been destroyed, then by reason of this very fact the social basis of the dictatorship has likewise been destroyed. Who, then, is its carrier now? Obviously the population as a whole. But when the entire people, emancipated from class contradictions, becomes the carrier of the dictatorship, this implies nothing else than the dissolution of the dictatorship in the socialist society, and consequently the liquidation of the state. The logic of Marxism is invulnerable. The liquidation of the state in its turn begins with the liquidation of the bureaucracy. Does the new constitution, perhaps, imply at least the liquidation of the G.P.U.? Should any one venture to express this idea in the U.S.S.R., the G.P.U. would immediately send convincing counter-arguments. The classes have been destroyed, the Soviets are being abolished, the class theory of society is reduced to dust, but the bureaucracy remains. Q.E.D.

The Whip Against the Bureaucracy

We shall return later to the question as to the extent to which the universal equal and direct suffrage corresponds to the alleged social equality of all citizens that has been attained. But if we accept this premise on faith, we become all the more perplexed by the following question: Why, if that be the case, must the elections be secret henceforth? Just whom does the populace in the socialist country fear? Against whose attempts in particular is it necessary to provide a defense? The child's fear of darkness has a purely biological foundation; but when grown up people dare not express their opinions openly, their fear is political in character. And for the Marxist, politics is always a function of the class struggle. In capitalist society the secret ballot is intended to provide a defense for the exploited against the terror of the exploiters. That the bourgeoisie did finally agree to such a reform—of course, under the pressure of the masses—was only because the bourgeoisie itself was interested in protecting its state at least partially against the demoralization of its own making. But in the U.S.S.R. there obviously cannot be any pressure of the exploiters upon the toilers. Against whom, then, is it necessary to protect the Soviet citizens by means of the secret ballot?

Under the old Soviet constitution, the *viva voce* vote was introduced as a weapon in the hands of the revolutionary class against bourgeois and petty bourgeois enemies. The same purpose was served by the restrictions in the franchise itself. Now, at the end of the second decade after the Revolution, no longer the class enemies but the toilers themselves are so frightened that they cannot vote except under the shield of secrecy. This touches precisely the masses of the people, the overwhelming majority, for it is impossible to allow that the secret ballot is being specially introduced for the convenience of the counter-revolutionary minority!

But who is terrorizing the peo-

ple? The answer is clear—the bureaucracy. The latter is preparing to protect the toilers against itself by means of the secret ballot. Stalin made this admission openly. To the question, *Why the secret ballot?* his reply was verbatim as follows: "Because we want to give the Soviet people complete freedom to vote for those they want to elect." Thus we learn from Stalin that the "Soviet people" cannot vote today for those they want to elect. "We" are only getting ready to provide them with such an opportunity. Who are these "we" who can give or refuse the freedom to vote? The stratum in whose name Stalin speaks and acts: the bureaucracy. Stalin need only have added that his important admission applies as much to the party as to the State, and that, in particular, he himself, occupies the post of General Secretary by means of a system which does not permit party members to elect those they desire. The phrase "we want to give the Soviet people" is in itself infinitely more important than all the constitutions Stalin has yet to write, for this brief phrase is a ready constitution, and, moreover, very real, and not a myth.

As the European bourgeoisie in its time, so the Soviet Bureaucracy is compelled today to resort to the secret ballot in order at least partially to purge its state apparatus which it exploits "as the rightful owner" from the corruption of its own making. Stalin was compelled to give an inkling of this motive for the reform. Said he to Howard, "There are not a few institutions in our country which work badly. . . . Secret suffrage in the U.S.S.R. will be a whip in the hands of the population against the organs of government which work badly." A second noteworthy admission! After the bureaucracy has created, with its own hands the socialist society, it feels the need . . . of a whip—not only because the organs of government "work badly" but above all because they are corroded through and through with the vices of uncontrolled cliques.

As far back as 1925, Rakovsky wrote the following with regard to a number of horrible cases of bur-

eaucratic demoralization that broke out into the open, "The most characteristic and most dangerous feature in the tidal wave of scandals, is the passivity of the masses, among the Communists even more than among the non-party men, toward the manifestations of unheard-of self-will, of which the workers themselves were witnesses. Out of fear of those who wield power, or simply out of political indifference, they passed by without a protest, or confined themselves merely to grumbling". More than eight years have elapsed since that time, and

Democracy Without Politics

Turning to the people for the salutary whip, the bureaucracy, however, lays down one ultimatum: condition: that there be no politics. This holy function must remain as hitherto the monopoly of the "leader." To the ticklish question of the American interlocutor relative to other parties, Stalin replied: "Since there are no classes, since the dividing lines between classes are being obliterated [there are no classes]—the dividing lines between classes (which do not exist!) are being obliterated"—L. T.] there remains only a slight, but not a fundamental difference between various strata in socialist society, and there can be no fertile soil for the creation of contending parties. Where there are not several classes there cannot be several parties, for a party is a part of a class." Every word a mistake, sometimes even two!

According to Stalin, it seems that the dividing lines between classes are rigidly described, and that in every given period only one party corresponds to each class. The Marxist doctrine of the class nature of parties is transformed into a ludicrous bureaucratic caricature: political dynamics is entirely excluded from the historical process—in the interests of administrative order. In point of fact not a single instance can be found throughout the entire extent of political history of only one party corresponding to one class! Classes are not homogeneous, they are torn by internal antagonisms, and they arrive even at the solution of common tasks only through an internal struggle of tendencies, groupings and parties. Within certain limits it may be allowed that "the party is a part of a class." But inasmuch as a class has many "parts"—some facing forward, others backward—one and the same class can put forth several parties. For the self-same reason, a single party can lean upon the parts of several classes.

metaphysics of unity but by the egoistic interests of the privileged cliques. Soviet bureaucracy is infinitely more powerful, wealthy and self-reliant than the labor bureaucracy in bourgeois countries. Highly skilled workers in the Soviet Union enjoy privileges unknown to the highest categories of labor in Europe and America. This two-fold stratum—the bureaucracy—which leans upon the labor aristocracy—is the ruler of the country. The present ruling party of the U.S.S.R. is nothing else than the political machine of a privileged stratum. The Stalinist bureaucracy has something to lose and nothing more to conquer. It is not inclined to share what it holds. For the future as well, it intends to reserve the "fertile soil" for itself.

To be sure, the Bolshevik party also occupied a monopoly position in the state during the first period of the Soviet era. However, to identify these two phenomena is to mistake appearances for reality. During the years of civil war, under extremely difficult historical conditions, the party of the Bolsheviks found itself compelled temporarily to prohibit other parties, not because the latter lacked a "fertile soil"—in that case it would not have been necessary even to prohibit them—but on the contrary, precisely because fertile soil existed: this is what made them dangerous. The party explained openly to the masses what it was doing, for it was clear to everybody that at stake was the defense of the isolated revolution against mortal dangers. Today, the more the bureaucracy embellishes the social reality, the more shamelessly it exploits it for its own benefit. If it be true that the kingdom of

Socialism has already come, and the fertile soil for political parties has disappeared, there would be no need to prohibit them. It would only remain, in accordance with the program, to abolish "any restrictions whatsoever upon liberty." But the bureaucracy will not allow so much as to peep about such a constitution. The internal falseness of the whole construction is all too apparent!

Seeking to dispel normal doubts on the part of his interlocutor, Stalin offered a new thought: "Candidates will be put forward not only by the Communist Party but by all sorts of public, non-party organizations. And we have hundreds of these. . . . Each of these strata (of Soviet society) may have its special interests and express them through our numerous existing organizations." Evidently, it is for this reason that the new Soviet constitution will be the "most democratic constitution in the world."

This piece of sophistry is no better than the rest. The most important "strata" in Soviet society are: the summits of the bureaucracy and its middle and nethermost layers, the labor aristocracy, the kolkhoz workers, the middle layers of the kolkhozes, the peasant proprietors, the labor strata of workers and peasants, and beyond them the lumpenproletariat, the homeless, the prostitutes and so on. As to the Soviet public organizations—trade union, cooperative, cultural, sport, etc.—they do not at all represent the interests of different "strata" because they all have one and the same hierarchic structure: Even in those cases, when the organizations are based upon the privileged circles, as for instance the trade unions and cooperatives, the active role in them is played exclusively by the representatives of the privileged summits, while the "party," i.e., the political organization of the ruling stratum, has the last word. The participation of non-political organizations in the electoral struggle will consequently lead to nothing else than the rivalry between the different cliques of the bureaucracy within the limits set by the Kremlin. The ruling summit calculates to learn in this manner some secrets hidden from it and to refurbish its regime, without at the same time permitting a political struggle to take place which must inevitably be directed against itself.

centration camps. Stalin is the indisputable leader of the bureaucracy and of the labor aristocracy. He keeps in constant touch only with these "strata". A sincere "worship" of the leader emanates only from these circles. Such is the essence of the present political system of the U.S.S.R.

But to maintain this mechanism, Stalin is compelled from time to time to side with the "people" as against the bureaucracy, naturally, with the latter's silent consent. He is even compelled to seek for a whip from below against the abuses from above. As we have already said, this is one of the motives for the constitutional reform. There is another and no less important motive.

The new constitution abolishes the Soviets, dissolving the workers in the general mass of the population. The Soviets, it is true, have long lost meaning politically. But they might have revived with the growth of new social antagonisms and with the awakening of the new generation. Above all, of course, are to be feared the city Soviets, with the growing participation of green and exacting Y.C.L.'ers. In the cities the contrast between luxury and dire want is all too glaring. The first care of the Soviet aristocracy is to get rid of the Workers and Red Army Soviets.

Despite the collectivization, the material and cultural contradiction between the city and the village has hardly been touched. The peasantry is still very backward and atomized. Social antagonisms also exist within the kolkhozes and between the kolkhozes. The bureaucracy finds it much easier to cope with the dissatisfaction in the village. It is able to use the kolkhozniks not without success against the

city workers. To smother the protest of the workers against the growing social inequality by the weight of the more backward masses of the village—this is the chief aim of the new constitution, about which neither Stalin nor Molotov naturally have communicated anything to the world. Bonapartism, incidentally, always leans upon the village as against the city. In this, too, Stalin remains true to tradition.

Learned philistines like the Webbs failed to see any great difference between Bolshevism and Czarism prior to 1923, but, in return, they have completely recognized the "democracy" of Stalin's regime. Small wonder: these people have all their lives been the ideologists of a labor bureaucracy. In point of fact, Soviet Bonapartism bears the same relation to Soviet democracy that bourgeois Bonapartism or even Fascism bears to bourgeois democracy. Both arise equally from the frightful defeats of the world proletariat. Both will crash with its first victory.

Bonapartism as history testifies is able to abide very well with universal and even secret suffrage. The democratic ritual of Bonapartism is the plebiscite. From time to time the question is put to the citizens: For or against the Leader? The leader, on his part, takes precautions so that the voter is able to feel the barrel of a gun at his temple. Since the days of Napoleon III, who now appears as a provincial dilettante, this technique has attained an unprecedented development, as witness, say, the latest spectacle by Goebbels. The new constitution is thus intended to liquidate juridically the outworn Soviet regime, replacing it by Bonapartism on the plebiscitary basis.

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The Whip Against the Bureaucracy

Remarkably enough, this scandalous mistake of Stalin is absolutely disinterested in character, for, you see, in relation to the U.S.S.R. he proceeds from the assertion that no classes at all exist there. Of what class is the C.P.S.U. a part—after the abolition of all classes? Carelessly straying into the field of theory, Stalin proves more than he intended. From his reasoning it follows not that there cannot be different parties in the U.S.S.R. but that there cannot be even a single party. Where there are no classes there can be no room for politics in general. Stalin, however, makes a gracious exception from this law in the case of the party of which he is General Secretary.

The history of the working class reveals best of all the bankruptcy of the Stalinist theory of parties. Despite the fact that the working class is in its social structure indubitably the least heterogeneous of all classes in capitalist society, the existence of such a "stratum" as the labor aristocracy and a labor bureaucracy bound up with it leads to the creation of reformist parties, which inevitably turn into one of the instruments of bourgeois rule. It matters nothing from the standpoint of Stalinist sociology whether the difference between the labor aristocracy and the proletariat mass is "fundamental" or only "slight"; but it was precisely by reason of this difference that the necessity to create the Third International arose in its time. On the other hand, it is indubitable that the structure of Soviet society is infinitely more heterogeneous and complex than that of the proletariat in capitalist countries. For this very reason, it can provide a sufficiently fertile soil for several parties.

Stalin is interested, as a matter of fact, not in the sociology of Marx but in the monopoly of the bureaucracy. These are two entirely different things. Every labor bureaucracy, even one that does not wield state power, inclines to the view that there is no "fertile soil" in the working class for the opposition. The leaders of the British Labour Party drive the revolutionists out of the trade unions on the grounds that there is no room for the struggle between parties within the framework of a "united" working class. Messrs. Vanderveide, Leon Blum, Jouhaux etc., act in a similar manner. Their conduct is dictated not by the

The Historical Meaning of the New Constitution

In the person of its most authoritative leader, the bureaucracy again demonstrates how little it understands those historical tendencies which determine its movement. When Stalin remarks that the difference between various strata in Soviet society is "slight but not fundamental," he obviously has in mind the fact that exclusive of the individual peasant proprietors, who are sufficiently numerous even today to populate Czechoslovakia, all other "strata" depend upon the stratified or collectivized means of production. This is beyond dispute. But a "fundamental" difference still remains between the collective, i.e. group property in agriculture and the nationalized property in industry: it can still make itself felt in the future. We shall not, however, enter into a discussion of this important question. Of considerably more immediate importance is the difference between their relation not to the means of production but to the articles of consumption. The sphere of distribution is, of course, only a "superstructure" in relation to the sphere of production. However, it is precisely the sphere of distribution that is of decisive importance in the everyday life of the people. From the standpoint of the ownership of the means of production, the difference between a Marshall and a street cleaner, between the head of a trust and an unskilled laborer, between the son of a people's Commissar and a homeless waif is not "fundamental". But some occupy lordly apartments, enjoy several dachas (summer homes) in various parts of the country, have the best automobiles at their disposal, and have long forgotten how to shine their own boots; while others not infrequently live in wooden barracks, without any partitions for privacy, lead a half-starved existence, and do not clean their own boots only because they are barefoot. To a high dignitary this difference seems to be only "slight", i.e., one that does not merit attention. To the unskilled laborer it appears, not without reason, to be "fundamental".

In a country in which the law of revolution has not yet cooled, the privileged are often very much afraid of their own privileges, especially against the background of general want. The topmost Soviet strata stand in dread of the masses, with a fear that is purely bourgeois. Stalin supplies the growing privileges of the ruling stratum with a "theoretical" justification by means of the Comintern, and he defends the Soviet aristocracy against dissatisfaction by means of con-

centration camps. Stalin is the indisputable leader of the bureaucracy and of the labor aristocracy. He keeps in constant touch only with these "strata". A sincere "worship" of the leader emanates only from these circles. Such is the essence of the present political system of the U.S.S.R.

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Tasks of the Vanguard

gining with their vanguard. The regeneration of the party of the Bolsheviks in counterpoise to the party of the Bonapartists is the key to all other difficulties and tasks.

On the road towards a goal, one must be able to utilize the real possibilities which arise on every stage. Any illusions about the Stalinist constitution would of course be unseasonable. But it is equally impermissible to wave it aside as an insignificant trifle. The bureaucracy assumes the risk of a reform not at its own whim but out of necessity. History tells of many cases of a bureaucratic dictatorship resorting for its salvation to "liberal" reforms, and still further weakening itself. By laying bare Bonapartism, the new constitution creates a semi-legal cover for the struggle against it. The rivalry between the bureaucratic cliques can become the vent-hole for a much wider political struggle. The whip against the "government institutions that work badly" can be turned into a whip against Bonapartism. Everything depends upon the degree of activity of the advanced elements of the working class.

The Bolshevik-Leninists must henceforth follow attentively all the twists and windings of the constitutional reform, painstakingly taking into consideration the experience of the first coming elections. We must learn how to utilize the rivalry between the various "public organizations" in the interests of socialism. We must learn how to engage in battles on the soil of the plebiscites as well. The bureaucracy is afraid of the workers, we must unfold our work among them more audaciously and on a more extensive scale. Bonapartism is afraid of the youth, we must rally it to the banner of Marx and Lenin. From the adventures of individual terrorism, the method of those who are desperate we must lead the vanguard of the young generation onto the broad road of the world revolution. It is necessary to train new Bolshevik cadres which will come to replace the decaying bureaucratic regime.

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