

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

the organized form of the tie between the vanguard and the class. A revolutionary content can be achieved in this form only by the party. This is proved by the positive experience of the October Revolution and by the negative experience of other countries (Germany, Italy, and finally Spain). No one has either shown in practice or tried to explain articulately on paper how the vanguard can seize power without the political leadership of a party that knows what it wants. The fact that the party subordinates the Soviets politically to the workers, has, in itself, abolished the Soviet system and replaced it with the domination of the conservative majority which has abolished the British parliamentary system.

As far as the prohibition of the other Soviet parties is concerned, it did not flow from any "theory" of Bolshevism but was a measure of defence of the dictatorship against a backward and devastated country, surrounded by enemies on all sides. For the Bolsheviks it was clear from the beginning that this measure, later completed by the prohibition of factions inside the governing party, signaled a tremendous danger. However, the danger lay not in the doctrine or in the tactics but in the material weakness of the dictatorship, in the isolation of its internal and international situation. If the revolution had triumphed, even if only in Germany, the prohibition of the other Soviet parties would eventually have fallen away. It is absolutely indisputable that the domination of a single party served as the central point of departure for the Stalinist totalitarian system. But the reason for this development lies neither in Bolshevism nor in the prohibition of other parties as a temporary war measure, but in the numerical defeats of the proletariat in Europe and Asia.

The same applies to the struggle with anarchism. In the early epoch of the revolution the Bolsheviks went to the front hand with the genuinely revolutionary anarchists, but many of them were drawn into the ranks of the Stalinist system. The author of these lines discussed with Lenin the possibility of allotting to the anarchists certain territories where, with the consent of the revolution, they would carry out their stateless experiment. But civil war, blockade, and hunger left no room for such plans. The Kronstadt insurrection? But the revolutionary government naturally could not "preach" to the insurrectionary sailors the fortress which they had captured with the capital only because the reactionary peasant rebellion was joined by a few doubtful anarchists. A concrete historical analysis of the events of the revolution, of the slightest room for the legends, built up on sentimentality, concerning Kronstadt, and other episodes of the revolution.

It remains only the fact that the Bolsheviks from the beginning applied not only conviction but also compulsion, often to a most brutal degree. It is also indisputable that later the bureaucracy which grew out of the revolution monopolized the system of compulsion for its own purposes. Every stage of development, even such catastrophic stages as revolution and counter-revolution, flows from the preceding stage, is rooted in it and takes on its own features. Liberals, including the Webbs, have maintained that the Bolshevik dictatorship was a new version of Czarism. They close their eyes to the "details" as the abolition of the monarchy and the handing over of the land to the peasants, the expropriation of capital, the introduction of planned production, atheist education, etc. In the same way liberal thought closes its eyes to the fact that the Bolshevik revolution, with all its repressions, meant an alteration of social relations in the interest of the masses, and that the Stalinist thermidorian upheaval accompanies the deformation of Soviet society in the interest of a privileged minority. It is clear that in the identification of Stalinism with Bolshevism there is not a trace of objective criteria.

QUESTIONS OF THEORY

One of the most outstanding features of Bolshevism is its severe, exacting, even quarrelsome attitude toward questions of doctrine. The twenty-seven volumes of Lenin's works will remain forever an example of the theoretical conscientiousness. Without this fundamental quality Bolshevism would never have fulfilled

its historic role. In this regard Stalinism, coarse, ignorant and thoroughly empiric, lies at the opposite pole.

The Opposition declared more than ten years ago in its program: "Since Lenin's death a whole set of new theories has been created, whose only purpose is to justify the backsliding of the Stalinists from the path of the international proletarian revolution." Only a few days ago an American writer, Liston M. Oak, who has participated in the Spanish Revolution, wrote: "The Stalinists in fact are today the foremost revisionists of Marx and Lenin—Bernstein did not dare to go half as far as Stalin in revising Marx." This is absolutely true. One must add only that Bernstein actually felt certain theoretical needs: he tried conscientiously to establish the relationship between the reformist practices of social democracy and its program. The Stalinist bureaucracy, however, not only has nothing in common with Marxism but is in general foreign to any doctrine or system whatsoever. Its "ideology" is thoroughly permeated with police subjectivism, its practice is the empiricism of crude violence. In keeping with its essential interests the caste of usurpers is hostile to any theory: it can give an account of its social role neither to itself nor to anyone else. Stalin revises Marx and Lenin not with the theoretician's pen but with the heel of the G. P. U.

QUESTION OF MORALS

Complaints of the "immorality" of Bolshevism come particularly from those boastful nonentities whose cheap masks were torn away by Bolshevism. In petty-bourgeois, intellectual, democratic, "socialist", literary, par-

liamentary and other circles, conventional or a conventional language to cover their faces. This large and motley society for mutual "live and let live"—cannot bear the touch of a lancet on its sensitive skin. The theoreticians and moralists, hesitating between diffidence and thought and continue to think that the Bolsheviks exaggerate differences, are incapable of collaboration and by their "intrigues" disfigure the workers' movement. Moreover, the squeamish centrist has always thought that the Bolsheviks were "calumniating" him—simply carried through to the end for him his own thoughts: he himself was never able to do otherwise. It remains that only that precious quality, the Bolshevik attitude toward all quibbling and the education of a revolutionary party which will be unawares by "exceptional circumstances".

The moral qualities of every party flow from its analysis, from the historical interests that it represents. The moral qualities of Bolshevism, self-disinterestedness, audacity and contempt for the tinsel and falsehood—the highest quality of nature!—flow from revolutionary intransigent service of the oppressed. The Stalinist imitates also in this domain the words and actions of Bolshevism. But when "intransigence" and "inflexibility" are applied by a police apparatus of a privileged minority they become a moralization and gangsterism. One can tempt for these gentlemen who identify the party heroism of the Bolsheviks with the burlesque heroism of the Thermidorians.

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Even now, in spite of the dramatic events of the recent period, the average philistine prefers to believe that the struggle between Bolshevism ("Stalinism") and Stalinism concerns a clash of personalities or, at best, a conflict between two "shades" of Marxism. The crudest expression of this opinion is the statement of Norman Thomas, leader of the American Socialist Party: "There is little reason to believe," he writes in *Review*, Sept. 1937, pag. 6) "that if Trotsky instead of Stalin, there would have been no intrigue, plots, and the reign of fear in Russia. Norman considers himself . . . a Marxist. Or the same right to say: "There is little reason to believe that if instead of Pius XI, the Holy See were headed by Norman I, the Catholic Church would be transformed into a bulwark of socialism." To understand that it is not a question of personalities between Stalin and Trotsky, but of an antagonism between the bureaucracy and the proletariat. To understand the governing stratum of the U. S. S. R. is forced to adapt itself to the still not wholly liquidated system of revolution, while preparing at the same time for direct civil war (bloody "purge"—mass arrests of the discontented) a change of the social relations. In Spain the Stalinist clique is already acting as a bulwark of the bourgeois order against so-called struggle against the Bonapartist bureaucracy before our eyes into class struggle: two programs, two moralities. If Thomas had understood the victory of the socialist proletariat over the caste of oppressors would not politically regenerate the Soviet regime, he proves that all his reservations, shufflings and piousness are nearer to the Stalinist bureaucracy than to the proletariat.

Like other exponents of Bolshevism, Norman Thomas has simply not grown up to the level of the moralists.

THE TRADITIONS OF BOLSHEVISM AND THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

The "lefts" who tried to skip Bolshevism and "return" to Marxism generally confined themselves to isolated panaceas: boycott of the old trade unions, creation of "genuine" unions, this could still seem extremely profound in

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