

Stalinism and Bolshevism - An Article Concerning the Movement for

Reactionary epochs like ours not only disintegrate and weaken the working class and its vanguard but also lower the general ideological level of the movement and throw political thinking back to stages long since passed through. In these conditions the task of the vanguard is above all not to let itself be carried along by the backward flow; it must swim against the current. If an unfavorable relation of forces prevents it from holding the positions that it has won, it must at least retain its ideological positions, because in them is expressed the dearly-paid experience of the past. Fools will consider this policy "sectarian". Actually it is the only means of preparing for a new tremendous surge forward with the coming historical tide.

THE REACTION AGAINST MARXISM AND BOLSHEVISM

Great political defeats inevitably provoke a reconsideration of values, generally occurring in two directions. On the one hand the true vanguard, enriched by the experience of defeat, defends with tooth and nail the succession of revolutionary thought and on this basis attempts to educate new cadres for the mass struggle to come. On the other hand the routinists, centrists and dilettantes, frightened by defeat, do their best to destroy the authority of revolutionary tradition and go backward in their search for a "New Word."

One could indicate a great many examples of ideological reaction, most often taking the form of prostration. All the literature of the Second and Third Internationals, as well as of their satellites of the London Bureau, consists essentially of such examples. Not a suggestion of Marxist analysis. Not a single serious attempt to explain the causes of defeat. About the future, not one fresh word. Nothing but clichés, conformity, lies, and above all solicitude for their own bureaucratic self-preservation. It is enough to smell ten lines from some Hilferding or Otto Bauer to know this rottenness. The theoreticians of the Comintern are not even worth mentioning. The famous Dimitroff is as ignorant and commonplace as a shop-keeper over a mug of beer. The minds of these people are too lazy to renounce Marxism: they prostitute it. But it is not they that interest us now. Let us turn to the "innovators".

The former Austrian communist, Willi Schlamm, has devoted a small book to the Moscow trials, under the expressive title, "The Dictatorship of the Lie". Schlamm is a gifted journalist, chiefly interested in current affairs. His criticism of the Moscow frame-up, and his exposure of the psychological mechanism of the "voluntary confessions", are excellent. However he does not confine himself to this: he wants to create a new theory of socialism, which would insure us against defeats and frame-ups in the future. But since Schlamm is by no means a theoretician and is apparently not well acquainted with the history of the development of socialism, he returns entirely to pre-Marxian socialism, and notably to its German, that is to its most backward, sentimental and mawkish variety. Schlamm renounces dialectics and the class struggle, not to mention the dictatorship of the proletariat. The problem of transforming society is reduced for him to the realization of certain "eternal" moral truths with which he would imbue mankind, still under capitalism. Willi Schlamm's attempt to save socialism by the insertion of the moral gland is greeted with both joy and pride in Kerensky's review "Novaya Rossia" (an old provincial Russian review now published in Paris): as the editors justifiably conclude, Schlamm has arrived at the principles of true Russian socialism, which a long time ago opposed the holy precepts of faith, hope and charity to the austerity and harshness of the class struggle. The "novel" doctrine of the Russian "Social Revolutionaries" represents, in its "theoretical" premises, only a return to the socialism of pre-March (1848!) Germany. However, it would be unfair to demand a more intimate knowledge of the history of ideas from Kerensky than from Schlamm. Far more important is the fact that Kerensky, who is in solidarity with Schlamm was, while head of the government, the instigator of persecutions against the Bolsheviks as agents of the German general staff: organized, that is,

the same frame-ups against which Schlamm now mobilizes his moth-eaten metaphysical absolutes.

The psychological mechanism of the ideological reaction of Schlamm and his like, is not at all complicated. For a while these people took part in a political movement that swore by the class struggle and appealed, in word if not in thought, to dialectical materialism. In both Austria and Germany the affair ended in a catastrophe. Schlamm draws a wholesale conclusion: this is the result of dialectics and the class struggle! And since the choice of revelations is limited by historical experience and... by personal knowledge, our reformer in his search for the Word falls on a bundle of old rags which he valiantly opposes not only to Bolshevism but to Marxism as well.

At first glance Schlamm's brand of ideological reaction seems too primitive (from Marx... to Kerensky!) to pause over. But actually it is very instructive: precisely in its primitiveness it represents the common denominator of all other forms of reaction, particularly of those expressed in a wholesale denunciation of Bolshevism.

"BACK TO MARXISM"?

Marxism found its highest historical expression in Bolshevism. Under the banner of Bolshevism the first victory of the proletariat was achieved and the first workers' state established. Nothing can erase these facts from history. But since the October Revolution has led in the present stage to the triumph of the bureaucracy, with its system of repression, plunder, and falsification—to the "dictatorship of the lie", to use Schlamm's happy expression—many formalistic and superficial minds leap to a summary conclusion: one cannot struggle against Stalinism, without renouncing Bolshevism. Schlamm, as we already know, goes farther: Bolshevism, which degenerated into Stalinism, itself grew out of Marxism; consequently one cannot fight Stalinism while remaining on the foundation of Marxism. There are others, less consistent but more numerous, who say on the contrary: "We must return from Bolshevism to Marxism." How? To what Marxism? Before Marxism became "bankrupt" in the form of Bolshevism it had already broken down in the form of Social Democracy. Does the slogan "Back to Marxism" then mean a leap over the periods of the Second and Third Internationals... to the First International? But it too broke down in its time. Thus in the last analysis it is a question of returning... to the complete works of Marx and Engels. One can accomplish this heroic leap without leaving one's study and even without taking off one's slippers. But how are we to go from our classics (Marx died in 1883, Engels in 1895) to the tasks of our own time, omitting several decades of theoretical and political struggles, among them Bolshevism and the October Revolution? None of those who propose to renounce Bolshevism as an historically "bankrupt" tendency has indicated any other course. So the question is reduced to the simple advice to study "Capital". We can hardly object. But the Bolsheviks too studied "Capital" and not with their eyes closed. This did not however prevent the degeneration of the Soviet state and the staging of the Moscow trials. So what is to be done?

IS BOLSHEVISM RESPONSIBLE FOR STALINISM?

Is it true that Stalinism represents the legitimate product of Bolshevism, as all reactionaries maintain, as Stalin himself avows, as the Mensheviks, the anarchists, and certain left doctrinaires considering themselves Marxist, believe? "We have always predicted this," they say. "Having started with the prohibition of the other socialist parties, the repression of the anarchists, and the setting up of the Bolshevik dictatorship in the soviets, the October Revolution could only end in the dictatorship of the bureaucracy. Stalin is the continuation and also the bankruptcy of Leninism."

The flaw in this reasoning begins in the tacit identification of Bolshevism, October Revolution and Soviet Union. The historical process of the struggle of hostile forces is replaced by the evolution of Bolshevism in a

vacuum. Bolshevism, however, closely fused with the work with it. And aside from the in the Soviet Union a hundred nationalities, and a heritage of ignorance. The state built up not only the thought and will of cultural level of the country, the population, the pressure of less barbaric world imperialism of degeneration of the Soviet of pure Bolshevism is to ignore name of only one of its elements. One has only to call this element name to do away with every thing.

Bolshevism, at any rate, new with the October Revolution or issued from it. Bolshevism or the factors of history, the "e important but not the decisive historical subjectivism. We see the existing basis of product struggle, not only on a national scale.

When the Bolsheviks made a tendency to private ownership membership in the party, purges, prohibited other parties, granted enterprises as concessive agreements with imperialist drawing partial conclusions from been theoretically clear to the that the conquest of power, to be in itself, by no means transfer sovereign ruler of the historic over the state the party is all the development of society will it before; but in return it sub greater influence from all other can, by the direct attack of how of power. Given a more dragg it can degenerate internally with power. It is precisely this dialectic that is not understood by who try to find in the decay of an annihilating argument again.

In essence these gentlemen party that contains in itself own degeneration is bad. By vism is naturally condemned: the criterion itself is wrong. So a concrete analysis: how and what? No one but the Bolshevik the present time, given such an had no need to break with Bols they found in its arsenal all the tion of its fate. They drew t Stalinism "grew out" of Bolshe ever, but dialectically; not as tion but as a Thermidorian neg the same.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PROGNOSIS

The Bolsheviks, however, did Moscow trials to explain the re tion of the governing party of they foresaw and spoke of the this development. Let us ren the Bolsheviks, not only on the lution but years before. The st in the national and internatio

COMING AS A

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