

The Lesson of Spain--the Last Warning :-: By Leon Trotsky

MENSHEVISM AND BOLSHEVISM IN SPAIN

The military operations in Ethiopia, in Spain, in the Far East are being studied closely by all military staffs, preparing themselves for the great future war. The battles of the Spanish proletariat, heat lightning flashes of the future world revolution, should be no less attentively studied by the revolutionary staffs: only under this condition will coming events not take us unawares.

Three conceptions fought—with uneven forces—in the so-called republican camp: Menshevism, Bolshevism and Anarchism. So far as the bourgeois republican parties are concerned, they had neither independent ideas nor independent political significance and maintained themselves only on the back of the reformists and anarchists. Furthermore, it would not be any kind of exaggeration to say that the leaders of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism did everything to repudiate their doctrine and virtually reduce its significance to zero. Actually in the so-called republican camp two doctrines fought: Menshevism and Bolshevism.

In accordance with the viewpoint of the Socialists and Stalinists, i. e. Mensheviks of the first and second mobilization, the Spanish revolution was to have solved only its "democratic" tasks, for which a single front with the "democratic" bourgeoisie was necessary. From this point of view every attempt of the proletariat to go outside the limits of bourgeois democracy is not only premature but fatal. Moreover, on the order of the day stands not the revolution but the struggle against the insurgent Franco. Fascism is "reaction". Against "reaction" it is necessary to unite all forces of "progress." Menshevism, itself a branch of bourgeois thought, does not have and does not wish to have any understanding of the fact that fascism is not feudal but bourgeois reaction, that one can successfully fight against bourgeois reaction only with the forces and methods of the proletarian revolution.

The Bolshevik point of view, consummately expressed only by the young section of the Fourth International, emanated from the theory of permanent revolution, that is, that even purely democratic problems, like the liquidation of semi-feudal land-ownership, cannot be solved without the conquest of power by the proletariat; but this in turn places the socialist revolution on the order of the day. Moreover, the Spanish workers themselves posed practically, from the first stages of the revolution, not only those problems simply democratic but those purely socialist. The demand not to step out of the bounds of bourgeois democracy signifies in actuality not a defense of the democratic revolution but a repudiation of it. Only through an overturn in agrarian relations could the peasantry, the great mass of the population, have been transformed into a powerful bulwark against fascism. But the land-owners are tied with indissoluble bonds to the banking-commercial-industrial bourgeoisie and bourgeois intelligentsia dependent on them. Thus the party of the proletariat faced the necessity of a choice between being with the peasant masses or with the liberal bourgeoisie. The inclusion of the peasantry and the liberal bourgeoisie in a common coalition could have been done with but a single aim: to help the bourgeoisie deceive the peasantry and thus isolate the workers. The agrarian revolution could have been accomplished only against the bourgeoisie, hence only through measures of the dictatorship of the proletariat. There does not exist any kind of middle, intermediate regime.

From the viewpoint of theory in Spanish politics, Stalin more than anything astounds one by his complete obliviousness to the alphabet of Leninism. After a lapse of several decades—and what decades!—the Comintern has fully re-established as proper the doctrine of Menshevism. More than that: it has contrived to give to this doctrine a more "consistent" and by that taken a more absurd expression. In Czarist Russia, on the eve of 1905, the formula of "purely democratic revolution" had behind it in any case immeasurably more arguments than in 1937 in Spain. No wonder that in contemporary Spain "the liberal workers' policy" of Menshevism became a reactionary anti-working class policy of Stalinism. At the same time the doctrine of the Men-

sheviks, this caricature of Marxism, was transformed into a caricature of itself.

THE "THEORY" OF THE PEOPLE'S FRONT

However, it would be naive to think that at the basis of the politics of the Comintern in Spain there lies a theoretical "mistake." Stalinism rules not through the theory of Marxism, or through any kind of theory in general, but by the empirical interests of the Soviet bureaucracy. In their own circle the Soviet cynics laugh at Dimitroff's "philosophy" of the People's Front. But they have at their disposal for deceiving the masses numerous staffs of preachers of this holy formula, sincere ones and cheats, simpletons and charlatans. Louis Fischer with his ignorance and self-satisfaction, with his provincial reasoning and organic deafness to revolution is the most repulsive representative of this unattractive fraternity. "The union of progressive forces!" "The triumph of the idea of the People's Front!" "The assault of the Trotskyists on the unity of the anti-fascist ranks!"... Who will believe that the *Communist Manifesto* was written 90 years ago?

The theoreticians of the People's Front in essence do not go further than the first rule of arithmetic, that is, addition: the total of "Communists", Socialists, Anarchists and liberals is greater than each one separately. Such is all their wisdom. Arithmetic, however, is not sufficient in this problem. Mechanics, at least, is necessary: the law of the parallelogram of forces has validity also in politics. The resultant, as is known, is the shorter the more the competent forces diverge from each other. When political allies pull in opposite directions, the resultant can prove equal to zero. A bloc of different political groups of the working class is completely indispensable for the solution of common practical problems. Under certain historical conditions, such a bloc is capable of attracting to itself the oppressed and petty-bourgeois masses whose interests are close to the interests of the proletariat. The general force of such a bloc can prove to be immeasurably stronger than the force of each of its component parts. On the contrary, the political union of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie, whose interests in the present epoch diverge upon basic questions at an angle of 180 degrees, is capable, as a general rule, of only paralyzing the revolutionary force of the proletariat.

Civil war, where the force of bare coercion has little validity, demands the spirit of the highest self-denial from its participants. The workers and peasants are capable of assuring victory only if they carry on a struggle for their own liberation. Under these conditions, to subordinate the proletariat to the leadership of the bourgeoisie means beforehand to assure its defeat in the civil war.

These simple truths are least of all the fruit of pure theoretical analysis. On the contrary, they represent the unassailable conclusion of the whole historical experience, beginning, at least, with 1848. The newest history of bourgeois society is filled with all forms of the "People's Front", i. e., with the most diverse political combinations for the deception of the toilers. The Spanish experience is but a new tragic link in this chain of crimes and betrayals.

THE UNION WITH A SHADOW OF THE BOURGEOISIE

Politically most striking is the fact that in the Spanish People's Front there was not in essence a parallelogram of forces: the place of the bourgeoisie was occupied by its shadow. Through the agency of the Stalinists, Socialists, and Anarchists, the Spanish bourgeoisie subordinated the proletariat to itself, not even troubling itself to participate in the People's Front: the overwhelming majority of the exploiters of all political shades openly went over into the camp of Franco. Without any recourse to the theory of "permanent revolution", the Spanish bourgeoisie from the very beginning understood that the revolutionary movement of the masses, no matter what is its initial point, is directed against private property, in land and in the means of production, and that it is utterly impossible to cope with this movement by democratic measures. In the republican camp remained, therefore, only insignificant splinters from the posses-

sing classes, Messrs. Azana, Companys, and their like—political lawyers of the bourgeoisie but not the bourgeoisie itself. Having placed its stake fully upon a military dictatorship, the possessing classes were able at the same time to make use of their political representatives of yesterday in order to paralyze, disorganize and afterward stifle the socialist movement of the masses upon "republican" territory.

No longer representing in the slightest degree the Spanish bourgeoisie, the left Republicans still less represented the workers and peasants. They represented no one but themselves. However, thanks to their allies: the Socialists, Stalinists and Anarchists, these political phantoms played the decisive role in the revolution. How? Very simply: in the capacity of incarnating the principle of the "democratic revolution", i. e. the inviolability of private property.

THE STALINISTS IN THE PEOPLE'S FRONT

The reasons for the rise of the Spanish People's Front and its inner mechanics are entirely clear. The problem facing the retired leaders of the left wing of the bourgeoisie consisted in stopping the revolution of the masses and thus gaining the lost confidence of the exploiters: "Why do you need Franco if we, the Republicans, can do the same thing?" The interests of Azana and Companys fully coincided at this central point with the interests of Stalin who needed to gain the confidence of the French and British bourgeoisie by proving to them in action his ability to preserve "order" against "anarchy". Stalin needed Azana and Companys as a covering before the workers: Stalin himself, of course, is for socialism, but one should not push aside the republican bourgeoisie! Azana and Companys needed Stalin as an experienced executioner with the authority of a revolutionist: without this they, an insignificant lot, would never have been capable of attacking the workers. They would not have dared. The traditional reformists of the Second International, long ago thrown off the rails by the course of the class struggle, began to feel a new tide of confidence, thanks to the support of Moscow. However, this support was given not to all reformists but only to the more reactionary ones. Caballero represented that face of the Socialist Party which was turned toward the workers' aristocracy. Negrin and Prieto always looked towards the bourgeoisie. Negrin won over Caballero with the help of Moscow. The left socialists and anarchists, the captives of the People's Front, tried, it is true, to save what could be saved of democracy. But since they did not dare to mobilize the masses against the gendarmes of the People's Front, their efforts at the end were reduced to woeful jeremiads. The Stalinists thus proved to be in alliance with the more rightist, openly bourgeois, wing of the Socialist Party. They directed their repressions against the left: the POUM, the Anarchists, the "left" Socialists, i. e., against the centrist groupings who reflected, though in a remote degree, the pressure of the revolutionary masses.

This political fact, very significant in itself, reveals at the same time the extent of the degeneration of the Comintern during the past years. We once defined Stalinism as *bureaucratic centrism*, and events gave a series of proofs as to the correctness of this definition. But now it has obviously become obsolete. Already the interests of the Bonapartist bureaucracy will not reconcile with the centrist half-way policy. Searching for reconciliation with the bourgeoisie, the Stalinist clique is capable of entering an alliance only with the more conservative groupings of the international workers' aristocracy. Thus the counter-revolutionary character of Stalinism on an international arena expressed itself definitively.

THE COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY ADVANTAGES OF STALINISM

We thus closely approach the solution of the enigma of how and why the leadership of the "Communist" Party of Spain, insignificant in numbers and level, proved capable of gathering into its hands all levers of power, in face of the incomparably more powerful organizations of the Socialists and Anarchists. The usual explanation that the Stalinists merely bartered Soviet weapons for power is extremely superficial. For the supply of

arms Moscow received Spanish gold. According to the laws of the capitalist market, this is sufficient. How then did Stalin contrive to get power also into the bargain? In reply to this we are commonly told: having raised its authority in the eyes of the masses by furnishing military supplies, the Soviet government asked as the condition of its "collaboration" drastic measures against revolutionists and thus removed dangerous opponents from its path. All this is completely indisputable but this is but one, and at that the less important, aspect of the matter. In spite of the "authority" created by the Soviet supplies, the Spanish Communist Party remained a small minority and met with ever-growing hatred on the part of the workers. On the other hand, it is insufficient that Moscow put up conditions; it was necessary that Valencia accept them. In this is the essence of the matter. Not only Zamora, Companys and Negrin, but Caballero, during his incumbency as premier, all of them more or less readily met the demands of Moscow. Why? Because these gentlemen themselves wished to keep the revolution within bourgeois limits. Not only the Socialists but the Anarchists as well did not seriously oppose the Stalinist program. They feared a break with the bourgeoisie. They were deathly afraid of every revolutionary onslaught of the workers.

Stalin with his arms and with his counter-revolutionary ultimatum was a savior for these groups. He guaranteed them, as they hoped, military victory over Franco and at the same time he freed them from responsibility for the course of the revolution. They hastened to put their socialist and anarchist masks into the closet in the hope of making use of them again when Moscow re-established bourgeois democracy for them. As the finishing touch to their comfort, these gentlemen could from now on justify their betrayal to the workers by the necessity for a military agreement with Stalin. Stalin on his part justified his counter-revolutionary politics by the necessity for an agreement with the republican bourgeoisie.

Only from this wider point of view does that angelic toleration which such knights of right and freedom as Azana, Negrin, Companys, Caballero, Garcia Oliver and others showed toward the crimes of the G. P. U. become clear to us. If they had no other choice as they affirm, it was not at all because they could not pay for the airplanes and tanks other than with the heads of the revolutionists and rights of the workers, but because their own "purely democratic" i. e., anti-socialist program, could not be realized by any other measures except through terror. When the workers and peasants enter on the path of their revolution, i. e., to take possession of the factories, property, drive out the old owners, seize power in the provinces, then the bourgeois counter-revolution—democratic, Stalinist, or Fascist, there is no difference—has no other means to stop this movement except by bloody force, complemented by lies and deceit. The advantage enjoyed by the Stalinist clique on this road consisted in its ability to use at once methods which were not within the capacity of Azana, Companys, Negrin and their left allies.

STALIN IN HIS OWN WAY CONFIRMS THE CORRECTNESS OF THE THEORY OF PERMANENT REVOLUTION

Two irreconcilable programs thus fought on the territory of republican Spain. On the one hand, the program of saving private property from the proletariat at any cost and—to the extent possible—saving democracy from Franco; on the other hand, the program of abolishing private property through the conquest of power by the proletariat. The first program expressed the interests of capital through the agency of the workers' aristocracy, the top circles of the petty bourgeoisie and especially through the Soviet bureaucracy. The second program translated into the language of Marxism expressed the not fully conscious but powerful tendencies of the revolutionary movement of the masses. Unfortunately for the revolution, between the handful of Bolsheviks and the revolutionary proletariat, stood the counter-revolutionary wall of the People's Front.

The politics of the People's Front was defined, in turn, not at all by the blackmail of Stalin as a supplier of arms. There was, of course, no lack of blackmail. But

the reason for the success of this blackmail is lodged in the inner conditions of the revolution itself. The growing onslaught of the masses against the regime of semi-feudal and bourgeois property was, during six whole years, its social background. The need to defend this property by the severest means threw the bourgeoisie into the embrace of Franco. The republican government promised the bourgeoisie to defend property by "democratic" measures but revealed, especially in July 1936, its full bankruptcy. When the situation on the property front became still more threatening than on the military front; the democrats of all colors, including the Anarchists, bowed before Stalin; and he found no other methods in his own arsenal than the methods of Franco.

The baiting of the "Trotskyists", POUMists, revolutionary Anarchists and left Socialists; the filthy slander, false documents, tortures in Stalinist holes, murders in dark-alleys—without all this the bourgeois regime, under the republican flag, could not have lasted even two months. The G. P. U. proved to be the master of the situation only because it defended more consistently than the others, i. e., with the greatest baseness and bloodthirstiness, the interests of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat.

In the struggle against the socialist revolution the "democrat" Kerensky at first sought support in the military dictatorship of Kornilov, then tried to enter Petrograd in the baggage-train of the monarchist general Krasnov. On the other hand, the Bolsheviks, in order to bring the democratic revolution to a conclusion, were compelled to overthrow the government of "democratic" charlatans and babblers. Through this they incidentally put an end to every kind of attempt at military (or "fascist") dictatorship.

The Spanish revolution again demonstrates that it is impossible to defend democracy against the revolutionary masses other than by the methods of fascist reaction. And vice versa, it is impossible to lead the actual struggle against fascism other than by methods of the proletarian revolution. Stalin waged war against "Trotskyism" (proletarian revolution), destroying democracy by the Bonapartist measures of the G. P. U. By this again and definitively is overthrown the old Menshevik theory, adopted by the Comintern, which divides the democratic and socialist revolutions into two independent historical chapters, separated in time from each other. The work of the Moscow executioners confirms, in its own way, the correctness of the theory of permanent revolution.

THE ROLE OF THE ANARCHISTS

The anarchists had no independent position of any kind in the Spanish revolution. They did no more than waver between Bolshevism and Menshevism. More precisely: the anarchist workers instinctively tried to go on the Bolshevik road (July 1936, the May days 1937) while their leaders, on the contrary, with all their might drove the masses into the camp of the People's Front, i. e., the bourgeois regime.

The Anarchists revealed a fatal lack of understanding of the laws of the revolution and its problems when they tried to limit themselves to their own trade unions permeated with the routine of peaceful times, ignoring what went on outside of the bounds of the trade unions, in the masses, in the political parties and in the apparatus of the government. Were the Anarchists revolutionists they would first of all have called for the creation of Soviets, uniting the representatives of all the workers of the city and the country, including the more oppressed strata who had never joined a trade union. The revolutionary workers would naturally occupy the dominating position in these Soviets. The Stalinists would prove to be an insignificant minority. The proletariat would convince itself of its own invincible strength. The apparatus of the bourgeois state would be suspended in the air. One strong blow would be needed to pulverize this apparatus. The Socialist revolution would have received a powerful impetus. The French proletariat would not for long have permitted Leon Blum to block the proletarian revolution beyond the Pyrenees. Neither could the Moscow bureaucracy permit itself such a luxury. The most difficult questions would prove soluble of themselves. (To be Concluded Next Week)