

Bolshevism - An Article Concerning the Roots and Traditions of the Movement for the Fourth International

...ups against which Schlamm now mobilizes metaphysical absolutes.

logical mechanism of the ideological reform and his like, is not at all complicated. These people took part in a political movement by the class struggle and appealed, in thought, to dialectical materialism. In Germany the affair ended in a catastrophe. Schlamm draws a wholesale conclusion: this is dialectics and the class struggle! And since revelations is limited by historical experience, by personal knowledge, our reformer or the Word falls on a bundle of old rags and only opposes not only to Bolshevism but well.

Since Schlamm's brand of ideological reaction is primitive (from Marx... to Kerensky!)

But actually it is very instructive: primitiveness it represents the common denominator of all other forms of reaction, particularly in a wholesale denunciation of Bolshevism.

"BACK TO MARXISM"?

...and its highest historical expression in the banner of Bolshevism the first proletariat was achieved and the first established. Nothing can erase these facts. But since the October Revolution has led to the triumph of the bureaucracy, of repression, plunder, and falsification of the lie, to use Schlamm's happy formalistic and superficial minds leap to conclusion: one cannot struggle against out renouncing Bolshevism. Schlamm, know, goes farther: Bolshevism, which Stalinism, itself grew out of Marxism; we cannot fight Stalinism while remaining in Marxism. There are others, less numerous, who say on the contrary: from Bolshevism to Marxism." How? Before Marxism became "bankrupt" Bolshevism it had already broken down Social Democracy. Does the slogan "Back to Marxism" mean a leap over the periods of the First International... to the First International too broke down in its time. Thus in the is a question of returning... to the communist Marx and Engels. One can accomplish without leaving one's study and even off one's slippers. But how are we to do this? (Marx died in 1883, Engels in 1895) our own time, omitting several decades of political struggles, among them Bolshevism and the October Revolution? None of those who once Bolshevism as an historically "bankrupt" has indicated any other course. So the led to the simple advice to study "Capital", object. But the Bolsheviks too studied not with their eyes closed. This did not stop the degeneration of the Soviet state of the Moscow trials. So what is to be

BOLSHEVISM RESPONSIBLE FOR STALINISM?

...hat Stalinism represents the legitimate development of Bolshevism, as all reactionaries maintain, as they do, as the Mensheviks, the anarchists, the doctrinaires considering themselves "We have always predicted this," they started with the prohibition of the other, the repression of the anarchists, and of the Bolshevik dictatorship in the soviets. Revolution could only end in the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Stalin is the continuation and development of Leninism."

...this reasoning begins in the tacit identification of Bolshevism, October Revolution and Soviet historical process of the struggle of hostile forces led by the evolution of Bolshevism in a

vacuum. Bolshevism, however, is only a political tendency, closely fused with the working class but not identical with it. And aside from the working class there exist in the Soviet Union a hundred million peasants, various nationalities, and a heritage of oppression, misery and ignorance. The state built up by the Bolsheviks reflects not only the thought and will of Bolshevism but also the cultural level of the country, the social composition of the population, the pressure of a barbaric past and no less barbaric world imperialism. To represent the process of degeneration of the Soviet state as the evolution of pure Bolshevism is to ignore social reality in the name of only one of its elements, isolated by pure logic. One has only to call this elementary mistake by its real name to do away with every trace of it.

Bolshevism, at any rate, never identified itself either with the October Revolution or with the Soviet state that issued from it. Bolshevism considered itself as one of the factors of history, the "conscious" factor—a very important but not the decisive one. We never sinned in historical subjectivism. We saw the decisive factor—in the existing basis of productive forces—in the class struggle, not only on a national but on an international scale.

When the Bolsheviks made concessions to the peasant tendency to private ownership, set up strict rules for membership in the party, purged the party of alien elements, prohibited other parties, introduced the N.E.P., granted enterprises as concessions, or concluded diplomatic agreements with imperialist governments, they were drawing partial conclusions from the basic fact that had been theoretically clear to them from the beginning: that the conquest of power, however important it may be in itself, by no means transforms the party into a sovereign ruler of the historical process. Having taken over the state the party is able, certainly, to influence the development of society with a power inaccessible to it before; but in return it submits itself to a ten times greater influence from all other elements of society. It can, by the direct attack of hostile forces, be thrown out of power. Given a more dragging tempo of development it can degenerate internally while maintaining itself in power. It is precisely this dialectic of the historical process that is not understood by those sectarian logicians who try to find in the decay of the Stalinist bureaucracy an annihilating argument against Bolshevism.

In essence these gentlemen say: the revolutionary party that contains in itself no guarantee against its own degeneration is bad. By such a criterion Bolshevism is naturally condemned: it has no talisman. But the criterion itself is wrong. Scientific thinking demands a concrete analysis: how and why did the party degenerate? No one but the Bolsheviks themselves have up to the present time, given such an analysis. To do this they had no need to break with Bolshevism. On the contrary, they found in its arsenal all they needed for the clarification of its fate. They drew this conclusion: certainly Stalinism "grew out" of Bolshevism, not logically, however, but dialectically; not as a revolutionary affirmation but as a Thermidorian negation. It is by no means the same.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PROGNOSIS OF BOLSHEVISM

The Bolsheviks, however, did not have to wait for the Moscow trials to explain the reasons for the disintegration of the governing party of the U.S.S.R. Long ago they foresaw and spoke of the theoretical possibility of this development. Let us remember the prognosis of the Bolsheviks, not only on the eve of the October Revolution but years before. The specific alignment of forces in the national and international field can enable the

proletariat to seize power first in a backward country such as Russia. But the same alignment of forces beforehand that without a more or less rapid victory the proletariat in the advanced countries the working government in Russia will not survive. Left to its own devices the Soviet regime must either fall or degenerate, exactly: it will first degenerate and then fall. I have written about this more than once, beginning in 1905. In my "History of the Russian Revolution" "Appendix" to the last volume: "Socialism in One Country") are collected all the statements on this question made by the Bolshevik leaders from 1917 until 1923. They all lead to one conclusion: without a revolution in the West, Bolshevism will be liquidated either by internal counter-revolution or by external intervention—a combination of both. Lenin stressed again and again that the bureaucratization of the Soviet regime was a technical or organizational question, but the political degeneration of the workers' state was the beginning of the degeneration of the workers' state.

At the Eleventh Party Congress in March, 1923 Lenin spoke of the support offered to Soviet Russia at the time of the N. E. P. by certain bourgeois politicians, particularly the liberal professor Ustrialov. "I am for the support of the Soviet power in Russia," said Ustrialov though he was a Kadet, a bourgeois, a supporter of intervention—"because on its present course it is heading back into an ordinary bourgeois power." Lenin called the cynical voice of the enemy to "sugary common babble." Soberly and harshly he warns the party danger: "What Ustrialov says is possible, one must not ignore it openly. History knows transformations of all kinds. It is absolutely trivial in politics to put one's faith in victory, devotion, and other excellent moral qualities. A small number of people have excellent moral qualities. The historical outcome is decided by gigantic forces. Those who, if they are not pleased with this small number of people, will treat them none too politely." In a word, the party is not the only factor of development and on a larger historical scale is not the decisive one.

"One nation conquers another," continued Lenin at the same congress, the last in which he participated. This is quite simple and understandable to everyone. But what of the culture of these nations? That is not so simple. If the conquering nation has a higher culture than the defeated, it imposes its culture on the latter, but if the contrary is true then the defeated nation imposes its culture on the conqueror. Did not something like this occur in the case of the capital of the R.S.F.S.R. and was it not in the case that 4,700 communists (almost a whole division of them the best) were submitted to an alien culture? This was said in the beginning of 1923, and not for the first time. History is not made by a few people, even the best; and not only that: these "best" can degenerate, the spirit of an alien, that is a bourgeois culture, only can the Soviet state abandon the way of socialism but the Bolshevik party can, under unfavorable conditions, lose its Bolshevism.

From the clear understanding of this danger the Left Opposition, definitely formed in 1923, fought day by day the symptoms of degeneration, in order to oppose to the growing Thermidor the conscious action of the proletarian vanguard. However, this subjective factor proved to be insufficient. The "gigantic masses" which, according to Lenin, decide the outcome of the struggle, became tired of internal privations and waiting too long for the world revolution. The masses declined. The bureaucracy won the upper hand. It cowed the revolutionary vanguard, turned upon Marxism, prostituted the Bolshevik party, and Bolshevism conquered. In the form of the Left Opposition Bolshevism broke with the Soviet bureaucracy and its internal Thermidor. This was the actual course of development.

To be sure, in a formal sense Stalinism did not break with Bolshevism. Even today the Moscow bureaucracy continues to call itself the Bolshevik party. It is using the old label of Bolshevism the better to fool the masses. So much the more pitiful are those theoreticians who take the shell for the kernel and the appearance for the reality. In the identification of Bolshevism and Stalinism they render the best possible service to the Thermidorians and precisely thereby play a clearly reactionary role.

COMING AS A PAMPHLET

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